



Department for Business & Trade

Kevin Hollinrake MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Department for Business and Trade
Old Admiralty Building
Admiralty Place
Whitehall
London SW1A 2DY

www.gov.uk

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25 April 2023

Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Liam,

Thank you for your email of 19 March, on behalf of a number of your constituents, regarding postal services in Portishead.

I regret the difficulties your constituents have experienced with local postal services, and I appreciate the concern and anxiety that may be associated with the delay of important deliveries. However, operational matters, which include local service delivery issues, are the direct responsibility of Royal Mail's management. As it is a private company, the Government is not involved in Royal Mail's operational decisions.

While the Government does not have a role in Royal Mail's operations, the Postal Services Act 2011 does set the minimum service requirements and delegates to Ofcom the responsibility to ensure the provision of that service. Ofcom's regulatory framework includes an obligation to deliver letters 6-days-a-week and parcels 5-days-a-week and to meet quality of service performance standards. Ofcom monitors Royal Mail's performance against these standards and has stated that it will take appropriate enforcement action where failures are identified without sufficient justification.

I note that you have contacted both Ofcom and Royal Mail directly on the concerns your constituents have raised and trust that you have since received an explanation for the delays to their local postal service. I am aware that Royal Mail implemented changes to local delivery rounds in February and expected above average staffing absences to be resolved and I trust that service levels in Portishead have now improved. If service issues continue, however, I would encourage your constituents to raise the matter directly with the company through its complaints process. Royal Mail's management are best placed to explain operational decisions.

While the Post Office, as a separate organisation to Royal Mail, remains Government owned, its commercial and operational decisions are matters for the business, as it operates independently of Government. The Government remains committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Post Office network and over the past ten years, has provided over £2.5 billion in funding to support the network and is providing a further £335 million between 2022 and 2025. This includes £50 million a year subsidy to safeguard services in the uncommercial parts of the Post Office network.

There are over 11,500 Post Office branches in the UK – the largest retail network in the country. Government protects the Post Office network by setting minimum access criteria to ensure that 99% of the UK population lives within three miles of a Post Office.

It is inevitable that the Post Office network may fluctuate between areas and some branches can unexpectedly close for reasons beyond the Post Office's control. While any closures are regrettable, the decision taken by Morrisons to close several McColl's branches, such as Portishead Post Office, was a commercial decision, made outside of the control of Post Office Limited and Government. Regarding the Portishead branch, officials have informed me that Post Office Limited has been working to find an alternative retailer to host the branch and has advertised and engaged with local retailers accordingly (runapostoffice.co.uk/branch/portishead-post-office-bristol-bs20-6ab).

I hope you find this information helpful in responding to your constituents.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin', written in a cursive style.

KEVIN HOLLINRAKE MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State – Department for Business and Trade