



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Proposal for the future of Darwen Jobcentre

January 2017

Contents

- Introduction..... 3
 - About this consultation 3
- How we consult 4
 - Consultation principles 4
 - Feedback on the consultation process..... 4
 - Freedom of information..... 4
- Introduction..... 6
 - What this means for Blackburn with Darwen..... 6
 - The proposal 6
 - Questionnaire..... 8
 - Annex A 10

Introduction

This consultation seeks views on the future of the Blackburn with Darwen jobcentres, including the closure of the buildings and the services provided being transferred to another jobcentre in Blackburn with Darwen. The closures will contribute to the consolidation of the Blackburn with Darwen jobcentre network and, through disposal, provide the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with the opportunity to deliver improved customer services at reduced costs to the taxpayer through better use of the office space we occupy.

About this consultation

Who this consultation is aimed at

The consultation seeks the views of everyone with an interest in the services of Darwen Jobcentre.

Purpose of the consultation

The results of the consultation will be used to inform the department's decisions about service provision following the proposed closure of the Darwen Jobcentre and the delivery of services to the local community.

Duration of the consultation

The consultation period begins on Monday 30 January 2017 and runs until Tuesday 28 February 2017 at 5pm.

How to respond to this consultation

Please send your consultation responses to:

Carla Passarello

District Manager's Office

Public Consultation

Orchard House

Penny Street

Blackburn

Lancashire

BB1 6HA

Email: PLP.SITECONSULTATION@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

Government response

We will aim to publish the government response to the consultation on the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website. The [consultation principles](#) encourage Departments to publish a response within 12 weeks or provide an explanation why this isn't possible. Where consultation is linked to a statutory instrument, responses should be published before or at the same time as the instrument is laid.

The report will summarise the responses.

How we consult

Consultation principles

This consultation is being conducted in line with the revised [Cabinet Office consultation principles](#) published in January 2016. These principles give clear guidance to government departments on conducting consultations.

Feedback on the consultation process

We value your feedback on how well we consult. If you have any comments about the consultation process (as opposed to comments about the issues which are the subject of the consultation), including if you feel that the consultation does not adhere to the values expressed in the consultation principles or that the process could be improved, please address them to:

DWP Consultation Coordinator
2nd Floor
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Email: caxtonhouse.legislation@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Freedom of information

The information you send us may need to be passed to colleagues within the Department for Work and Pensions, published in a summary of responses received and referred to in the published consultation report.

All information contained in your response, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure if requested under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. By providing personal information for the purposes of the public consultation exercise, it is understood that you consent to its disclosure and publication. If this is

not the case, you should limit any personal information provided, or remove it completely. If you want the information in your response to the consultation to be kept confidential, you should explain why as part of your response, although we cannot guarantee to do this.

To find out more about the general principles of Freedom of Information and how it is applied within DWP, please contact the Central Freedom of Information Team:
Email: freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

The Central FoI team cannot advise on specific consultation exercises, only on Freedom of Information issues. Read more information about the [Freedom of Information Act](#).

Introduction

After 20 years, the national contract covering many Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) offices expires on 31 March 2018. This gives the department an opportunity to review what offices are needed in the future, taking account of the welfare reforms that will be delivered over the coming years and the services on which so many of our customers depend.

By paying only for the space we need we will save many millions of pounds of taxpayers' money. Where it makes sense to do so, we will also continue to make use of opportunities to co-locate and share buildings with other organisations.

The financial savings secured from improving the efficiency of our estate is an integral part of the department's overall financial plan.

What this means for Blackburn with Darwen

1. DWP is committed to maintaining a network of jobcentres, across Great Britain, delivering services that support an effective welfare system that enables people to achieve financial independence by providing assistance and guidance into employment. Our commitment to the Blackburn area means we are proposing an estate that is right for the area, our benefit claimants and our colleagues; an estate that will deliver improved services by bringing together some neighbouring jobcentres where we can achieve access to more employers and partners. Our proposals will provide an estate that gives access to more employment opportunities for local claimants and allow us to achieve significant savings for the taxpayer.

The proposal

2. Darwen is a market town within Blackburn with Darwen local authority, Lancashire. DWP has one jobcentre in the town and another larger jobcentre in Blackburn.

3. DWP propose to merge the smaller jobcentre in Darwen into the neighbouring jobcentre in Blackburn. Merging the sites reduces costs and maximises the use of Blackburn Jobcentre, while retaining sites in a location which are accessible to all residents. Our overriding priority has been to ensure the location of the site we have proposed for retention is as accessible as possible to all of our claimants. We believe our current proposals are the best way to achieve this in Blackburn with Darwen.
4. The remaining site is based in a location in the town that can offer better services to our claimants. This approach builds on the improvements DWP has already delivered over recent years for the town by bringing services together to offer additional support to those who need it most.
5. We believe that it is a reasonable expectation that claimants travel to an office within 3 miles or 20 minutes by public transport of their existing jobcentre. This is an approach applied across the jobcentre network and not specific to the Blackburn with Darwen area. If a proposed closure is outside of these criteria, we have chosen to consult publicly. This will ensure that we take into account the impact of any closure before we make a final decision.
6. This consultation proposes that 1 jobcentre is closed as follows:
 - Darwen Jobcentre.
7. We have carefully considered where the workload and services of the jobcentres proposed for closure, could be relocated. We propose that service delivery for Darwen Jobcentre will relocate to Blackburn Jobcentre. Although we expect that this will be the most convenient alternative jobcentre for the majority of claimants, all claimants are able to attend the site which is most convenient for them based on their own travel arrangements.
8. In proposing closure of Darwen Jobcentre and relocating service delivery to Blackburn Jobcentre, we also propose basing a Work Coach in a community location, such as a library, on a part time basis to provide job search advice to claimants and members of the public. We will also be working with partner organisations, such as training providers, to explore options for delivering services from their premises.
9. In designing the future estate, and making this proposal for these jobcentres, we have sought to maintain the services we offer claimants and to minimise the impact on claimants travel as far as possible. In some instances, this may mean slightly longer and slightly shorter journeys for some of our claimants.

10. Annex A illustrates estimated travel time between the jobcentres we propose to merge, using shortest journey times by public transport and by car.
11. We are committed to complying with our Public Sector Equality Duty. By consulting publicly about our proposals, we are seeking your views on the office mergers, including the impact on travel times and costs, and on support available to claimants and the wider population.
12. When considering responses to this consultation and making decisions regarding the future of these jobcentres, ministers will consider whether effective access to services can be maintained, whether the proposal creates any significant cost issues for claimants and, the closure offers value for money for the taxpayer.
13. Jobcentre Plus is able to reimburse travel costs for those claiming Jobseekers' Allowance for any attendance above their fortnightly signing appointment. In addition, those claiming ESA and Income Support are not generally required to attend their local Jobcentre regularly.

Questionnaire

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 Darwen 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.

Thank you for participating in this consultation exercise.

Annex A

This table provides estimates of travel times between the jobcentre we are proposing to close and the jobcentre from where future services will be delivered.

Jobcentre proposed for closure	Proposed location for service delivery	Distance	Public Transport	Car
Darwen Jobcentre	Blackburn Jobcentre	4.8 miles	Approximately 23 minutes	14 minutes