



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Response to the proposal for the future of Finchley Jobcentre

Response to consultation

---

July 2017

# Contents

- Background ..... 2
- DWP’s estate strategy ..... 2
- Summary of responses ..... 3
- Response themes ..... 3
  - Travel time ..... 3
  - Travel cost ..... 4
  - Access to services ..... 5
  - Sanctions ..... 6
  - Outreach ..... 7
  - Equality analysis ..... 7
- Conclusions and next steps ..... 8
- Annex A: questionnaire ..... 9
- Annex B: list of respondents ..... 10
- Annex C: detailed travel information ..... 11

## 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 Finchley into Barnet 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 from 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 Barnet Jobcentre falls outside these criteria:

- distance: 3.4 miles
- public transport: approximately 23 minutes
- car: 12 minutes

The public consultation paper, ***Proposal for the future of Finchley 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 London.

## 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 now.

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.

## Summary of responses

There were 12 responses, in total, to the public consultation proposal:

- 8 from members of the public
- 1 from claimants
- 2 from local organisations
- 1 from the local MP

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

## Response themes

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

### Travel time

All 12 respondents were concerned about the increase in travel time. These related specifically to longer journey times, inconvenience and increased difficulties.

Typical comments:

*"...the estimation of travel time by bus or car is completely unpredictable, even outside of rush hour; Finchley from Central to North can become gridlocked in the middle of the day. The tube of course is more predictable, but expensive for the fortnightly signing on, and less frequent out of rush hour times..."*

*"...the travel time from Finchley to Barnet job centre is estimated by the DWP as 12 minutes by car and 23 by public transport.... the journey by bus takes far more than 23 minutes. TfL give a travel time of double that yet, in my experience, at mid-morning it takes the best part of an hour..."*

*"...it (travel time) doesn't take into account the uncertainties of buses running to schedule or sudden problems with traffic that can delay people..."*

## 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.

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.

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

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.

[Annex C](#) provides additional detailed travel information for claimants travelling from the Finchley to Barnet Jobcentre.

## Travel cost

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

Typical comments:

*"...the biggest impact will be felt by those currently within walking distance (e.g. one mile for those with no health issues) of Finchley and Edgware jobcentres who have not previously had to incur any costs to attend the jobcentre..."*

*"...we are concerned about ... the additional cost to services users brought about by the extra travel distance..."*

*"...my constituents will be able to apply for reimbursed travel, but this presents a cash flow problem because there is a delay between purchasing bus and/or train fares and having them reimbursed..."*

## **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.

DWP recognise 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.

Annex C provides additional detailed travel information for claimants travelling from the Finchley area to Barnet Jobcentre.

## **Access to services**

Three respondents expressed concern that closing Finchley Jobcentre would have an adverse impact on the local community, removing access to services and support for vulnerable benefit claimants and those seeking work.

Typical comments:

*“...it is likely to affect both of my disabled children in the future - travel is very difficult for people with disabilities...”*

*“...the proposal makes no mention on the growing number of people with mobility issues who no longer qualify to stay off work (ESA) and are currently required to sign on. For these claimants any additional travel could have a very negative impact in their prognosis...”*

*“...the very nature of being a claimant means that every effort must be made to provide easily accessible services that don't require access to an online account...”*

## **Response**

DWP is not reducing its services and is committed to retaining an accessible jobcentre network. The proposal takes account of any increases in demand for its services and 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.

The overall aim is to provide an enhanced service in Barnet Jobcentre. IT equipment will be moved and rehoused in the Barnet 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 job search activities. Dedicated staff will be available to support claimants by delivering services and additional support in our digital suites.

The excellent working relationships that are already in place with voluntary and partner organisations, and employers, will be maintained, with plans to build on these over the coming year.

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, a majority of claimants will retain their current work coach who will continue to deliver tailored and personalised support from the new jobcentre.

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.

## **Sanctions**

Three respondents expressed concern that the number of sanctions issued would increase if the proposed jobcentre closure went ahead.

Typical comments:

*"...if people are late for appointments because of a sudden traffic problem, particularly people who may have been able to walk to the Finchely centre and in the early days of transfer haven't been able to assess how long the journey will take in different circumstances, they may be sanctioned..."*

*"...we are concerned about the risk of people receiving financial penalties for being late for appointments. This would have a detrimental effect on claimants and their families..."*

## **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 on-going work to ensure claimants know and understand expectations with their work coaches. The number of sanction decisions for failure to attend, or failure to participate in a work coach interview without good cause, has fallen.

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

DWP recognise 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.

## **Outreach**

Three respondents expressed the view that a 'footprint' or outreach facility should be left in the Finchley area.

Typical comments:

*"...maybe in Finchley Central library but this should not replace the jobcentre which has all the facilities nearby..."*

*"...Barnet Council has a good track record of working in partnership with DWP to provide services from community and other venues.... It is essential that this joint working continues, and that claimants are able to undertake formal DWP processes at these sites as well as receiving advice and guidance..."*

*"...any outreach support should be in addition to the current 4 jobcentres – not instead of..."*

## **Response**

DWP fully recognises the value of the developed relationship between claimant, work coaches and with partners. These will continue after services have moved to the Barnet Jobcentre.

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

## **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 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 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.

## **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 Finchley Jobcentre and move the services to Barnet Jobcentre.

Consequently, the recommendation of this report is to proceed with the proposal to close Finchley Jobcentre and transfer services to Barnet 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 proposals?

**Question 2:** Will the proposal to close Finchley 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 Organisations and Member of Parliament provided a response:

- Barnet Labour Group
- London Borough of Barnet
- Mike Freer MP for Finchley and Golders Green

## **Annex C: detailed travel information**

- One bus (263) route taking approx. 24mins
- Single bus journey cost is £1.50 reduced by 50% (75p) if customer has been issued with a Jobcentre travel discount card, typically issued after 13 weeks of unemployment
- London underground (4 stops) from Finchley Central to High Barnet 9 mins by tube followed by 10 mins walk. Daily pay as you go cap is £5.60 with Jobcentre travel discount card