

Irish Postmasters' Union

General Election Manifesto 2016

Monday, February 15, 2016

SUMMARY

OVERALL – Over the Term of the new Government

The Irish Postmasters' Union (IPU) is calling on all Political Parties, Groups and Candidates contesting the 2016 General Election to ensure that the Irish Post Office Network has a viable commercial and social future, with its potential maximised, during the lifetime of the next Government.

IMMEDIATE – During the next Six Months

During the immediate election period, formation of a new Government and 'settling in' period of the next six months the following needs to happen:

- The Two Working Groups (1. Network Renewal and 2. Service Hubs) established on foot of the *Post Office Network Business Development Group Report* (published in January 2016) must continue with urgency and not be stalled.
- The focus of these Groups must be to:
 - Support the Network as the provider of choice for Social Protection Payments
 - Roll out new government services business to Post Offices
 - Roll out a Post Office based epayment Account
 - Agree new Postmaster contracts.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Post Office Network Business Development Group Report

On January 20th 2016, the *Post Office Network Business Development Group Report* was launched by Chairperson Bobby Kerr and the Minister for Communications Alex White. The Report sets out a blueprint for the serious challenges facing the Network, includes recommendations on how these can be addressed and put in place an immediate process to progress the issues.

Postmasters do not see the future of Ireland's Post Office Network as a party political issue. It is a cross-party and cross-candidate social and community issue and it is critical that all political parties, groupings and candidates are committed to a viable network. To progress the recommendations of the Bobby Kerr Chaired Report, two Working Groups have been established and have already commenced work. They are expected to make significant progress by this summer.

1. Network Renewal Working Group

The Network Renewal Working Group has been established to 'Develop a Five Year Strategy for the Network'. This group is being Chaired by Bobby Kerr and includes the Government, as shareholder, represented by the Departments of Communications and Social Protection, the Irish Postmasters' Union and An Post.

The Group is overseen by the Minister for Communications and has authority to call on input from other Government Departments when relevant. The Group is due to Report by July 2016. It is critical that this group deals comprehensively with core issues such as:

- How Government can support the Post Office Network to be the provider of choice for Social Protection payments (either in cash or epayment)
- A five year plan for the future size and distribution of the network

- Roll out of new government services business to Post Offices
- Roll out of a Post Office based epayment account
- Development and agreement on new Postmaster contracts.

The IPU is calling for continued oversight by the next Minister for Communications and constructive input to this process by all Government Departments.

2. Service Hubs Working Group

A parallel Working Group to 'Develop a Nationwide Pilot of Post Office Service Hubs' has also been established. The aim of this Group is to run a pilot for developing rural Post Offices as Hubs which extend citizen access in rural areas by facilitating additional services such as transport and health.

The Group is to be Chaired by the Minister of State for Rural Economic Development, Ann Phelan and includes representation from the Postmasters, relevant Government Departments and An Post. The group is aiming to have Pilots in place later this year.

The IPU is calling for continued Chairing of the Group at Ministerial level and constructive input to this process from all Government Departments.

Conclusion

In the immediate term, the Irish Postmasters' Union is calling for all Political Parties, Groupings and Candidates to support the urgent delivery of both processes in order to deliver progress on implementing the Post Office Report recommendations.

Overall, the IPU is calling on the next Government to lead on an effective re-organisation of the Irish Post Office Network which maximises the economic and social potential of the Network. It must also offer appropriate exit strategies for Post Offices which are not viable in the long term.

Please let us know your response and view.

Ned O'Hara, General Secretary, Irish Postmasters' Union
 Pier 19, 6/8 Usher's Island,
 (01) 677 6863 / ned@postmasters.ie / www.postmasters.ie

Facts and Figures

Post Offices are the largest retail network in the country with 1,150 Offices, employing 3,700 people. 1,100 of these Offices are operated by Postmasters who are locally based SMEs providing employment, facilitating economic activity and providing community engagement. Post Offices serve 1.7 million customers every week and were voted Ireland's most trusted consumer brand in 2014. **The Irish Postmasters' Union** is the representative body for 90% of Postmasters.

Social Protection cash transactions and NTMA State Savings account for 55% of Post Office business.

Concern about the future of the Post Office network has been growing, particularly following an independent report by Grant Thornton, published in February 2014. It concluded that hundreds of Offices would close in the coming years, mainly due to the movement towards direct electronic transfer of social welfare payments.