



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Response to the proposal for the future of Rotherham Goldthorpe Jobcentre

Response to consultation

July 2017

Contents

- Background 4
- DWP’s estate strategy 4
- Consultation..... 5
- Summary of responses 5
- Response themes..... 5
 - Travel time 5
 - Travel cost 6
 - Access to services 7
 - Sanctions 8
 - Outreach 9
 - Equality analysis 10
- Conclusions and next steps..... 10
- Annex A: questionnaire 11
- Annex B: list of respondents 12
- Annex C: travel information 13

Background

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced new proposals on Thursday 26 January 2017 to relocate some of its Jobcentre Plus offices.

Jobcentre Plus operations have changed in recent years as people make more use of online and telephone services, generally only attending offices for appointments or for help in researching job vacancies.

To reflect this, achieve more efficient use of DWP premises and save public money, a proposal was made to move Rotherham Goldthorpe into Mexborough Jobcentre.

Guidelines around the movement of jobcentres, referred to as 'ministerial criteria', have been used for many years across the whole of the UK network. They originated from a desire to standardise the circumstances when considering the movement of one jobcentre to another.

DWP believe that it is reasonable to expect claimants to travel 3 miles or 20 minutes by public transport of their existing jobcentre. Where it is proposed to move or close an office, and the move to a new jobcentre is further than these criteria, DWP has the option to consult publicly about this proposal. The proposal to move to Mexborough Jobcentre falls outside these criteria:

- distance: 3.3 miles
- public transport: approximately 22 minutes
- car: 8 minutes

The public consultation paper, ***Proposal for the future of Rotherham Goldthorpe Jobcentre***, was published on 30 January 2017. It invited comments from everyone with an interest in the future of this jobcentre. This included the closure of the buildings with the services provided being transferred to another jobcentre within Rotherham.

DWP's estate strategy

On 31 March 2018, DWP's PFI PRIME (Private Finance Initiative for the Management of the Estate) contract with Telereal Trillium expires. This 20-year contract covers the majority of DWP's current property portfolio of 966 sites. This gives DWP an opportunity to review which offices are needed in the future, taking account of the increased use of online services, the reforms being implemented over the coming years and the anticipated demand on services.

The roll out of Universal Credit and reforms of Jobcentre Plus, have increased the number of interactions claimants now have with DWP online. For example, eight out of ten claims for Jobseeker's Allowance are now using digital channels and 99.6% of applications for Universal Credit are submitted online. At the same time, DWP has seen record levels of employment across the UK, with the claimant count dropping to around 800,000.

As a result, 20% of the space DWP currently occupies is no longer being used: even allowing a contingency for any medium-term increase in demand. This offers a major opportunity for both modernisation and rationalisation: over the next 10 years, DWP expects to save £180m per annum on average as a result.

When considering how to achieve this, DWP's priority has been to offer the best possible service to claimants while delivering a good deal for the taxpayer.

Consultation

Following the announcement about Rotherham Goldthorpe Jobcentre, invitations were sent to the local MP and other interested parties to get in touch with DWP to discuss any issues in relation to this consultation: no responses were received to this.

The consultation period closed on 28 February 2017 and this report summarises the responses, including how the consultation process influenced the final decision on the future of Rotherham Goldthorpe Jobcentre.

Summary of responses

Seventeen responses to the consultation proposals were received.

DWP is grateful for all the contributions made in response to the consultation.

The respondents have been categorised as follows:

- 14 responses were from members of the public
- 2 responses were from organisations
- 1 response from the MP for Wentworth and Dearne

Response themes

The following summarises the responses by grouping issues into a series of themes.

Travel time

Ninety-four per cent of respondents expressed concerns about the increase in travel time to attend Mexborough Jobcentre. Concerns cited included inconvenience, journey times on public transport and increased difficulties for vulnerable groups: those with disabilities, mental health conditions and those caring for young children.

Typical comments:

"...i live in thurnscoe and am in daily signing if the jobcentre moves to Mexborough it will take me and others using public transport nearly an hour to get there as it is two buses not the 20minutes ..."

“This will affect me and most others from the location i have to travel from, i will need to catch a bus from Thurnscoe to Highgate/Goldthorpe, then have to wait for the next bus to Mexborough which in total will be over an hour travelling for a ten minute appointment.”

“I live walking distance to my local job centre makes it easy and more efficient for me to get to”

“Most people are able to walk to Goldthorpe job centre at no cost... Also, for people in Thurnscoe it's two buses to Mexborough.”

Response

DWP believes that it is reasonable to expect claimants to travel to an office within 3 miles, or 20 minutes by public transport from their existing jobcentre. Rotherham Goldthorpe Jobcentre falls outside these criteria so DWP chose to consult publicly. Through consultation, the catchment area of each jobcentre has been investigated and the specific travel times and public transport routes have been compiled, see [Annex C](#)

DWP's work coaches personalise the support provided for each claimant based on individual need and circumstance. Where claimants have limitations due to a health condition or disability or because of caring responsibilities, then this is taken into account when arranging any attendance. DWP has various ways of interacting with vulnerable claimants, including:

- face-to-face
- by email
- by telephone
- by post
- by SMS

However, DWP recognises that some claimants will be taking an unfamiliar journey: work coaches will support claimants over the transition period until they become familiar with new travel arrangements. Claimants can also request to attend a jobcentre that is closer to their home. Work coaches will help signpost claimants in such circumstances.

Travel cost

Seventy-one per cent of respondents expressed concern about the potential increase in travel costs and the effect this would have on disposable income for food and other necessities.

It has been suggested that some claimants will face a more expensive journey to get to their jobcentre and many will no longer have the option to walk thus incurring additional expense.

Typical comments:

“A one-way bus ticket costs £3.90, a large chunk if you receive JSA and have just £58 to live on.”

“As they [claimants] on benefits and have to travel would they get travel allowance to sign on. Some of these people are already destitute to put additional costs on them would make it even harder.”

“The people of Goldthorpe will have to travel further which will cost them more money. This money will come from the least wealthy people and ultimately come out of benefits money that could and should be used to feed families and also pay bills with.”

Response

DWP acknowledge that the proposal included in the consultation may increase travel costs for some claimants when they are required to attend a jobcentre. This will be particularly so for those who currently live within easy reach of their current jobcentre.

DWP are able to reimburse travel costs for claimants and customers, taking into account their particular circumstances, who are asked to attend the jobcentre outside of their minimum requirement of attendance. This is not new and is the case for any claimant required to attend a jobcentre throughout the UK.

Support to meet travel costs is also available to eligible claimants via the Jobcentre Plus Travel Discount Card. Claimants can also request to attend a jobcentre closer to their home, should there be one. Work coaches will help signpost claimants in such circumstances.

Additional detailed travel information has been provided in [Annex C](#) from the wards affected by this proposal.

Access to services

Forty per cent of respondents expressed concern about the adverse effect on the local community, of removing access to services and support for vulnerable benefit claimants and those seeking work.

Typical comments:

“As a disabled person on esa I am able to park close to the building and the advisors are here to help should I need it. The service is personal the staff understand your needs and requirements and how they can help you, the staff go over and above what they need to do and they really can support you.”

“Local agencies work closely together in Goldthorpe to help local people attend regular appointments and seek employment in a variety of ways, using other job clubs in the area.”

“...The closing of Goldthorpe job centre not only as an impact on the people that use it but also an impact on the community as a whole.”

Response

DWP is not reducing its services and is committed to retaining a jobcentre network in the area. The office proposed for closure will deliver economies of scale, which will enable DWP to deliver enhanced services to support business improvements including digital services, group information support and access to a wider spectrum of partners and employers.

The overall aim is to provide an enhanced service in jobcentres: IT equipment will be moved and rehoused in the Mexborough office. Claimants will continue to be encouraged to bring their own electronic devices into jobcentres to make good use of DWP's free Wi-Fi to help them manage their online claim and support their jobsearch activities. Dedicated staff will be available to support claimants by delivering services and additional support in the digital suites.

These proposals will ensure that DWP can respond better to customer demand, support the move towards Universal Credit and increase flexibility to deliver a full service across all jobcentres.

Flexible tailored support will continue to be offered to meet customer needs including the delivery of specific group sessions, co-delivered with employers and partners if appropriate, and tailored to offer maximum support. The proposals will ensure claimants have full access to employers via job fairs, recruitment events and, networking events that currently cannot take place in all offices due to space and resource constraints.

DWP fully recognises the value of the developed relationship between claimants and work coaches and this will continue after services have moved. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, claimants will retain their current work coach who will continue to deliver tailored and personalised support from Mexborough Jobcentre.

Sanctions

Thirty-five per cent of respondents expressed concern that the number of sanctions issued would increase if the proposed jobcentre closure went ahead.

Some responses highlighted that longer more complex journeys by public transport could lead to increased lateness or failure to attend appointments. Longer journey times might also affect the time available to claimants to meet their claimant commitment. Concerns have been expressed about the impact on public transport services of external factors such as:

- frequency of service
- reliability

Typical comments:

“There is only one bus which runs every hour and having to connect to another bus, if these buses don't connect and you're late for an appointment people are going to be sanctioned for not turning up on time.”

“There could be a possibility that the people of Goldthorpe may miss appointments and be sanctioned due to them being unable to travel to Mexborough...”

Response

The National Audit Office has estimated that a million jobseekers missed appointments between July 2015 and December 2015 compared with only 34,000 sanction referrals. This reduction is specifically due to the ongoing work to ensure claimants know and understand expectations with their work coaches.

Concern about public transport will continue to be considered on an individual basis. DWP do not expect this proposal to result in additional sanctions, as a direct result of the impact of travel journeys beyond claimant’s control.

DWP recognises that some claimants will be taking an unfamiliar journey so work coaches will support them over the transition period until they become familiar with new travel arrangements.

It should also be noted that claimants, including those with vulnerabilities, are only asked to meet reasonable requirements. These take into account their individual circumstances, capability (including health conditions), disability and caring responsibilities.

Outreach

Twelve per cent of respondents expressed the view that a ‘footprint’ or outreach facility should exist in these local communities. People acknowledged that this type of service would not replace jobcentres but could provide advice, support or guidance for claimants about their jobsearch in the event of any closures.

Typical comment:

“In the event that the decision is taken to close Goldthorpe Jobcentre we would welcome consideration being given to the location / colocation of a JCP work coach to provide help with looking for work based in an appropriate and accessible community location.”

Response

DWP are committed to retaining a jobcentre network and continuing to serve people in all areas of the UK to make sure they can continue to access the tailored services they need. When a full-time jobcentre closes following a public consultation, we will put an ‘outreach’ service in place within the local community.

Outreach is a vital front-facing service to claimants. Host organisations offer access to their facilities as part of the ongoing partnership activities with DWP. This allows work coaches and partner organisations to work together to support the joint needs of claimants. DWP are currently working with partner organisations within the local area to develop an outreach service following the closure of Goldthorpe Jobcentre. What this service will offer will be publicised ahead of the closures.

Equality analysis

Eighteen per cent of respondents asked if DWP had completed an Equality Analysis whilst considering this proposal.

Typical comments:

“We would ask whether an equality impact assessment has been undertaken as we are concerned that vulnerable claimants may struggle to access the proposed provision in Mexborough?”

“...I am concerned by reports that DWP has not carried out an impact assessment of the plan to close jobcentres across the country.”

Response

DWP has been mindful of its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and has carried out local jobcentre level consultation to inform understanding of the effect of the proposal. Careful consideration has been given to the wider effect on the local communities. DWP will maintain services to claimants, whether in their existing jobcentre where a decision is made to retain that office or, where their existing jobcentre will close, at an alternative site.

DWP recognises that these proposals represent a major change that may have a greater impact on some groups with protected characteristics than others, as evidenced by the consultation responses, and consideration has been given to how any such impacts can be mitigated.

DWP has had due regard to the impact of this proposal throughout its development, as evidenced by the high-level equality analysis that was undertaken before the proposal was finalised and by the consultation and full Equality Analysis that has just been undertaken.

Conclusions and next steps

DWP has considered the points raised by all of the people and organisations that have responded to the consultation. The points raised by respondents do highlight difficulties raised in making these changes, but DWP has to balance the need to provide services along with the budget it has to deliver those services.

After careful consideration of the responses, it is DWP's view that these do not provide a basis to amend or change the proposal to close Rotherham Goldthorpe and move the services to Mexborough Jobcentre.

Consequently, the recommendation of this report is to proceed with the proposal to close Rotherham Goldthorpe Jobcentre and transfer services to Mexborough Jobcentre.

Annex A: questionnaire

The consultation paper invited responses to the following questions:

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposal? What overall comments would you like to make on the proposal?

Question 2: Will the proposal to close Rotherham Goldthorpe Jobcentre have a direct impact on you? If yes, please provide further details.

Question 3: If you currently use Jobcentre Plus services at these jobcentres, what impacts are there on the time and cost taken to travel to your new jobcentre?

Question 4: Are there any other particular impacts of the proposal that DWP should take into account when making a decision?

Question 5: Are there alternative services that could be provided that would be a benefit to some claimants? For example, this could be a member of Jobcentre Plus staff based in a community venue to provide help with looking for work. Please explain your answer, with specific examples and evidence of the potential demand for the service where possible.

Question 6: Please provide any additional comments that you have.

Annex B: list of respondents

In addition to members of the public and claimants who responded to the consultation, the following named individuals and organisations provided a response:

- Clare Dawson Dearne Council
- Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
- John Healey MP

Annex C: travel information

Goldthorpe Jobcentre claimants will be affected differently according to their home location. It provides services to the following three villages and claimants will incur additional travelling to Mexborough.

Public transport information:-

Thurnscoe (S63 0) 223 claimants.

The journey would involve 2 buses to Mexborough and the journey is between 54 to 60 minutes, with an average time of 55 minutes for a 4.6 mile journey.

Goldthorpe (S63 9) claimants

The journey involves just 1 bus to Mexborough and the journey is between 21 to 31 minutes for a 3.3 mile journey.

Bolton (S63 8) claimants

The journey involves 1 bus to Mexborough and the journey is between 7 to 29 minutes (the variance is because the bus journey sometimes can take a longer route to enable customers to access an industrial park that employs a significant number of people in Manvers) for a 2.3 mile journey.

Note: work is ongoing to determine if there is a jobcentre nearer to these claimants homes so that they could have a shorter in journey time on public transport on one bus rather than two. This may mean a slightly longer journey for those claimants with their own transport.