

**Community
& Post Office**



**THE IRISH
POSTMASTERS'
UNION**



**Presentation to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Heritage,
Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs**

Wednesday, November 9th 2016

General Secretary, Ned O'Hara

President, Paddy McCann

Vice President, Ciarán McEntee

Treasurer, Seán Martin

SUMMARY

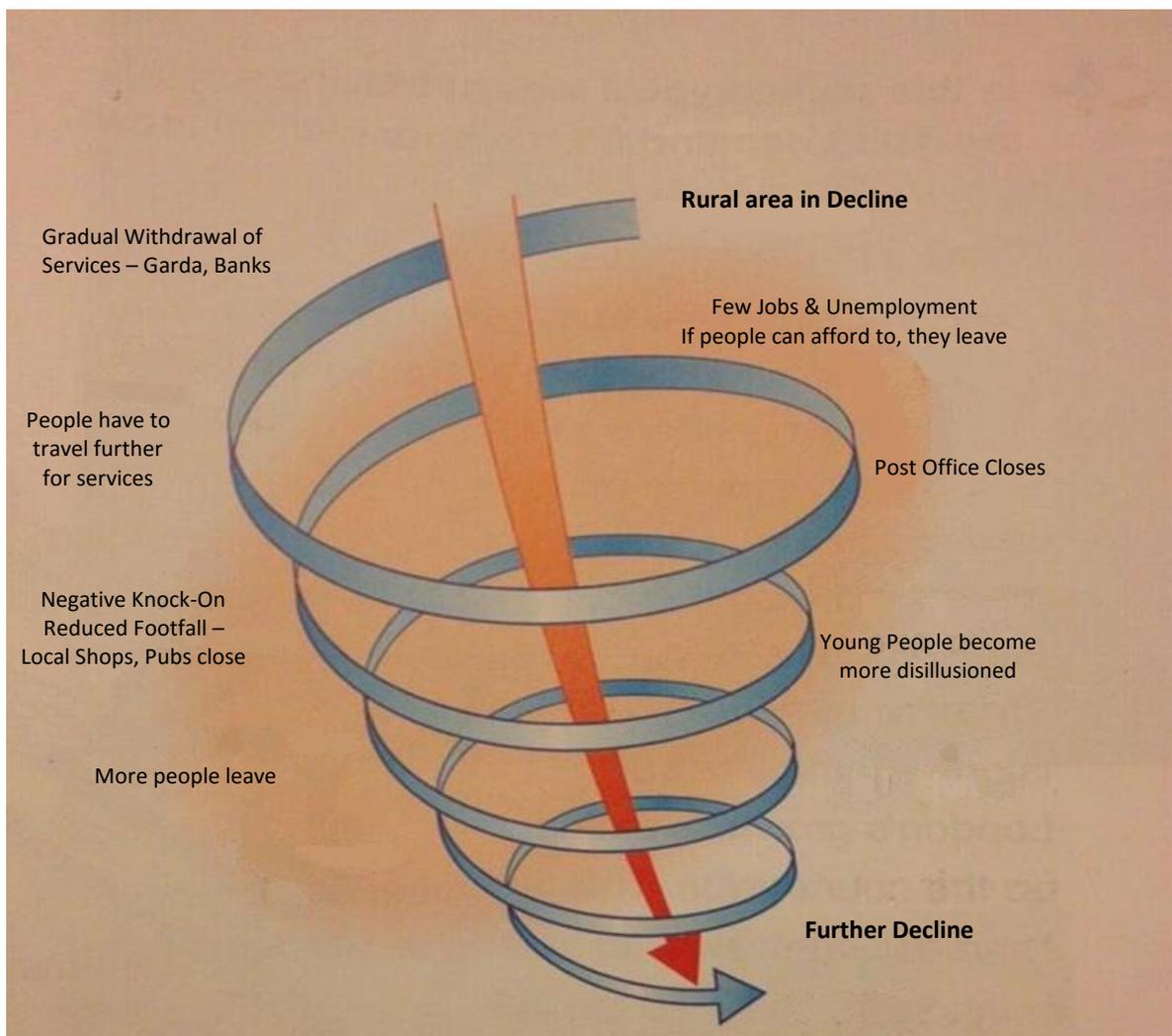
- The Post Office Network is a National Asset and a key resource to address many of the challenges faced by rural Ireland.
- It can provide good value for the people of Ireland in doing so.
- The Network can offer expanded State and Financial services and innovative Social and Community Services.
- Trust and goodwill - people want their local Post Office to stay open and to do much more
- The Post Office Network is facing financial crisis - current annual income of €72m is forecast to drop by a cumulative €35m over next 5 years
- This Government needs to make decisions NOW to invest and secure the future of the Network.

The Post Office Network needs important Government decisions NOW to prevent its imminent collapse.

The Network, which is owned by the people, is part of the fundamental economic and social fabric of our country and is a National Asset.

Current changes happening in our country are affecting and damaging communities who feel that their views are and have been ignored by different Governments.

Rural communities, in particular, want support to help stop the 'Negative Multiplier Effect' to their communities as different services are withdrawn from their localities.



The Post Office currently serves as a magnet in retaining footfall in towns and villages and in some cases, attracting footfall.

When Post Office services are withdrawn, there is less incentive to visit or stay in that town or village and other businesses suffer.

The State, as the owner of the Post Office Network, has a major role to play in addressing and redressing the issues faced by these communities.

Communities can and do experience significant barriers in accessing State services.

The Post Office Network currently provides sensitive and secure services and is well positioned to address gaps in the provision of State services and to be developed into a network of Community Hubs.



Additional State, Financial, Social and Community services which Post Offices can provide include:

- All Government payments – DSP, Motor Tax, HSE, CAO, third level, Fines and Licences
- Supply and completion of Government forms – including identity verification (Peace Commissioner role)
- A standard (An Post) Bank Account
- Counter transactions for all Commercial Banks
- Remote health checks & prescription drop off point
- Transport information, bookings, pooling and meeting point
- ICT services and guaranteed broadband
- Citizen's and Tourist information.

These services will require Government investment both current and capital.

The level of investment required will provide good value for the people of Ireland but decisions need to be taken NOW.

All the issues involved have been considered at length by the Post Office Network Business Development Group set up by Minister Alex White.

- Bobby Kerr appointed December 2014
- Final report published January 2016
- Two Working Groups to implement the Report findings were established
 - Post Office Network Review Board chaired by Bobby Kerr - initial meeting held on February 4th 2016
 - The Post Office as Social Hub chaired Minister Michael Ring - initial meeting on July 27th 2016
 - No concrete action plan from either Group to date

All the issues have been identified and considered, the time to finalise a comprehensive Five-year Plan to transition the Network is NOW.

Post Offices are at the breaking point, because of the reduction in transaction levels and the collapse of the Network is imminent.

Individual Postmasters remain under pressure to maintain their Post Offices and need urgent decisions to be taken by the Government.

CONCLUSION

Post Offices are ideally placed to provide a significant contribution to the challenges faced by rural Ireland and can provide good value in doing so.

The following is required from Government:

- Appropriate investment to protect the Network
- A comprehensive five-year plan
- Additional State services to be sanctioned
- Additional financial services to be provided
- New social and community services must be tested and delivered, particularly in rural areas.

We are asking the Committee to request that Ministers Denis Naughten, Heather Humphreys and Michael Ring act immediately to ensure that the Government takes the necessary decisions NOW.