

Scottish Government attack Westminster over lack of communication on Jobcentre closures



The UK Government announced on Thursday 26 January that many JobCentres will close across the country including that on South St Andrew Street in Edinburgh city centre.

The axe has been hovering [over the office in the city centre for several years](#), but now the decision has been made to move out.

It will also move out of Silvan House on Corstorphine Road partly used by JobCentre.

The offices which will remain open in Edinburgh are Lyndean House 199 Commercial Street, High Riggs, Westside Plaza at Wester Hailes, Argyle House on Lady Lawson Street. It appears that the Department for Work and Pensions leases all of its offices.

The government has explained that they are reforming the way they work as about one-fifth of the office space is underused. Part of the reason for this is that many claimants apply for benefits online making it unnecessary to visit a JobCentre at all.

Some smaller Jobcentres will be merged with larger ones, and in all the government believes it can save £180 million a year for the next 10 years.

Although the office space is to be reduced there is at the same time a DWP recruitment drive seeking 2,500 new work

coaches.

Damian Hinds, Minister for Employment said: "We will always make sure that people have the support they need to get into and progress within work, that's why we are recruiting 2,500 more work coaches to help those who need it most.

"The way the world works has changed rapidly in the last 20 years and the welfare state needs to keep pace. As more people access their benefits through the internet many of our buildings are under-used. We are concentrating our resources on what we know best helps people into work.

"The changes we've announced today will help ensure that the way we deliver our services reflect the reality of today's welfare system."

The Scottish Government Minister for Employability and Training, Jamie Hepburn has written to the UK Government expressing what he describes as his 'deep concern' over closure of 15 Jobcentres across Scotland. This follows an earlier announcement to close 8 Jobcentres in Glasgow in December.

Mr Hepburn has asked for a timetable on closures, has asked about redundancies among JobCentre staff and has called upon the DWP to work with the Scottish Government to help those who use the employment services. He has also asked for more details about the consultations with local communities which are due to begin tomorrow, 30 January.

Mr Hepburn said: "I am alarmed that the UK Government is yet again ignoring the needs of people in Scotland.

"The closure of Jobcentre Plus offices will not only disproportionately affect Scotland's people, but could push vulnerable Scots further into crisis. This makes it even more difficult for people to find employment and will lead to many more people having to travel further to visit a centre and

engage with their work coach.

“I am also concerned that there has been a lack of consultation with the communities affected and about the level of information shared with us in advance. I have again written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and asked for urgent clarification around fundamental issues, including how any redundancies will be managed, as well as seeking assurances that the remaining offices can support the increased demand being put upon them.

“This week’s announcement was once again made without any prior consultation with any local communities or the Scottish Government, repeating the pattern that we saw in December when the UK Government announced the closure of eight Jobcentres in Glasgow.

“As I made clear in my letter to the UK’s Employment Minister, the lack of consultation is unacceptable. It is against the principles of the Smith agreement, and I have called for greater communication in the future.

“As we move towards the launch of the Scottish Government’s transitional employment services this year, we need to be in a position where UK and Scottish Government can work together to offer people support and work that aligns with Jobcentre Plus; not see the UK Government take services away and make them harder to access.”

Alison Johnstone, Social Security spokesperson for the Scottish Greens and MSP for Lothian, said: “The UK Government appears determined to punish the very people who need the most support in our society. They should be making it easier, not harder, to find employment.

“Not everyone has reliable access to the internet or can afford to make the numerous phone calls needed to speak to prospective employers. There’s also the cost of travelling longer distances to job centres. It’s simply wrong-headed.

“I’m also concerned at what this means for staff. These changes will be hugely disruptive and while the DWP says that most staff will have the option to relocate or take alternative roles, that won’t suit everyone. Staff should not pay the price for UK Ministers’ obsession with cutting back on social protections.”