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The Rt Honorable Kemi Badenoch
Secretary of State for Business and Trade
Old Admiralty Building, Admiralty Place
London
SW1A 2DY
United Kingdom

12th June 2024

Dear Secretary of State

Royal Mail and Post Office Counters

In view of the timing, we are copying this to the current lead spokespeople on Business and Trade of other political parties standing in the UK General Election and to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Ofcom. We will also be making the content of the letter more widely available.

We are writing to you because of a growing concern about the management of a range of essential services to rural communities in the UK including, but not confined to, postal services covered by the Universal Service Obligation (USO). The USO is a matter of critical importance to rural communities, rural businesses and people living in all rural areas.

We seek reassurance from both you and Ofcom, that nothing will be negotiated in the context of the current offer to buy Royal Mail without wider impacts on rural communities and rural businesses being taken into account.

We believe there is a risk that ongoing negotiations over the transfer of ownership, and the obligations transferred with it, could close-off alternate ways in which rural areas could better be served. Over several years, market factors have resulted in people and businesses in rural communities seeing a serious drop in the quality of many essential services including postal deliveries, access to cash and other banking services and other functions previously carried out by the Post Office. A move to placing everything online – digital by default – may, in the long term, be inevitable, but in the immediate present too many people living in rural areas find themselves severely disadvantaged over access to these services.

We ask that, as Secretary of State until 4th July, you issue a clear 'holding instruction' to the operators of the postal services USO to the effect that any transfer of ownership will be blocked pending the outcome of the General Election. In the same way, we ask that you issue an instruction to Ofcom that no decisions are taken over the USO in the same timescale.

Following the General Election, we look forward to your Department working with Royal Mail, the FCA, CMA, the Post Office and Ofcom to 'rural proof' the way in which this collection of services are provided to rural communities in order both to avoid unequal access and enable rural businesses to thrive throughout the UK. Our three organisations stand ready to work with the Department in this endeavour.

Yours sincerely

Corinne Pluchino
Chief Executive, ACRE

Kerry Booth
Chief Executive, Rural Services Network

James Alcock
Chief Executive, Plunkett UK

Cc

Jonathan Reynolds, Labour Party
Sarah Olney, Liberal Democrat Party
Molly Scott Cato, Green Party
Nikhil Rathi, Chief Executive of the Financial Conduct Authority
Sarah Cardell, Chief Executive of the Competition and Markets Authority
Dame Melanie Henrietta Dawes, Chief Executive of Ofcom

Scottish Rural Action
Northern Ireland Rural Community Network
PLANED – Wales
National Council of Voluntary Organisations

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