



MALEW PARISH COMMISSIONERS

Clerk: Mr B.J. Powell

**Hon. Howard Quayle MHK
Chief Minister
Legislative Buildings
Finch Road
Douglas
IM1 3PW**

3 February 2020

Dear Chief Minister,

Malew Parish Commissioners request that you intervene in the Post Office's insatiable appetite to close down the counter service in Ballasalla Post Office. Whilst we accept that the Post Office is having financial issues the ferociousness, speed and some say, underhanded way this is being undertaken is alarming.

We have a large part of our community that is elderly and/or vulnerable, and this issue is causing them considerable stress. The Isle of Man is known for its community spirit and keeping community services in place when often the UK has abandoned them, it would appear, however, that this positive policy has now been abandoned and the perception is that this has been replaced with a philosophy that; if it isn't making a large profit then it should be disposed of. Indeed, many of the vulnerable are beginning to feel they are being cast aside.

The biggest issue for our constituents is that of benefits payments, with the Post Office nonchalantly saying that you can still collect from Castletown or have your monies paid directly into the Bank. It was obvious to us all, with the casualness this statement is pushed out with, that they have no concept of living within a tight state pension budget. A family living on the bread line would find it hard, believe it or not, to find the Bus fare to travel to Castletown, yes for some family's things really are that desperate. Should people opt to use the banking facility for benefits then this would result in a 4-week payment in arrears. How are families and pensioners living within an already tight budget supposed to make up that gap? This action alone could lead to families seeking debt provision which given their status would be at high interest rates or could encourage illegal money lending with loan sharks. We would also point out that only a couple of weeks ago Lloyds shut its branch in Castletown whilst Barclays are now only open 3-days a week so it won't be long before this is probably shut too. The lack of cash machine facilities in Ballasalla also does not help this situation. We would also seek clarification on who stands the bill if say a bank went bankrupt with benefit payments in the account. Even if the person fell under the Government Compensation Scheme this would take time to be paid out and these people don't have that luxury. Before you say that is unlikely to happen, we refer you to the financial crises of 2007/8 plus we have the RBS systems outages 2012 were no one could get money, use cards or make online payments. There are more examples, so to say it won't happen is farcical it happens too often.

The list is endless, and we are more than happy to meet up and explain. On recently well attended Public meetings, the Post Office Board, often said on the one hand they can't do a specific function as they are a company and then hide behind Government rules on another point. So, are they a wholly owned Government Company or are they a Government body? If

you have taken the time to read the press, you will know how well attended the two Public meetings were and yet this had no effect on the decision of the Post Office. The commissioners at the first board meeting offered to help, we requested information about the losses and costs of the Ballasalla Counter Service but the Isle of Man Post Office Board were unwilling to provide under business sensitivity concerns.

The Post Office justifies its actions under the Tynwald approved Strategic Recommendation and seems to be focusing intensely on bullet point 1 below to the detriment of the other 5 and using the point of closure as the key driver. We would like to point out that Principle 1 states that "the aim is to be financially self-sustaining" however this does not indicate that a profit needs to be made nor as stated above can we verify whether the Ballasalla Post Office is self-sustaining.

- Principle 1: Remain Financially efficient, managing costs in line with revenues, supporting the overall aim of remaining financially self-sustaining.
- Principle 2: Ensure 96% of Island residents live within 3 miles of a service access point for postal services, with a postal service access point in each constituency.
- Principle 3: Ensure postal service access points are accessible, e.g. via main bus routes, with ample parking and disabled access.
- Principle 4: Where financially viable, IOMPO will continue to seek opportunities to provide new retail services.
- Principle 5: Innovate and improve how postal services are provided, in efficient, financially responsible ways that satisfy the changing needs of its customers.
- Principle 6: Adopt a formal consultation process, engaging constituent politicians, local Government, 3rd sector organisations and special interest groups before changing a service method or removing a service access point.

The Isle of Man has one of the oldest and most respected democracies in the world indeed it is the availability of MHK's and Ministers in everyday life that makes it unique. We therefore appeal, that this bill, at the very least is suspended pending a review and the wider implications for everyone are addressed. Indeed, this bill's enactment by the Post Office flies in the face of the Isle of Man trying to promote its green credentials and the lack of Digital inclusion of the elderly and disadvantaged makes a mockery of the Post Office claims that bills etc can be paid online.

If we are to keep our vulnerable safe and our communities vibrant, we need to stop this now. If you are concerned that the Taxpayer maybe against this, look on social media and the press to see how many people across the island are concerned about their post office's. We the Commissioners feel this is such a vital issue that effects the very heart of our communities and way of life on our Island that urgent action should be taken to stop all Post Office counter closures until an inclusive Island survey and review is conducted. If after the survey and review it is felt the bill should be re-introduced, then a re-vote is taken as many of the MHK's felt that 'common sense' would prevail in the implementation and not the blinkered concentration on shutting the services down.

We invite all Commissioners, Boards and people from across the Island to write to you as the Chief Minister so that you may gauge the anguish the action by the Isle of Man Post Office Board is causing.

Your sincerely



Malew Parish Commissioners