



Closure of Glasgow Job Centres

OPFS Submission to DWP Consultation January 2017

The DWP issued a consultation seeking views on the future of Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill jobcentres in Glasgow - including the closure of the buildings and the services provided being transferred to other jobcentres in the city of Glasgow.¹

After 20 years, the national contract covering many DWP offices expires on 31 March 2018. As a result DWP are reviewing what offices are needed in the future, taking account of the welfare reforms that will be delivered over the coming years.

The DWP say “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.”

What this means for Glasgow

The city of Glasgow is split into 4 geographical areas - north, south, east and west. DWP propose to bring smaller jobcentres together into larger existing sites within the city’s 4 geographical areas while retaining sites in locations which they say are accessible to all residents.

The DWP 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.” If a proposed closure is outside of these criteria DWP consult publicly. Therefore the official consultation only covers the following 3 jobcentres:

- Bridgeton Jobcentre;
- Castlemilk Jobcentre; and
- Maryhill Jobcentre.

DWP propose that: service delivery for Bridgeton Jobcentre will relocate to Shettleston Jobcentre, services for Castlemilk Jobcentre will move to Newlands Jobcentre and Maryhill Jobcentre services will be merged with Springburn Jobcentre.

This OPFS response covers answers to the consultation questions but our views, and feedback from parents, is not restricted to the 3 Jobcentres identified in the document as we feel most of the concerns apply to the single parents affected by the closure of all 8 jobcentres in Glasgow.

One Parent Families Scotland is Scotland’s national organisation for single parent families. We aim to ensure that the voices of single parents, already living below the poverty line and faced with the daily threat of sanctions, are included within the current discussions around Glasgow JCP closures.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposal-for-the-future-of-bridgeton-castlemilk-and-maryhill-jobcentres>

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Glasgow city has the highest rate of families headed by a single parent of all 32 Scottish local authorities -with four in 10 families being lone parent families and wide neighbourhood differences across the city. Thirty-three per cent of unemployed lone parents have a disability or longstanding illness, and 34 per cent have a child with a disability.

Council ward areas in Glasgow (e.g. Springburn, Calton, North East and Drumchapel/Anniesland) face some of the biggest welfare losses in Scotland while also having some of the highest rates of child poverty and lone parent families. In Parkhead and Dalmarnock, six in 10 families with children are lone parent families and 52% of all children live in poverty.

DWP Consultation Questionnaire

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 Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill 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?

We have taken all of these questions and answered them together below:

OPFS consulted single parents on how the closures would affect them and our response below is based on this feedback. OPFS disagrees strongly with the proposals and believes that closure of half of Glasgow's job centres will have a devastating impact on parents who rely on the service, particularly single parents, and will negatively impact the aim of supporting parents into employment. This will cause huge problems and it's inexplicable that the Westminster government seem to have no concern about the barriers and potential hardship being raised by this.

OPFS wishes to highlight the following concerns:

- **The number of parents that will require job centre contact is likely to increase due to parents having to return to paid employment when they're youngest child is 3yrs or above.**

"Job Centre Plus already gives appointments at times when parents are either dropping their children off or picking them up from school/nursery! People often pop into their local JC to request a change of time as the time given clashes with school pick up. If we are unable to do this and perhaps not having the credit on our phones to call and rearrange timesthis could lead to further sanctions. It also leaves less time in the day for parents to attend other activities-courses/volunteering etc. I need to attend weekly appointments which is more time but also a lot more money for travel."

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- **The introduction of ‘in-work conditionality’ through the requirement to prepare, look, and be available for more or better-paid work is a new concept and will put increasing pressures on single parents. Under Universal Credit people that are already in paid employment will have to attend work coach interviews if they are working less than 35 hours per week (less than 16 hours if youngest child 12 or under)**

“I’m finding it a struggle as it is - trying to work 20 hrs with 2 kids! To have to try to increase my hours or wage in my current job, or find new or additional employment is going to be very stressful and on top of that travel to a jobcentre that’s miles away- who are they kidding !”

- **The cost and time implication of parents having to travel even further to nearest job centre is likely to result in an increase of sanctions.**

“ Yeah the cost is going to be a big issue - £4.50 for an all-day ticket, which will be cheaper than me paying 4 single bus fares as I will need to get 2 buses there and 2 back. From an income of £73.10 a week it’s a lot, a real lot- like losing food shopping for a day.... ”

- **The Increased stress of having to pay bus fares out of limited income, or having to walk, and arrive on time when a child may only be in nursery for 3.25 hours session.**

“From Summerston where I live, to sign on or attend a compulsory interview, I would need to get a bus to Maryhill Road to get another bus to Springburn JCP office. The service from Maryhill Road is every half an hour and not the most reliable. Sometimes I run out of money so would need to walk. I have a child at nursery so I would need to ensure I was back within the 3 hours my child has allocated, to collect her on time. Not only might I be sanctioned by the jobcentre for being late but I will also be extremely anxious about making sure I get back in time to collect my child from nursery. This sounds so stressful. The thought is making me feel ill already.”

“If the appointment is at 2 pm, how would you sign on and pick up your kid? It’s the same in the morning, as well—10 am means you’d not be able to drop off your kid in time.

” When the DWP considered distances between jobcentres, it found that the estimated walking times are 30 minutes between Bridgeton and Shettleston and 45 minutes between Castlemilk and Newlands. By the DWP’s own admission, those walking times exceed the agreement that it had in 2011 that the time would be a maximum of 20 minutes.

- **Jobcentre closures will impact on family caring responsibilities.**

“I look after mum who is waiting on an operation, as well as my 2 children - having to travel further to a jobcentre will mean mum is on her own without any support & care for a longer time.”

“If your child’s unwell, how do you get up there? I don’t want to take a sick child on the bus. Just now I can ask a neighbour to look after them for a short while, but not for the over two hours which it will take to get there and back.”

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- **Claimants with poor health will find travel difficult and stressful.**

“I suffer from chronic pain. The thought of sitting on buses for almost an hour each way scares me. It is really worrying and it’s scary for lots of people.”

I suffer from depression and anxiety and I’ll not be able to travel to Springburn. I also don’t have enough money to live on. I couldn’t afford the extra expense.”

- **It’s important when getting a vulnerable person who faces barriers to employment ready for work is to encourage those relationships, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. Changing to a new Job Centre with different staff will be counterproductive**

“My work coach is absolutely brilliant. She knows I’ve got the kids and tries to help. I’ve built a relationship with mine. With others the trust falls down.”

“You don’t want to keep repeating your story. It’s often very personal and your job coach you have just now knows you.”

- **If a parent needs advice about their claim/signing on and can’t make the longer trip the excessive charges faced by people calling by telephone will be an issue and increase poverty.**

Recently Frank Field MP, Chair of the HoC Work & Pensions Committee,² said:

“Vulnerable people and those on low incomes should not face expensive charges for seeking advice on or trying to process their benefit claims. I welcome the DWP’s review of telephony and will be monitoring its progress closely. The Government is rightly seeking to expand digital services but it is important that people who need to use the telephone are not left behind.”

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.

Single parents have told OPFS that they see local Job Centres as being part of the local network of services and we believe they should all remain open. Advisors could be based in community centres for example but other advice agencies may feel their neutrality would be questioned if they’re seen to be hosting a service which implements conditionality. Single parents also need to feel safe and that they can speak privately without the worry of being overheard. In reality this model would be very labour intensive for JCP, given the numbers of claimants using the job centres which are to shut. Moreover as Scotland is developing its own model of social security delivery it surely makes sense to

² [Work-and-pensions-committee/news-parliament-2015/excessive-call-charges](#)

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work with the new social security division at Scottish Government to avoid confusion for people using both services.

OPFS believes it's unacceptable to make changes with such significant impacts without allowing single parents and other JCP service users more input and an opportunity to make their voice heard.

Question 6: Please provide any additional comments that you have.

There are two predictable impacts of the changes. **More single parents will miss appointments and get sanctioned as a consequence. Secondly, more parents will be forced to use foodbanks and fall deeper into poverty by having their benefit cut and having to find money for the additional travel cost burden.**

OPFS is concerned that the consultation on the closure of Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill Jobcentres is not being extended to the other five Jobcentres.

We are appalled at the proposed plans to close half of all jobcentres in Glasgow and wish to make clear our strong opposition to this proposal as its impacts will have an extremely detrimental impact on single parents in Glasgow. There are so many reasons why this decision goes against the needs of the local community that we feel it is completely unacceptable and we strongly believe the current proposals should be reconsidered.

Based on both our experiences of working with single parents and other available expert evidence we conclude that the ongoing experience of living day to day with conditionality is having a profoundly negative effect on single parent families' health and wellbeing and is undermining efforts to tackle health inequality. Already inadequate social security benefits exacerbate the fear of being sanctioned because many single parent families have no financial resources or safety net to fall back on.

OPFS is seeing increasing numbers of single parents who are suffering from anxiety and depression associated with the fear of being sanctioned. Closures of local JCP offices will add to this severe pressure.

Further Information

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