

# Improving Access to Services The 'Essex Models' for Supporting Diverse Communities

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# The Essex experience

- Improving access to services may require new methods of access and possibly new services themselves – sometimes delivered by new partners
- Keep in mind the need to put the customer first – it's no good being creative and innovative if it doesn't deliver improved outcomes
- Communicate, communicate, communicate it's crucial to keep progress on track

# Overriding principles

- 1) Consider the customer's needs and from this the desired outcome
- 2) Keep your options open, one size fits all is probably not going to meet the first principle – Essex has five operating models for Post Office Services
- 3) You need people, money and time, but, people and time are key
- 4) When in doubt refer to (1)

# The Essex Strategy

**The goal**  
To deliver the best quality of life in Britain.

**The programme**  
EssexWorks.

**What's it based on?**  
Extensive consultations and public engagement for the Essex Strategy. This helped the Cabinet decide their ten priorities.

**3 delivery programmes, 10 priorities**

- One overarching priority**  
Putting the customer first
- Our People**  
Increasing educational achievement and skills  
Promoting health and leisure  
Supporting vulnerable people
- Our Economy**  
Improving transport  
Promoting sustainable economic growth  
Delivering value for money
- Our World**  
Protecting the environment  
Reducing and recycling waste  
Making communities safer



## 3 delivery programmes, 10 priorities

### **One overarching priority**

Putting the customer first

### **Our People**

Increasing educational achievement and skills

Promoting health and leisure

Supporting vulnerable people

### **Our Economy**

Improving transport

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### **Our World**

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# Making it happen

- Two distinct phases
  - Designing the model
  - Delivering it
- Different skills required for different challenges

## How Essex did it – designing the model(s)

- The Council's vision to save Post Offices threatened with closure
- Affected sub-postmasters/mistresses contacted and information gathered, community views sought
- Strategy and delivery plan developed by project team
- Proposal developed and submitted to Post Office Limited where it was rejected
- Intensive discussions with Post Office Limited and lobbying central government for support
- Revised detailed proposal developed in the light of State Aid concerns, submitted to and accepted by
  - Essex County Council external lawyers
  - Post Office Limited operational and legal staff
  - Post Office Limited external lawyers and DBERR
- Proposal approved by Essex County Council Cabinet

# Thinking outside the box

- Quick wins – Essex looks to re-open branches that Post Office Limited have not decommissioned
- Where viable, ECC seeks to reinstate decommissioned sub-post offices
- Thereafter ECC will look for innovative ways to offer outreach services – the Essex model

# What is the Essex model?

Value for Money a priority, so no 'one size fits all' solution

- The model comes in 5 flavours with each model incorporating a Community Information Point, the models are: -
  - *Standalone model*
  - *Partnership model*
  - *Hosted model*
  - *'Essex Light' model*
  - *Essex Restart model*

# Community Information Point

- Local access to key information
  - Broadband access to local websites: -
    - *Essex County Council*
    - *Borough/District Council*
    - *Essex Emergency services: Ambulance Service, Police & Fire*
    - *NHS UK, NHS Direct. PALS (Patient advice and liaison service)*
    - *Transport, Government and Charity advice and information*
  - Various council leaflets and forms

# Standalone Service

- Sub-Postmaster/Postmistress operates as before with similar products and services
  - Community Information point
  - Intended for areas where the Sub-Post Office carried out more than 400 transactions per week
  - Public will see no difference to pre-closure service

# Partner Service

- Sub-Postmaster from a nearby town/village contracts with an existing business in the community
  - A limited number of products and services carried out within an existing business based in the community
  - Public House, Shop, Library or Town Hall
  - Secondary to existing business proposition – cannot be onerous or compromise host business.

# Hosted Service

- Sub-Postmaster from a nearby town/village makes regular community visits
  - A temporary sub-Post Office in a community building
  - NOT operating from a school
  - Village or Church Hall, Sports Club, Public House, retail outlet etc
  - Intended for areas where the Sub-Post Office carried out up to 150 transactions per week

# ‘Essex Light’

- No involvement with Post Office Limited
  - Where no agreement for Post Office service provision is possible
  - Paypoint terminal to pay bills and charge fuel keys
  - Stamps and envelopes for sale
  - ATM with no fees for access to cash

# Essex Restart

- To reinstate Post Office® services where communities have suffered unexpected closure due to retirement or resignation of sub-postmaster etc
  - Capital investment
  - Community Information Point
  - In collaboration with parish / town councils or community groups

## How Essex did it – the delivery

- Sub-postmaster decided the appropriate level of Post Office® involvement and created an outline business plan
- Sub-postmaster gathered information – Disability Discrimination Act, insurance, bank facilities etc
- Sub-postmaster developed and submitted detailed proposal to Essex County Council
- Essex County Council considered and accepted the proposal
- Essex County Council contracted with the sub-postmaster in line with Cabinet approval
- 13/09/2008 Station Way Post Office officially launched
- Further 3 outlets opened
- Complimentary feedback received from council taxpayers
- Additional 5 outlets in the pipeline



## Design Phase

- Customer needs and desired outcome identified
- Why, where, when, who, what & how?
- Negotiation and revisions
- Acceptance by the current provider
- Local governance approval

## Delivery Phase

- Customer needs and desired outcome communicated to new provider
- Why, where, when, who, what & how?
- Negotiation and revisions
- Acceptance by the initiator
- Contracts signed
- Customer gets improved service
- Customer feedback and review

# Why has it taken so long?

- To get this far, our proposals have had to satisfy the following: -
- Post Office Limited
  - Slaughter & May
- Pat McFadden MP - Minister of State for Employment Relations and Postal Affairs
- Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform
  - EU (Advisory Committee on State Aid)
- Essex County Council: Member Support & Governance
  - Nabarro
- Essex County Council: Cabinet
- Essex County Council: Project Management Steering Group
- Retailers concerned

# Some potential pitfalls

- Post Office Limited have the right to veto any outlet that would compromise an existing part of their network
- Potential sub-Postmasters/mistresses must pass an interview with Post Office Limited
- Post Office Limited self-insures the significant amounts of cash held in branch – commercial insurance is expensive,
- State Aid – the total financial support by any and all public bodies cannot exceed euro 200,000 in any three year period without specific EU approval – worth £185,820 in April 2009. Historically has varied between £116,240 and £194,840 !

# Some opportunities

- Avoiding 'like for like' provision offers the chance for cheaper **and** better solutions – Post Office at Little Hallingbury is now also a community shop
- Engagement beyond your own organisation boundaries may allow you to share costs and benefits – district and borough councils exploring possibilities for using our post offices
- Allow for unintended upsides – Police now operate a drop-in surgery for residents at Buckhurst Hill
- Community Information Points are popular with residents and are being piloted more widely

## In summary

- Be prepared for everything to take twice as long as originally expected
- A trouble shared is a trouble halved - you could be right next to someone facing similar issues
- Agreeing costs and funding can be a very expensive activity
- Success is more likely for those who are good at Plan B
- What's in it for you, the current provider **and** the new provider, everyone must bring something to the party and get something back

# Questions

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