

ADVISORY BOARD  
THE POSTCODE ADDRESS FILE

## USE OF COUNTIES IN ADDRESSING

Note by the AMU

When Postcode Defined Circulation was introduced in the mid 1990's (mail circulated direct to inward Mail Centres, rather than via Distribution Centres), the "County" element was no longer required and Royal Mail took a decision to introduce its "Flexible Addressing" policy which removed the County names from the PAF database, but provided three types of County name (Former Postal, Traditional and Admin) where all three existed as an alias file to data users.

This policy allowed both customers and data users to use any of the three County names within a postal address depending on their individual needs.

Although we do not require the inclusion of a County name within an address to deliver an item of mail, there are a small number of organisations, such as Readers Digest, who still use the former Postal Counties for marketing purposes e.g. Mr Jones of Leicestershire is this month's prize draw winner. This is seen to be more inclusive than using the relevant local Town e.g. Oakham.

If the Address Management Unit were to reintroduce County names nationally this would add an additional line into all postal addresses. The impact of this could be that vital address information, such as the postcode, would then not appear in a window envelope and subsequently be rejected by Royal Mail's sorting equipment. Thus increasing the businesses processing costs.

The Alias product provides, where available, three versions of a County; the Traditional County, Administrative County and Former Postal County, e.g.

Traditional	-	Hampshire
Administrative	-	Portsmouth
Former Postal	-	Hampshire

For many years, a small, but vociferous group of customers, and MPs, have pressed for the use of a particular version of a County within PAF® addresses. This is not withstanding the fact that County information is not required for the delivery of mail.

Postcomm's recent consultation on the PAF Code of Practice failed to determine a consensus on the use of the County, other than agreement that the Former Postal County was not popular amongst all respondees. This paper seeks consideration and a view from the Advisory Board to 5 possible ways forward.

Proposals

There would appear to be 5 possible ways forward with regards the supply of County information:

- 1 Status Quo
- 2 Provide only the Administrative County within the Alias product
- 3 Provide only the Traditional County within the Alias product
- 4 Provide only the Former Postal County within the Alias product
- 5 Cease the provision of County information

Notwithstanding the issues raised with regard to postal addresses and there not being a need to include County information, it would be naive to believe that this information is not being used in day by day activities. Some internet sites require the inclusion of a County within an address, and it would appear that this is predominantly the Former Postal County.

#### Options

Option 1 is non-realistic. This is an issue for a small number of customers who will continue to press for change and Royal Mail will be expected to act following the publication of Postcomm's Code of Practice response.

Option 2 removes the Former Postal County and Traditional County. This would leave customers with no other option than the Admin County, and provides a County that can be maintained, albeit reliant upon sources outside of Royal Mail.

Option 3 removes the Former Postal County and Admin County. This would leave just the Traditional County which is the only County data that can be maintained by the Address Management Unit but reflects historic information (the data can not be maintained to a customer preferred County only a recognised Traditional County).

Option 4 is similar to the two options above, but is an historic piece of data and not subject to change and would, from feedback received to date, would not be welcomed by customers.

Option 5 makes Royal Mail's position very clear, Counties are not required for delivery purposes and do not form part of a Postal address. It would not necessarily resolve the issue for all customers but none of the options would appear to do so.

#### Conclusion

The use of Counties within addresses is an emotive issue and one that Royal Mail's current way of working fails to resolve. If provision by Royal Mail were to cease, County information would still be accessible through other sources, i.e. ONS, Association of British Counties, Wikipedia, and from Solutions Providers and existing software applications. Royal Mail's preferred option, option 5, will not result in this information no longer being used and over the immediate term, is unlikely to result in very much change as existing applications will continue to access the existing data. However, it will place the emphasis on the users of solutions to recognise the requirements of their customers and if appropriate respond to these. A reasonable period of notice to withdraw this information would be provided.

The views of the Advisory Board on this issue and on the options proposed, and any others, would be welcomed.

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