

CAMPAIGN AGAINST MEDICAL EXAMINATION CENTRES CLOSURES

CLOSURES OF MEDICAL EXAMINATION CENTRES WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

BRIEFING PAPER

The following 21 sites throughout England & Scotland have been identified for closure. These are

Barnsley, Bolton, Bradford, Cambridge, Catford, Chesterfield, Colchester, Derby, Dorchester, Greenock, Hartlepool, Oxford and Stirling , closing by 31/8/05 and

Chelmsford, Darlington, Durham, Lewisham, Middlesborough, Seven Sisters, Sunderland, Thornton Heath to close by 31/12/05

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT CLAIMANTS?

Many people will be unable to travel great distances due to the nature of illness and in some circumstances will fail to attend their appointments. On doing so unless they have a good reason to justify non-attendance then their benefit will be suspended until they are forced into attending.

BACKGROUND

Under the Social Security regulations any person that claims Incapacity Benefit must attend a mandatory medical assessment provided by the government to establish their right to continue claiming incapacity benefit. To make attending these medicals more accessible for the public an assessment centre was established in nearly every major town and city

PRIVATISATION

The government privatised the medical services using the argument of cost savings to the taxpayer and has recently awarded a new contract to Atos Origin a recognised multi million pound profit making company.

Atos Origin have stated that the contract is worth over £500 million over the next seven years

It will be the responsibility of Atos Origin to see thousands of members of the public each year to provide advice for the DWP as to whether they satisfy the requirement for claiming benefit. Part of the DWP contract stipulates that a member of the public attending a medical must not be expected to travel longer than 90 minutes from their home to the assessment using public transport. It is our understanding that this 90 minute rule was included as a safeguard to prevent excess travelling not a bench mark. Since Atos Origin has been awarded the contract they have reviewed the current assessment centres with a view to identifying offices for closure and thereby saving them more money from the contract.

There are only two sites in Derbyshire and both of these are targeted for closure. The closure of these two sites will mean that members of the public having to attend a medical will be forced to travel to either Sheffield, Manchester, Mansfield or Nottingham. This will have an adverse effect on any person having to travel a greater distance.

At the moment the DWP do pay travelling expenses for attendance at the medicals however, this is only 6.5p per mile Compared to Members of Parliament that receive 40p per mile. The reality is that many people are unaware that they can claim their travel costs.

CLOSURE MEANS WORSE SERVICES

Closure of the medical assessment services will exacerbate people's health related conditions.

The closures are taking place purely for the convenience of the winners of the contract and their subsequent profiteering. It is not being done for the benefit of the service users.

The 90 minute travelling time is a safeguard not a benchmark.

The closure of medical assessment centres will exacerbate social exclusion with people not receiving the benefit for which they are entitled.

We are being told that job cuts and privatisation will not affect front line services, these closures show this not to be the case.

Public transport is not in a position to offer the best form of transport especially when the government is announcing the closure of some rural railway lines and bus services being axed. Public transport availability is not static, what is 90 minutes might not be in the future.

Under the governments agenda of welfare reform incapacity benefit claimants are being targeted in a national roll out of the welfare to work pilot this will have adverse effects on the roll out.

The DWP is facing staffing cuts of 30,000, if benefits are suspended as a result of not attending a medical this will mean people will have to wait longer for the money they are entitled to.

As a result of the closures staff working for Atos Origin in these sites will be facing compulsory redundancy.

For more information about this briefing paper contact

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