



MEDIA RELEASE

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Newcastle Permanent customers urged to direct branch closure anger at management

Customers of the Newcastle Permanent Building Society upset by the announcement of the closure of four local branches are being urged to direct their anger at directors and executive management, encouraging them to reverse their decision, rather than at the workers impacted by the decision.

The United Services Union, which represents hundreds of staff at Newcastle Permanent, said many in the community were justifiably angered and frustrated by the loss of local financial services, but that it was important to direct those complaints at the people responsible for the closures.

The announcement that the Cardiff, Mayfield, Maitland, and Nelson Bay branches will close in March 2020 comes less than two years after Newcastle Permanent controversially shut the Lambton, John Hunter Hospital, and University of Newcastle branches.

USU private sector manager Peter Campise said customers and local communities had the power to save these branches, but it would require efforts aimed squarely at the board and executive management.

"Our members have been overwhelmed by community concerns about these closures, particularly from less mobile customers who will no longer have access to quality local financial services," Mr Campise said.

"Branch staff — who were blindsided by the announcement of the closures — have been left to handle the complaints of customers, despite having no involvement in the decision to axe these services.

"It is understandable that many Newcastle Permanent customers are outraged by the announcement, but they should focus their anger at the people responsible: the directors and management team.

"As a customer-owned financial institution, Newcastle Permanent ultimately answers to its customers, so they have a very real capacity to stop these branch closures by highlighting how they will be impacted by the loss of local branches and why the decision must be reversed.

"This is particularly the case for customers without easy access to transport, including the elderly or those who rely on public transport, along with local small business customers.

"Newcastle Permanent puts at risk their reputation for caring for the local community with this decision to put economic interests and short-term profitability ahead of service quality for their customers.

"While Newcastle Permanent has said there will be no job losses as a result of these branch closures, there have been a number of redundancies during the past 12 months, and we are working to ensure staff are not adversely affected by these, or any future changes at the Society.

"Our focus is on the welfare of local workers impacted by these changes, and we continue to remind management that Newcastle Permanent's success has always been the result of the exceptional service local staff have provided to their communities for more than a century."

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