

Community & Post Office



THE IRISH
**POSTMASTERS'
UNION**



Presentation to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment

Tuesday, November 28th, 2017

Attending

General Secretary, Ned O'Hara
Vice President, Ciarán McEntee
Treasurer, Seán Martin

SUMMARY

- The €30m investment for the Post Office Network announced last week by Minister Denis Naughten, is welcomed. It must now be prioritised for implementation as a matter of urgency.
- The Minister has, in the Dáil, acknowledged that Postmasters' incomes are dropping at an alarming rate and the danger this poses to the Network.
- Clarity is needed in terms of the breakdown of what the investment is for. The investment must:
 - deliver sustainable new services in Post Offices
 - support a four-year transition period to enable Postmasters to adapt to any new agreed commercial contracts
 - support keeping as large a Network as possible, open and sustainable
- Postmasters' contracts are in need of review and this allocation should enable this process to be agreed and completed.
- The investment should allow for an ordered review and an agreed plan for the future size of the Post Office Network.
- The investment must not get diverted into addressing other issues in An Post.

Postmasters' Overall Position

The Post Office Network Post Office Network is a National Asset and a key resource to address many of the challenges faced by rural Ireland.

It provides 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 postal industry may be in decline (they account for 30% of existing Postmaster transactions), but the demand for 'Personal' service centres has not - communities should not be threatened just because the postal industry is changing

Clarification Needed

The current issue facing the Post Office Network is 'what happens next', following Minister Naughten's announcement of the €30m investment last week.

We now need full transparency and details on:

- What is the €30m for specifically in terms of a breakdown?

I quote from Minister Naughten:

The €30 million which has been put into the company has been ring-fenced for the five day a week universal postal service in order that it continues to every address in the country and to support and develop services in the post office network. The nationwide reach of the post office network makes it uniquely positioned to act as a gateway to Government.

This statement does not give clarity of what the money entails for the development of actual Network itself. The IPU understands that the €30m announcement involves a split of €15m for the Post Office Network and €15m to support the Universal Service Obligation of An Post. Clarity is needed.

- What is the term, or time period, of the €30m investment?
- What are the new services that are planned in Post Offices?

I quote again from the Minister:

The Government has also committed to exploring the potential for extra Government business, including motor tax, to be channelled through the network.

A new pilot initiative called Digital Assist will use the local post office as a digital gateway for Government business.

- When will Motor Tax be available for payment at the Post Office?
 - What are the range of services which Digital Assist will involve and when will these come on stream?
 - Key Performance Indicators were referenced at the announcement to measure the project which Government referred to last week. Postmasters would like to know what these KPIs are and how they will be measured
 - What is planned with regard to renewal of the Network?
 - Should there be a requirement to close any Post Office it must only be on a voluntary basis
 - The business from any office closed, in such circumstances, must transfer to neighbouring Postmaster(s) to ensure those offices have a sustainable future.
 - What does the announcement account for in terms of modernising Postmasters' contracts?
 - What is An Post and Government's vision on the size of the network over the coming 4-5 years?
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Additional Services

For information to the Committee – the full range of additional State, Financial, Social and Community services which Postmasters believe Post Offices can provide include the following:

- 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)
 - 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.
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CONCLUSION

Minister Naughten's announcement of a €30m investment last week is welcome.

There are many current challenges being faced by An Post and we need full clarity that this 'Post Office Network' allocation does not get diverted into addressing other issues at the company.

Postmasters and communities now need assurance, transparency, specific detail and a timeline on how this investment will translate into:

- Post Offices being actively supported to remain open
- Additional services becoming available in Post Offices as a matter of urgency
- A fair and acceptable exit process for non-viable Post Offices
- Clarity and agreement on Postmaster's contracts.
- An agreed and planned vision on the size of the Irish Post Office Network into the future.