



**Woughton Community Council**  
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**Environment & Communities Evaluation Form**

Name	Mark Gould
Position in group	Secretary
Phone number	

Name of Organisation	Friends of the Community Cafe Association, Coffee Hall
Amount awarded	£400.00
Purpose of Grant	Part Funding of trip to Black Country Living Museum, Dudley

**How has this grant made a difference to your group and the local people who benefitted from this project?**

They say that living in the past is unhealthy, but research has shown that 'emembering' the past can bring about a sense of nostalgia which can have positive mental benefits by alleviating depression and anxiety. One of the aims of this trip was to trigger the memories of the more elderly residents who went on the trip. Equally, there was also an opportunity for the younger members of our group to experience and learn about many aspects of the past. Without this grant many of our residents would not have been able to afford the relatively high cost of travel and admission. Furthermore, travelling as a group with their friends, gave the more infirm and mobility impaired members of the group the confidence to venture away from home.

**What lessons did you learn in the process of delivering this project?**

The travel and admission elements of the trip were well under control. However, there was a Covid outbreak in our local Community and we did not have any contingency plans in place beforehand. However, on the day of the trip we distributed face masks and sanitising gel to all passengers on the coach. As far as we know there were no additional Covid cases resulting from contact on our trip.

The trip also confirmed that you can plan for everything apart for the wet and windy weather.

Updated July 2015

**Please provide at least one quote or testimonial from a participant/service user describing their experience of this project**

This trip has brought up some old memories and created new ones. The new 1950' street was particularly relevant to me since this reminded me of my childhood during that time. I am thoroughly looking forward to the further expansion of the 1950' street.

**Will this activity/project continue after the end of this grant? If so, please tell us where the funding will come from**

This was a one-off activity but, based on feedback at our last meeting, the memories of the day will stay with the participants for a long time. They have already shared their experiences with others who did not come on the trip and are looking forward to going again if the opportunity arises.

**How/where has the Woughton Community Council logo been used in conjunction with this grant**

The trip was mainly communicated by word of mouth, since many of the participants do not use Social Media to a large extent.

How many people benefitted from the grant?

Please specify numbers

Total number of participants: 38

Young People up to the age of 18: 1

Adults: 6

Older People over 60: 31

Area attending from, please specify numbers

Tinkers Bridge: 3

Netherfield: 6

Beanhill: 18

Coffee Hall: 11

Leadenhall:

Eaglestone:

Peartree Bridge:

We do understand that it is difficult sometimes to gauge numbers, please estimate to the best of your ability

Please attach any relevant receipts to this form and detail them below

Item	Details	Cost
Catteralls Coaches	Coach Travel	£700.00
Black Country Living Museum	Admission	£575.00

We would love to see any photographs that you are able to share with us, or please provide copies of any evaluation/feedback forms that you have. Should you require any assistance to complete this form or assistance with copying receipts etc, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please complete and return to Woughton Community Council within six weeks (42 days) of your award, failure to do so may result in a 12 month ban of applying to Woughton Community Council Grant Aid

Updated July 2015

**Agenda item: FC 61/23**

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Services & Communities Committee**

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To update the committee on the Depot and Community Garden developments.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the committee notes the report and poses any questions or queries.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

**New Depot site.**

The new depot site is now (almost) completed. The fencing, storage and electrical work has been completed, but the water and internet remain more of a challenge. All equipment (bar the diesel tank) has been moved over from the Fishermead site, with the hand tools that had been stored in the Coffee Hall 'Hub' building also now moved (freeing up space within the Hub). The equipment stored at the Eaglestone garage (the environment team equipment) is in the process of moving over / being rationalised, meaning that the costs associated with both former sites will cease at the end of this calendar year. This equates to:

- Rates (Fishermead)            £3600 per year
- Rent (Fishermead)            £1960 per year
- Rent (Eaglestone)            £852.80 per year
- Electricity (Fishermead)    £300 per year\*
- Water (Fishermead)         £200 per year\*

This totals £6,912.80 per year.

In addition, the reduction in travel costs (time and fuel) are around 4 working hours per day (30 mins each end, for four officers) = approx. £50 per hour, £200 per day for 250 days per year = £50,000 (it is suggested that with annual leave, efficiencies, etc, that this is probably an overestimate, but even if halved, still equates to £25,000 a year).

Plus fuel (approx. 2 miles per day, per vehicle = 500 miles per year per vehicle, for truck, plus mowers = 1000 miles per year @ 45 per mile = £450.

Overall reductions of around £30,000 a year in both direct savings and efficiency benefits.

That is the positive news.

The challenges around delivering the depot are well documented – the fencing almost doubled in cost between planning and delivery, additional costs became apparent around electrical installations and, despite the significant security measures in place, there was still a break in where the fence and

gates were damaged and the trailer was stolen (this has now been recovered, but costs remain high – loss of use, damage, recovery costs, repairs to the fencing / gates, increased insurance costs (£1000 increase) and further security measures (hitch locks, extra gate locks, etc).

Other challenges are around installation of water and internet (if wanted).

The water situation is simply that neither the council nor Anglian Water appear to have any records of where the water enters the site. This means that the quotes we have received to install the water involve either road closures and significant pipe work OR bringing it up from the neighbouring road. Either option equates to £4,000 plus. There have been some early looks as to whether we can get a 'radar investigation' to find the in pipe, but nothing has been possible yet (the only quote we have had is for £1000 with no guarantees!).

There is a similar situation with internet – whilst this is only really needed for any security measures installed, the cost would add a few hundred pounds per year onto the budget. At the moment, there is alternative CCTV on the road which helps, but isn't perfect. A further decision, once all costs are finalised, will be made around this.

Despite all these issues, there is no doubt that having this depot locally is an excellent investment. The flood equipment storage, additional storage for the 'Library of Things' and the existing tool library and, what we hope will be secure storage for all the relevant equipment, on parish, nearby and easily accessible to the teams, is very useful.

### **Community Garden site**

This project, funded by the National Lottery, has been a long time coming! Now that the main build has been completed, activities are starting on the site and this has provided some much needed and really useful opportunities; apple day took place there and was a really nice space in which to do this. Forest School pilot is happening within that site. Payback now use that as their base at weekends – it is already doing some of the things it was designed for.

The Log Cabin offers a nice, internal space from which to work. The gazebo (fixed, wooden) offers an outdoor space for similar approaches. The polytunnel will allow growing year round, enabling seeds to be planted and grown over the winter. The composting toilet is now also finished and working well (although apparently, there is an internal storage provision that has to be 'changed' every now and then – clarification on who will be responsible for this is still being decided!).

The next stage within the overall project is to look at a project worker to take it forward. The grant application and agreement includes a 15 hour per week post over the 3 years of the project – the job description for this role is currently in

development and will be considered in the New Year. The idea is that the new officer will work alongside existing Environment Team, community food, partners, groups and individuals to develop a range of activities, growing spaces, education / training sessions and similar to encourage use, increase yields and provide further options for the cafes, fridges and similar across the parish.

In addition, the site aims to grow, from seed or small plants, alternatives to the current inappropriate planting that is installed across the parish. By operating as a 'nursery' for these plants, replacements

can be grown affordably, in line with agreements with landowners and produced in a way that compliments the environmental and biodiversity targets of the council and other agencies.

**STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None.

**AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager

**Agenda item: SC 63/23**

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Services and Community Committee**

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To propose work on two (2) projects, suggested by councillors.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That the committee notes the report.**
- 2. That the committee considers whether any resource should be allocated to either of the two proposals:**
  - a. The provision of a new bus service, provided by WCC, to replace the service previously provided via the 150**
  - b. The provision of a new post office on Coffee Hall, provided by WCC, to replace the current provision that is due to end in November 2024\***
- 3. That if committee agrees to progress either of the above, a fuller case is developed for agreement at Full Council.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

There have been two specific requests made for work to be undertaken on projects within the parish. Due to the size, complexity and expense needed for both projects, plus the officer resource that would be needed to develop any case AND the need for council, as a corporate body, to agree to these works, this paper is the initial outline to assess whether any further work is warranted.

**New bus service.**

This request came following some changes to the bus service that runs through Coffee Hall. This was previously the Number 7 which was re-routed to the outside of the estate. Following some campaigning, a new service was provided, the 150. This has recently had a route change, meaning that it no longer travels via Asda, but instead via the Open University. No other routes have been changed, at this time.

As a result of these changes, a request was made to explore the potential for a new service, provided by WCC (with possible partners), to develop a new service, covering the estates of parish and travelling a route that includes a variety of supermarkets to the south of the parish.

As can be seen on the map below, the parish has several bus routes that serve it – this map, whilst the most up to date available, may not be fully accurate as this still has the 150 serving the MK1 development. Also attached is the MKCC Bus Service Improvement Plan, for added background.

The major routes are the 4, 5 and 6. These serve most estates, via the grid roads, with Saxon Street, Marlborough Street and Standing Way the significant thoroughfares. The hospital is a major interchange, leaving something of a gap along Saxon Street running between Beanhill and Netherfield (well served by other routes and with stops on other sides of the estates). The routes then

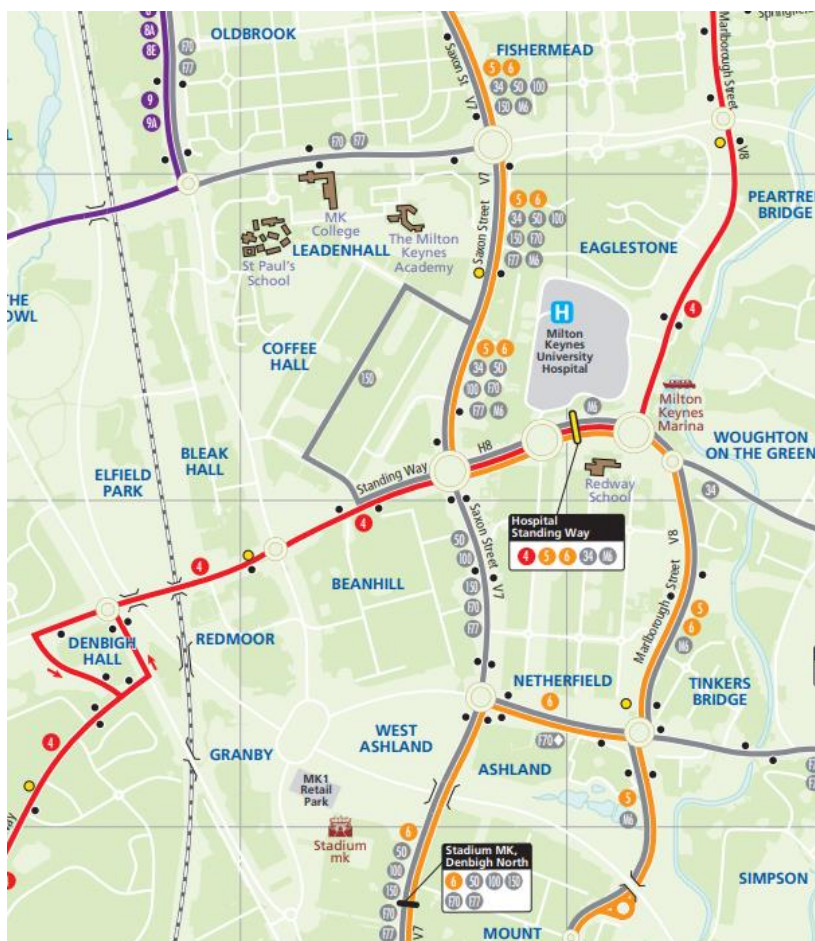
serve estates to the south (primarily Bletchley and surrounds) and the routes run to the north west of the city – Stony Stratford, Wolverton, New Bradwell and the estates along the way.

To the north west of the parish (Leadenhall / Oldbrook corner), services 8 and 9 also run – these serve the estates to the west, running through to Westcroft.

Other routes include longer trips to Aylesbury, Leighton Buzzard, Ampthill, Dunstable, and Luton.

Coffee Hall is the only estate that currently has a route running through it.

As can be seen on the accompanying map (the full bus route map), the parish is reasonably well served when compared with other parts of the city. This is necessary, given the lower levels of car ownership and other challenges faced by our communities.





## Costs of bus service provision

Whilst this is hard to evaluate without clarity around routes, frequency, etc. the following gives some idea of costs that are likely\*

This breakdown came via <https://www.busandcoachbuyer.com/on-target-10-costing-contracts/> where further detail is available, but the assumptions made are noted below. It is unclear whether this provision includes any disability accessible services or otherwise.

Further information about setting up at <https://startups.co.uk/guides/how-to-start-a-bus-company/>

Cost Item	Cost per day	Annual cost (190 operational days)
Fuel	£ 28.08	£ 5,335.20
Driver cost	£128.66	£24,445.40
Motor Insurance	£ 18.43	£ 3,501.70
Tyres	£ 2.24	£ 425.60
Vehicle Maintenance	£ 45.58	£ 8,660.20
Vehicle Depreciation & interest	£ 82.91	£15,752.90
<b>Total direct costs</b>	<b>£305.90</b>	<b>£58,121.00</b>

\*It should be noted that these figures are based on 2019 costs – fuel at £1.04 per litre (now nearer £1.50, so a 50% increase to £8,000), driver costs at £11.00 per hour (average now nearer £14.00 per hour, a 25% increase to £30,000), insurance has increased, alongside other increases in terms of maintenance, etc. – it is estimated that overall costs would have increased by around £20k per year, meaning around £80k per year). This is all based upon 55 miles per day – again, it is unclear as to whether this would be sufficient.

This doesn't include any management, organisational overheads, legislative provision (e.g. creating a trading arm, payment of registration fees, etc.) or ticketing needs. This is likely to add a further burden.

This is also based upon buying a new vehicle (52 seater @ £170,000) and costing this over 10 years. It is likely that this cost could be reduced by buying second hand, but that maintenance would increase – perhaps saving £5 – £10,000 per year.

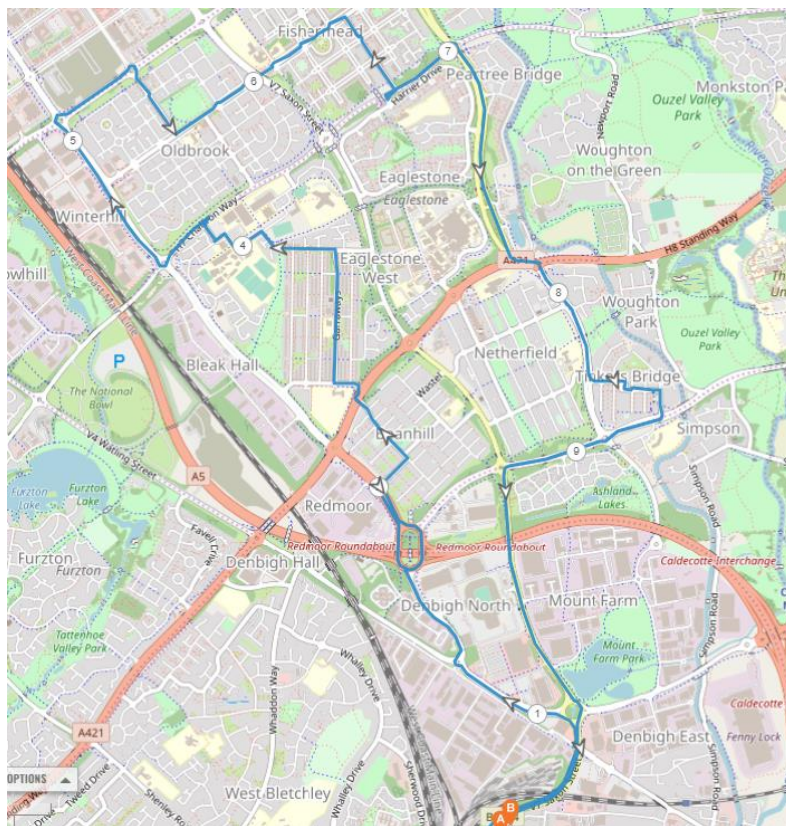
Based upon these rough figures, an annual cost of £60,000 is a reasonable assumption to make – based on 190 operational days (approx. 4 days per week, running for 8 hours a day) would mean approx. £320 per day costs.

To 'break even', this would mean 320 journeys per day (assuming £1 per journey). Again, assuming that the route is similar to the one below, this is approximately an

11 mile round trip (so 5 trips per day, based on the figures above), with 64 people per round trip needed (this is bordering on full capacity on every journey, with the assumption that some people will get off and on at various spots).

One suggestion made was that the various supermarkets would ‘sponsor’ the bus, to promote people attending their premises. Another was that ‘retired’ bus and coach drivers would volunteer to drive any such bus. Another was that a smaller vehicle could be used, reducing the fuel costs (and potentially some of the servicing and repair demands). If a 17 seater was to be considered, the initial

costs would be lower, fuel probably halved and servicing reduced significantly. However, customer levels would drop enormously, due to capacity, meaning that income would drop accordingly.



Whilst WCC does have General Power (GPOC) and therefore could undertake a project such as this, to do so would mean creating a new ‘trading arm’ of the council to deliver these services. In addition, any scheme would be regulated and need to be in line with all relevant legislation:

*“Bus services in the UK regions outside London are deregulated, with companies largely free to set fares and timetables. This system was introduced with the Transport Act 1985, which was designed to reduce the cost of bus services on taxpayers and encourage a more commercial approach to meet changes in demand and has resulted in greater investment from bus companies in customer improvements. However, operators are still required to meet strict criteria. They are monitored by the Traffic Commissioner – an independent regulator - which licences operators and enforces punctuality and reliability standards. Bus companies also*

*have to comply with legislation on health and safety, accessibility, driver training, and environmental performance.”*

As noted, there are existing bus services that serve the parish reasonably well. In addition, there is the relatively new ‘transport on demand’ option (MK Connect) which offers support to people who have additional needs, or for journeys that aren’t served well by the existing system. Whilst this doesn’t work for everyone, it has some uses.

#### **Questions for the committee:**

- Is this something that is needed, noting the existing transport infrastructure in place?
- Is this a project that is a priority for WCC at this point – was it an issue prior to the changes to the bus route through Coffee Hall?
- Having previously explored the potential for a community bus, when proposed by a former councillor and dismissed the idea, what has changed?
- Considering the costs associated with a project such as this, even with the potential for sponsorships and volunteering, is this something that is affordable?

#### **New Post Office**

Following the news that the contract for the post office that sits within the ‘One Stop’ shop on Coffee Hall is cited for closure, the Council Manager was asked to explore the possibility of WCC ‘taking over’ the provision. The Post Office ‘franchising’ site has the following information:

*Coffee Hall Post Office*

*MK6 5EG*

*General information*

*Franchise*

*We're seeking applicants to set up brand new Post Offices in this area*

*Closing date: 30th November 2023*

*(Advert may close early if sufficient interest is registered)*

*Post Office Ltd is looking for a successful retailer to incorporate a Post Office Local into their existing or proposed business.*

*The offer available in this Post Office would be:*

*Post Office Local – integrating Post Office services into a vibrant and sustainable retail business, so they can be offered over the same opening hours. The exact layout and design will be agreed with you to suit your business.*

*Estimated Post Office fees:*

*In the current location in the range of £12,150 - £13,500 per annum. Please note this estimate is inclusive of the products listed under General Information.*

*Advertised Annual Fees Disclaimer - All fees ranges on this site are based on 12*

*months' trading history. Past performance is no guarantee of future performance for each branch. As a result of COVID-19 some branches have experienced a significant change in trading patterns and therefore fees will be reviewed during the application process.*

Upon further investigation, it appears that the One Stop does not want the Post Office to remain within their premises and as such, any new provider will need to set up from scratch, with new space within an existing business. Within Coffee Hall, this is unlikely, as no other businesses have sufficient space within the locale (the other spaces are currently a Chip Shop, a Chinese takeaway and a hairdressers). This would mean a suitable space would be needed to enable any future provision.

At the current time, there are four Post Offices within the parish: Coffee Hall, Netherfield, Eaglestone and Tinkers Bridge. If Coffee Hall is removed from this, everyone in the parish is within 1.5km of a

post office. Currently, all are within 1km. This is a higher number of options than many areas of the city, reflecting the transport issues faced by many within the parish.

Initial investigations into the potential for a local council to provide services led to Hailsham Town Council, who are the only local council running a post office. The story is similar to this – the franchisee was retiring, nobody stepped forward and the town council felt that it was too important a service to lose.

Hailsham is a town of 23,500, with a 'High Street' where the post office is provided. They initially allowed £60k for 'set up' costs, with this made more affordable via the 'scavenging' of items from the previous post office (including the 'fortress' – safe, cages, etc.) which saved a significant amount. They set up a new business (a trading arm) with the Clerk as 'Post Master' and the only director of the Community Interest Company (CiC) that became the trading arm. There is considerable work to undertake (see below), including:

- Setting up the company
- Liaison with Post Office nationally
- Business planning, premises, etc.
- Legal compliance and contractual checks
- Etc.

The town council continues to subsidise the project, recently increasing that to £60k per annum. Depending on the level of delivery proposed, it is likely that WCC (or any trading arm of WCC) would need to look at a similar level, but with a significantly smaller population to support it (the total population of Woughton is around 15,000 and, for those for whom Coffee Hall would be the closest option, that figure drops to around 3,500 – 15% of the Hailsham levels.

The Clerk of Hailsham sent the following through when asked for a brief overview to help formulate this paper:

*Thanks for your email. Since we opened the Post office I've had a handful of similar enquiries from other councils, so I have drafted a generic email below, which covers most of the issues and aspects we had to consider when we set up the Post office in Hailsham. It does not necessarily answer your questions directly and some of it may not be relevant to your circumstances).*

*There were several strands to what amounted to be a pretty large and complex project for us and I would imagine they may not all apply to your council, depending on what the circumstances are. These various strands to the process ran consecutively at times, not necessarily following on from each other.*

### *1. Applying for the Post office franchise*

*You're probably aware that the vast majority of Post offices are now run by PO Ltd on a franchise model. It's a long story, but basically, the PO in Hailsham had for a long time been part of a newsagents business. They surrendered the franchise and despite some initial interest from other parties, eventually no-one stepped forwards to take over the franchise so the town council stepped in. This involved initially, liaising with the Post office and their regional development manager, who was very helpful throughout the process. PO Ltd advertise available franchises on their website and there*

*is a relatively thorough application process that includes; submitting an application, including a business case, based on PO Ltd's own statistics for projected business, details of how you intend to run, maintain and grow the business etc, and form there an interview with the prospective Post Master (which is me as Town Clerk) including giving a presentation at PO headquarters in London on how it will all work. Assuming you are successful there is a detailed contract to sign from PO Ltd.*

### *2. Setting up a CIC*

*At Hailsham Town Council we have the General Power of Competence, which of course you'll need to legally operate a Post office. On the advice of our LAC's legal adviser, the only way a parish/town council can legally 'trade' is by setting up a community interest company. We paid a company to do this for us – fill in all the forms, submit them to companies house etc. Then you'll need a separate bank account for the CIC (this became a real sticking point further down the line with the perfect 'catch 22' situation of the Post office not issuing us a contract until we had bank account details and the bank refusing to open us an account until we had a signed contract from the post office). We set up our CIC with myself as sole director just in order to make it easier and quicker to get things moving for the time being.*

### *3. Staff TUPE transfer*

*We sought legal advice and help first on whether we had to do this at all, and then on ensuring smooth transition. Our lawyers told us we did have to TUPE transfer the existing staff over because they would essentially be doing exactly the same job as they had before although in a different location. This was the subject of some debate within the council as many members felt this legislation did not apply because they would be going to a new employer. Our lawyer confirmed this is very much not the*

case – if a person transfers from one company to another, from one work place to another but is in essence doing the same job then yes you have to 'TUPE' them. This means you have to replicate their current conditions, salaries and employment benefits as closely as possible. This required us to set up new pensions and life and income protection arrangements for the staff, matching as closely as possible the old conditions. For the most part I was able to do this using the existing pensions and insurance providers, but I could not have achieved this without the help of the staff's existing/old employers, in sending me all the details of the existing scheme, the help of those scheme providers themselves and last but absolutely essentially, a good employment lawyer. In reality it would have been virtually impossible for us to successfully run a post office without transferring the existing staff over, as they include a very experienced and competent team with a PO Manager and deputy manager who really know what they're doing.

#### 4. The premise

For various reasons the old site for the post office was not suitable (it was far too large for just a post office, having been a large newsagents and offices for a newspaper delivery company) although the old post office company did offer to lease it to us on favourable terms. We decided to locate a new premise, being a much smaller empty shop on Hailsham High Street, which we had to negotiate a long term lease for, including getting all of the necessary checks and surveys for (general survey, electrical, asbestos, etc). You need to know where your Post office is going to be located before you submit your application for the franchise to PO Ltd – this is something they will look at very closely. In fact the regional Development manager at PO Ltd very helpfully visited potential locations with us and advised on which might work best. Once we'd secured the franchise and the lease, we had to get the

'shop fit' done by PO Ltd's appointed contractors. We took advice from them on what would work best. We were fortunate in being able to scavenge some of the old fixtures and fittings (including two heavy duty safes and the steel security caging, known by PO Ltd as the 'fortress' which all main branches are required to have in place; which otherwise would have cost a small fortune. PO Ltd themselves will also fund some of the fit-out and will co-ordinate getting the PO Systems in place (tills, the 'Horizon PO IT system, lottery terminals etc). Once fitted you need a fire safety audit and to get in fire extinguishers, consider whether CCTV is a requirement (PO Ltd will only provide it automatically for what they deem 'high risk' stores which basically means inner-city – we felt it was necessary ourselves for a relatively small outlay) and of course all the fixtures and fittings to ensure the comfort of the staff.

#### 5. Now we're up and running

We had quite a well organised and promoted opening ceremony (although essentially PO will organise it and get their own publicity machines involved) including councillors etc -really just ceremonially cutting a ribbon, but actually a few weeks after opening, to ensure everything is up and running. I am now basically 'Post master' (on top of my day job). I was required to attend three days training on using the (now infamous) Post Office 'Horizon system' and although I won't be using it for day to day transactions, it was useful to get an overview of how it works. The payroll is run separately as part of the CIC by our Finance officer and we get monthly

statements from PO Ltd detailing our turnover and income, determined by the amount of transactions taken. In reality, it has not yet been particularly onerous once up and running. I have to check the staff are OK, liaise with the regional PO manager and look into the income statements, but beyond that my direct involvement has been relatively minimal – again only because we have transferred a competent team into the new location. However, we have recently had some staff turnover due to natural wastage and recruiting new PO staff has been fairly difficult, plus the vetting and training systems they have to go through. We lost one new member of staff after a short space of time because he just did not get on with the role.

We now have a small sub-committee of councillors who meet quarterly to look at how the PO is performing, the income data etc and just have an overview of how it's all going. At the moment nearly five years on now) we are not at a point of 'breaking even'. We anticipated running at a loss initially, but the council felt this was too vital a service for a town of this size, (23.5K) which is also cited for really significant growth in the District Council's local plan.

In terms of the costs – it's really difficult to say how the costs we incurred might relate to your particular circumstances.

Overall there were several separate contracts in the whole process:

Setting up the CIC (it was much easier to pay a company to do this remotely)  
Law firm to look over the PO contract and advise us on its contents and any queries

Law firm to manage and negotiate the lease of the new premise  
Law firm to manage the TUPE transfer process  
Life Assurance and income protection for the PO Staff  
Pension providers for the PO Staff

Specialist safe removal company that moved the safes from the old to the new premise  
Building survey

Electrical survey  
Asbestos survey  
Fire safety audit  
Contract to provide fire extinguishers  
CCTV installation  
Shop fitting contract (a company recommended by PO Ltd, as they had fitted post offices before and know how to lay them out and set them up)  
Electrical contractors (appointed by the shop fitting firm)  
Cleaning and window cleaning contract for the new premise

Initially the council allocated £60K for the shop fit (although I don't think it came to that in total) and has allocated £45,000 per annum to cover the running costs of the PO (income from PO transactions matched against on costs for staff, premise, utilities etc). It is expected that as the business picks up we should be able to reduce this amount and hopefully break even. There was six month gap when the Post Office was not open (the staff continued to be paid by the old employer as essentially

*it was more cost effective than, making them redundant) but this means that the old level of custom will take quite some time to pick up. I can dig out more detailed figures for you but it really depends on how much of the above will apply to yourselves. The venture has been met with almost universal acclaim by the local community and I do believe it to be really progressive venture for the council (our local LAC thinks so to), which from my POV was exhausting but ultimately rewarding!*

*I hope all of that is helpful – if there's anything else I can help with or if you need any more detail on the specifics of these points I'll do what I can. My recommendation to start with is create a good relationship with your local PO Ltd – we made early contact with the 'Network Operations Manager' and her help and advice was invaluable.*

*Following on from the paragraph above about the extent to which we are 'underwriting' the service financially. We have recently increased that to £60K. We essentially opened a High Street business just before a global pandemic, and we've still not really recovered. The most recent figures for our income suggest things are starting to level out. I have some very business-minded members of council who are helping us look into ways to reduce our costs (most significantly, staffing costs) assessing how we could reduce those without adversely affecting the staff too much – plus also looking into other ways we might help the branch to start 'washing it's own face'. we are still currently underwriting the business and looking at ways to reduce that issue, including branching out into enhanced banking services (Hailsham has lost virtually all of its High Street banks now)*

As can be seen, even in a town the size of Hailsham, the challenges of running a business such as this are considerable. Whilst it is possible that WCC could offer something within the existing space (e.g. by removing the Wellbeing Room and converting that into a Post Office), the costs would be significant and the benefits limited to a relatively small number of people.

#### **Considerations for the committee:**

- Is this potential option one that is a priority for the council at this time?
- Given the information in the paper above, is this something that is realistic to take on? Is there a likelihood of 'breaking even'?
- Does the committee feel that suitable space is available for delivery of a post office service within the current WCC property portfolio?
- Does the committee feel that the level of investment needed to undertake this project is reasonable and realistic, either with regard to 'set up' or in terms of the ongoing commitment noted?

#### **STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

To progress either of these proposals will be a demand on officer time OR will require external expertise or, most likely, will need both.



In the longer term, management and delivery of either project will take additional officer time, with significant demands on RFO, Council Manager and, most likely, additional officers being appointed to both manager and deliver these services.

**OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

At the current time, WCC is looking to reduce costs and make the council more sustainable in the long term. These projects will be a significant additional financial demand on the council.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Bus Service Improvement Plan  
Urban Bus Routes Map – January 2023

**AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager