

No. 124/25

26th June 2025

USO Pilot Office Update - CWU Report

Dear Colleagues,

Further to LTB 123/25 issued on Tuesday 24th June, confirming that the CWU would be providing a full written update on the status of all pilot offices, which has been compiled with the assistance of our representatives across the UK.

You can access our 1st Bulletin on the USO Pilots, which has been published on the CWU website via the link below. I hope you will find it useful and informative.

<https://www.cwu.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Update-on-the-USO-Pilot-Units-bulletin-1.pdf>

Given the scale of the change and that all 37 pilot offices are continually learning from the activity and making changes via the PIR process, we will aim to issue these on a regular basis, in addition to any other updates circulated via the union's regular channels.

Thank you to everyone taking part in the pilots and to the Reps involved for all their efforts into this activity.

Finally, in publishing the written update today I wanted to share a reminder of the CWU live show tonight at 5pm, which you can watch via the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/live/HqHW4RHmoeM?si=MhyB_YDj7C2Gy8Pk

Any enquiries to the content of this LTB should be directed to the Outdoor Department, email address: Pharacz@cwu.org.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Bouch
Assistant Secretary

UPDATE ON THE PILOT UNITS

Dear Colleagues,

In December, Royal Mail and CWU agreed to pilot 37 units under Royal Mail's proposed USO reform, the Optimised Delivery Model. There are currently 33 pilot units that have been deployed and we now want to give you an update on those developments.

The aim of the Bulletin is to detail the progress of this project, capturing the feedback and data received from our CWU Representatives across all levels at the participating USO offices. These will be issued regularly going forward, in order to update our Branches, Reps and Members across the country on an ongoing basis on all aspects of this activity, both positive and negative.

The below first roundup of reports we received from our Reps who cover the pilot sites displays the range of feedback and experiences across the participating offices. It also highlights the amount of hard work put in by the Reps in all the Divisions in the best interests of all frontline members. In addition, at national level, we are involved in weekly USO meetings with the business, and the whole union, at all levels, is pulling together to meet these challenges.

A Post Implementation Review (PIR) process has been agreed and has already started in some of the Divisions / pilot offices. For the others, it is scheduled to commence after their participating offices complete the four-week bedding-in period and complete their first full shift rotation.

The PIR is an opportunity for the CWU and Royal Mail to discuss what has happened so far, analysing the challenges experienced and provide the necessary solutions, in order to identify any adjustments and fixes required going forward.

The review will be focussed on the pilot project's four key criteria:

- 1. Achieve Ofcom Quality of Service targets and all commercial targets;**
- 2. Ensure fair, manageable and achievable workload is in place;**
- 3. Provide opportunities to improve attendance patterns with fewer Saturdays at work;**
- 4. Improve confidence and morale within the workplace.**

Furthermore, a staff feedback survey will be conducted as well, as another part of the review.

It is anticipated that Ofcom will make their decision on USO reform in July. However, regardless of this decision, it is for Royal Mail and the CWU to agree how and when any USO reform is deployed.

In addition, as per the Joint Statement issued on Monday 23rd June 2025 between Royal Mail and CWU, we have agreed that **any final agreement with the CWU on USO reform is also conditional on progress and implementation within the agreed timelines of the issues set out in Section 5 of the EP Group / CWU agreement.**

There will be no full deployment of USO reform until we have evaluated and remedied any issues from the ongoing pilot offices via the abovementioned agreed PIR process and success criteria.

We hope you will find this Bulletin useful and informative. As outlined above, we will aim to issue these on a regular basis, in addition to any other updates circulated via the union's regular channels.

Thank you to everyone taking part in the pilots and to the Reps involved for all their efforts into this activity.

There are two units within this group, Hadleigh and the much larger Southend. Hadleigh opted for the 2/6 duty pattern and started its trial in late May, while Southend chose the nine-day fortnight and began last week.

Southend MPU had a challenge during its first week, one of the combined duties had 200 tracked items, however, since going live, measures are being actively considered and introduced to resolve the Week One teething problems.

This is a large unit and 20 walks are being put back in, as well as a night shift, to assist with the indoor advance and are expected to improve the situation.

One key positive that has been flagged is getting 96% of duties agreed as full-time, which represents a considerable step forward. The union's current perspective at Southend so far is that it is very early days, but there are some optimistic signs and the focus is and will be on Quality of Service and an end to the old culture of failure.

The much smaller Hadleigh started in late May. This unit is described by the Reps as struggling on several fronts, including understanding of the process and mail presentation on arrival. There are discussions taking place as to whether there can be more hours put into the Monday-to-Friday operation.

Another point which has been picked up is the emergence of some workload disparity between the unit's rural and non-rural duties.

Despite the frustrations of some aspects of the new system as it beds in, it is reported that members here are liking the extra Saturday off work.

In London, the three selected USO reform pilot units are Mount Pleasant W1, North Finchley and Stoke Newington. Mount Pleasant W1 chose the 2/6 duty pattern, while North Finchley opted for 'Wallington Plus' and both units went live in mid-May. At Stoke Newington, they selected 'Option G', a variation to the 4-day week, which is an improved version that requires 17 working days out of every 24 and provides two Saturdays off out of four (23 Saturdays off per year, compared to the planned 17) and the office goes live on Monday 30th June.

Mount Pleasant W1 deliveries are already challenging, with the increasingly pedestrianised W1 area making driving difficult. The union has asked for a tailored solution, such as small electric delivery vehicles.

Starting the pilot, W1 put 10 jobs back in as driver assists and to address the ongoing shortage of drivers, a particular problem for Saturdays, there are 12 to be recruited. Some deliveries have been taken out of scope, as the delivery area is predominately businesses and further discussions are taking place to review other routes. To assist the indoor operation several IPS frames have been put back in.

Reps report that Monday-to-Friday deliveries are showing an improvement, but that Saturdays are challenging.

In North Finchley, there has been significant agency support and the unit started well, but recently, a surge in first-class postings coupled with some unexpected sickness absences has caused difficulties.

An issue which has been flagged is mail presentation on arrival at the unit, specifically second-class leakage into first-class. This unit previously was in surplus staffing, but this has been absorbed into the extra workload and a couple of part-time members have been made up to full-time.

Key issues for the Reps in the Division are maintaining and improving resource and reaching a solution on mail presentation and pre-arrival segregation. In addition, they have ensured that innovative attendance patterns that capture Sunday deliveries, are included in the planning, as well as a fair attendance roster for those who are contracted to Sunday working.

MIDLANDS / NOTTINGHAM MC

All three nominated units (Bulwell, Carlton and Nottingham North) within this area have chosen the 2/5 option. However, so far only Bulwell has gone live, with extra preparatory work being done at the other two and ongoing discussions between the CWU and the company taking place.

Bulwell started its trial mid-May and is reporting 100% on first and second class, with an average dispatch time of 9:20am, call rates for core duties at 90% and 30-40% combined across all streams.

In terms of overall (max) delivery spans, these are reported in excess of five hours on both core and combined with the caveat that data is masked due to overtime and assistance on duties.

There was a Saturday specific plan to deploy 12 drivers, on a mixture of a combination of HCT single duty plus indoor and indoor only duties. This plan is scheduled for review as part of Bulwell's overall pilot review that will take place once the 2/5 shift pattern's first rotation has completed.

Other issues flagged up for the review include fatigue, Saturday advance prep, disparity in workload, duty rotations, methods and the need for additional parcel routes.

MIDLANDS / SOUTH MIDLANDS MC

The three units within this group are Melton Mowbray, Coventry North and Brinklow. All three voted for the 2/5 duty pattern and Melton Mowbray and Brinklow kicked off their pilot projects in mid-to-late May. Preparatory work and discussions between the union and the business are still ongoing at Coventry North.

Reports from Melton Mowbray indicate that the office is struggling, reporting an average of 83.35% DP / USO, a fall compared to before the pilot, and significant amounts of second-class mail arriving on Fridays. Call rates for core duties are estimated at approx. 85% and an average dispatch time for combined duties is reported as 9:45am.

A number of factors have been identified, including resourcing, the indoor operation and workplace relations difficulties. Resourcing is considered insufficient at present, with no flexibility in the system to cope with the unexpected increase in traffic.

There are also challenges reported with regard to Saturdays, with geographically discontinuous new routes, which significantly increase travelling time between deliveries.

Brinklow DO went live at the end of May and while members have had no problems getting to grips with the new frame layouts, the IPS is taking significantly longer, resulting in members getting out on delivery later. There are further challenges on delivery with regards to call rates and associated fatigue, but until the indoor plan is resolved it is not possible to properly ascertain which routes require outdoor assistance and to identify appropriate solutions. Other concerns relate to equipment available and DPRs.

Reps in the Division have sent in a detailed report setting out their concerns and actions considered to be required. At local level, the union has reached agreement to put some night duties into the unit to tackle the indoor operational problems.

NORTH EAST / NEWCASTLE MC

Hexham was the first of the three pilot offices from this area to start its trial change, with Darlington going live in the first week of June and Stockton phasing-in its pilot project in two stages over the last two weeks. All three have selected the 2/6 duty pattern.

Hexham has had four walks put in, plus increased hours to some of the unit's part-time contracts. With 50% of its walks classified as rural, the change here has impacted fewer staff than is the case elsewhere and it is reported as having settled down with the pilot project and coping well, with the solutions and fixes requested now agreed between both parties.

Darlington is described as having got off to a good start, with resource put into its indoor work, seven walks being put back in and 20 part-time staff made up to full-time. There is also a recruitment request for new starters. It is early days there and call rates and prep time are expected to become the biggest challenges.

At Stockton, the largest of the three, some 28 walks have been put back in and a recruitment request has been submitted for 15 new delivery staff. The CWU and the business are working to identify how many of the office's part-time staff will have the option to move up to full-time and then review the process, should there be not enough employees willing to increase their hours.

NORTH WEST / PRESTON MC

Preston South, Lytham and Fleetwood DOs all switched to the trial method in mid-May, all of them choosing the 2/5 pattern. They began their PIR process last week.

At Fleetwood, at least 13 part-time staff have been brought up to full-time and at Preston South, part-time colleagues have been offered full-time hours. Initially, for a six-week period, but potentially extended until the scheduled duty re-pick.

Resourcing issues are being further addressed at Fleetwood with the assistance of volunteers from Lytham, which currently has a workforce surplus.

At Preston, recruitment is being described as very difficult, with agency workers being brought in for the short term. The union is pressing for a better, long-term solution to this.

Quality of Service is reported as having improved, but there is also an element of confusion emerging with the varying daily workloads and duties.

NORTH EAST / SHEFFIELD MC

One small unit (Louth) and two larger ones (Hull Malmo Road and Scunthorpe) went live with their pilots at the end of April / beginning of May.

Each chose a different duty pattern, with Louth opting for a nine-day fortnight, Hull going for the 2/5 and Scunthorpe picking 2/6.

As a mostly rural office, 16 of Louth's walks were considered to be out-of-scope and are unchanged Monday - Friday, but are helping their colleagues working the remaining 12 in-scope walks on an ad-hoc basis by taking out some of the larger parcels. The change has been difficult and the past few weeks have seen significantly increased traffic. Recruitment is under way there to increase resource and replace employees that have left.

At Hull Malmo Road, 15 part-time staff have been made up to full-time and there may be an increased night shift. They are experiencing some indoor difficulties and the unit is seeking to recruit, however we need to work through the learning from this as it is a significant learning curve for the new entrants.

Scunthorpe has started to trial a new night shift to assist with the indoor sort bottleneck created by the change and the night shift volunteers' existing roles will be backfilled by new recruits. First-class standards are being achieved, but currently not the second-class target.

As appears to be the case elsewhere, the indoor operation is in need of more support and resource, even though it is currently being addressed through contract uplifts, overtime and agency. The union is considering proposing a night shift to address this further.

Members are understood to be welcoming the new shift patterns, but the Saturday operation is something of a challenge. There are issues relating to HCTs and a degree of inconsistency for non-drivers and the variance of their Saturday duties.

CWU Reps have progressed the above issues at meetings with the business that took place at the end of last week and early part of this week via the formal PIR activity to start addressing members' concerns and feedback, with solutions and fixes being finalised as soon as possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND / BELFAST MC

Antrim and Ballymena DOs joined the project in April, with Antrim choosing the duty pattern providing two Saturdays off out of every five (2/5) and Ballymena selecting the 2/6 option.

The inaugural PIR meeting in this Division saw agreement in principle over the need to re-invest in extra resource for town deliveries in Ballymena, with the local rep and COM tasked with developing a local plan. At Antrim, a small re-organisation of certain van duties has been agreed to improve some of the difficulties reported at that unit.

An issue at both offices relating to mail presentation on arrival from the Mail Centre, specifically the mail mix, was raised and has been successfully resolved. There have also been difficulties reported regarding the D2D product at both offices.

The situation has improved on rurals at Ballymena and overall the unit's numbers have been reported as good, although the issue of fatigue has been flagged up as needing to be addressed and is on the PIR agenda, as well as ongoing national talks.

Antrim is reported as slightly less successful and that the departure of the lead project manager left a void and the relatively inexperienced management team have been struggling. There are also several new entrants working there who are still getting used to the job and there are also some other individual issues to be addressed.

SOUTH CENTRAL / SOUTHAMPTON MC

Winchester, Romsey and Salisbury all began their USO reform projects in late May, with Salisbury and Romsey choosing the 2/6 roster and Winchester selected 'Option G', which requires 17 working days out of every 24 and provides two Saturdays off out of four.

Fatigue is reported to be a problem at all three, with a feeling that there is not enough flexibility in the system to take account of unexpected circumstances, such as sick absences or a sudden traffic surge. Resourcing problems are being flagged up and there are efforts to recruit, but the time taken to train new recruits is another short-term challenge overall.

The uneven nature of the working week means that the specified call rates seem unrepresentative and there are growing concerns that there will be problems in regard to Sunday deliveries once all the duties have been signed for and the re-pick is complete.

SCOTLAND / GLASGOW MC

The USO reform pilot programme began in Scotland, with Newton Mearns being the first unit in early March, followed by Cumbernauld and Girvan later that same month and the office at Ayr a couple of weeks later.

All four units chose the duty pattern, which provides for two Saturdays off out of every five.

CWU leads across the Division report that overall members are happy with the increased Saturdays off, but the longer daily shifts are challenging and a fatigue / ergonomic study is under way at Cumbernauld. Resourcing is a major issue and a need for walks to be put back in has been identified at all four units, as well as DPRs (Dedicated Parcel Routes), which requires recruitment of new staff, and this is top of the agenda at the current round of meetings with the business.

Newton Mearns is reported to be meeting Quality of Service and USO targets, while the other three have been improving and are expected to improve further if the requested extra resource is actioned.

The four Scottish offices, as well as the two Northern Irish offices, have also been the first to begin their PIR process and this week national talks have agreed this will be a priority action for all parties to finalise and introduce the agreed fixes.

SOUTH EAST / MEDWAY MC

Our two South East pilot units, Tonbridge and Tenterden, both went live in May and Tenterden chose the 2/6 duty pattern. Under the pilot project guidelines, if an office has two COMs, it is allowed to choose two different duty patterns and Tonbridge has selected the 'Wallington Plus' option, as well as the 2/6.

Reports received so far from these two offices are mixed to say the least, with positive feedback from the smaller of the two, Tenterden. Quality of Service and USO compliance are both described as good and Divisional Reps visited it last week.

However, at the significantly larger Tonbridge, there have been real concerns from the union and a feeling that the preparatory work was not carried out adequately. The CWU says that existing issues and problems there, which should have been addressed prior to launch, were not tackled.

There is also criticism from the union of some managers' attitudes, which are reported as being resigned to USO failure and of a normalisation of it. The CWU, by contrast, is insisting that the aim must be full USO compliance.

However, there are some encouraging signs with a decision by the Regional Operational Director to become personally involved here and set out some robust guiding principles for managers, which lead to feeling that the problems are now gradually being addressed.

At the start of the pilot Tonbridge was carrying 10 vacancies, but there has been a recruitment programme over the past few weeks to address this.

SOUTH WALES / CARDIFF MC

Blackwood was the first pilot unit to go live in Wales, starting in late April after choosing 'Option G', which requires 17 working days out of every 24 and provides two Saturdays off out of four. South Wales's other two trial offices, Usk and Pontypool, have opted for the nine-day fortnight and the 2/5 respectively.

The Reps report that the project in Blackwood has gone quite well so far and is completing on a regular basis, although this is another unit where there are issues around mail presentation on arrival. Examples cited are parcel delivery duties with a lot of non-first-class items in their walksorts. Saturdays have been difficult, and the manager has asked for another 45 minutes on the shift, which the union does not agree with and has proposed an alternative option, altering the arrangement of the walks and of the indoor workload to enable members to get out quicker.

Usk is the smallest of this group, with just 14 staff in post covering 10 duties. It is reported as meeting its USO targets and clearing 100% on Saturday. However, a few issues described as teething problems have been identified.

Reps requested more duties to be put in at Pontypool, as well as an indoor role, and the office is reported as failing on occasion. The reasons why have not yet been fully identified, but it is felt that the rounds may be too big and that the root cause may relate to mail presentation on arrival.

Overall, the feeling is that members are happy with the increased Saturdays off, particularly at Usk and Blackwood. The Division has taken a step-by-step approach to the project and has supported members at each stage.

SOUTH WEST / BRISTOL MC

Trowbridge, Clifton and Cheltenham are the South West units, with all three choosing the 2/5 duty pattern.

Trowbridge began in mid-May and has reported 100% USO compliance for the late May / early June period, with its 36 walks clearing each day. There is agency assistance with cut offs and the office is still experiencing issues with mech. There are 61 staff in post and overall (max) delivery spans are estimated between 4 hours and 15 minutes to 4 hours and 45 minutes for both core routes and combined duties. On the most recent Saturday reported, numbers on duty were 22, with 2 on indoor. Workload is described as heavy, with increased fatigue and a WTLL debrief is planned on use of the equipment. From feedback received, it is apparent that morale has not improved.

Clifton DO went live in late May and, as reported by the Reps, it is the combined element that found to be the most difficult here. Over the working week, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday seem to be the heaviest days, with some reports of fatigue. Members welcome the increased Saturdays off and the Saturday operation is reported as stable.

Staff in post numbers are at around 30, with 24 walks. The unit is not currently recruiting, but is being assisted by volunteers coming in from nearby offices.

The largest of this group, Cheltenham, joined the project in three phases (early May, end of May and two weeks ago). So far, Reps are reporting it as doing OK in general and improving in its USO targets, with the Saturdays off proving popular. On their Saturday duty, the relatively large number of non-drivers are on indoor prep duties for the week ahead. As elsewhere, there are reports of fatigue and issues around mail presentation on arrival.



Tony Bouch
National Officer



CWU 150 The Broadway | Wimbledon | SW19 1RX | T: 020 8971 7200 | F: 020 8971 7300

Published by the Communication Workers Union 2025.