

Title:

Mrs

Forename:

Janette

Surname:

Wilson

Representing:

Self

Organisation (if applicable):

Scottish Churches Committee

What do you want Ofcom to keep confidential?:

Keep nothing confidential

If you want part of your response kept confidential, which parts?:

Ofcom may publish a response summary:

Yes

I confirm that I have read the declaration:

Yes

Ofcom should only publish this response after the consultation has ended:

You may publish my response on receipt

Additional comments:

The Scottish Churches Committee is a body constituted to enhance the temporal and patrimonial interests of the Churches in Scotland and also to monitor, so far as possible, the policy and legislation of both the UK and Scottish Governments. The following denominations are represented on the Committee:

1. The Church of Scotland;
2. The Roman Catholic Church in Scotland;
3. Scottish Episcopal Church;

4. The Methodist Church in Scotland;
5. The Baptist Union of Scotland;
6. The United Reformed Church, Scottish Synod;
7. The Free Church of Scotland;
8. The United Free Church of Scotland;
9. The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland;
10. The Associated Presbyterian Churches of Scotland
11. The Salvation Army.

Because of geographical and economic factors, Scotland contains a particularly large number of people who fall into the categories of being poor, vulnerable or living in remote areas. One of the greatest challenges faced by the Churches is the provision of ministry in the more remote parts of Scotland and in areas (both urban and rural) of social deprivation. The complications and financial difficulties of sustaining an institution or indeed a service such as the postal service across such diverse and/or sparsely populated areas is, therefore, appreciated. However, the Committee also recognises the imperative of doing so. Those who live in the rural community often do so because they work or have worked in both agricultural and industrial occupations which require them to live in greater isolation than others - for example, those who maintain the hydro electric supply. They already receive fewer government provided resources than most and the Committee would view it as unfair that they should have a lesser or more expensive service than those living in more populated areas. The loss of the universal postal delivery service would indicate a society more concerned with wealth than people. The Committee views both its retention and it being available at a reasonable cost for customers as being crucial.

The Committee appreciates that the Royal Mail is the only company currently capable of delivering the universal service and that it faces huge financial challenges in doing so due to a combination of failure to tackle past inefficiencies more promptly, the move to Email and other electronic means of communication and competition from other providers and, in particular, the threat of "cherry picking". Clearly, the current consultation is a very technical one and the Committee does not feel qualified to evaluate a number of the conclusions reached - for example, that price controls have failed to protect the service and should be abandoned. The Committee would, however, urge that the three safeguards mentioned in Section 1 of the consultation document should be kept closely under review and that Ofcom should swiftly take appropriate action should they appear to be insufficient to protect both the provision of the universal service and the protection of vulnerable customers.