



CRC 17/07

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Rural Service Support goes live

Post Offices play a vital role in rural life, providing access to services and often acting as the social hub for a village. Over the next year or so around 1,250 rural Post Offices are set to close across the country with the possibility of up to 500 of these being replaced through ways of providing an alternative service known as 'Outreach'.

Rural Service Support will provide national and local organisations which support local communities with on-line access to experts who can help them plan for the future, including looking at alternative ways of meeting the services needs of rural residents and businesses.

Commenting on the introduction of Rural Service Support, Dr. Stuart Burgess Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities and the government's Rural Advocate said: "I am delighted to be supporting this vitally important initiative. Post Offices play a crucially important role in the economic and social fabric of rural areas. There are already successful examples around the country of Post Office services being provided in places such as pubs and community halls, as well as in village shops. Rural Service Support will help a wide range of organisations to assist communities through periods of change in provision. I hope as many organisations as possible from around the country will use the system – the more it is used the more valuable it will be in serving the needs of rural communities".

Following a successful trial in Essex, Rural Service Support is now going live across the country. Funded by the Commission for Rural Communities and supported by a consortium of national organisations including Post Office Ltd, the service is being operated by ruralnet|uk, alongside the established Experts Online service.

The project will continue to at least October 2008 and will aim to signpost organisations to solutions that may help them identify alternative ways of providing services for their communities.

ENDS

For more information about Rural Service Support, contact ruralnet|uk via
0845 1300 411

Notes for editors:

1. To register for Rural Service Support go to:

www.expertsonline.org.uk/rssupport

2. Organisations supporting Rural Service Support include: Action for Market Towns, Action with Communities in Rural England, Commission for Rural Communities, Post Office Ltd, Postwatch, Local Government Association, National Association of Local Councils, Pub is the Hub, ruralnet|uk and the Village Retail Services Association.

3. ruralnet|uk is a rural regeneration charity which promotes a living and working countryside and finds new and effective ways to help rural communities improve and strengthen their local economies. It supports agencies working on the ground to alleviate disadvantage, to enable social inclusion and social enterprise. It works through promoting and enabling collaboration, research, consultancy and knowledge and information transfer. With local partners, it supports projects which put ideas into practice at the local level. It has specialist skills in information, communications and collaboration technologies and wide experience covering their potential and their appropriate use for rural areas. For further details go to: www.ruralnetuk.org

4. Information about the Commission for Rural Communities and its work can be found in its current Annual Review at:

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/annualreview20062007