



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Response to the proposal for the future of Broxburn Jobcentre

Response to consultation

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# Contents

- Background ..... 2
- DWP’s estate strategy ..... 2
- Summary of responses for Broxburn ..... 3
  - Response themes ..... 3
  - Travel time ..... 3
  - Travel cost ..... 4
  - Access to services ..... 5
  - Sanctions ..... 6
  - Outreach ..... 7
  - Equality analysis ..... 7
- Conclusion and next steps..... 8
- Annex A: questionnaire ..... 9
- Annex B: list of respondents ..... 10

## 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 Broxburn Jobcentre and transfer staff and services into Livingston 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 Broxburn to Livingston Jobcentre, falls outside these criteria.

From Broxburn Jobcentre to Livingston Jobcentre:

- distance: 6 miles
- public transport: 27 minutes
- car: 12 minutes

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

There were four responses to the public consultation proposal:

- 2 from claimants
- 1 from the local MSP
- 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 Broxburn Jobcentre's services.

### **Response themes**

The respondent themes are summarised as follows.

#### **Travel time**

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

Typical comments:

*"...there is also the factor of a very poor bus service that operates in some parts of the area that the Broxburn Jobcentre currently covers..."*

*"...this will involve me having to travel 9 miles and will take me 2 hrs there and 2 hrs back to travel by public transport..."*

*"...my primary concern is the length of time the journey will take (30 mins at the least) as this will have a direct impact on my chronic pain causing me more pain..."*

#### **Travel time response**

DWP believes that it is reasonable, given any specific circumstances, to expect claimants to travel to an office within 3 miles, or 20 minutes by public transport from their existing jobcentre. Broxburn Jobcentre falls outside these criteria so DWP chose to consult publicly.

Through consultation, the catchment area of Broxburn Jobcentre has been investigated and travel times and bus routes have been compiled. Average journey times for claimants travelling within the Broxburn area to Livingston Jobcentre are:

- the shortest and longest bus journey takes between 20 minutes and 67 minutes
- journeys for some claimants may involve catching 2 or more buses

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 sign post claimants in such circumstances.

## **Travel cost**

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

Typical comments:

*"...to travel between Broxburn and Livingston costs approximately £5.80. For young people especially, this represents a significant proportion of their weekly job seekers allowance..."*

*"...I am concerned about the cost of this additional traveling and the cost of parking once I arrive I cannot afford the additional cost of traveling and parking at the new jobcentre in Livingston. I am really unhappy and stressed about the additional financial costs and additional stress to my health..."*

## **Travel cost 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.

Public transport in the area is covered by multiple bus companies. Travel costs for claimants travelling within the Broxburn area to Livingston Jobcentre are:

- A first bus day rider ticket costs £4.30.
- The cost of a single ticket starts at £1.60; the cost of a return journey starts at £2.70.
- A Lothian bus ticket costs £1.60 for a single journey
- A Lothian all day bus ticket costs £3.50

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**

Two 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. There was also concern that claimants would not be able to access the same quality of service that a local jobcentre provides.

Typical comments:

*"...removing Job Centres from communities could also reduce the number of people interacting with advice services either in that area or more generally... they should also be close to local libraries so that people can access the internet and use computers to complete their job search..."*

*"...wheelchair users also face additional issues travelling by public transport with most buses unable to carry more than one wheelchair user at a time...claimants with children will also find this an increased barrier as they will either have to find childcare for this time, or potentially bring their children with them..."*

## **Access to services**

DWP is not reducing its' services and is committed to retaining an accessible jobcentre network. The proposal will enable DWP to deliver enhanced services to support business improvements including digital services and group information support.

The overall aim is to provide an enhanced service in jobcentres. IT equipment will be moved and rehoused in Livingston Jobcentre. 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: For those claimants who do not have access to IT equipment, the following centres offer free online access:

- Local History library
- Broxburn library
- There are a significant number of other local libraries where claimants are able to access the internet.

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

One respondent was concerned that longer, more complex journeys by public transport could lead to increased lateness or failure to attend appointments.

Typical comment:

*“...for as long as the sanctions regime continues to punish people for even slight lateness, then the closure of Jobcentres may ultimately lead to more people being unduly penalised... Infrequent and unreliable bus services mean that people cannot be expected to face a sanction if they are late for their appointment...”*

## Sanctions response

The longer more complex journey may be particularly difficult for more vulnerable claimants: See response to **Travel Time**.

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

All claimants receive personalised tailored support, taking account of individual circumstance recognising capability (including health conditions) disability and caring responsibilities. It should also be noted that claimants including those with

vulnerabilities are asked to agree reasonable steps appropriate to individual circumstances.

## **Outreach**

Two respondents expressed the view that a 'footprint' or outreach facility should be left in Broxburn.

Comment:

*"...an alternative option might be to put advisors in community centres or other advice agencies but it is important that people are able to access services in an environment where they feel safe and where they can speak privately without fear of being overheard..."*

## **Outreach response**

DWP recognises the need to ensure facilities are made available to offer additional local support to claimants. This might take the form of assistance in using IT or to make a claim, in addition to other advice and support. However, there would still be a requirement for claimants to attend the jobcentre for mandatory interventions. Also, Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants use an electronic signature capture tool, which is automated to release the benefit payment and is only available in jobcentres.

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 Broxburn 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 Broxburn Jobcentre and relocate services to Livingston Jobcentre.

The recommendation of this report is to proceed with the proposal to close Broxburn Jobcentre and transfer services to Livingston 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 Broxburn 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 two claimants who responded to the consultation, the following named MSP and organisation provided a response:

- Neil Findlay MSP for the Lothians
- The Poverty Alliance