



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Mims Davies MP
Minister for Employment

Department for Work and Pensions
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Rt. Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair of the Work and Pensions Select
Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

26 May 2022

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter dated 30 March regarding the recent DWP estates announcements and Phoenix House, Barrow in Furness. I am responding to you as the Minister who has responsibility for the DWP estates transformation programme, alongside our Baroness the Minister for Lords, Debbie Stedman-Scott.

The Department has made a significant investment in frontline services. Since the start of the pandemic, DWP has opened 194 temporary Jobcentres as part of its Rapid Estate Expansion Programme (REEP). It has also recruited 13,500 new Work Coaches in order to provide claimants with the tailored face-to-face support they need.

The changes the Department is making to estates will both improve the working environment for staff, become greener by becoming smaller, helping meet the Government's carbon reduction target, and provide value for money for the taxpayer.

The announcements do not impact on Jobcentres and customer facing services. Rather, this is about consolidating back-office DWP functions into fewer, but larger, sites which will benefit staff, and the taxpayer.

With this backdrop of modernisation, I want to assure you that the Department is committed to supporting the Government's ambitions for levelling up, and to that end DWP is maintaining a national footprint – including a presence in some of the most deprived areas of the country.

In addition, we are introducing hybrid working arrangements for back of house functions, meaning that staff will have opportunities to stay local and spend local in the areas they live on the days they are working from home.

The closure of Phoenix House will have no impact on the Department's ability to continue to process claims for IIDB. Where the work currently undertaken at Phoenix House is ongoing it will be redistributed to other locations across the national network in that business area, including Bradford (Ambler Mills) and Barnsley (John Rideal House), and delivered to the same high quality and level of expertise.

Finally, in response to your question about the retention of skills and experience of staff in Phoenix House, and across the wider DWP network – I would like to reiterate that this is not a plan to reduce the Department's headcount.

Where possible, staff in offices due to close are being offered opportunities to be redeployed, or retrained into a new role in DWP, or another Government Department. This is alongside DWP's effort to utilise its hybrid working policy to help facilitate more inclusive workplaces, which are capable of adapting to the needs of employees and the Department.

I also want to assure you that when planning an office closure, the Government undertakes a full Equality Assessment to consider the impact on staff.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mims', written in a cursive style.

Mims Davies MP
Minister for Employment



Work and Pensions Committee

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Chloe Smith MP
Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work
Department for Work and Pensions

30 March 2022

Dear Chloe,

Phoenix House, Barrow in Furness and other proposed closures

The Department's [written statement](#) to the House on 18 March said that it planned to close a number of offices providing 'back of house' services. I understand that this will include the closure of Phoenix House in Barrow with 46 staff affected.

In her evidence to our Committee in January, Joanne Gordon from the Asbestos Victims Support Groups' Forum told us that the DWP team in Barrow had amassed considerable expertise in processing relatively specialised claims for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit and support under Worker Compensation Schemes. Her organisations clearly value the quality of service provided by Phoenix House. My concern, then, is that accumulated knowledge and skills will be lost if this office is closed.

I would be grateful for answers to the following questions:

- 1. How do your plans for closure of offices in smaller cities and towns outside the main metropolitan areas fit with the Government's ambition to level up and to provide good employment opportunities to more vulnerable communities?**
- 2. What are your plans for administration of services currently provided by each of the 'back of house' offices the Department proposes to close?**
- 3. In particular, what are your plans for ensuring that the specialist skills and experience of the DWP team in Phoenix House (Barrow) are retained?**

It would be helpful to have your reply by 14th April 2022. Please do let me know if this is not possible.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen Timms". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the name.

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee