

One in five post offices faces closure within next year

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

MORE than one in five post offices could close in the next 12 months after a survey found that self-employed postmasters are struggling to earn a living due to falling wages and customer demand.

A survey of 1,000 post office workers by the National Federation of Sub Postmasters (NFSP) found that 22 per cent are planning to close, hand on their business or downsize over the next year as they go without holidays and take on extra jobs to make ends meet.

Postmasters have also voiced concerns over the amount they are paid by the Post Office for individual transactions, with 76 per cent of respondents saying they earned less now than the hourly national minimum wage for the work they do.

Their biggest concerns include falling incomes and higher costs, low transaction rates for banking services, more customers using Royal Mail services directly via the internet, and fewer using a Post Office card account.

During a speech at the NFSP's annual conference yesterday, Calum Greenhow, its chief executive, said: "We can see how easy it would be for sub-postmasters to lose faith and feel disenfranchised, to feel the system is working against them.

"For many of you, your feet are going to do the talking."

Those who took part in the survey have been running post office counters for an average of 12 years, and 61 per cent said they were earning less today than when they started. As small business operators they are susceptible to the same challenges that high-street retailers face, including a shift to online shopping.

Andy Furey, national officer at the Communication Workers Union, which represents about 500 postmasters, said that more communities would be losing their post offices at a time when more vulnerable members of society were already suffering from the closure of high-street bank branches.

He said: “This is a ticking time-bomb. Postmasters are handing back the keys because they can’t make a living. The operating model is that they’re simply not paid enough, and many are saying they can’t make ends meet.

“The Post Office and NFSP are sleepwalking into a nightmare. Postmasters have been let down seriously here, with many working for less than the hourly national minimum wage.”