

PO Ltd can't deliver Outreach plans
Third version of Rippingale decision a "a farce"

Post Office Ltd will be forced to admit this week they can't deliver key "Outreach" proposals for its East Midlands area branch closure plan, protesters believe.

It's understood that PO Ltd will call 11 branches in the East Midlands on Monday or Tuesday (December 17/18) to confirm their closure and replacement by limited service mobile offices, contrary to public notices and press releases last week - last Tuesday they were told further review would last six weeks.

For Rippingale sub-Post Office this will mean a third version of its fate in a week. The village support group says this proves the so-called public consultation process has been a cynical mockery all along.

Phil Rippingale, for the Friends of Rippingale PO said "They're just making this up as they go along - and looking ridiculous in the process - it's a PR disaster. If they'd done the research they claim to have done, they would have known months ago that no one in their right minds would accept their hosted and partnered Outreach proposals.

When we met Mark Partington, the PO Network Change Manager six weeks ago, he specifically told us and our MP Quentin Davies that they'd dropped mobile offices from their Outreach options - now they're desperate because they can't find premises or partners in any village.

And the crucial issue is that mobile offices are going to cost far more than our alleged deficit - the sensible thing to do would be to hold business-like talks with us about this, but they won't do that.

Their closure plans are a pantomime farce and we think they simply want to withdraw completely from rural services and that's been the agenda all along. They told our sub-Postmaster, Simon Deane, a month BEFORE the first announcement that Rippingale would close, be replaced by Outreach and there would be no appeal. That's exactly how it's turned out and we think that proves what an outrageous, cynical, mockery this whole exercise has been. And don't forget these people are working to a Government brief."

He added "another intriguing issue concerns the mobile offices - how many of them there are, what they cost, when they were ordered and whether they're suddenly going to appear in East Midlands villages in January, when elderly and infirm customers will presumably have to queue in snow and rain for their stamps and pensions - it's going to be a long queue in Rippingale.

But what really makes us furious is PO Ltd's treatment of the sub-Postmasters - it's beneath contempt - many are facing ruin."

The Rippingale sequence of events is as follows:

- September 1 - PO Ltd visit Rippingale and tell Simon Deane his branch will close, be replaced by Outreach and there will be no appeal
- October 1 - PO East Midlands closure plan published, promising that no decisions had been reached and wouldn't be until after six week public consultation exercise

- November 5 – Friends of Rippingale PO, Quentin Davies MP and Martin Hill, Leader of Lincs CC, meet Mark Partington, PO Network Change Manager – he says mobile offices are dropped from Outreach plan, more recent sales figures for Rippingale would be inspected and no decisions would be reached until public consultation considered
- November 29 – PO Minister Pat McFadden announces in the Commons a new level of decision review, taking six weeks longer, final decisions to be taken by the PO Chairman Allan Leighton – in spite of Government previously saying they wouldn't intervene in the closure process
- December 11, 9am – special delivery poster to Simon Deane for public display- Rippingale decision on hold for further review for six weeks
- December 11 10am – Press, radio and tv told Rippingale to close and be replaced by Outreach
- December 11 6.30 pm - Mark Partington appears on tv, unable to answer questions about what Outreach proposals are
- December 13 – Simon Deane receives letter confirming Rippingale decision delayed 4-6 weeks
- December 15 – Friends of Rippingale PO told final decision taken, closure and replacement by mobile office to be confirmed within three days

Jim Latham

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