

HMRC office closures will be devastating

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The following [comes from the PCS union blog](#) and I reproduce it because I think it right and am happy to support that union's demands having worked with them on numerous occasions on this issue:

PCS says plans reported this morning to close all but a handful of HM Revenue and Customs' 160 remaining UK offices would be "devastating" and must be reviewed by MPs.

The department had said it would make an announcement to staff at lunchtime today, but details have been leaked to the media.

We believe the plans, being announced while parliament is in recess, "pose a significant threat to the operation of HMRC, its service to the public and the working lives of staff".

The threat is so severe, we believe, that as well as entering into genuine negotiations, it says HMRC must launch a high-profile public consultation and allow its proposals to be subject to full parliamentary scrutiny. We have previously pledged to support shadow chancellor [John McDonnell's review of HMRC's role and resources](#).

Last week MPs on the [public accounts committee criticised HMRC's "woefully inadequate" efforts](#) to tackle tax evasion, raised fresh concerns about aggressive tax avoidance and said they feared the telephone helpline service was so bad it was "having an adverse impact on the collection of tax revenues".

Since 2010, more than 10,000 jobs have been cut from the department and 250 offices have closed, plus the network of 281 walk-in tax enquiry centres. The union says it is clear that with so few sites planned to remain, the livelihoods of thousands of current employees are being needlessly put at risk.

HMRC is currently not planning to subject these proposals to parliamentary scrutiny or public consultation, and we have yet to see any assessment of the impact on staff with disabilities or caring responsibilities, or the socio-economic and environmental effects of such a large-scale closure programme.

Local presence vital

MPs and tax experts have previously supported our view that a visible, local HMRC presence is essential to maintaining confidence in our tax system and ensure taxpayers comply with their obligations.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "No one should be in any doubt that, if implemented, these proposals would be absolutely devastating for HMRC and the people who work there.

"Closing this many offices would pose a significant threat to the operation of HMRC, its service to the public and the working lives of staff, and the need for parliamentary scrutiny of the plans is undeniable and urgent."