



Response to the proposal for the future of Wellington Jobcentre

Response to consultation

July 2017

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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 to save public money, the following change was proposed - to move Wellington into Telford 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 believes that it is reasonable to expect claimants to travel 3 miles or 20 minutes by public transport from their existing jobcentre. Where it is proposed to move or close an office, and the move to a new jobcentre is outside these criteria, DWP has the option to consult publicly about these changes. The jobcentre at Telford falls outside these criteria as follows:

- distance: 4.4 miles
- public transport: approximately 36 minutes
- car: 10 minutes

The public consultation paper, ***Proposal for the future of Wellington 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 building with the services provided being transferred to Telford Jobcentre.

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 provides 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 made using digital channels and 99.6% of applicants for Universal Credit full service submitted their claim 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 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.

Summary of responses

Six responses to the consultation proposals were received from individuals or members of the public.

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

Response themes

The respondent themes are summarised as follows.

Travel time

Responders were concerned about the increase in travelling time. These related specifically to longer journey times, the inconvenience and increased difficulties.

Typical comments:

"...the distance between the two jobcentres are too far to travel."

"...requires a working car with a driver's licence...I don't have either."

"...you can't just walk from Wellington to Telford on foot without walking problems..."

"...Telford office is not inside the town centre site, adding an extra pedestrian burden on anyone who does not have access to a private vehicle."

"...if it wasn't for me driving I would have to get two buses as I live in a rural location"

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. Detailed travel times can be found in Annex B.

It should 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.

Travel cost

Respondents expressed concern about the potential increase in travel costs and the impact this would have on disposable income.

Typical comments:

"...will cost me more in fuel...which I can ill afford..."

"...it may seem very small to some people, but for the cost of a bus fare between Wellington and Telford I could eat for 2-3 days!"

"Public transport between Wellington and Telford is very costly and the public transport between the two locations is very poor as well."

Response

DWP acknowledge that the proposals 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.

Access to services

Respondents expressed concerns about access to the internet and the effect on those with mental health issues.

"There's an expectation that everyone will have access to the internet, but that's not always the case."

"I have mental health issues, depression I suffer from Panic Attacks. To move the jobcentre to Telford would not be good."

"...the worry and stress of all this has affected my health and activities."

Response

DWP is not reducing its services and is committed to retaining an accessible jobcentre network. These proposals will ensure that DWP can respond better to

customer demand, support the move towards Universal Credit and increase flexibility to deliver services across the full working day.

The aim is to provide an enhanced IT service in the jobcentre: this will be moved and rehoused in Telford. Claimants will be encouraged to bring their own electronic devices to make good use of DWP's free Wi-Fi to help them manage their online claim and support their jobsearch activities.

It should be noted that all our claimants, including our vulnerable ones, are only asked to meet reasonable requirements which take into account their individual circumstances and capability (including health conditions), disability and caring responsibilities.

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

Flexible tailored support will continue to be offered to meet customer needs including the delivery of specific group sessions, co-delivered with employer and partners if appropriate, and tailored to offer maximum support.

Equality analysis

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 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 the proposals throughout programme 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.

Conclusion 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.

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 Wellington Jobcentre. What this service will offer will be publicised ahead of the closures.

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 Wellington Jobcentre.

Consequently, the recommendation of this report is to proceed with the proposal to close Wellington Jobcentre and transfer services to Telford 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 Wellington 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: Travel time

Wellington Jobcentre to Telford Jobcentre – The shortest journey time is 20 minutes & the longest journey time is 42 minutes

- **Bus – “ Number 4”** – 5 minute walk to bus stop – 27 minute bus journey – 10 minute walk to Jobcentre – **total journey time 42 minutes**
- **Bus – “Number 81”** – 5 minute walk to bus stop – 11 minute bus journey – 4 minute walk to Jobcentre – **total journey time 20 minutes**
- **Train** – 5 minute walk to station – 7 minute train journey – 10 minute walk to Jobcentre – **total journey time 22 minutes**