

14 Opinion Letters

Digital drive corroding society

Three hearty cheers – and lots of signatures please – for the organisers of the digital exclusion petition (*Digital-first strategy leaves many behind*, Sept 11).

After years of non-consultation about public service reform, culminating in Parliament's passage this year of the pathetically inadequate Public Service Act 2020, it's high time to demand a reversal of government's systematic withdrawal of services from contact with the public.

The closure of post offices in the 1980s was just the foretaste of what became a tsunami of public non-service.

Face-to-face contact with an actual human being is, for many people, the best way to resolve issues and problems. The cost-saving retreat by both business and government behind impenetrable telephone "answering" services that don't answer, websites that substitute vacuous FAQs for actual questions, and insistence that digital communication is always better than human, is corrosive of the fabric of society and of trust in our key institutions.

A central plank in this year's election ought to be the (re-)opening in every town centre of a government shopfront where ordinary citizens can walk in and get hard copies of official forms and reports, person-to-person help, and advice in navigating the pitfalls of our increasingly faceless and unresponsive bureaucracy.

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