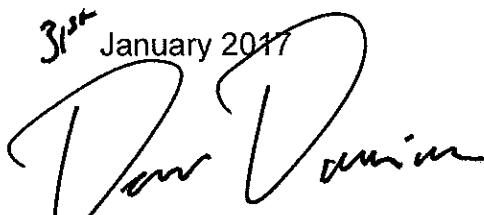




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Rt Hon Damian Green  
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions  
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31<sup>st</sup> January 2017  


Further to our recent correspondence on the subject of the proposed closure of 8 Jobcentre Plus locations in Glasgow, please note the following which I trust you will accept as the Scottish Government's formal position in response to on DWP's consultation on the closure of 3 of those offices; Maryhill, Bridgeton and Castlemilk.

I do not agree in principle to the approach taken by DWP in limiting their consultation to only three of the eight Jobcentres identified for closure. While I note the argument that the remaining 5 sites are within reasonable travelling distance of an alternative location, I am not persuaded by the scope of the analysis undertaken by DWP to reach this position.

Despite the fact that Glasgow contains some of our most deprived areas, I note that an Equalities Impact Assessment has not so far been undertaken. In the absence of such detailed analysis, or engagement with local stakeholders, it is difficult to fully understand the implications of these changes on groups such as single parents, carers and those with disabilities and health conditions. I therefore urge DWP to carry out a proper analysis of impact, including meaningful dialogue with local people and stakeholders who will be most impacted by the proposed closures.

Notwithstanding the lack of detailed analysis, it seems clear that the proposed closures would have the greatest impact on those more vulnerable customers, particularly those with health and mobility problems. Those attending jobcentres will have increased travel costs, with additional time taken to travel. I am concerned that these additional challenges in accessing Jobcentres at the appointed times would in turn bring about an increased risk of customers being subject to benefits sanctions in future. I therefore seek your assurance that service users will not be adversely affected by the proposed changes.

I am aware that customers themselves are concerned that the proposed changes pose a threat to the important and established relationships with Work Coaches, which are particularly important to customers with complex or sensitive needs. If changes go ahead as planned arrangements should be put in place to ensure that customers enjoy continuity of service.



While I understand the need to protect public spending, I do not consider that enough has been done to seek alternative accommodation in communities where JCP offices could close. I urge you to share your plans to allow Scottish Government to better engage with the process and provide a platform for further discussion on Paragraph 58 of the Smith Commission. Assurances would also be welcome about the arrangements which will be put in place to maintain the JobCentre Plus footprint in the event that offices do close.

Finally, further to DWP's most recent proposal to close yet more Jobcentre Plus offices across Scotland, I re-iterate the concerns set out in my letter to the Minister of State for Employment last week, which mirror in many respects the issues raised in this letter. I will continue to pursue these issues in respect of all proposed closures in Scotland.

I am copying our correspondence to the Glasgow-based Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for their constituency interests.



**JAMIE HEPBURN**