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Dear Sir / Madam

Equality Impact Assessment – Proposed closure of IPS Interview Offices and Newport Application Processing Centre

Improvements in the efficiency of the Identity and Passport Service and falling passport demand means IPS simply has more staff and office space than it needs. In order to provide taxpayers with better value for money, IPS have put forward proposals that would lead to savings of £50m over the next four years while still providing a highly secure passport and an excellent service to customers.

These proposals are now the focus of a formal 90 day consultation period with the trade unions and we are also undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The initial 90 day consultation period is due to finish on 19th January. At this stage it should be stressed that no decisions have been made.

What is expected to change if the proposal is implemented?

A new site will be sought within Newport to house the Regional Office public counter and the Newport Interview Office. The new office structure will be referred to as a 'Customer Service Centre'. It is anticipated that 30-45 members of staff will be required to deliver the current range of services to customers, which will include processing applications completed in the Welsh language. Postal applications will be transferred to other IPS sites for processing. Support services such as Finance and Customer Services will either centralise in one location for the entire Agency, or transfer to other IPS locations. There will be no change to the passport issuing services for customers based in Wales; however the change will result in approx 250 job losses in the Newport Regional Office.

I am enclosing the currently available data about the workforce in each IPS regional office.

Extensive changes have been proposed for the Interview Office Network. Customer Service Centres will be set up to provide all face-to-face services in seven locations throughout the UK. 34 of the existing 56 interview offices will be decommissioned by September 2011. In order to limit the travel distance and inconvenience to customers caused by closing these sites, flexible teams will be established in 13 areas throughout the UK during 2011. Premises will be hired across an appropriate number of days to meet customer demand in each of these areas, and trained interview officers will travel to the hired premises to conduct the interviews. The exact location where the interviews will take place, the days the service will be available to customers in each location, and the number of staff required to carry out these interviews is still to be determined. Video Interview Services will continue to be made available via Local Authority premises in remote areas of the UK. Earlier this year the Isle of

Wight interview office was used as a pilot site for the flexible team concept. Premises were hired and 67 customers were interviewed. Exit interviews were conducted to assess the customer experience; 100% of customers found the surroundings met their expectations and 100% found the staff polite and professional. If you would like any further information about individual interview offices, please contact Alison Skillen at alison.skillen@ips.gsi.gov.uk.

The aim of the EIA is to identify impacts and appropriate mitigating activities that will remove or limit the level the impact has on customers and staff across the following Equality and Diversity strands:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Gender Identity (transsexual/transgender)
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
- Race
- Religion and Belief
- Marriage & Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy & Maternity
- Caring Responsibilities
- Working patterns
- Grade

I would be grateful if you would consider these proposals from your perspective and provide feedback outlining the key equality impacts from the strand relative to your area of expertise.

This letter has been forwarded to a range of Charities, Home Office staff groups and Government organisations. Feedback received will be included in the EIA report which will be published on the corporate website following the end of the consultation period on 19th January. I would therefore appreciate a response by 14th January 2011. Replies and comments are welcome prior to this date.

If you require further information or clarification, please contact Alison Skillen via email alison.skillen@ips.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Pugh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paul Pugh
Executive Director of Operations