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## 'Tory santa' joins protest over plans to close half of Glasgow jobcentres



Wearing an alternative Santa suit, the costumed figure turned up at Maryhill Jobcentre bearing a gift-wrapped present offering 'less help, more hassle'

10 hrs ago / [Kirsteen Paterson](#), Journalist / [@kapaterson](#)

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A 'TORY Santa' had "less service, more sanctions" for jobcentre users yesterday, as the campaign to save half of Glasgow's centres continues.

Wearing a blue and white striped suit, the costumed figure turned up at Maryhill Jobcentre bearing a gift-wrapped present offering "less help, more hassle" for those depending on the site.

The move came as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) launched a consultation on some of the cuts planned for the city's offices.

Half of Glasgow's 16 job centres are earmarked for closure under proposals aimed at slashing the DWP's footprint in the city, but because most of these will relocate to premises with 20 minutes' travel of the existing site, the public will have a say on just three.



These are the include offices in Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill, where MPs Patrick Grady and Anne McLaughlin joined MSP Bob Doris and local councillors fighting the move yesterday.

According to the DWP, it will take users from Bridgeton and Maryhill around half an hour on public transport to attend vital appointments, if plans to shift services to Shettleston and Springburn are rubber-stamped.

Meanwhile, those currently visiting the under-threat Castlemilk office face a 45-minute public transport journey to Newlands Jobcentre.

Under DWP rules, anyone late to scheduled meetings can have their payments cut and politicians fear their constituents will suffer if the cuts go ahead.

A Westminster Hall debate will be held today.

Yesterday, Grady, who represents Glasgow North, vowed the city's MPs would will use "every lever we can" to convince the government to bin the plan.

Meeting with locals to gather testimony about the impact on their lives, he told The National: "People will have further to travel, at greater expense, and an increased risk of sanctions if they're late. The job centre in Maryhill, like the others threatened with closure across the city, provides a vital local service.



"We hope to hold more sessions like this to hear directly from people affected in Maryhill and build a clear case to save the local Jobcentre."

Doris, who also spoke with constituents, said some reported facing journeys of more than one hour to Springburn, meaning a "major challenge" for those with caring responsibilities or disabilities.

Meanwhile, Glasgow North East MP McLaughlin said: "The Department for Work and Pensions has admitted that it used Google Maps to work out how long it would take people to travel from one closed Jobcentre to the nearest

alternative – nobody actually carried out research on the ground, and no consideration has been given to people who already live some distance from their current Jobcentre.

“Revelations today that DWP staff in Glasgow have been told to focus on processing benefit sanctions rather than appeals over the Christmas holidays will only add to a sense that this Tory government has no compassion, and will carry out its heartless policies without any regard for the daily lives of people affected.”

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When asked about the closure programme in the House of Commons by the SNP's Angus Robertson, Tory Leader of the House David Lidington said the number of sites was less important than “how accessible the offices and services continue to be to the people who need them”.

The decision is expected within six months and the changes would be made by the end of March 2018.

The consultation says it could save “many millions of pounds”, adding: “Our commitment to Glasgow means we are proposing an estate that is right for the city, our benefit claimants and our colleagues; an estate that will deliver improved services by bringing together some neighbouring Jobcentres where we can achieve access to more employers and partners.



“Our proposals will provide an estate that gives access to more employment opportunities for local claimants and allow us to achieve significant savings for the taxpayer.”

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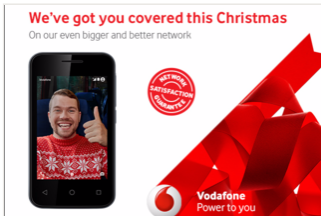


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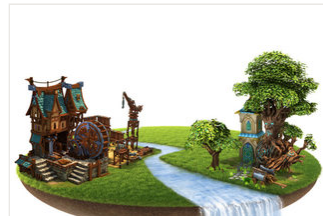
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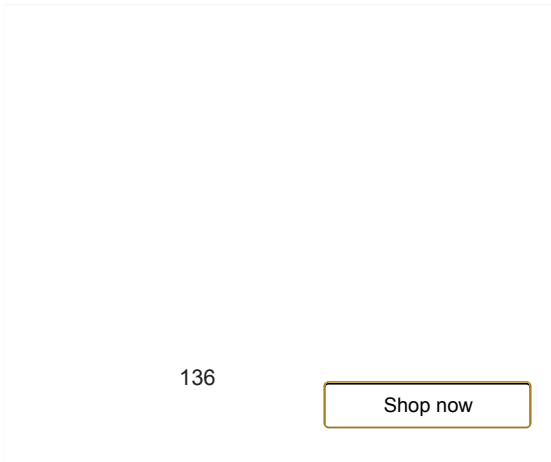
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