

Royal Mail to End Saturday Delivery of Second–Class Mail in Cost–Saving Reform

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The communications regulator Ofcom has approved a plan allowing Royal Mail to halt Saturday deliveries of second–class letters from 28 July. The change, part of a broader package that alters delivery targets and launches a stamp–price review, is expected to save between £250million and £425million annually, but has raised concerns about service quality and access.

Ofcom has given Royal Mail the green light to cease the six-day-a-week universal postal service obligation for second-class letters. From 28 July, deliveries will take place only on alternate weekdays, although the three-working-day window for delivery will be maintained. First-class post will continue to be delivered from Monday to Saturday.

The revised delivery performance standards set by Ofcom require 90 per cent of first-class mail to arrive the next working day, down from 93 per cent previously, and 95 per cent of second-class mail to reach recipients within three working days, compared to the former target of 98.5 per cent. A new enforceable “back-stop” rule stipulates that 99 per cent of mail must arrive within two days beyond the standard thresholds.

Royal Mail and its parent company, International Distribution Services, which was acquired by Czech businessman Daniel Křetínský’s EP Group in April, say the reforms are vital for maintaining a reliable and financially sustainable universal service. Martin Seidenberg, Chief Executive Officer of IDS, noted these changes followed widespread consultation and reflect the realities of declining letter volumes.

Supporters point out that letter volumes have more than halved, dropping from 14.3 billion in 2011–12 to 6.6 billion in 2023–24, while the company reported losses of £348 million in the latest fiscal year. Ofcom estimates that the changes will save between £250 million and £425 million each year, enabling reinvestment in delivery performance.

However, critics say the changes come at too high a cost. Tom MacInnes, Director of Policy at Citizens Advice, warned that relaxing delivery

obligations without binding accountability measures amounts to a “missed opportunity”. He said the regulator needs to ensure Royal Mail improves standards rather than simply cutting services and costs.

Unions have also raised concerns that scaling back Saturday deliveries won’t solve deeper issues such as recruitment shortages and slipped performance across busy delivery offices. Some Liberal Democrat politicians echoed this view, urging Ofcom to reconsider and ensure consumer interests are protected.

From a centre—right perspective, the reforms offer pragmatic fiscal relief for a struggling state—owned entity. Yet they must be paired with renewed attention to operational efficiency and infrastructure investment. If properly executed, they could preserve universal service while focusing efforts on critical delivery functions. Without careful implementation and oversight, though, degraded service could undermine public trust and the principle of accessible postal services across the UK.