



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Response to the proposal for the future of Liverpool Edge Hill and Liverpool Wavertree Jobcentres

Response to consultation

July 2017

Contents

- Background 2
- DWP’s estate strategy 2
- Consultation..... 3
- Summary of responses 3
- Response themes..... 3
 - Travel time 3
 - Travel cost 4
 - Access to services 5
 - Equality analysis 7
 - Sanctions 7
 - Outreach 8
 - Assessment of risk..... 9
- Conclusions and next steps..... 9
- Annex A: questionnaire 11
- Annex B: list of respondents 12

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 both Wavertree and Edge Hill Jobcentres into the Toxteth 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 Toxteth Jobcentre falls outside these criteria:

- Wavertree to Toxteth
 - distance: 2.9 miles
 - public transport: approximately 25 minutes
 - car: 14 minutes

- Edge Hill to Toxteth
 - distance: 1.8 miles
 - public transport: approximately 22 minutes
 - car: 8 minutes

The public consultation paper, ***Proposal for the future of Liverpool Wavertree and Liverpool Edge Hill Jobcentres***, 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 Liverpool.

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 applicants 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.

Consultation

The consultation period closed on 28 February 2017 and this report summarises the responses.

Summary of responses

Forty five responses to the consultation proposals were received: 32 for Wavertree and 13 for Edge Hill.

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

The respondents have been categorised as follows:

- 44 responses were from individuals or members of the public
- 1 MP response for Wavertree

Response themes

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

Travel time

Twenty-seven per cent of respondents expressed concerns about the increase in travel time to attend Toxteth Jobcentre. Concerns cited included inconvenience, journey times on public transport and increased difficulties for vulnerable groups: those with disabilities and those caring for young children.

Typical comments:

*"...average journey times of 10 different trip options is actually –
Edge Hill – Toxteth 26.5 mins (best time of 23 mins, longest of 32 mins)
Wavertree – Toxteth 34.2 mins (best time of 26 mins, longest of 39 mins)..."*

“...found the travel times to be in excess of these estimates on every occasion when starting from the person’s home.”

“... requires 1 bus and a 12 minute walk or 2 buses....is everyone capable of walking 12 minutes uninterrupted.”

“...large numbers of people who live in the Liverpool 7 area are going to have to go all the way to.... Liverpool 8, including parents with children, people who have disabilities or are sick, and older people.”

“...this is worrying for me.....I have a few health problems, one of which is walking...”

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. Through consultation, the catchment area of each jobcentre has been investigated and the specific travel times and bus routes have been compiled.

The furthest journey from Wavertree will involve two buses and a walk of 0.5 miles with a maximum journey time of 51 minutes. The furthest journey from Edge Hill will also involve two buses and a walk of 0.5 miles. The maximum journey time is 57 minutes.

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

Travel cost

Fifty-one per cent of respondents expressed concern about the potential increase in travel costs and the effect this would have on disposable income for food and other necessities.

It has been suggested that some claimants will face a more expensive journey to get to their new jobcentre and many will no longer have the option to walk thus incurring additional expense.

Typical comments:

"...living a 'hand to mouth' existence with no money for travel costs."

"...would mean spending money on buses, money that could be spent on groceries and essentials."

"...I would have to get the bus....which I do not have the money for."

"...reimbursement for public transportation costs over and above normal signing on...will be in arrears and lead to significant additional upfront costs for attendees."

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.

Single bus journeys are £2.20. There is a save away ticket available for £3.90, which is valid after 9.30am on any bus. Prior to this there is a daily solo ticket which is £4.70 and can be used on any bus (there are currently three bus companies operating in Liverpool). Arriva do an all-day ticket at £4.30 and stagecoach do an all-day ticket at £4.00. These are not interchangeable between service providers, and most journeys require buses from different companies.

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

Fifteen per cent of respondents expressed concern about the adverse effect on the local community, of removing access to services, the ability of the new office to absorb the increased caseload, and support for vulnerable benefit claimants.

Typical comments:

"...I've seen in Toxteth there would be no space to fit us all in..."

"...we also rely on it for computer use to do our jobsearch, as well as other courses and useful information."

“...I do not think the Toxteth job centre can cope with all the extra footfall and work generated by amalgamating three centres into one.”

“... the centre has a lack of resources and facilities. I would like to know if there are any plans to improve this centre?”

“Also many service users are vulnerable people to struggle with travel due to mental health conditions, physical and mental disabilities. Will there be any support offered to these people?”

“... where do our vulnerable claimants go as Edge Hill has such a diverse claimant base...”

Response

DWP is not reducing its services and is committed to retaining a jobcentre network in Liverpool. The offices proposed for closure will deliver economies of scale, which will enable DWP to deliver enhanced services to support business improvements including digital services, group information support and access to a wider range of partners and employers.

The overall aim is to provide an enhanced service in Toxteth: IT equipment will be moved and rehoused there. 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 the digital suites.

These proposals 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.

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.

DWP is confident that the additional workload can be accommodated into the new jobcentre with the capacity to expand as necessary. Working practices and service delivery methods will continue to be reviewed and adapted to maximise the use of the estate.

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, claimants will retain their current work coach who will continue to deliver tailored and personalised support from Toxteth Jobcentre.

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.

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 will have a greater impact on some groups with protected characteristics than others, as evidenced by the consultation responses.

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.

Sanctions

Fifteen per cent of respondents expressed concern that the number of sanctions issued would increase if the proposed jobcentre closures went ahead.

Some responses highlighted that longer more complex journeys by public transport could lead to increased lateness or failure to attend appointments. Longer journey times might also affect the time available to claimants to meet their claimant commitment. Concerns have been expressed about the impact on public transport services of external factors such as:

- frequency of service
- reliability

These could all affect an already challenging journey.

Typical comments:

“...bus highly unreliable...makes me late for appointments leading to sanctions...”

“...with having to get buses or walk then our money gets stopped then it’s our fault...”

“...a sanctions regime that regularly punishes people for arriving late for interview whatever the distance they have had to travel or whatever difficulties they may have experienced with public transport.”

“...will result in people being late for appointments due to travel delays as they have to get additional buses and could end up with sanctions.”

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 sanction, as a direct of the impact of travel journeys beyond the claimant's control.

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

Outreach

Seven per cent of the respondents expressed the view that the DWP should use the local facilities, which currently exist in the community. Concern was also raised about the lack of detail around the work coaches being based in the community.

Typical comment:

"There are vacant buildings in the area (the former Job bank on Tunnel Road) that perhaps could be used to facilitate job seeking..."

"...the proposal says..... we also propose basing a Work Coach in a community locationit is unacceptable to suggest that a part time post based at an unspecified venue for an indeterminate time could hope to provide a service in any way replicating two fully staffed, local jobcentres."

"...staff based in a community venue to provide help with looking for work. To have a convenient shared location such as the Job Bank on Tunnel Road, where a work coach could be assigned to meet the needs of job seekers..."

Response

The Job Bank at Tunnel Road is run by Liverpool in Work (funded by the Local Authority). They offer job clubs, CV's mentoring etc, but currently have no formal connection with the local jobcentre. Customers are signposted there by work coaches.

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 Wavertree and Edge Hill Jobcentres. What this service will offer will be publicised ahead of the closures.

Assessment of risk

Four per cent per cent of the respondents expressed concern over the safety issue of attending Toxteth Jobcentre and about risk assessments being carried out.

Typical comments:

“...Toxteth is a very rough area of Liverpool I feel absolutely frightened by the news that I may have to walk through areas where I might get mugged for being student looking I’ve never gone in that area its miles away for me...”

“No risk assessments have been carried out to ascertain the impact of these closures on the safety of other users and staff of people who may be involved in territorial gang violence moving out of their areas to attend jobcentres out of ‘their ‘areas.’”

Response

Unfortunately, Toxteth does have an unwarranted reputation. This stems from issues in the early 1980’s. Today the area is no different to any other inner city area. The last Health and Safety Plan for this site was completed in September 2016. The police have an input into this plan, and their response was that Toxteth is not considered a high-risk area.

Merseyside police have said that anecdotally, their intelligence shows that the gang culture is not within the areas affected by these moves. The police did not therefore feel there were risks involved with this move.

The jobcentre is situated opposite a large, busy Tesco store: it is not an area that is isolated, or that people are frightened of walking through. There are no reports from claimants that currently use the jobcentre of issues when coming to or leaving the building.

Site risk assessments will be undertaken as part of the move, when details are known.

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 Wavertree Jobcentre and Edge Hill Jobcentre and move the services to Toxteth Jobcentre.

The recommendation of this report is to proceed with the proposal to close Wavertree Jobcentre and Edge Hill Jobcentre and transfer services to Edge Hill Jobcentre.

Annex A: questionnaire

The consultation paper invited responses to the following questions:

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposals? What overall comments would you like to make on the proposals?

Question 2: Will the proposals to close Liverpool Wavertree and Liverpool Edge Hill Jobcentres 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 proposals 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:

- Luciana Berger MP