

21 January 2021



Karen McFarland  
Director of Health & Community  
Derry City and Strabane District Council  
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Dear Ms McFarland

Thank you for your communication dated 15 January regarding the Royal Mail operation in Castledearg.

I recognise how frustrating it is for people who are experiencing disruption to their normal deliveries at the present time, and I would like to apologise for the inconvenience that has been caused.

Our postmen and women across Northern Ireland, and all the colleagues who play a vital part in keeping the network going, have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. The Christmas peak, which is always our busiest time of the year, concluded what had already been an extremely challenging year with unprecedented volumes of parcels, and significant changes to our working practices to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. The subsequent announcement of further lockdowns across the UK has led to continued high volumes of items in our network.

Unfortunately, despite our best endeavours and all the precautions we have implemented, like the rest of Northern Ireland our people are not immune from the effects of COVID-19. We have seen colleagues fall ill. Others have had to shield, or stay home to care for their loved ones. Many more have been instructed to remain in isolation after coming into close contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus. This has a direct impact on our staffing levels, especially in areas where there are higher levels of local outbreaks. Unfortunately, because people have to isolate immediately, we receive no advance warning of a sudden drop in attendance, making it harder to plan ahead.

As a result, mail deliveries to addresses in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area may have been impacted. I apologise to you and residents if that has led to delays in receiving items. I know how much people rely on our service, and we are doing everything we can to deliver as comprehensive a service as possible.

**Castledearg Delivery Office** - Across the Royal Mail network our operation in rural areas operates out of Post Office buildings where typically, small numbers of postmen and women

sort mail before taking it out to deliver. For a number of years now, we have been reviewing our operational sites due to the changing nature of the modern postbag and to ensure our sites are better equipped now and, in the future, to safely handle the huge increase in parcel volumes. In the first half of the Financial Year we delivered c.33 per cent more parcels and delivered c.20 per cent fewer letters.

As councillors will be aware we have been in discussions with the Communication Workers Union regarding the Royal Mail operation in Castlederg. With the changing nature of the modern postbag we have taken the decision to relocate the sortation of mail from Castlederg to Strabane Delivery Office. This relocation will take place next month. We continue to be in discussions with all of our employees in Castlederg regarding the relocation.

I would like to reassure you that the relocation of the operation in Castlederg is being undertaken with health and safety at the forefront. The relocation has taken into account the social distancing guidelines that are currently in place and we are confident this can be maintained by all colleagues at Strabane Delivery Office with the Castlederg operation in situ from next month.

Customers will not be affected by these changes. They will continue to have their mail delivered by the same postman or woman as they do now. I would also like to reassure you that we are not planning to withdraw the service for customers to collect items that could not be delivered first time from Castlederg Post Office. I expect this service to remain in place.

The contract we have with Post Office Limited obliges Royal Mail to give a Postmaster six months notice. We would offer compensation to the Postmaster equivalent to 12 months worth of fees paid as a lump sum. The compensation is offered to support the Postmaster should they wish to re-purpose the space or diversify the Post Office business to different revenue streams. This is the case in relation to our proposed changes for Castlederg.

I hope that this update is helpful. As always if I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Hogg', followed by a large, stylized flourish or scribble.

Michael Hogg  
Senior Public Affairs Manager