

Written evidence from Stuart McDonald, MP for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth & Kirkintilloch East

I understand that the Public Accounts Committee will be hearing evidence for the HMRC Estate inquiry on Wednesday 25th January. As you will be aware, the Cumbernauld HMRC office is one of the centres which has been selected for closure as part of HMRC's plan to merge 170 existing centres into 13 new regional centres across the UK.

As you also know, the recent National Audit Office (NAO) report has revealed fundamental problems with HMRC's original plan, labelling it "unrealistic" as well as raising major budget and staffing concerns.

We now find ourselves at a crucial stage in the process and I would be grateful if the committee could take the time to scrutinise the decision to close the Cumbernauld office in greater detail. So far, HMRC have offered nothing in the way of justification for the decision, beyond its broad and vague overall objectives. As I pointed out during the recent urgent question on this issue, Cumbernauld actually ticks all the boxes of what HMRC are looking for in a regional office, including location, size and staff experience. By moving this team to an expensive city centre location, HMRC are actually going against what it says in "Building Our Future". Across the UK local staff representatives and MPs have been unable to properly scrutinise these individual decisions and engagement by HMRC has been close to non-existent.

The NAO report acknowledges the significant disruption the proposed move will cause HMRC staff and many of my constituents will now be expected to commute from the Cumbernauld area into Glasgow each day. Recent estimates show the travel costs associated with the proposed move to a regional centre will be between £672 and £1272 annually. Members of HMRC staff with childcare or caring responsibilities will be particularly effected as a result of the extra time required to travel between the constituency and Glasgow each day.

It is also important to highlight the vital importance of the Cumbernauld HMRC office to my constituents and the town itself. The HMRC office in Cumbernauld is the town's largest employer, with around 1500 members of staff, and it is located within the very heart of Cumbernauld town centre. The appalling and unnecessary decision to close the HMRC office is not just unfavourable to staff but will cause untold damage to the local community and small businesses in Cumbernauld - none of which appears to have been a consideration.

Many of my constituents are rightly alarmed at the potential consequences of the decision to close the Cumbernauld HMRC office. I would therefore urge the committee to take this opportunity to investigate the decision and establish the impact this will have on members of staff and the wider community, and whether this programme of reorganisation and cuts makes any sense at all. A wide-ranging inquiry by the PAC would be widely welcomed by MPs, staff and HMRC customers.

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