

ANGUS COUNCIL

NEW

ITEM No. 17POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE
HOUSING COMMITTEE8th September 1998
29th September 1998**PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF REFURBISHMENT OF LOCAL HOUSING OFFICES, AND
FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF ACCESS OFFICES**JOINT REPORT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE, DIRECTOR OF PROPERTY SERVICES,
DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND DIRECTOR OF HOUSING**ABSTRACT**

This report proposes a programme of refurbishment of Local Housing Offices, considers ACCESS Office implications, suggests a method of funding and a timetable for implementation.

1. RECOMMENDATION

The Policy and Resources Committee is recommended to :

1. note the contents of this report;
2. approve the proposed programme of housing office refurbishments and associated funding packages;
3. instruct the Director of Property Services to progress these refurbishments in accordance with the agreed programmes;
4. agree that the ACCESS office in Monifieth opens on a Saturday between the hours of 9.00am and 1.00pm.
5. instruct all Chief Officers to produce, on a service by service basis, detailed proposals as to what elements of their various services can be delivered through ACCESS provision.

The Housing Committee is asked to note the above.

2. BACKGROUND

It has long been recognised that the general standard of accommodation in local Housing offices requires a significant degree of improvement from the perspective both of the visiting public and the staff who work there. Indeed the Customer Care Working Group has highlighted the need for a much higher standard of reception facilities to improve the image of Council services and, in keeping with valuing staff, it is essential to provide staff with a much improved working environment.

The Council has also adopted a programme for the provision of local ACCESS Offices in accordance with its strategy for decentralisation and this strategy has recognised

the financial and management opportunities to provide ACCESS Offices at the same location as housing offices. The agreed order of provision of ACCESS Offices is Monifieth, Montrose, Carnoustie, Brechin, Kirriemuir, Arbroath, and Forfar subject to the availability of financial resources.

The Director of Housing has proposed a scheme of improvements to certain local Housing offices and there is now an opportunity to make significant progress towards achieving the goals set out above within the financial year 1998/99.

Funding packages have been prepared which will permit a number of these improvements to be undertaken over the next twelve months utilising, in part, revenue balances from the Housing Revenue account, and provision made within the Composite Capital Plan for ACCESS Offices.

Montrose

The original scheme for incorporating an ACCESS Office and improved Housing Office in Montrose Town House ran into difficulties with both Historic Scotland and a degree of opposition from local groups in Montrose when it was proposed to enclose part of the piazza area.

As a consequence this scheme was not progressed but since then there has been a body of opinion which advocated the Council re-examine the potential of the Town House for use as an ACCESS office.

This view was further supported by a letter from the Montrose Community Council addressed to the Director of Planning and Transport urging the Town House to be used as an ACCESS office.

A scheme, incorporating an appropriate funding package, has been prepared and is to be subject to consultation with the local community. A report will be submitted to Angus Council on the 17th September 1998 reporting the outcome of this consultation exercise and hopefully seeking approval to proceed with the scheme.

The establishment of the new ACCESS provision and housing offices will however not be complete before October 1999 and proposals developed for other housing offices would permit new ACCESS provisions and refurbished housing offices in other burghs to be available before then.

Carnoustie

The present housing office is in Carnoustie Burgh Chambers, an important building in the High Street which accommodates the main Housing services and the Registrar's service at ground floor level, and storage, clerk of works and the Council Chamber at first floor level. The lease on the store at first floor will shortly expire.

Given that Carnoustie is next on the list for ACCESS Office provision after Montrose and that the Open Golf Championship is due in 1999, it is opportune to carry out a comprehensive refurbishment of the building to incorporate an ACCESS provision and a much improved public reception for Housing services. This alteration can also make

better use of the first floor accommodation and the combined provision would enhance the presence of Council services in time for this major event.

A scheme, incorporating an appropriate funding package, has been prepared for this project, as detailed later.

Brechin

The present housing office is in Bank Street and would require alterations to provide both ACCESS and Housing services.

Consideration has been given to incorporating an ACCESS/Housing provision in the Town House but there is insufficient space available.

A scheme, which could be completed next financial year, incorporating an appropriate funding package is being prepared for this project and will be subject of a further report.

Kirriemuir

The present housing office is at Marywell Brae and mostly on the ground floor but use is also made of first floor rooms (including the former committee room which is used for the occasional wedding and for meetings of the Community Council).

There is an opportunity to carry out a comprehensive refurbishment of the ground floor of the building to incorporate an ACCESS provision and an improved public reception for Housing services. This alteration can also make better use of the first floor accommodation and the combined provision would enhance the presence of Council services.

It should be noted that the Kirriemuir office has traditionally closed for one hour each weekday at lunchtime. It is suggested that this practice should continue meantime but be reviewed after refurbishment and the staffing implications are fully considered.

A scheme, incorporating an appropriate funding package, has been prepared for this project, as detailed later.

Arbroath

The existing housing office in Dewar House is limited in its potential for improvement and space for an ACCESS Office. Detailed consideration is therefore being given to the options available, including the possible acquisition of a more central and accessible location for a housing office which will provide enhanced accommodation and improved public accessibility. It is the intention to bring forward a separate report dealing with possible options which include the incorporation of an ACCESS Office.

Forfar

It is intended that an ACCESS provision could be achieved by suitable redevelopment of Municipal Buildings to provide an ACCESS/ Housing provision. This is dependant on the relocation of Environmental Health and Consumer Protection staff and proposals to provide additional meeting facilities with a link to Town and County Hall.

Development Programmes

Programmes have been developed for the refurbishment of the offices in Montrose, Carnoustie and Kirriemuir, as summarised below. Programmes have yet to be developed for Brechin, Arbroath and Forfar.

ID	Task Name	Duration	Start	Finish	BS															
					1999				2000				2001							
					Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4		
17	Montrose Town House	303	02/09/9	29/10/9																
28	Carnoustie Burgh Chambers	221	03/08/9	07/06/9																
34	Marywell Brae, Kirriemuir	171	14/09/9	10/05/9																

3. ACCESS OFFICES

The works proposed above will not necessarily fulfil the complete brief for an ACCESS Office as outlined in the earlier Committee reports in terms of the dedicated space provision for both visitors and staff. However given the degree of counter and interview services provided at these Offices, it is envisaged that an ACCESS service could be provided at these locations at lesser costs.

Members are advised that if they approve the proposals set out in this report, existing Housing services will require to be decanted to alternative locations during the contract periods. However, every effort will be made to minimise disruption to customers and staff during the refurbishment process.

4. REGISTRAR'S SERVICES

The operation of the Registrar services within the local offices outlined above will be reviewed in the course of preparing the detailed proposals for the respective offices and any alterations/improvements agreed with the Director of Law & Administration.

5. USE OF PREMISES BY OUTSIDE BODIES

A number of the premises referred to in this report are used by outside bodies such as Community Councils.

Prior to finalising arrangements for the various upgradings, the Director of Property Services will liaise with these organisations in order to ensure that their future needs are adequately dealt with.

6. INTEGRATION OF OFFICES INTO THE COUNCIL'S OVERALL IT NETWORK

Given the important role that these offices will fulfil in terms of the Council's customer focused approach, it is suggested that they be linked in with the Council's telephone and IT network. The Director of Information Technology has prepared estimated costs for this work and these are included in the development costs detailed below.

7. OPERATIONAL ISSUES AT MONIFIETH ACCESS OFFICE

Members will recall that Monifieth ACCESS Office has been open 6 full days per week since its opening in 1997.

Experience to date has shown that usage of the ACCESS office on Saturday afternoons has been minimal. It is therefore suggested that the ACCESS office in Monifieth opens on a Saturday between the hours of 9.00am and 1.00pm. This will

mean that one of the 4 posts of ACCESS Assistant which was created, but not filled, can now be deleted.

8. USAGE OF ACCESS OFFICES BY SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE COUNCIL

During the past year, through Monifieth ACCESS Office, a number of services in addition to those provided by the Housing Department, have been delivered.

Given the proposed changes and impetus in the provision of ACCESS Offices during the current financial year, it is now suggested that all Chief Officers be instructed to produce, on a service by service basis, detailed proposals as to what elements of their various services can be delivered through ACCESS provision.

9. CUSTOMER CARE AND TRAINING OF FRONT LINE STAFF IN ALL DEPARTMENTS

During recent presentations made by the Chief Executive to staff from all departments on the Council's "Corporate Agenda", one consistent issue which has arisen is that of front line staff in all departments, not necessarily being aware of how and by whom, other services provided by the Council are delivered. This has often led to confusion and sometimes frustration by service users.

It is suggested that a number of initiatives could be taken to address this problem. These include:-

- (a) the provision of corporate training for all front line staff in all departments on delivery mechanisms for all Council services.
- (b) the private sector has over the past number of years developed a concept of "Call Centres". It is suggested that the same concept might be usefully adapted in terms of the provision of local authorities service information. It is suggested that officers be instructed to bring forward detailed proposals as to how this particular concept (a Council ACCESS line) might usefully be developed by Angus Council.

10. COST IMPLICATIONS

The costs associated with these developments can be broadly split into two sections, namely:-

- (a) capital costs; and
- (b) revenue costs.

Capital Costs

The Director of Property Services has provided estimated costs for the refurbishment of Housing Offices in Carnoustie, Brechin and Kirriemuir to meet the requirements and suggestions as set out in this report. The estimated costs for these refurbishments are as follows:-

- (a) Carnoustie - £124,000;
- (b) Brechin - £100,000;
- (c) Kirriemuir - £88,000.

Note: These costs exclude alterations to information technology systems and costs for temporary accommodation during the construction phase of each project both of which will be funded from the Housing Revenue Account.

Funding packages have been developed for each property as detailed below:-

FINANCIAL PLAN 1998/1999

Current Provisions	TOTALS £000s	1997/1998 £000s	1998/1999 £000s	1999/2000 £000s	2000/2001 £000s	2001/2002 £000s
Access Point, Montrose	17	17	0	0	0	0
Access Point/Housing Office, Montrose	400	0	220	170	10	0
Access Point, Carnoustie	150	0	40	100	10	0
Access Point, Kirriemuir	200	0	0	0	180	20
Access Point, Brechin	150	0	30	112	8	0
<i>Totals</i>	917	17	290	382	208	20

Alternative Proposed Amendments

	TOTALS £000s	1997/1998 £000s	1998/1999 £000s	1999/2000 £000s	2000/2001 £000s	2001/2002 £000s
Access Point, Montrose	17	17	0	0	0	0
Access Point/Housing Office, Montrose	603	0	82	494	24	3
HRA Revenue	-166	0	0	-166	0	0
Common Good	-70	0	0	-70	0	0
<i>Capital Balance</i>	367	0	82	258	24	3
Access Point, Carnoustie	124	0	50	70	4	0
HRA Revenue [excl decanting]	-60	0	-50	-10	0	0
<i>Capital Balance</i>	64	0	0	60	4	0
Access Point, Kirriemuir	88	0	36	49	3	0
HRA Revenue [excl decanting]	-50	0	-36	-14	0	0
<i>Capital Balance</i>	38	0	0	35	3	0
Access Point, Brechin	100	0	0	95	5	0
HRA Revenue [excl decanting]	-25	0	0	-25	0	0
<i>Capital Balance</i>	75	0	0	70	5	0
<i>Totals</i>	561	17	82	423	36	3
<i>Capital Balance</i>	-356	0	-208	41	-172	-17

Revenue Costs

There are a number of staffing and personnel issues yet to be discussed but the revenue implications will be of the order of £50,000 per annum.

There will also be a one-off setting up cost of the order of £26,500 including the installation of telephone and IT networks.

Members are asked to note the following:-

- a) Financial allowances will require to be made for Saturday morning working and this is included in the above revenue estimates.
- b) It is suggested however that consideration of the opening of ACCESS offices in the other towns on Saturdays is deferred until the Saturday operation of the Monifieth Office is reviewed after a suitable trial period.
- c) No allowance is made in Kirriemuir for the office to open at lunchtime.
- d) In terms of developing the refurbishment proposals, allowance for staff space has been made within the three locations to accommodate staff once the Housing Benefit and Council Tax administration is merged in April 1999.
- e) Additional items such as built furnishings, required wiring, redecoration, improved telephone systems etc., are contained within the Director of Property's estimates.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs of refurbishment could be met from individual packages consisting of contributions from the Housing Revenue account and provision made within the Composite Capital Plan for ACCESS Offices.

The annual revenue costs are minimal when compared to these which would occur if separate ACCESS provision was created in each of these burghs.

Given that the Housing services would be continuing within the present staffing and revenue resources, the general fund will only have to bear a share of additional accommodation and staff costs associated with ACCESS services and any agreed Saturday working.

The additional revenue costs will be accommodated in the 1999/2000 Revenue Budget.

12. OFFICE NOMENCLATURE

Members are asked to give consideration as to what these refurbished offices should be called.

A suggestion is that they be called Kirriemuir ACCESS Office, Brechin ACCESS Office and Carnoustie ACCESS Office.

13. CONSULTATION

The Director of Law & Administration has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

14. CONCLUSION

There is a clear need to make improvements to a number of Local Housing Offices and there is also an opportunity to combine such a programme of improvements to include making provision for ACCESS Office services.

At a time when resources are scarce, it is thought this approach would enable the provision of ACCESS services to be made earlier than capital consents might otherwise allow and make better use of the revenue resources available.

REFERENCES

Rep No.	By	Subject	Committee	Date
24/96	Chief Executive	Decentralisation in Angus	Angus Council	24/01/96
744/96	Chief Executive	Decentralisation	Policy & Resources	10/09/96
900/96	Chief Executive	Decentralisation Scheme	Policy & Resources	29/10/96
175a/97	Chief Executive	Decentralisation Scheme	Policy & Resources	04/02/97
520/97	Chief Executive	Continuation of the Council's Strategic Approach: Customer Care	Policy & Resources	6/5/97

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

A B Watson, Chief Executive
 J Torbet, Director of Personnel
 D Sawers, Director of Finance
 M G Lunny, Director of Property Services
 R Ashton, Director of Housing

27 Aug 1998

P&Rhusing offices4.doc