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Sign up to protect call centre jobs

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BANK customers are being urged to back a campaign to protect hundreds of call centre jobs on Wearside. Lloyds TSB, which employs 600 people at its centre on Sunderland Enterprise Park, is today due to announce its profits for 2004.

Despite city analysts predicting the bank will announce pre-tax profits of about £3.33billion, Lloyds TSB still presse

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d ahead with the closure of its Newcastle call centre last November – with the loss of 960 jobs.

The Newcastle jobs were "offshored" – shifted to India –and union bosses fear the same could happen to the jobs at Sunderland and the company's other bases nationwide.

The Lloyds TSB Group Union will be petitioning customers visiting the bank's branches across the country today as the bank's profits are announced.

The move is part of the union's campaign to collect more than half a million signatures from customers opposed to their bank accounts being handled abroad.

Although Lloyds TSB has denied any plans to move jobs from Sunderland, it has confirmed that a total of 2,500 of its UK posts will have transferred to India by the end of the year, a figure the union fears could eventually rise to 10,000.

Spokesman Peter O'Grady said the bank had blamed difficulty in finding suitable staff for its decision to close Newcastle.

"If they are saying the North East is not an easy place to recruit, that could have serious implications for Sunderland," he said.

Steve Tatlow, Assistant General Secretary at Lloyds TSB Group Union, said: "The level of profits being announced by Lloyds TSB removes any remaining excuse for exporting jobs abroad.

"What is more, other leading banks such as HBOS and RBS have announced even higher profits while remaining committed to operating only from the UK.

"To continue with a policy of exporting jobs to India while making such huge profits is evidence of a total lack of corporate social responsibility."

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