



SURF response to the UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions Consultation: 'Proposal for the future of Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill job centres'

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposals? What overall comments would you like to make on the proposals?

As a forum of more than 250 cross-sector organisations that are involved in the regeneration of Scotland's disadvantaged communities, SURF does not agree with the DWP proposals to close a number of job centres in Glasgow.

The 2016 update of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) states that the majority of the 100 most deprived areas in Scotland are within the Glasgow city boundary.ⁱ Maryhill East (data zone reference S01010353), Dalmarnock (S01010029), Parkhead West and Barrowfield (S01010055), Castlemilk (S01009986), and three places in Castlemilk's Glenwood South (S01009975, S01009976 & S01009977) are among these 100 most deprived community zones nationally – while a number of other zones in the areas that will be directly affected by the three planned closures are also in the most deprived decile.ⁱⁱ

Research produced for SIMD statistics confirm that these areas suffer from deep-rooted and severely concentrated social and economic problems, including low incomes, high unemployment, and low educational attainment.ⁱⁱ For example, Glasgow Centre for Population Health neighbourhood profiles show that: 23.8% of young people in Parkhead and Dalmarnock are not in education, employment or training; 20.6% of people in Maryhill Road Corridor are in income deprivation; and 36.9% of people in Castlemilk are claiming out of work benefits.ⁱⁱⁱ

Job centres can play an important role in helping to tackle poverty at the community level. They can do so by promoting social security provisions, supporting economic development, and making appropriate referrals to skills training courses and other forms of personal support. Closing job centres in Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill – areas with large

populations and some of Scotland's highest deprivation levels – is therefore likely to significantly decrease the prospects for residents of these already-poor communities.

We consider the planned response to the closures – the relocation of services to bases in Shettleston, Newlands and Springburn – inadequate, given the additional time, energy and financial demands that will be placed on job centre service users.

Car ownership is low in these communities – for example, only 36% of households in Castlemilk have access to one or more cars.ⁱⁱⁱ Many people who wish to visit their nearest job centre will be obliged to use public transport on poorly served routes, such as Castlemilk to Newlands and Maryhill to Springburn. This is likely to discourage people already struggling with low incomes, disabilities and/or family care responsibilities from accessing valuable job centre services. If the planned closures go ahead, some people living in Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill without access to information services may simply not know where to find their local job centre.

Additionally, the timing is unhelpful. In a January 2017 survey of more than 100 leading economists by the Financial Times, there was a clear consensus of a “gloomy” medium term economic future for the UK, characterised by low economic growth, rising unemployment, depressed business investment, high inflation, and “squeezed” household incomes.^{iv} Withdrawing reasonably accessible support for the people of Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill, at a time when unemployment is widely predicted to rise, is hard to understand.

Finally, an analysis of the 2016 SIMD statistics carried out by the University of Glasgow for SURF asserts that poverty is ‘suburbanising’; *i.e.* that deprivation is growing at the edge of Scottish cities, including areas like Castlemilk, and reducing in inner-city areas. This suggests that DWP plans to move Castlemilk service provision to the more centrally located and affluent neighbourhood of Newlands, is not taking long-term service demand into account.^v

For these reasons, SURF is keen that the Department of Work and Pensions reconsiders and reverses plans to close these three job centres.

Question 4: Are there any other particular impacts of the proposals that DWP should take into account when making a decision?

The consultation paper, in the first three paragraphs of the introduction, states that: “the national contract covering many DWP offices expires on 31 March 2018... By paying only for the space we need we will save many millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money... The financial savings secured from improving the efficiency of our estate is an integral part of the department’s overall financial plan.”^{vi}

The impression given is that the decision to close three prominent and well-used community job centres is an opportunistic one, based on an arbitrary lease expiration date, and motivated solely by a desire to make short-term budgetary savings. There is no evident rationale for such a closure from a community or service user perspective.

The plans also conflict with DWP's stated commitment, "to maintaining a network of job centres, 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."^{vi} The necessary network of job centres will not be adequately maintained, and these services will not be adequately provided, if three job centres that presently serve large urban populations in areas of high demand are closed.

There is also a reasonable argument that the financial savings may not be realised over the longer term. Closing job centres is likely to lead to higher unemployment, lower business growth and a deterioration of skills, in turn placing greater financial demands on the welfare system from these communities in future.

For both financial and service efficiency reasons, a more thorough review of impacts, including a survey of local people and businesses in Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill, and a formal poverty impact assessment, should be undertaken and published before any final decision is made.

A related challenge concerns the complex policy and practice landscape around employability and skills provision in Glasgow. This comprises services provided by local government, the Scottish Government, and the UK Government, in addition to arms length government agencies and third sector providers.

Evidence gathered for SURF's 'Reality, Resources, Resilience: Regeneration in a Recession' 2013 report, for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, provided evidence of the practical problems this complexity was creating for the residents of Govan in Glasgow.^{vii} Reducing the accessibility of DWP-informed signposting services in the three locations is likely to exacerbate this complexity by leaving local people seeking employability and skills support less clear about appropriate support options.

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.

As SURF stated in its 2016 Manifesto for Community Regeneration, there is a strong concern in the SURF network that devolving governmental functions to community groups can, in some cases, be inappropriate and result in a deterioration of service provision.^{viii}

There may, however, be useful scope for DWP representatives to provide information on-site for service users of community organisations, such as the SURF Award winning projects 'The Platform' in Easterhouse, 'The Portal' in Govan, and the Greater Easterhouse Alcohol Awareness Project.^{ix}

An outward looking government agency that is closely engaged with the communities it serves is more likely to build beneficial levels of trust and knowledge through good local relationships. Trust and local knowledge are vital resources for making more effective and

efficient service impacts. An on-site service would require an initial additional resource investment to complement, but not replace, existing job centre based service delivery. In financial terms alone, however, such an investment may be recovered over a relatively short period of operation.

[End of Consultation Response: References Follow]

ⁱ Bradley, J., 31/08/16, 'Scotland's Most Deprived Areas Revealed', Edinburgh, The Scotsman: <http://www.scotsman.com/news/scotland-s-most-deprived-areas-revealed-1-4217443>

ⁱⁱ Data collected from interactive mapping available from the Scottish Government's Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation online resource: <http://simd.scot/2016/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Data collected from neighbourhood profiles available at the Understanding Glasgow website managed by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health: http://www.understandingglasgow.com/profiles/neighbourhood_profiles

^{iv} Tetlow, G., & Giles, C., 02/01/17, 'Economists Gloomy on UK Prospects for 2017', London, Financial Times: <https://www.ft.com/content/a0c3fce4-d0e2-11e6-b06b-680c49b4b4c0>

^v Bailey, N., & Minton, J., 08/09/16, 'What SIMD 2016 Tells Us About the Future for Scotland's Cities', Glasgow, SURF: <https://www.surf.scot/scotregen/simd-2016-future-for-scotlands-cities/>

^{vi} Quotes are taken from p6 of the DWP December 2016 consultation paper, 'Proposal for the future of Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill job centres': https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/578841/proposal-for-the-future-of-bridgeton-castlemilk-and-maryhill-jobcentres-consultation.pdf

^{vii} Milne, A., & Rankine, D., 23/01/13, 'Reality, Resources, Resilience: Regeneration in a Recession', York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/reality-resources-resilience-regeneration-recession>

^{viii} Milne, A., & Rankine, D., 19/12/15, 'Planning Ahead for Regeneration: SURF's 2016 Manifesto for Community Regeneration', Glasgow, SURF: <https://www.surf.scot/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/SURF-2016-Manifesto-Final-Draft.pdf>

^{ix} The SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration is a national awards scheme recognising success and innovation in regeneration projects annually since 1998. It is delivered by SURF in partnership with the Scottish Government. More information at: <https://www.surf.scot/surf-awards/>

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