



Subject:	Motion: Proposed Bank of Ireland Closures – Response from Managing Director Northern Ireland
Date:	21st May, 2021
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To consider a response to a motion relating to the proposed closure of a number of Bank of Ireland branches, which was passed by the Council at its meeting on 1st April.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Members of the Committee are requested to consider the response and, in line with the Council's decision of 4th May, to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to take such action thereon as may be determined.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At the Council meeting on 1st April, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor McAteer and seconded by Councillor Gormley, was passed: "This Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none">notes the plans announced by Bank of Ireland to close 103 branches across the island of Ireland, including three in South Belfast;

- notes the expectation set by the Financial Conduct Authority that banks should assess customer needs and consider the availability and provision of alternative arrangements where closures are planned;
- notes the concern expressed by the Financial Conduct Authority that it may be harder than usual to reach all customers under the current restrictions and engage with them on closure proposals effectively;
- supports the call from the Financial Services Union that there should be no closures of branches during the pandemic and its call for a moratorium on closures until the end of 2022; and
- agrees to write to the CEO of Bank of Ireland to call for such a moratorium.”

3.2 A response to the motion has been received from Mr. Ian Sheppard, Managing Director Northern Ireland, a copy of which is attached.

3.3 Mr. Sheppard begins by stating that he understands the disappointment being expressed around the proposed branch closures and stresses that this decision has not been taken lightly. He explains that Bank of Ireland has undertaken a thorough analysis of its services, including branch usage, the growth in online banking and the range of services which it can offer through the Post Office network and highlights the fact that 52% of counter services provided to Bank of Ireland customers in Northern Ireland are already carried out at a local Post Office.

3.4 He points out that the trend towards digital banking has been evident for more than a decade and has been accelerating since 2017. Given the clear changes being seen in customer behaviour, Bank of Ireland is not, therefore, in a position to change its approach in relation to branch closures.

3.5 He goes on to explain that Bank of Ireland is committed to ensuring that customers are fully informed of the alternative arrangements available to them and refers to mobile and on line banking, telephone banking, remaining Bank of Ireland branches and the Post Office. Full details of these arrangements are contained in a letter and a branch impact analysis which has been sent to customers of those branches in Belfast which have been identified for closure. The branch impact analysis documents are also available on the bank’s website.

3.6 Mr. Sheppard refers to the fact that Bank of Ireland customers can, at their local Post Office, make lodgements of cash and cheques, withdraw cash and make balance enquiries. Business customers will, later this year, also be able to access enhanced services, such as cheque encashment, bulk cash lodgements and obtaining pre-ordered coin at nominated Post Office outlets. The bank will again be writing to its customers before and after each branch closes. In addition, branch teams will be making proactive calls to those customers who may need additional support and will meet with them in branch, if required.

3.7 Mr. Sheppard adds that Bank of Ireland is engaging fully with its Regulators on the closure of the branches, including the communication of its decision analysis, its consideration of the impact of the closures on customers and businesses and the alternative arrangement which

<p>3.8</p> <p>3.9</p> <p>3.10</p> <p>3.11</p>	<p>are, or will be, put in place. In line with guidance, it has also considered the impact on customers of the closure dates, should lockdown measures be in place at that time.</p> <p>He stresses that Bank of Ireland is committed to Belfast and that the outcome of the strategic review of its business has underlined its commitment to providing financial services in Northern Ireland in the long term. However, it needs to restructure its business to respond to the significant and accelerating changes in how customers are banking. It is, therefore, focusing on a smaller, better equipped branch network and investing in technology improvements, which will mean that it can continue to play a strong role in Northern Ireland for the years to come.</p> <p>He concludes by pointing out that Bank of Ireland will be investing in its remaining branches and technology in order to improve customer service across its business. It is also relocating its Head Office from London to Belfast, which again underlines its long term commitment and will in time provide employment opportunities by securing talent from local Universities, apprenticeship schemes and the wider community, which has recognisable banking expertise.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Document Attached</p>
	<p>Response from Managing Director</p>