

Sandy Cumming CBE, chief executive  
Direct tel: +44 (0)1463 244204  
Direct fax: +44 (0)1463 244351  
E-mail: sandy.cumming@hient.co.uk



**Highlands and Islands Enterprise**  
Iomairt na Gaidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

17 January 2008

Tricia Dow  
Postwatch Scotland  
9-10 St Andrews Square  
EDINBURGH  
EH2 2AF

*Dear Ms Dow*

## **Post Office Closure Programme - The Highlands Postwatch Scotland**

### **Introduction**

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to Postwatch regarding the proposed post office closure programme in the Highland Council area.

### **Background**

HIE is the Scottish Government's economic and community development agency which serves the Northern and Western parts of Scotland. Established in 1991, it has played a major role in diversifying the area's economy; assisting locally-based businesses and attracting new ventures and supporting a host of community and cultural activities. With a unique remit, combining economic and community development, HIE has a key role to play in delivering the Scottish Government's strategic objectives to make Scotland wealthier and fairer; smarter; healthier; safer and stronger; and greener.

### **Post Office closure programme in the Highlands and Islands**

While we acknowledge the reasons behind the proposed restructuring programme, primarily the need to modernise and reshape the Post Office network we feel that it plays a significant role in the social and economic wellbeing of some of our most remote and fragile communities. Achieving a balance between efficiency and social provision will be very important if the principles of universal service delivery and equivalence of access to services are to be maintained.

HIE submitted a response to the DTI post office consultation in February 2007, requesting the consideration of a number of factors when finalising the proposed closure list, namely that due cognisance should be given to transport accessibility and affordability, alternative service provision in the local area and local socio-economic conditions.

Cowan House, Inverness retail and business park,  
Inverness, Scotland IV2 7GF  
Tel: +44 (0)1463 234171 Fax: +44 (0)1463 244469  
[www.hie.co.uk](http://www.hie.co.uk)



Careers Scotland in the Highlands and Islands is part of the HIE network.



HIE have been working closely with colleagues in Highland Council over recent months, assisting in the analysis of socio-economic data to inform Post Office Ltd of local economic conditions.

Information was gathered to highlight alternative access to key Post Office services, availability of public transport, local demographics and the impact on local economies. This evidence was submitted to Post Office Ltd on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007 and to Postwatch on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007.

The Area Plan Proposal for Highland states that Post Office Ltd has taken account of these factors, alongside topographic obstacles, the number of customers currently using a particular Post Office branch, the size and ability of nearby branches to absorb extra customers and the commercial implications for Post Office Ltd. HIE welcomes this approach.

### **Post Office Ltd consultation response**

HIE and Highland Council are jointly funding a customer profiling exercise at a sample of post locations proposed for closure. This is being conducted on behalf of the Wellbeing Alliance, the Community Planning Partnership in Highland. The survey work will provide a profile of the number and circumstances of customers using the Post Office and how they will be affected should Post Office Ltd's plans to close the office go ahead. It is intended that this exercise, coupled with socio-economic data already gathered, will provide information which will assist the Wellbeing Alliance Partners in responding appropriately to the Post Office Ltd consultation.

### **Next Steps**

HIE will continue to work with Highland Council throughout the survey period and will utilise the information gained to inform a response to the Post Office Ltd consultation by 18<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

Please contact Claire McDonald, Senior Economist on 01463 244228 or [claire.mcdonald@hient.co.uk](mailto:claire.mcdonald@hient.co.uk) if you wish to discuss any aspect of this response in more detail.

*Yours sincerely*  
*S. J. [Signature]*