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Rt Hon Damian Green MP  
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House  
Tithill Street  
London  
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25<sup>th</sup> January 2017

Dear Damian,

Further to my letter to you on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2016 regarding the proposed closure of 8 Jobcentre Plus locations in Scotland, I wanted to provide you with a summary from a Members debate on the subject which took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2017. The full transcript of the debate can be found at the Official Report of the Scottish Parliament at <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10737&i=98535>.

The debate was proposed by Bob Doris MSP. His Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituents would be among a number of those directly affected by the closure of Maryhill Jobcentre. The general outcomes of the debate was a sense of real concerns among Members of the Scottish Parliament that the proposed closures would have the greatest impact on those more vulnerable customers, particularly those with health and mobility problems.

A number of more specific issues were also raised. In addition to disappointment that these changes have been proposed without consultation with the Scottish Government or other partners in Scotland, MSPs expressed concern that the current Department for Work and Pensions consultation is limited to just three Jobcentres; Maryhill, Bridgeton and Castlemilk. The scope of the analysis undertaken by DWP to determine that the remaining 5 sites were within reasonable travelling distance of an alternative location was also brought in to question, suggesting that this had been limited to research via Google maps.

Also, bearing in mind that Glasgow contains some of our most deprived areas, it was noted with concern that no Equalities Impact Assessment has 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.

Those attending jobcentres will have increased travel costs, with additional time taken to travel. MSPs were particularly concerned about the impact on single parent families and those with other caring responsibilities, those with disabilities and those who suffer from health conditions. There was evidence that customers themselves had highlighted 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.

It was felt 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 and assurances were sought that more would be done to ensure that service users are not adversely affected by the proposed changes.

While MSPs understood the need to protect public spending, they were of the view that not enough had been done to seek alternative accommodation in localities where JCP offices could close. They expressed concern around the lack of information and consultation on co-location opportunities and urged UK Government to share their 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.

I had a very constructive meeting with Mr Hinds in the morning prior to the debate, where we discussed the UK Government's current plans on the rationalisation of the JCP estate. I encouraged him to meet with local people and stakeholders who will be most impacted by the proposed closures. We both recognised and welcomed the effective joint working across both Governments in relation to the devolution of employment support and I look forward to our discussion on how we can develop this further at the at the Joint Ministerial group on Welfare on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017

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

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Hepburn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**JAMIE HEPBURN**