



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Response to the proposal for the future of Hoylake 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 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 close Hoylake Jobcentre and transfer staff and services into Upton Jobcentre in Birkenhead. In addition to this, we will maintain a small facility at a site in West Kirby

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 falls outside these criteria, DWP has the option to consult publicly about these changes. The proposed relocation of services from Hoylake Jobcentre to Upton Jobcentre in Birkenhead, falls outside these criteria as:

From Hoylake Jobcentre to Upton Jobcentre:

- distance: 4.8 miles
- public transport: 23 minutes
- car: 16 minutes

From Hoylake Jobcentre to West Kirby footprint:

- distance: 1.6 miles
- public transport: 7 minutes
- car: 6 minutes

The public consultation paper, ***Proposal for the future of Hoylake Jobcentre***, was published on 30 January 2017. It invited comments from everyone with an interest in the future of this jobcentre, including the proposed closure of the building and the transfer of its services, to Upton Jobcentre in Birkenhead.

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 applications for Universal Credit are made online. At the same time, DWP has seen record levels of employment across the UK, with the claimant count dropping to its current level of 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 for Hoylake

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

- 4 from members of the public
- 3 from claimants
- 1 from the local MP

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

The consultation was seeking the views of everyone with an interest in Hoylake Jobcentre's services.

Response themes

The respondent themes are summarised as follows.

Travel time

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

Typical comments:

"...I don't drive, I use public transport. Not only would this be a nightmare to get to, there is one bus every half hour..."

"...Upton is not very accessible for people without cars..."

"...my concerns being I am disabled and concern access to other offices..."

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. Hoylake Jobcentre falls outside these criteria so DWP chose to consult publicly.

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 recognise 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 choose to attend a jobcentre that is closer to their home, should there be one. Work coaches will help signpost claimants in such circumstances.

[Annex C](#) provides additional detailed travel information for claimants travelling from Hoylake to Upton Jobcentre.

Travel cost

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

Typical comments:

"...a train and a bus would cost people like me a fortune, its money we simply do not have..."

"...the transport costs for people from Hoylake to access Job Centre services are going to be significant..."

"...at present most residents of Hoylake and Moels using the Jobcentre can walk there. Having to travel to Upton or Birkenhead incurs significant extra costs for these folk on low incomes..."

“...I am reliant on public transport and bearing this additional cost will be hard enough on its own. I read that fares can be reimbursed, but that's not always made clear and the bar to affording a trip to the JCP in the first place is significantly higher before you can even reclaim the fare some days/weeks later...”

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.

[Annex C](#) provides additional detailed travel information for claimants travelling from Hoylake to Upton Jobcentre.

Access to services

Six respondents expressed concern about how the closure may affect claimants' ability to access the internet, to make claims for benefit and to manage their jobsearch commitment.

Typical comments:

“...at the moment Hoylake Job Centre is the only place residents of Hoylake who are unemployed and without the facility at home can access the internet...”

“...walking to West Kirby is possible but would result in journeys of between 20 and 35 minutes for mobile, fit users. Others with limited mobility would take longer...”

“...whether they're our youth, young families, middle-aged or the elderly in receipt of support from DWP, especially when they're ill or disabled or carers for these people, we will all struggle to travel 5 miles to Upton...”

“...we are keen to maintain a jobcentre in Hoylake, which has a higher than national average number of teenagers...”

Response

DWP is not reducing its services and is committed to retaining an accessible jobcentre network. The proposal 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 overall aim is to provide an enhanced service in jobcentres. IT equipment will be moved and rehoused in the new 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 our digital suites.

Free internet access is also currently available in the following UK online centres:

- Hoylake Library
- West Kirby Library and West Kirby Connect Learning Centre

The last census (2011) shows that the teenage population in the Hoylake area is slightly higher (0.2%) than the Wirral as a whole and 0.5% lower than the Northwest as a whole. The following are examples of specialised support available to 18-24 year old claimants on the Wirral:

- Youth Employment Gateway
- Talent Match (a voluntary programme of intense mentoring etc.)
- Skills to Succeed (an online employability skills training site)
- Work Experience opportunities with local organisations and businesses

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.

Sanctions

Two respondents were concerned that longer, more complex journeys by public transport could lead to increased lateness or failure to attend appointments.

Typical comment:

"...public transport in Hoylake and Moels is good - but can be inconsistent - especially the rail service. Cancelled trains can mean missed timed appointments. I am very concerned about reports of the mental health problems being sanctioned..."

"...I am not able to go on long journeys... This would make this journey more difficult if not impossible at times and likely to lead to me missing appointments and potentially subject to sanction..."

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: work coaches will support claimants over the transition period until they become familiar with new travel arrangements.

Outreach

One respondent expressed the view that a 'footprint' or outreach facility should exist in the local community.

Comment:

"...if a reduced facility could be established for Hoylake and Moels residents, this would be greatly appreciated..."

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 Hoylake 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.

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.

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 Hoylake Jobcentre and relocate services to Upton Jobcentre in Birkenhead.

Consequently the recommendation of this report is to proceed with the proposal to close Hoylake Jobcentre and transfer services to Upton 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 Hoylake Jobcentre have a direct impact on you? If yes, please provide further details.

Question 3: If you currently use Jobcentre Plus services at this jobcentre, 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, Margaret Greenwood MP also provided a response.

Annex C: detailed travel information

Travel times for claimants travelling within the Hoylake area to Upton Jobcentre are as follows:

- the shortest and longest bus journey takes between 16 minutes and 48 minutes with most bus services running every 30 minutes.
- Upton Jobcentre is located next to the General Hospital (Wirral) and transport links are generally good.
- Claimants who live in the Caldy area, may have to catch two buses. The first bus journey is short and takes approximately 6 minutes. Those who are able to, may choose to walk the first leg of the journey rather than catch the bus.

Travel costs for claimants travelling from Hoylake to Upton Jobcentre:

- A 'Saveway' ticket, which can be used on all buses after 9:30am, costs £3.90. This ticket is valid for all journeys on the day of purchase.
- Where an appointment requires the claimant to travel before 9:30am, the cost of a single ticket is £2.20.
- A Merseytravel day ticket, which can be used on all buses at any time, costs £4.70. This ticket is valid for all bus journeys on the day of purchase.