

Conservative Amendment

7 – Administration Motion for Debate - regarding the closure of Poplar JobCentre Plus

Proposer: Cllr Andrew Wood

Seconder: Cllr Peter Golds

This council notes:

1. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) intends to close the JobCentre Plus branch based at Dod Street, Poplar.
2. That the reasons for the closure are due to the landlord not renewing the lease due to the intended redevelopment of the site for much needed new housing.
3. The submission in late 2019 of planning application PA/20/00123/A1 for 13-15 Dod Street to build an 8-storey residential building with 84 homes where the single storey job centre is now (plus the 3-storey office building behind it)
4. The Applicant engaged in four meetings with the Council's planning team. The pre-application meetings were held on 12th July 2019, 27th September 2019, and 22nd November 2019.
5. That on the 5th November 2020 the Development Committee voted unanimously to approve the application to re-develop the site. That in the Committee Report it said "The current occupiers are due to vacate the site and relocate their services to Mansell Street, E1"
6. That on the 1st November 2019 the Council approved an earlier permitted development application for 35 homes on this site.
7. That in the DWP Estates Proposals 26.01.2017 v1.0 it was proposed to retain Dod Street as well as Mansell Street job centres in Tower Hamlets plus centres in Hackney, Stratford, and Canning Town.
8. That the 29th August 2019 update on job centre closures in 2018 by the DWP did not include any closures in London but did mention co-location with local authorities as a way of finding new premises.
9. That in 2021 the DWP set up temporary jobcentres to deal with increased demand including at 100 Leman Street, this is to provide more space for safe meetings
10. The failure since 2019 to identify and then offer an alternative location to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in one of the many planning applications to go through LBTH
11. That the possibility of offering the DWP space in the new Town Hall at centre of Whitechapel has never been raised with Town Hall Steering Group
12. That Tower Hamlets for the 2nd year running has missed the housing delivery targets set by the Mayor of London as a result of which there is now greater pressures on us to deliver new housing.
13. The closure transfer of this branch will result in longer travel times for some residents needing of a critical layer of support for our residents in Tower Hamlets, at a time when Universal Credit uplift ends, the furlough scheme closes, and the government imposes an increase in National Insurance.

14. The central position of the Dod Street branch is located close to some of the areas of highest deprivation in our borough: the ~~closure~~ **transfer will-may** result in increased deprivation through residents not claiming the benefit support that they are entitled to.
15. **That while Dod Street has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) of 4 (where 6B is best and 1 worst) due to its bus connections on Burdett Road it is not that well connected to the DLR or Underground network. We should aim for it to be relocated to an area with a higher PTAL and which is more prominently located and visible.**
16. That access to welfare support is becoming increasingly digitised and those in most need of support ~~are~~ **maybe** less likely to have the digital capability to access that support.
17. **That LBTH has itself closed many opportunities for face-to-face support or over the phone and moved services online**

This council believes:

1. The DWP's JobCentre Plus branches provide vital face-to-face support to residents who are unemployed and/or are claiming benefit support.
2. Within Tower Hamlets, there are ~~just~~ **3** JobCentre Plus branches, ~~both~~ **all three** in Poplar & Limehouse constituency, which provide vital support for many Tower Hamlets residents.
3. The recently published "Poverty Review" highlighted that residents were not always aware of the benefit support available to them, and that there is high correlation between illiteracy, digital exclusion and poverty. Face to face advice is often vital for many residents to understand and access the support they need.
4. That provision of employment and welfare support can be conducted in a variety of buildings and places that are accessible and welcoming to residents, and closer working between the DWP, council frontline services, and the borough's advice centres, can only benefit our residents.

This council resolves:

1. To ask the Mayor and Lead Member to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Thérèse Coffey MP and the Minister for Employment Mims Davies MP to:
 1. **To welcome the redevelopment of the centre for housing** and
 2. ~~express concern at the closure of Dod Street JobCentre Plus,~~ and
 3. offer support in finding alternative suitable accommodation **perhaps including at the new Town Hall**
2. To call on our local MPs to raise our concerns with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions **about the failure since early 2019 of LBTH and the DWP to find an alternative location.**