



Response to the proposal for the future of Coventry Tile Hill 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 Coventry Tile Hill to Coventry Cofa Court 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 Coventry Cofa Court falls outside these criteria as follows:

- distance: 4 miles
- public Transport: approximately 35 minutes
- car: 14 minutes

The public consultation paper, ***Proposal for the future of Coventry Tile Hill 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 another jobcentre within Coventry.

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 from almost 1.5 million in 2010 to around 800,000 now.

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

Four 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:

- two responses were from individuals or members of the public
- two responses were from an organisation

Response themes

The response 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:

"Appointment times should also take into account journey time, buses being notoriously late and customers having to drop children off at school prior to coming to the city centre."

"...it would probably take me all day to walk to Corfa Court and back, therefore wasting time that could have been spent job hunting."

"...the health consequences of having to travel into town rather than 'around the corner.'"

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. Coventry Tile Hill Jobcentre falls outside these criteria so DWP chose to consult publicly.

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.

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

Travel cost

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

Typical comments:

"As I sign-on weekly this means £8 took out of my JSA for bus fares (a better use for this money would be for job interviews)..."

"Parking is limited and cost for parking."

"This will have an impact on our clients, refugees and migrants, who live in the Tile Hill area...is a significant distance from the City Centre...will necessitate an additional cost out of what is already a low income"

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 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

Typical comment:

"We feel that, as well as damaging the customer experience, this closure will indirectly, if not directly, impact our workload as an independent advice agency."

Response

The need for space for support organisations has been considered as part of space planning. The proposals mean that partners will be able to reduce the number of sites they attend and will have access to a larger customer base. The excellent working relationships that are already in place with voluntary and partner organisations will be maintained: with plans to build on these over the coming year.

Partnerships are an integral part of DWP's service delivery model and plans are being produced to ensure the close working with local groups and voluntary organisations to maximise customer support available from all our offices. These will be monitored to assess the effect of these proposals and steps will be put in place to provide additional support as required.

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.

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 Coventry Tile Hill 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 Coventry Tile Hill Jobcentre and relocate this office to Cofa Court.

The recommendation of this report is to proceed with the proposal to close Coventry Tile Hill Jobcentre and transfer services to Cofa Court 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 Coventry Tile Hill 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:

- Coventry Citizens Advice
- Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre

Jim Cunningham MP also raised two questions in the House on 7 February 2017 which were responded to by Damian Hinds, Minister for Employment.