



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Response to the proposal for the future of Brighthouse 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 with people making more use of online and telephone services, 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 Brighouse Jobcentre, transferring staff and services into Halifax Crossfield House 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 falls outside these criteria, DWP has the option to consult publicly about these changes. The proposed relocation of services from Brighouse Jobcentre to Halifax Crossfield House Jobcentre falls outside these criteria:

From Brighouse Jobcentre to Halifax Crossfield House Jobcentre:

- distance: 4.8 miles
- public transport: 34 minutes
- car: 14 minutes

The public consultation paper, ***Proposal for the future of Brighouse 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 Halifax Crossfield House 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 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

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

- 3 from members of the public
- 3 from claimants
- 1 from a local organisation

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 Brighouse Jobcentre's services.

Response themes

The response themes are summarised as follows:

Travel time

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

Typical comments:

"... for most of us Brighouse is the easiest job centre to get too, as it's within walking distance for most of us well more or less all of us really... Halifax would be just too far and too difficult too get too..."

"...this (the additional travel time) would be taking time out of my day when I could be looking for work..."

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

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 needs and circumstances. 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 request to attend a jobcentre that is closer to their home. Work coaches will help signpost claimants in such circumstances.

[Annex C](#) provides additional detailed travel information for claimants travelling from the Brighouse area to Halifax Crossfield House Jobcentre.

Travel cost

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

Typical comments:

"...closing this (Brighouse Jobcentre) means I can't get to a jobcentre without extra costs of travel which I can't afford. I would be looking at an extra £4-£5 a day to get to the nearest job centres..."

"...I too am writing to say that closure would not be a good thing for me to travel to Halifax to sign on with no bus fares money and it will take longer to travel to Halifax..."

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 the Brighouse area to Halifax Crossfield House Jobcentre.

Access to services

Three respondents expressed concern that closing Brighouse 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:

“...I fear this will reduce my chances of getting work faster, I regularly attend the job centre to use the computers to help me find jobs to apply for...”

“...we (Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council) anticipate some impact on the local Customer First office based upon the existing figures of around 240 claimants of Universal Credit in the Brighouse area with a slight increase in footfall or the need to access digital services...”

“...it should also be borne in mind that Calderdale MBC are currently working on a Local Plan for Calderdale that will potentially impact upon the population in the Brighouse area over coming years...”

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 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 Halifax 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. For those claimants who do not have access to IT equipment, the following centres offer free online access:

- Brighouse library
- Rastrick library
- GMB (12 computers. Jobcentre Plus run a Job Club from 9:30-13:00 every Thursday)

- Salvation Army

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. The specialist partnership team work closely with all partners including Calderdale Local Authority and this work will continue after any changes.

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.

Outreach

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

Typical comments:

"...hot-desking 'in partners' buildings would seem to provide an obvious solution should it be decided that the current JCP building isn't sustainable. The service could then go to where employment is highest and engage with people in their own communities where they may be initially more receptive..."

"...whilst I understand the reasoning behind the closure of the Job Centre in Brighthouse, I do feel that there should be some presence in the town and therefore other options should in my view be considered..."

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 Brighthouse 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.

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 Brighthouse Jobcentre and relocate services to Halifax Crossfield House Jobcentre.

The recommendation of this report is to proceed with the proposal to close Brighthouse Jobcentre and transfer services to Halifax Crossfield House 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 Brighthouse 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, the following organisation provided a response:

- Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council

Annex C: detailed travel information

Although most claimants will transfer to Halifax Crossfield House Jobcentre, some claimants may be closer to Huddersfield Jobcentre and choose to transfer there instead.

Travel times for claimants travelling within the Brighouse area to their nearest jobcentre are as follows:

- the shortest and longest bus journey take between 24 minutes and 62 minutes.

Travel costs for claimants travelling from the Brighouse area to their nearest jobcentre:

- A Plus Bus ticket costs £3.00 per day for unlimited travel from Brighouse to either Halifax or Huddersfield.