



CATHERINE WEST MP

Member of Parliament for Hornsey and Wood Green

Dame Melanie Dawes
Chief Executive, Ofcom
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

18 March 2024

Dear Dame Melanie,

Re: Ofcom's Call for input: The future of the universal postal service

I have written to you previously about my concerns over Royal Mail's delivery of the Universal Service Obligation (USO). As you know, many of my Hornsey & Wood Green constituents rely heavily on our postal service and have been badly affected by delays over recent years. I have heard alarming stories from residents who have missed cancer scan appointments, failed to receive vital prescriptions, or been pushed into financial hardship because energy vouchers have taken weeks to arrive.

As such I welcomed Ofcom's decision to review the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and how it is being met. However, I am concerned that Ofcom's current paper focuses too heavily on the needs of Royal Mail shareholders rather than my constituents' demands for a reliable and comprehensive service. I am also disappointed that the views of frontline postal workers and the Communication Workers Union weren't sought in advance of your report's publication.

What is clear is that the USO is not delivering for my constituents in its current form. The latest Quality of Service results reveal Royal Mail has now failed to hit its target in every single postcode area for six quarters in a row – and only delivered 79% of post on time in my area in the last quarter. Data from Citizens Advice found 12.1 million people were hit by letter delays over Christmas, with the majority receiving no letters for at least one week. I have heard from a local charity who repeatedly failed to receive vital paperwork, and an elderly resident left without access to cash because her new pin number didn't turn up. On top of this, my constituents are now having to pay nearly twice as much - a 1st class stamp costs 93% more than it did just 5 years ago at a time when households are under intense financial pressure.

I am concerned that the proposed revisions to the USO put forward by Ofcom do not address these issues and lack concrete solutions to tackle Royal Mail's entrenched culture of **missed targets, unreliable deliveries, and soaring prices**. While the financial sustainability of the service is clearly one element of this review, **my constituents want a reliable, affordable and comprehensive service – not a race to the bottom**.

I'm concerned that this review presents a missed opportunity to address:

- **The adequacy of enforcement measures** – including more meaningful penalties for missed targets and looking at the role consumer representation could play within Ofcom's investigative process. Recent investigations by the Sunday Times and BBC Panorama concluded Royal Mail routinely prioritises parcels over letters, in clear breach of its legal requirements to deliver letters 6 days a week.
- **Digital and social exclusion** – at present my constituents who can't buy postage online can end up paying over 20% extra for some USO products. Constituents facing housing insecurity

or affected by domestic abuse can find themselves shut out of communication by post because they have no access to a secure address. Models are already in place in other countries to address this and Citizens Advice has set out a proposal for a service called Address & Collect where people without a safe address can pick up their post at post offices.

- **Opportunities for growth** – working with the CWU and frontline postal workers to use their expertise to ensure that any changes to the USO reflect the needs of customers, the workforce, and our communities.

I therefore urge Ofcom to rethink your approach to this vital review and use the opportunity to ensure that the views of the postal workers delivering the service are taken on board and that consumers receive an affordable, reliable and universal service. As Ofcom rightly looks to future-proof this essential national communications infrastructure, consumers and hard-working postal staff must be at the heart.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine West
Member of Parliament for Hornsey & Wood Green