Introduction to BFPO Postcode Data

BFPO (British Forces Post Office) data will be available as an option to extract with PAF® from March 2012. This will be the default option. To fit the PAF format as closely as possible, each BFPO number will be assigned a Postcode and the PAF Post Town field will contain "BFPO". The hope is that this will enable BFPO addresses to be easily included in address management products. The goal is to enable members of our armed forces and their families and friends to order online or by telephone and obtain services with ease – in the same way as anyone residing in a UK address. BFPO intend to inform personnel of their "BF" Postcode.

This document provides the information in a "frequently asked questions" style regarding the BFPO data option and how to take advantage of it in your own solutions and applications.

How easy is it to add this data to my solution?

BFPO data has been structured to be easy to add to PAF based solutions. The data can be extracted in the same format as PAF and therefore it can used with any PAF solution with no extra work required. Every BFPO number has been assigned a Postcode in a new "BF" Postcode area. If a new Postcode area can be accommodated then accommodating the new "BF" Postcode area should be fine.

BFPO require that Number, Rank, Name, Sub Unit and Unit details must be entered above the BFPO number. This is analogous to addressee and property information with a normal PAF address. The best solutions will present a form labelled and ready to receive the required additional data.

What should a BFPO address with the Postcode look like on an envelope/label?

The preferred format for printing on an address label is to place the BFPO number on the last line,

i.e.:

987456321 Col. John Brown
Unit 6, Welsh Guards
BFPO
BF1 0AA
BFPO 15

How is the data formatted when extracted with the PAF files?

The data is held in the same fields as normal PAF addresses. The BFPO data will be included at the point of extract with any PAF product – unless the option to exclude it is selected. An example BFPO address returned from a Postcode lookup would be:

Thoroughfare / Street: BFPO 15
Post Town: BFPO
Postcode: BF1 0AA

What additional data needs to be captured from a customer to correctly address an item for delivery to a BFPO address?

The following additional information needs to be captured:

Number, Rank, Name
Sub Unit
Unit

I would like to present a separate data entry form / change field labels when a BFPO Postcode is entered, what layout would you recommend to best capture this data?

We would recommend presenting a form with the following fields (those blank are for the user to enter):

Number:
Rank:
Name:
Sub Unit:
Unit:
BFPO Number: BFPO 15
Town: BFPO
Postcode: BF1 0AA

This allows all the required data to be properly entered, stored and addressed to the customer.

I have an existing address cleaning engine how does this change affect that?

It is important to examine how the engine handles BFPO addresses. If the engine does not currently deal with BFPO addresses, then the presence of the BFPO data enables BFPO addresses to be matched and Postcodes added. The engine could be upgraded and tested to accommodate this.

If the engine has existing routines to deal with BFPO address these may put the BFPO number in the Postcode field. Routines which search on BFPO number could be upgraded to accommodate the BFPO Post Town and Postcode.

Many existing BFPO address will not have anything below the BFPO number so it is worth testing to ensure BFPO addresses passing through the engine can be handled in either format on an existing database.

When dealing with BFPO addresses entered in Royal Mail PAF Format with the postcode, you will be able to easily identify the address with the BFPO number, "BFPO" as the Town and the Postcode and add in any line that might be missing. You should also note that BFPO preferred Format for
printing labels is to have the BFPO number following the Postcode. So while not recommended
for data storage (for consistency reasons) you may also need to handle that eventuality.

Any data above the BFPO number should be retained as this will be the required sub-unit, unit and number, rank and name. It is important to ensure none of this data is lost during cleansing. In cases where un-necessary data is included (e.g. operation) it is likely safer not to alter it as it cannot be validated.

How can I add additional features which use the BFPO data to enhance the user experience?

Royal Mail Solution Providers can provide innovative uses and implementations using the additional BFPO data to provide the best experience to customers. End users organisations can also add further functionality to this.

You might like to consider:

- Include reverse searching. While the MOD will be publishing BFPO Postcodes and informing personnel and families of their Postcodes, there will be an initial period while awareness builds. Many applications don't include reverse searching. Reverse searching by BFPO number to find BF Postcode would be helpful.

- Translate BFPO to BF Postcode. Many applications and forms are Postcode lookup only. Upgrading to recognise a BFPO number and translate it to the Postcode would be useful to users who don't yet remember the issued BF Postcode.

- Upgrade the address form layout so when a BFPO address is entered an appropriately labelled and structured form is displayed ready to capture the required additional data (Number, Rank, Name, Sub Unit and Unit).

- Disallow prohibited goods. Systems could be upgraded to disallow ordering of items prohibited for despatch via BFPO – displaying a suitable message to users.

We send BFPO parcels by a different carrier. How can BFPO addresses be identified for separate treatment?

All BFPO Postcodes will start with 'BF' so simply use this to detect a BFPO address. The same would be the case in other situations already such as if you were detecting for JE and GY as Channel Islands addresses.

I make use of Address Keys, UDPRN's and/or other keyed products how will these fit in with other PAF keys?

All BFPO addresses have a set of keys just like other PAF records. This includes UDPRN and Address Key, Locality Key etc. Key ranges are assigned to avoid future conflicts with PAF.

For example the UDPRN and Address Key start at99000001. It is important to check that no conflicting arbitrary limit is in place and that these ranges do not cause difficulty.

Address keys and UDPRN's are provided for consistency and to make use of the BFPO data within existing processes as easy as possible. It is not a requirement to accommodate them.

Are there any special cases for BFPO numbers that I should be aware of?

BFPO 105 relates to Isolated Detachments. These require a Box number in addition to the BFPO number. However the Box number should be specified as the Unit so there is no need to treat this situation any differently. For example:

12345678 Sgt Smith
NETMA, Box 589
BFPO 105
BFPO
BF1 0AX

The Unit here is "Box 589" with the Sub Unit being "NETMA". If creating or updating fields dynamically it might be worthwhile considering explicitly asking for the box number when BFPO 105 is entered rather than the unit.

Do BFPO addresses require a barcode?

Final sortation of BFPO mail is carried out by the British Forces Post Office and the Royal Mail barcode is not required or applicable. A DPS (delivery point suffix) of 1A is provided with the data simply to assist in compatibility with existing applications that may expect this to be present. A barcode will do no harm, but BFPO items will not attract Royal Mail pre-sortation discounts.

How often is the data updated?

Data is updated monthly and the latest set will be included alongside all updates regardless of frequency. This includes both PAF Changes and full refresh products.

Royal Mail

I take the changes product will I also get the BFPO data?

Yes, PAF Changes products will include changes to the BFPO data as the default option on extract. If you are a Changes customer, to include BFPO data for the first time, select the special option "Insert all BFPO records". From then on simply extract the changes file as usual and by default it will include any BFPO data changes.

I take daily changes; will I also get the BFPO data?

BFPO data is updated monthly and will be available to Daily Changes customers on a monthly basis. The file will be called YyyMmmBFPO.zip where yy is the year of release and mm is the month (e.g. Y11M05BFPO.zip). This will appear in the daily folder along with the regular daily update.

How should I store this data in my database?

The ideal is to accommodate Number, Rank, Name, Sub Unit and Unit elements as either additional fields in the database.

If addresses are stored in the same format as PAF, then the Sub Unit would be equivalent to Sub Building, Unit to Building and Number, Rank and Name to Organisation. For consistency and ease of cleaning we would recommend storing these in the same fields as might be available for normal addresses, for example:

BFPO Field	Same as Normal Address Field
Number	(Field for BFPO use only)
Rank	Title
Name	Name or constituent first name, surname fields
Sub Unit	Sub Building or Flat
Unit	Building or House Name
BFPO Number	Street
BFPO Town	Town
BFPO Postcode	Postcode

Rather than the Number and Rank fields being additional fields, validation on the Name field could be relaxed to allow this data to be accommodated.

My application requires a county to be present, what should I use for BFPO?

If this is essential, probably the most logical solution is to duplicate the Town entry 'BFPO'. County data was removed from the core PAF files over ten years ago, has not been actively maintained and is not needed for delivery purposes.

Is BFPO part of PAF?

No, BFPO data is not part of the core Royal Mail Postcode Address File (PAF). It is an option available at the point of data extract to all recipients of RAW PAF from Royal Mail.

The British Forces Post Office (BFPO) is part of the MOD and an entirely separate entity from Royal Mail. BFPO has its own sortation and delivery systems and BFPO numbers are assigned and maintained by BFPO.   Royal Mail route mail intended for BFPO destinations to the BFPO, based at RAF Northolt, for onward processing and delivery.

Most external mail destined for BFPO addresses is first processed by Royal Mail. BFPO data can be extracted with PAF in the same format as the PAF data with any of the applicable PAF products. It will be placed in the correct location, i.e. between the BD and BH Postcode areas, so as not to cause any problem with sortation. This is to facilitate the incorporation of BFPO data into PAF based solutions and encourage maximum take-up of BFPO.

For further information on the use of BFPO data please contact us:

Email   –   address.management@royalmail.com

Call   –   0845 606 6854* (option 3)

*Calls cost 5p per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge.