



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Response to the proposal for the future of Clay Cross Jobcentre

Response to Consultation

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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 save public money, the following change was proposed - to move Clay Cross into Alfreton and Chesterfield Markham Jobcentres.

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 proposal to move Alfreton Jobcentre and Chesterfield Markham Jobcentre falls outside these criteria:

- Alfreton Jobcentre
  - distance: 5.4 miles
  - public transport: approximately 34 minutes
  - car: 14 minutes
  -
- Chesterfield Markham Jobcentre
  - distance: 5 miles
  - public transport: approximately 35 minutes
  - car: 14 minutes

The public consultation paper, ***Proposal for the future of Clay Cross 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 Alfreton and Chesterfield Markham 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 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 to 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.

## **Consultation**

The consultation period closed on 28 February 2017 and this report summarises the responses, including how the consultation process influenced the final decision on the future of Clay Cross Jobcentre.

## **Summary of responses for Clay Cross**

Six responses to the consultation proposals were received from individuals or members of the public.

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

## **Response themes**

The respondent themes are summarised as follows.

### **Travel time**

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

Typical comments:

*"... to endure a longer journey to already busy job centres."*

*"...takes me just 5 minutes or so to get to Clay Cross yet 15mins or more to Alfreton and 20 mins or more to Chesterfield."*

*"The extra miles travelled, from home to Clay Cross job centre it's a 5 mile round trip, to Chesterfield it's an 8 mile round trip, this does not include searching the vicinity for a car park."*

*“... for people with walking difficulties it's the walk to and from the car in Chesterfield across some of the busiest roads in town.”*

*“Ease of parking, at Clay Cross the car park is next door to the job centre.”*

## **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 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:

*“North East Derbyshire is a semi-rural District with infrequent local transport links, making the proposed closure and redirection of jobseekers to Chesterfield and Alfreton Job centres, with no plan to reimburse transport costs or extend opening hours a costly and cruel decision.”*

*“Parking in Chesterfield is expensive.”*

*“.....and then there's the parking fees for people who can ill afford yet more expense.”*

## **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.

## **Access to services**

Respondents expressed concerns about the merger of the offices and the ability of the new jobcentres to absorb the increased workload. Comments were also made about access to computers, the loss of services and the impact on external organisations.

Typical comments:

*“...where the staff do not have enough time to support the existing claimants; let alone more claimants from Clay Cross.”*

*“Neither Alfreton nor Markham jobcentres have many resources in computers to aid claimants to look electronically for work, this is going to put even more pressure on an already stressed environment and allow booking of computers near on impossible.”*

*“The persistent move towards online claims and processes makes for increasing difficulties for those with access problems to computers.”*

*“Services are much better when provided at a local level, particularly those services that require individual tailoring to the needs of the people using the services”*

*“...as far as the Advice Sector is concerned, increased pressure and demands on our organisations.”*

## **Response**

DWP is not reducing the service to claimants and is committed to retaining an accessible jobcentre network. This proposal will ensure that DWP can respond better to demand, support the move towards Universal Credit and increase flexibility to deliver its services across the full day with the availability of more staff.

DWP has considered and planned future space and accommodation carefully and is confident that the additional workload can be accommodated in the new jobcentre. The new, larger jobcentre will have capacity to expand as necessary and will allow for reasonable future increases in workload for example Universal Credit demand, over time.

DWP will continue to review working practices, service delivery methods and, where appropriate, will adopt more streamlined, efficient ways of working maximising the use of the estate.

The aim is to provide an enhanced IT service from the new office. IT currently located in jobcentres proposed for closure will be moved and rehoused in the new office. As part of space planning, DWP is looking to improve the layout of the claimant facing IT to maximise availability and to make these areas as user friendly and supportive as possible.

Claimants will be encouraged to bring their own electronic devices into jobcentres to make good use of DWP free Wi-Fi to help them manage their online claim and support their jobsearch activities.

Consolidating services in these new locations will offer the potential to increase collaborative working with partner organisations. The need for space for support organisations has been considered as part of space planning. The proposal means that partners will be able to reduce the number of sites they attend and will have access to a larger claimant base.

The excellent working relationships that are already in place with voluntary and partner organisations will be maintained and there are plans to build on that base over the coming year. Partnerships are an integral part of the service delivery model and DWP is producing a plan to ensure closer working with stakeholders to maximise claimant support available from all of DWP's jobcentres. DWP will work closely with local groups and voluntary organisations now and in the future to monitor the impact of these proposals and will put steps in place to provide additional support as required.

## **Sanctions**

Responders were concerned about the consequences of missing appointments.

Typical comments:

*“For individuals the journey from Clay Cross is regularly disrupted by traffic problems on the A61 with the prospect of missed appointments and the consequences for claimants should they be late.”*

*“This will make keeping appointments more difficult.”*

## **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 on-going work to ensure claimants know and understand expectations with their work coaches.

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

## **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 Clay Cross 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 Clay Cross Jobcentre.

Consequently, the recommendation of this report is to proceed with the proposal to close Clay Cross Jobcentre and transfer services to Alfreton Jobcentre and Chesterfield Markham 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 Clay Cross 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.