

Additional comments:

The opportunity to comment on Royal Mail's proposed Delivery to Neighbour service is appreciated. Had the summary to this consultation explicitly said what the "proposed notification and approval" (referred to in question 3) were (or provided links), this would have been helpful.

Whilst responding, I tried to download Royal Mail's existing delivery schemes from its website. This was to view, for example, the terms for opting out of junk mail delivery for the purpose of comparison. Unfortunately, the links were broken.

Question 1: Do you agree that Ofcom should grant approval to Royal Mail for the Delivery to Neighbour service? If not please explain your answer. :

1. Introduction

Ofcom should grant approval to Royal Mail for its Delivery to Neighbour service ONLY if adequate arrangements are in place for opting out of the service. I believe that requiring a householder to display a clearly visible sticker, that can be seen by neighbours, makes the proposed arrangements for opting out inadequate.

2. Requirement to use sticker

The proposed Inland Letter Postal Scheme reads: "8.2.3 If an addressee does not want their items to be delivered to a neighbour or does not want to take items for neighbours they can opt out of the Delivery to Neighbour service, free of charge, by registering their wish to opt out in such a way as Royal Mail may reasonably require from time to time."

I understand this to mean that an addressee need only notify Royal Mail if s/he wishes to opt out of the service and is NOT required to do anything else such as display a sticker.

However, Royal Mail recently delivered to me a leaflet (code RMDTNE1) that states: "If you'd rather we didn't leave items with neighbours, or if you'd rather not accept items on their behalf, that's absolutely fine. Simply register online or call us and we'll send you a sticker to display near your letter box, or somewhere clearly visible to us."

This gives the impression that Royal Mail will still require the addressee both to register their wish to opt out AND to display a sticker. This answer therefore assumes that Royal Mail would require a householder to use a sticker for opting out.

There are similar proposals with regard to the Inland Parcel Postal Scheme. This answer applies to both letters and parcels.

3. Effect of using a sticker

There are good reasons why a householder might not want their post delivered to a neighbour. S/he may have elderly, infirm or ill neighbours that s/he does not want to impose upon. Also, certain neighbours pose a security risk, as can be the case where high-turnover, multiple-occupation rented properties are involved. It's sad but nonetheless a fact that sometimes neighbours simply 'don't get on'. (I've experienced all three situations.)

My main concern is that a requirement for a householder to display a sticker clearly indicating that post cannot be left with his/her neighbours is insensitive. Since the sticker needs to be visible to the postal officer, it will typically also be visible to the addressee's neighbours--those with whom the addressee does not want post left.

The addressee's neighbours will receive the impression that they cannot be trusted or are disliked by the addressee or otherwise that the addressee is an 'un-neighbourly' person. Where people don't get on, it might even antagonise the neighbour. Some householders are genuinely un-neighbourly or anti-social--and may be happy to display a sticker--but for the rest of us, it's unfair to require a householder to, quite literally, label themselves in this way..

In addition, the stickering system is fallible. A sticker could be removed by an unscrupulous neighbour, for instance if s/he knows that the addressee is away on holiday and s/he will be leaving his/her property imminently. (This is more likely to occur where multiple-occupation, high-turnover rented properties are involved.) Leaving a card with the addressee in this instance no guarantee that they will ever see their post.

During its initial thirteen-week trial of the service, Royal Mail received four complaints--6% of all complaints--about items delivered to a neighbour despite the addressee having opted out. This emphasises that the stickering system is fallible.

Finally, there is also the issue of aesthetics. The sticker would, by definition, need to be indiscreet and thus likely to spoil the appearance of the entrance to a property.

4. Supporting information

During its initial trial, Royal Mail received 4,425 opt-out request (out of a potential 747,904). It also received nine complaints--14% of all complaints--about the requirement to display a sticker. These figures underline the importance not only of being able to opt out, but of the opt-out mechanism being sensitive to the needs of addressees and their neighbours.

Royal Mail presently allows householders to opt out of the delivery of junk mail. To do so, the householder need only register his preference. The opt-out is effected at Royal Mail and no sticker is required. A similar system could be used to effect opting out of the Delivery to Neighbour scheme.

Question 2:Are there other consequences following the roll out of the service across the UK that we have not included in our assessment? If so, please explain.:

None other than any found in my answer to question 1.

Question 3:Do you have any comments on the scope and wording of the proposed Notification and approval:

It appears that it is a blanket approval for the delivery of post to a neighbour that is being proposed. (My reading may be incorrect.) I believe that approval should be given only for deliveries to neighbours that have NOT been the subject of an opt-out.

This would give Royal Mail greater incentive to put a system in place that ensures that EVERY delivery it makes to a neighbour is one that has not been the subject of an opt out (i.e. one that is not an 'un-approved' delivery). The postal officer would be discouraged from leaving items with neighbours in cases where he is unsure.

Also, if the approval or notification incorporates the proposed postal scheme changes then there may be issues arising from my understanding of the wording of the postal schemes' terms as given in my answer to question 1.