

Standing up for vulnerable postal consumers in a changing world



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We are Citizens Advice

- We are the statutory consumer champion for postal services in England and Wales
- Independent and impartial - we work with government, regulators and industry to advance consumer interests
- Look across whole of postal market, including postal operators and physical access points (Post Offices, pick-up and drop-off points)



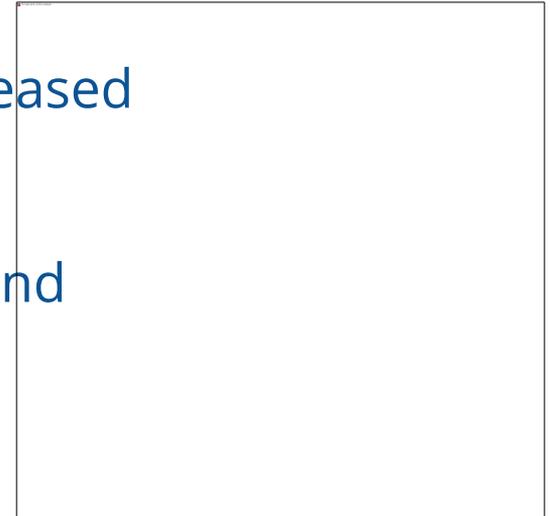
We work towards the following consumer outcomes in the postal market

- Value
- Inclusive
- Quality
- Redress
- Protected
- Sustainable



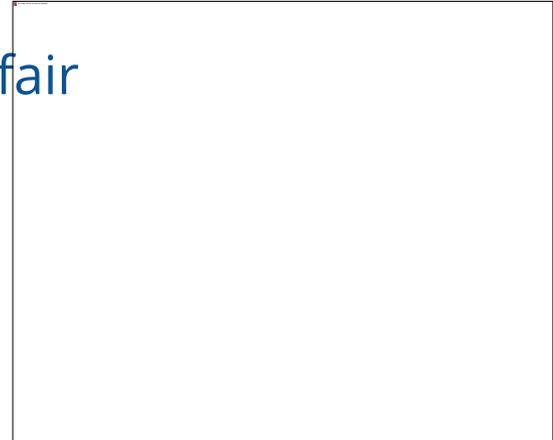
We stand up for all consumers, but have particular regard for vulnerable consumers

- Different needs - typically more reliant on postal services
- More likely to experience range of barriers, increased risk of harmful practices
- Vulnerability is about circumstances - dynamic and often volatile



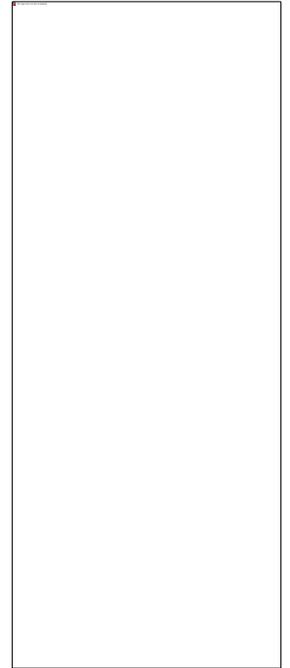
Three insights from our work on vulnerable consumers of postal services

- 1. Despite increased digitisation, post still remains important for UK consumers
- 2. Accessibility should be considered in light of differing needs of vulnerable consumer groups
- 3. Ensure that postal services stay affordable and fair in a changing world



1. Despite increased digitisation, post remains important for UK consumers

- UK digital transformation happening more slowly than in some other countries
- Many vulnerable consumers use and value post to administer their day-to-day lives
- Most service providers still allow customers option of correspondence by post



1. Despite increased digitisation, post remains important for UK consumers

- Link between digital exclusion and reliance on postal services



41%

Of UK adults aged 75+ used the internet in the past 3 months



1 in 5

Disabled adults in the UK have never used the internet

2. Accessibility should be considered in light of needs of different vulnerable consumer groups

- **Disabled consumers** - 13 million people in UK
- We asked about their experiences and needs when accessing postal services across the customer journey



Ordering online and
arranging Home delivery



Planning and travelling
to the access point



Entering the access
point



Moving around inside
the access point



Being served at the
counter

2. Accessibility should be considered in light of differing needs of vulnerable consumer groups

- **Rural and remote consumers** - more likely to depend on access to postal services locally vs urban consumers



1 in 3

Rural consumers in the UK use the Post Office weekly or more vs 1 in 5 urban consumers



30%

Average additional cost of delivery paid by consumers in Central Scottish Highlands



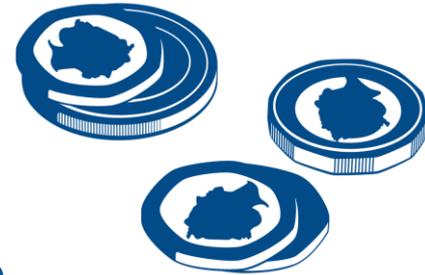
5%

Of consumers in rural and remote areas say they have easy access to a shop offering parcel collection

services

3. Ensure that postal services stay affordable and fair in a changing world

- Consumers on average satisfied with cost of postage - but prices continue to rise as letter volumes decrease
- Some concerns about cost and payment structures of mail redirections service
- Change to UK USO unlikely in near future - but want to understand impacts of changes in other countries



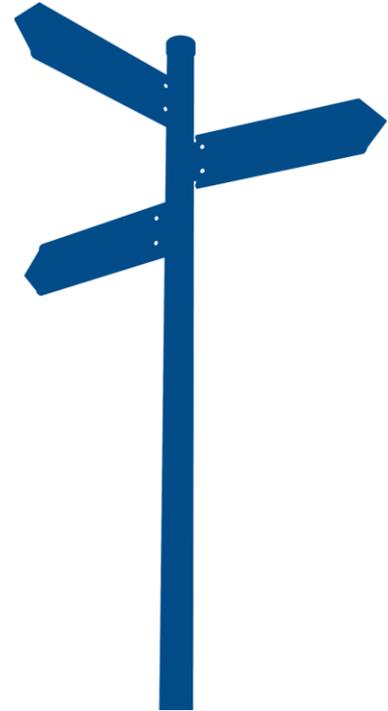
3. Ensure that postal services stay affordable and fair in a changing world

- *In 2018/19 we will investigate:*
 - **Freepost** - 50% of those provided with freepost envelopes during benefits claim don't use it
 - **Insecure accommodation** - Solutions for the homeless and victims of domestic abuse without regular access to post
 - **Brexit** - Potential impacts for postal consumers as a result of change to EU-UK relationship



Conclusion

- Any change to scope of USO should only take place after a full assessment of consumer needs
- Important that vulnerable consumer groups aren't put at further disadvantage by potential reduction in available services
- We will continue to monitor consumer experience of postal services market and act where appropriate to ensure their needs are met



Further reading

- Citizens Advice, [‘Are rural consumers getting a bad deal with parcel delivery?’](#) (April 2018)
- Citizens Advice, [‘The customer journey: disabled people’s access to postal services’](#) (March 2018)
- Citizens Advice Scotland, [‘The postcode penalty: delivering solutions’](#) (December 2017)
- Citizens Advice, [‘Rural post office use’](#) (November 2017)
- Citizens Advice, [‘Consumer use of post offices’](#) (July 2017)
- Citizens Advice, [‘Using the post to access benefits’](#) (July 2017)
- Citizens Advice, [‘The future of consumer needs for postal services’](#) (August 2016)