



## Post Office News - February 2020

### Post offices “increasingly relied upon” for access to banking

A [new report](#) highlights the growing role of the post office network in providing access to cash. The IPPR comments that as ATMs and bank branches close, increasing numbers of consumers are being pushed towards alternative providers, such as the Post Office. However, the think tank warns that with fewer consumers withdrawing cash, the costs of maintaining cash infrastructure are shared across a shrinking pool of transactions.

The IPPR calls for an extended banking levy to include the full range of major payment and financial service providers, and says the government should legislate for a universal service obligation on cash access. The IPPR proposes a mixed approach to meeting local banking needs. Building on existing Post Office banking services, the think tank recommends the creation of a government owned [Post Bank](#) providing affordable basic banking services to all citizens. The IPPR also recommends the retail banks should expand shared banking hubs for personal and business banking.

Separately, LINK, the UK’s main cash machine network, has [announced](#) banks and building societies have agreed an extra £4 million additional funding for ATMs. The news follows last autumn’s launch of a [request a free-to-use ATM](#) service for communities in areas where people find it hard to access cash. LINK reports that over 2,700 community requests for an ATM have been received since October.

### Post Office retail chief executive to depart

Debbie Smith, Post Office Ltd’s (POL) [retail CEO is to leave](#) as part of restructuring to improve the relationship with subpostmasters, according to reports. The role included responsibility for supporting post offices to become

simpler to run and 'creating and distributing market-leading products that customers want'.

It is reported that the move will strip out a layer of management between retailers and group chief executive Nick Read who took up his post in September. Further structural changes are expected.

### **Post Office fined for overcharging disabled customers**

The UK broadband and phone division of the Post Office has been fined £175,000 after the communication regulator, Ofcom, found that the company had [overcharged customers](#) with hearing or speech difficulties who made telephone calls using a relay service.

Relay services help people with hearing and speech difficulties to communicate over the phone, by offering text-to-speech and speech-to-text translation services. A special price compensates for the additional time it takes for them to make phone calls using a relay service. In addition to the fine, POL was required to refund customers who were affected. The Post Office says it [no longer applies any charge](#) to calls made using the service.

Telecoms represent an increasing part of POL's revenue, delivering 16% of total company turnover in 2018/19.

### **Post Office trials parcel shops**

POL is conducting London [trials of a new parcel shop network](#) allowing customers to collect and return parcels without using a post office. In total, 11 sites including libraries, homeware shops and pharmacies are providing services for Royal Mail and Parcelforce.

Some [post office operators](#) are reported to be dismayed by the trial, which they see as competing with nearby existing post offices. POL emphasises that the trial is taking place in locations which have a high population density, and the company says it has assessed locations very carefully.

### **Northern Ireland's ParcelPal helps consumers find nearest parcel shops**

The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland has launched an [online tool](#) designed to help people based in Northern Ireland find their nearest parcel shop or outlet. With many of the outlets, customers can use click & collect and return

online shopping with participating retailers. Providers covered by the Parcelpal service include the Post Office, DHL Parcel, DPD, Hermes and UPS.

## Post developments around the world

- **Ireland** - Following the launch of the service in April, over 2,800 [homeless people are using An Post post offices as home addresses](#). Irish homelessness charities warn that the high volume of users indicates how many homeless people could not access a basic postal address, and expect these numbers to continue to rise.
- **France** - La Poste has begun using [drones to make deliveries](#) to a remote Alpine village. The postal service says flying packages by remote control is more reliable, quicker and safer than driving up narrow mountain roads in winter.
- **Norway** - Posten Norge is planning to provide [parcel lockers](#) throughout the country, starting with a pilot in Oslo. The lockers can be opened with an app on customers' phones. In future, it will also be possible to use the parcel lockers to return parcels to online shops and send parcels to members of the public. The move follows the trial of a similar service in Denmark.
- **United States** - The United States Postal Service (USPS) is trialling [fingerprinting services](#) at post offices for the FBI. The fingerprinting service is designed for customers applying for an identity history summary check - needed for some adoptions, foreign travel and other purposes.