



PRESS RELEASE

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“DEVON KNOWS” – A REPORT ON SUPPORT FOR RURAL POST OFFICES HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE RSA

For several years the Rural Shops Alliance has been providing retail advice and help as part of a scheme operated by Devon County Council to support some rural Post Offices in the county. Consumer Focus has just issued a report that highlights how successful the scheme has been and holds it up as a model for other councils faced with similar issues. It combined a modest financial payment to the operators, to help cushion the loss of income resulting from the changes, whilst enlisting the Rural Shops Alliance to provide retail support and the Community Council for Devon to help them engage more fully with their local communities.

Consumer Focus' report, "Devon Knows, Long-term impacts and lessons from the Post Office Closure Programme" researched the impact of this project and found that it has worked well. They concluded, "The success of the package could help other local authorities...Devon County Council's scheme is a highly transferable model, even in a challenging financial period". The report goes on, "A number of key lessons for further restructuring of the Post Office network have been identified following this research, and Devon has highlighted the critical importance that local stakeholders and community engagement can play to help mitigate the impacts that changes can bring. These lessons will be important in the light of the major changes that are due to occur to the Post Office network from the middle of 2012 onwards".

The Rural Shops Alliance's role was summarized as follows, "Operators tell us that the practical support offered through the specialist retail consultancy and community development initiatives proved to be as important, if not more so, than the direct financial assistance".

Ken Parsons, Chief Executive of the RSA, commented, "The RSA has been delighted to be involved in this successful programme. We are pleased that this independent report has recognized its overall value and of our part in it.

We hope that we will be able to work with Post Office Ltd. and other local authorities to make sure that the forthcoming changes to the Post Office network can be implemented in a way that enables the rural offices involved to thrive and remain as crucial parts of their communities".

Note to editors:

The full report can be found at:

<http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/publications/devon-knows-long-term-impacts-and-lessons-from-the-post-office-closure-programme>

Notes for editors:

The Rural Shops Alliance (RSA) is the national voice for about 7,500 rural retailers. We campaign on their behalf and also help these shops to become more competitive with practical advice and support, to the benefit of thousands of rural communities. Many 'blue chip' suppliers and county councils sponsor and partner the work of the RSA. Our direct contact with rural shops and with these organisations means that we keep in close touch with emerging issues and concerns in our fast changing business sector.

More Information:

Kenneth Parsons	- Tel 01761 462371 Mobile 07980 673675
Gary Hepburn	- Tel 01305 752050
Duty Press Contact	- Tel 07092 048546