

Fianna Fáil Motion on Post Office Network

That Dáil Éireann:

Recognising that:

- post offices provide crucial economic, administrative and social services to communities all around Ireland, especially to those in rural and isolated areas;

- many citizens depend on post offices in order to access basic state services, including social welfare payments and passport application, as well as key financial services including insurance, banking and foreign exchange;

- this government and the previous government have stripped vital state services away from rural communities, including rural transport links, support for small schools, and rural Garda stations;

- previous post office closures took place as the result of population decline and not as the result of a pre-meditated programme to drastically reduce the number of post offices that are present in rural areas;

- technological and societal changes have presented significant challenges to the existent post office business model, and that significant change is required in order to ensure the viability of the An Post Network;

- the programme for government committed to revitalising the An Post network through the introduction of new services;

- there has been a Post Office Business Development Group since 2014, which made a final report to the government in January 2016 that made 23 recommendations, which have yet to be acted upon;

Noting that:

—it is the government's responsibility to provide equality of access to important services to all citizens;

—following the recent decision by An Post to circulate retirement packages to hundreds of post masters and post misters, 159 post masters and mistresses have elected to take their well-deserved retirements;

— it is An Post's intention that wherever a post master or mistress has elected to retire, that post office will close, leaving communities without access to critical post office services;

— other European countries have already extended PSO payments for the purpose of maintaining post office outlets in areas where they would be otherwise financially unviable;

— the proposed changes to a 15km radius will place an intolerable burden on the elderly and most vulnerable in our communities, particularly those without access to private or public transport;

Calls on the Government to:

—guarantee the current post office network to ensure that all citizens of Ireland have access to this important service by introducing a new PSO payment for post offices, based on models in the United Kingdom;

—immediately roll out new services, as recommended by the Post Office Business Development Group and An Post's own strategy, to ensure the financial viability of the entire An Post network;

— prevent the loss of post office services in the 159 communities where post masters or mistresses are retiring by advertising a new contract, appropriate to the local area and taking into consideration the potential for co-location, to continue the provision of post office services.