



BRIEFING PAPER

Number 2585, 9 August 2018

Post office numbers

By Lorna Booth
Jennifer Brown

Inside:

1. Overall network size
2. Post offices by type
3. Post offices by location



Contents

Summary	3
Further information on post offices in each constituency	3
1. Overall network size	4
1.1 Change in the network size	4
1.2 Commitments on numbers and location of Post offices	5
Access Criteria	5
2. Post offices by type	7
Trend in post offices by branch type	7
3. Post offices by location	9
3.1 Urban and rural post office branches	9
Trend in urban and rural post offices.	9
3.2 Post offices by region and country	9
Change over time	9
Appendix: discontinuity in post office network statistics in 2005 and 2007	11

Summary

As of March 2018 there are 11,547 branches in the Post Office network. In the year to March 2018 the total number of post offices in the UK fell by 112 (1.0%).

Since around 2009 the number of post offices in the UK has remained reasonably consistent. Over the longer term (since the early 1980s) the number of post offices has almost halved.

Post Office Ltd, which owns and runs the Post Office Network, was separated from Royal Mail Group Ltd on 1 April 2012. In return for a package of Government funding for transformation and modernisation, the Post Office has committed to investing in the network, and maintaining around 11,500 branches. Further details about Post Office Ltd are given in the Library Note [The Post Office](#).

Further information on post offices in each constituency

A full list of Post offices by constituency has been made available to the Library by the Post Office Ltd, since 2002. These lists are copyrighted to the Post Office and for that reason the Library is only able to provide them to Members and their staff.

A table with the numbers of post offices by constituency [Post offices by constituency](#) is available via the Parliamentary intranet only.

1. Overall network size

As of March 2018 there are **11,547 post office branches in the UK**.¹

The vast majority of post offices (around 98%) are operated by franchise partners or sub-postmasters, who are independent business people. Only around 2% of post offices are Crown post offices, which are directly managed by Post Office Limited.

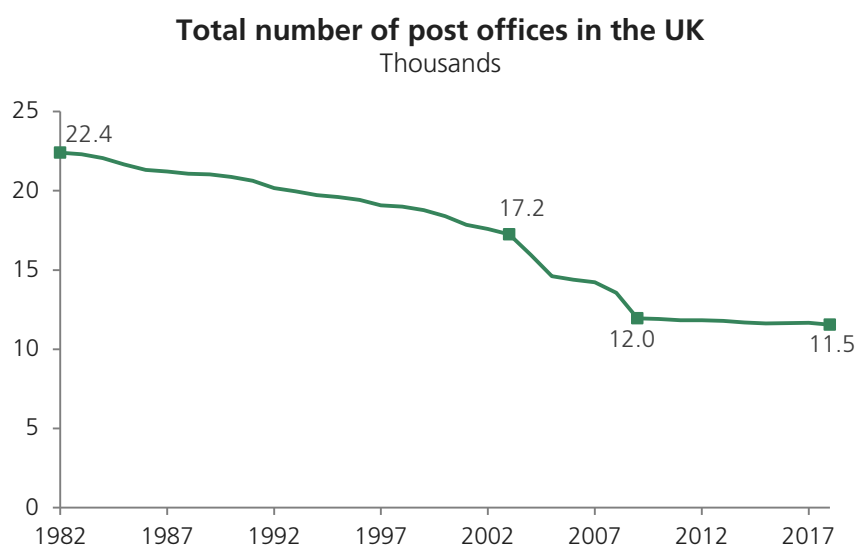
The Library Briefing Paper [The Post Office](#) accompanies this paper and explains how the Post Office network is owned and managed

1.1 Change in the network size

Between March 2017 and March 2018 the total number of post offices in the UK decreased by 112, a fall of 1.0%.

Since around 2009 the number of post offices in the UK has remained reasonably consistent.

Whilst the recent trend has been stable, over the longer term there has been a decline in the number of post offices. In the 1980s and 1990s there was a steady decline in the number of post offices. In the mid-2000s this decline increased.



Source: Post Office Ltd

Notes: Care should be taken in interpreting the data given discontinuities in the data in the period 2005-2007 (see appendix).

¹ Many of the figures in this paper are from Post Office Network Reports, which also contain further information – see reports for [2014](#), [2015](#), [2016](#), [2017](#), [2018](#).

1.2 Commitments on numbers and location of Post offices

Access Criteria

In return for its package of funding for transformation and modernisation, the Post Office is committed to investing in the network, and maintaining around 11,500 branches with no further substantive reductions and continued accessibility for all at the national level.²

In December 2017 the government pledged £370million in funding for the Post Office up to March 2021.³

The Post Office is required by government to meet six 'Access Criteria:'

1. 99% of the UK population to be within three miles of their nearest post office outlet;
2. 90% of the UK population to be within one mile of their nearest post office outlet;
3. 99% of the total population in deprived urban areas across the UK to be within one mile of their nearest post office outlet;
4. 95% of the total urban population across the UK to be within one mile of their nearest post office outlet;
5. 95% of the total rural population across the UK to be within three miles of their nearest post office outlet.
6. 95% of the population of every postcode district to be within six miles of their nearest post office outlet.⁴

Post Office performance against the access criteria

At the end of March 2018, the Post Office met five of its six access criteria as shown in the table below.

It missed the target for the number of postcode areas in which 95% of population are within six miles of their nearest post office – this is intended to ensure a minimum level of access for customers living in remote rural areas. There were seven postcode area where this was not met.⁵

² BIS, [Building a Mutual Post Office: the Government Response](#), July 2012

³ See the Library briefing [The Post Office](#) for further details

⁴ Post Office Ltd, [Post Office Network Report 2015](#)

⁵ The Post Office said that:

In this instance there were short term service issues affecting 3 [postcode districts] and service has since resumed. The other cases were in HS8, PA31, BT92 and HS3 Postcode Districts and progress is being made on restoring services. The current position is:

- HS8 - The service at Howmore is relocating to new premises with the re-opening planned for the summer 2018.
- PA31 - The service at Ardfarn and Tayvallich have closed following resignations, new replacement services are being worked on and the plan is to re-open soon.
- BT92 - The service at Derrylin closed following resignation, a solution is being worked on with a view to opening in the Autumn 2018.
- HS3 - Communication issues are affecting the service at Amhuinnsuidhe, a solution is being sought

Performance against accessibility criteria

	Minimum requirement	2014/15 performance	2015/16 performance	2016/17 performance	2017/18 performance
Total population within 3 miles	99%	99.7%	99.7%	99.7%	99.7%
Total population within 1 mile	90%	93.0%	93.0%	92.9%	92.8%
Deprived Urban population within 1 mile	99%	99.8%	99.7%	99.6%	99.6%
Urban population within 1 mile	95%	99.1%	98.5%	98.4%	98.3%
Rural population within 3 miles	95%	99.1%	98.7%	98.7%	98.7%
Postcode areas with < 95% of population within 6 miles	0	1	2	0	7

Source: Post Office Ltd: The Post Office Network Reports

2017 Conservative Manifesto Commitment

The 2017 Conservative Party Manifesto committed to “safeguard the post office network, to protect existing rural services and work with the Post Office to extend the availability of business and banking services to families and small businesses in rural areas.”⁶

⁶ The Conservative Party, [Forward together: Our plan for a stringer Britain and a prosperous future](#), p26

2. Post offices by type

Post office branches operate under different contract types. There are three main contract types of post office;

- Crown post office branches: those post offices that are directly managed by Post Office Ltd.
- Agency post office branches: post offices owned and managed by either an independent postmaster or a larger franchise partner (for example WH Smith or the Co-operative).⁷
- Outreach services: typically small part-time branches that may use a village hall or mobile van to provide post office services to communities that might not otherwise receive them.

More information regarding these post office contract types can be found in the Library briefing paper [The Post Office](#).

At the end of March 2018, there were

- 9,768 agency branches, 85% of the network.
- 1,517 outreach services, 13% of the total network.
- 262 Crown branches, 2% of the Post Office Network.

Trend in post offices by branch type

Between 2017 and 2018 there was a fall in both the number of Crown and Agency branches. Crown branch numbers fell by 23, and Agency branch numbers fell by 167. However the number of outreach services grew by 78. These continue trends seen in recent years.

Number of post offices by contract type

	Crown	Agency	Outreach
2009	373	10,776	803
2010	373	10,599	933
2011	373	10,468	979
2012	373	10,428	1,017
2013	373	10,342	1,065
2014	350	10,255	1,091
2015	326	10,172	1,136
2016	315	10,062	1,266
2017	285	9,935	1,439
2018	262	9,768	1,517

Source: Post Office Limited, Network Reports

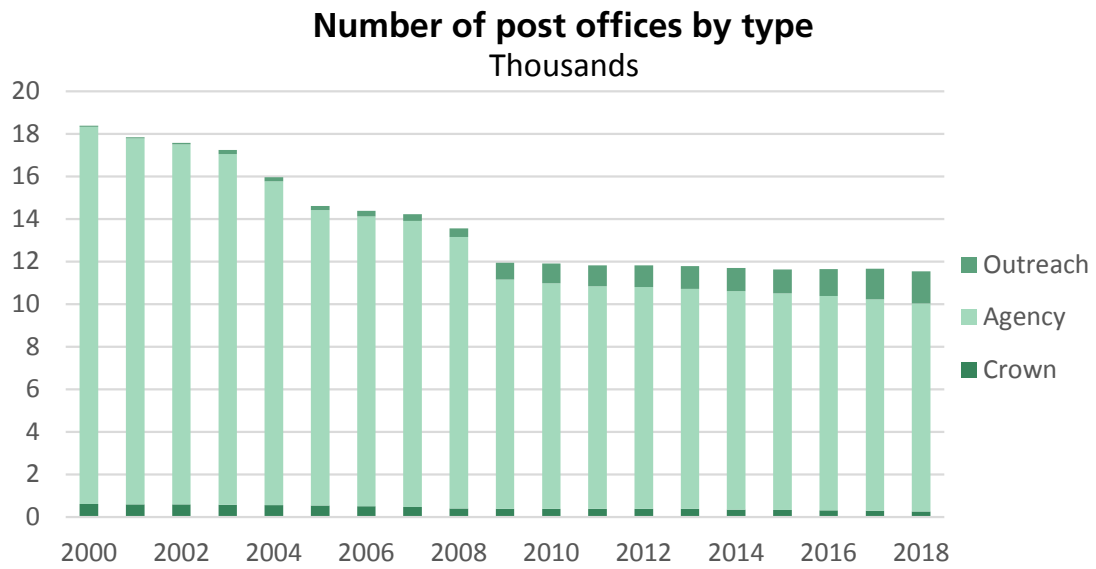
Notes: Data is for end of March in each year

There has been a significant rise in the number of outreach services since 2000. There were 52 outreach services in the year 2000 representing less than 1% of the total Post Office Network at the time. By 2008 there were more outreach services than Crown branches. Outreach services now number 1,517 as of March 2018, 13% of the total network.

The number of Crown post offices has been falling since 2013 (when there were 373 Crown branches, compared with 262 in 2018). The

⁷ There are multiple types of agency branch. Further details about the different types of post office branch can be found in the Library briefing [The Post Office](#).

number of agency branches has also been declining, but much more gradually.



Source: Post Office Ltd

3. Post offices by location

3.1 Urban and rural post office branches

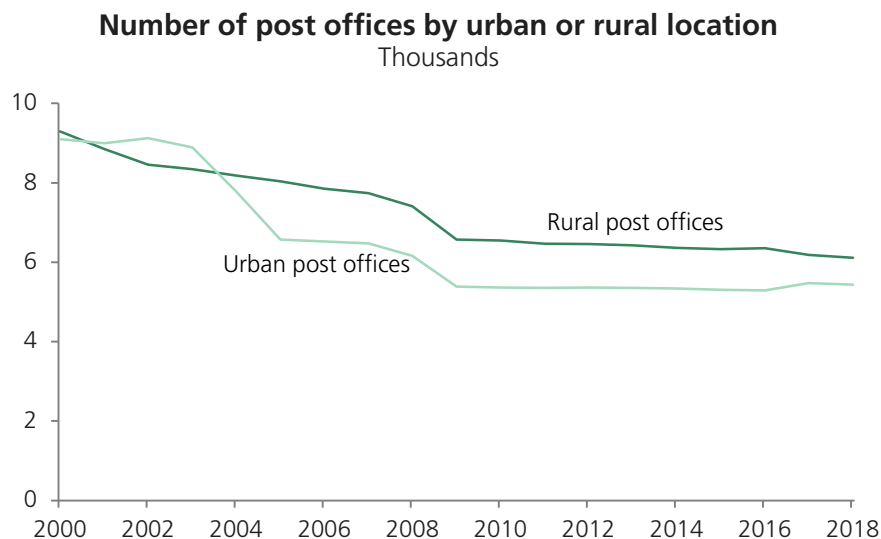
There are more post offices in rural locations than there are in urban locations.

At the end of March 2018 there were 6,110 post offices in rural locations in the UK, 53% of the Post Office Network, and 5,437 post offices in urban locations, 47% of the network.

Between March 2017 and March 2018 the number of rural post offices fell by 75, while the number in urban areas fell by 37.

Trend in urban and rural post offices.

The number of both rural and urban post offices has been relatively stable since 2009.



Source: Post Office Ltd

3.2 Post offices by region and country

The number of post offices in each UK region or country varies depending on the size and density of the population. Sparsely populated regions and countries often have more post offices per person to ensure that the access criteria is met for all residents.

As of March 2018, Scotland had the most post offices of any UK region and country (1,398) and Northern Ireland had the fewest (485).

Change over time

During the period between March 2017 and March 2018, the change in the number of post office branches across the UK's regions and countries varied from an increase of 4 in Northern Ireland to falls of 25 in each of the South West and Wales.

Data by constituency is available to Members of Parliament, please contact the Library for details.

Number of post offices by UK region and country

	Number		Change	
	2017	2018	Number	%
North East	497	490	-7	-1.4%
North West	1,117	1,119	2	0.2%
Yorkshire and The Humber	963	951	-12	-1.2%
West Midlands	906	900	-6	-0.7%
South West	1,293	1,268	-25	-1.9%
South East	1,389	1,373	-16	-1.2%
London	661	662	1	0.2%
East of England	1,136	1,116	-20	-1.8%
East Midlands	882	879	-3	-0.3%
Northern Ireland	481	485	4	0.8%
Scotland	1,403	1,398	-5	-0.4%
Wales	931	906	-25	-2.7%

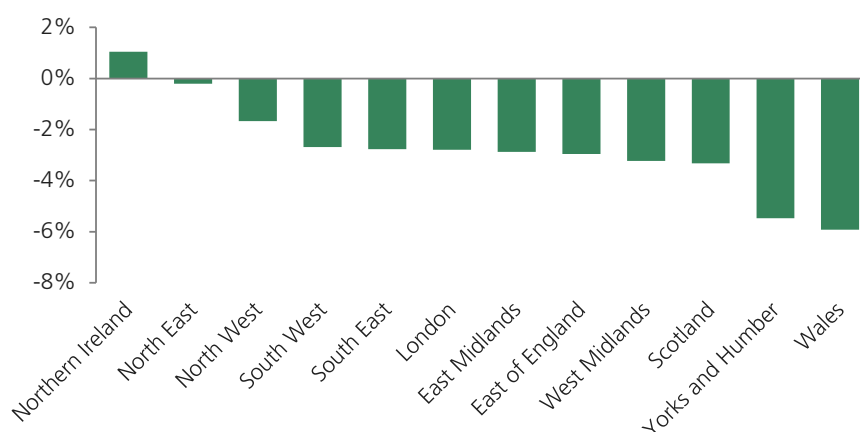
Source: Personal communication with the Post Office and the Post Office Network Reports

Notes: Data refers to March in each year

Longer term trend

Since 2010 the trend in many UK regions and countries has been fairly similar. Northern Ireland has seen modest growth in the number of post offices whilst all other regions and countries have seen reductions in the number of post offices. Wales and Yorkshire and the Humber have seen the largest percentage falls in the number of post offices.

% change in number of post offices by region
2010-2018



Source: Post Office Ltd

Appendix: discontinuity in post office network statistics in 2005 and 2007

From June 2005 a new system of recording the number of Post offices was introduced. This caused a discontinuity in the overall total, regional figures and the urban/rural breakdown. Overall, the number of post offices recorded at the end of June 2005 was only two below the total at the end of March 2005. However, 31 net rural reductions and 33 net urban reductions were counted.

There is also a break in the series at the end of 2006 and again at the end of 2006/07 after Royal Mail undertook work regarding the identification of branches and services. In rural areas in particular, they have, over the past few years, introduced a number of 'innovative solutions' - for example, where sub-postmasters provide a service in a nearby village from the village hall. They may do this for one or more villages and the previous technical set up meant that all accounting was completed at the host or hub site. Technical updates now mean that all individual serving points are identified. Also, in many remote areas communication with branches was through satellite links and the Post Office is now able to communicate with them online. These and other activities have changed the way that some branches are identified, although there has in effect been no actual physical change in services to the public at these branches.

Between December 2006, March 2007 and June 2007, the Post Office increased the accuracy of the data in terms of the methodology and data sets used. Previous analysis to identify branch locations was based on postcode information where postcode centroids were used to plot locations which are accurate to 100m. The new approach is to use address pointed coordinates, these are accurate to the actual building, rather than the 100m for the postcode centroids.

As an example of these changes, there was a fall in the physical network at June 2007 of 44 branches on March 2007, the impact of the technical changes (-28 branches) means that the statistics showed a fall in the post office network of 72 branches.

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publically available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).