



1 April 2020

Dear Local Authority CEO,

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

As an essential service, Post Office is working hard to ensure that customers, especially the vulnerable and the elderly, can continue to access vital services while protecting their health and wellbeing along with that of postmasters and colleagues.

### **Supporting postmasters and keeping branches open**

Post Office has a critical role to play in helping people access cash, social benefits and essential services including mails and bill payments. I'm incredibly proud of our postmasters and branch staff for their dedication to serving customers and keeping the largest retail network in the UK open for business during this difficult time. The situation around the coronavirus pandemic is changing rapidly and undoubtedly there will be some disruption to services. Postmasters are not immune to this virus, and we have a duty to help protect them.

### **Updated guidance and supplies**

Post Offices have been designated an essential service by Government, and branches will remain open wherever possible.

We have provided each of our postmasters with updated guidance on hand washing and hygiene to enable business to continue. We are working closely with Government to secure a supply of hand sanitizer and gloves. However, there are long lead times for these products, given the demand for them in hospitals and elsewhere. In the meantime, we have provided each branch with funds to access local supplies of sanitizer.

Additionally, in the coming days and weeks, we will also be distributing and installing Perspex screens in branches across the network. Each postmaster has also been provided with in-store signage to encourage customers to follow Government guidance on staying two metres apart whilst in branch.

### **Guaranteeing remuneration**

As key workers, independent postmasters and their staff are continuing to keep their branches open to provide vital services, particularly to elderly and vulnerable people, despite an overall reduction in transactions and revenue.

Post Office is guaranteeing that all independent Postmasters will receive 100% of their remuneration in April and 90% in May. Eight thousand independent Post Offices will benefit from this guarantee, which will be kept under review if public health advice to stay at home continues. This remuneration guarantee backs Postmasters for their dedication and hard work in making sure that some of the country's most vulnerable people can benefit from essential services. This is irrespective of whether branches are open or not, or have reduced their hours, because we recognise that some

branches have had to close through circumstances outside of their control such as self-isolation or sickness.

### **Access to cash**

We have a critical role to play in providing access to cash to some of the most vulnerable in society. Through our Banking Framework agreement with all of the UK's banks, and the network of branches we have across the country, we are able to do this like no other organisation.

However, we are conscious that during this crisis, some customers will be unable to leave the house or accommodation, and might not have ready access to family or friends. We are working with several high street banks and Government on a way to overcome this, and we are hopeful that we will have a solution to announce in the coming week. We know that this will be a lifeline for many people who are isolated and rely on cash to pay for goods and services and we are working around the clock to put new services in place.

### **Post Office Card Account, provided on behalf of DWP**

For Post Office Card Account (POCa) customers, we are in constant communication with DWP about how we can best support these customers, often the most vulnerable in society.

Payments by government departments into POCa accounts are unaffected. For those who cannot visit a Post Office to make a withdrawal we have established processes in place to allow a trusted person to be added to a card holders account, which will allow them to withdraw cash out from their local Post Office counter or Post Office ATM on their behalf. We are working hard to improve this process to allow this to be set up by customers without the need for them to venture outside to visit a post office. Further information on this will be available as soon as next week.

For those who are isolated and without nearby help from family and/or friends, we are continuing to work with DWP to look at other ways in which we can ensure that can access their accounts nonetheless. We hope to have some news soon. In the meantime, if one of your constituents is having trouble accessing their money due to being isolated, they should call the POCa helpline on 0345 722 3344 or contact their local authority community hub for assistance.

### **Disruption to services**

Some Post Offices will be forced to close during the outbreak when postmasters go into isolation or become unwell themselves.

Where this is the case, posters should be displayed to explain where the next available branch is, and opening hours will be available through Branch Finder on the Post Office website and App. This is being updated three times a day by a dedicated team to provide customers with the most up to date information.

I want to assure you that we are doing everything we can to ensure that postmasters have the support they need and our field teams and area managers are on hand to support them. The weeks ahead will be challenging but I am sure that, with your continued support, we will be able to keep the majority of the network open for business and serving communities in your constituency and right across the UK.

Should you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with your Regional External Affairs Manager, who will be on hand to discuss any issues in your constituency.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Read". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Nick Read  
Group Chief Executive, Post Office