

ANGUS COUNCIL

PERSONNEL & PROPERTY SERVICES COMMITTEE

13 JUNE 2000

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT: ANGUS COUNCIL TRAINING SERVICES - REVIEW OF
PROGRESS 1999/2000

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL

ABSTRACT

This report advises members of the successful outcome of a series of measures for the reorganisation of the Angus Council Training Services section of the Personnel Department which this Committee approved last year and seeks the approval for staffing changes intended to continue the Section's progress.

1. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee

- i note the terms of this report
- ii approve the following changes to the establishment of the Personnel Department:
 - a) establish two IT Training Instructor posts (AP3, SCP 23-26) which are currently established on a temporary basis
 - b) establish one post of Training Projects Supervisor (AP3, SCP 23-26), to be filled by an employee currently employed on a supernumerary basis

2. INTRODUCTION

Angus Council Training Services (ACTS), which became part of the Personnel Department on 1 April 1998, is contracted with Scottish Enterprise Tayside (SET) and the Employment Service to deliver a range of government funded training and employment programmes. These include Skillseekers, Training for Work and New Deal. These initiatives provide opportunities for the young and long term unemployed in the area by giving them the skills and experience required to enter the jobs market. ACTS is the largest training provider of its type in Angus. In addition to these programmes ACTS also provides information technology training to Council employees and elected members.

For several years prior to 1998/99, ACTS incurred a series of budget overspends. In 1997/98 the figure was £107,000 and in 1998/99 £100,000. These overspends arose principally because of significant changes in the environment in which ACTS operated and in particular changes to funding criteria. Report No 125/99, approved by this Committee at its meeting of 2 February 1999, described the nature of these changes and made a series of recommendations for rationalising ACTS in line with the changed operating conditions in order to address its financial position. Those recommendations were approved and this report advises members of the successful consequences of their implementation. It also seeks approval for further alterations to staffing arrangements to continue the section's progress.

3. PROGRESS 1999/2000

Staffing

Amongst the recommendations made was a reduction in staffing levels. Following the implementation of this recommendation four employees were identified as supernumerary. Two volunteered for early retirement during the course of the year and the third has been re-deployed to a job within the Housing Department. Plans for addressing the position of the remaining supernumerary employee are described later in Section 5 of this report.

Accommodation

The report recommended the relocation of those staff based in Montrose to Arbroath to eliminate operational inefficiencies. This move took place in October 1999, with the Business Centre at Dens Road extensively altered and refurbished with the assistance of European funding.

Additionally the Directors of Personnel and Property Services were asked to identify suitable alternative accommodation for the operations at Old Ladyloan School in Arbroath. This has not yet been achieved but members will recall that at the meeting of this Committee of 2 May this year they approved Report No 479/00 recommending that, following an expression of interest from a developer, the property be marketed. This is now in hand, and alternative accommodation would be provided by funds received from a sale.

Operating Practices

Changes have been made to operating practices in order to address the difficulty in predicting ACTS income which was identified as a key problem. Progress in this respect has been considerable, thus allowing more accurate and long-term planning of activities. Additionally, where appropriate, training opportunities are being provided on a discrete project basis allowing accurate financial appraisal of costs and income to be balanced against training opportunities created.

Specific Projects

There has been an increase in working on projects in partnership with other Council departments and external agencies. Report No 533/00 (on the agenda for today's meeting) advises members of the Warm Deal initiative being undertaken in conjunction with the Housing Department. Other similar initiatives are being developed with external bodies.

Amongst other major developments has been the delivery of the IT and Customer Service Training initiative, which is supported in part by European Social Funding. To date, sixteen participants have completed this course which is specifically aimed at unemployed people in Arbroath. A further group is in training and more will follow. The success of the project has allowed ACTS to draw down further funding to extend this initiative until December 2000.

These new developments have taken place alongside ACTS' main activity which is the management of the Skillseekers training programme. Despite the rationalisation of staffing, numbers engaged in the Skillseekers programme in the year 1999/2000 have slightly increased. A pilot programme seeking work placements for Skillseekers with special training needs was completed in partnership with SET and this work has now been absorbed into mainstream Skillseeker activities.

Budgetary Performance

The aim of the recommendations approved in Report No 125/99 and the actions which have been taken since was to enable ACTS to continue to deliver highly quality training to unemployed people in Angus but to achieve this within necessary financial constraints. During 1999/2000 this aim has been achieved largely by the considerable efforts of ACTS' staff. Although the final budget outturn figure cannot be confirmed, the indications are that ACTS' budget for 1999/2000 will show a favourable variance of £35,000 to £40,000. This compares with an overspend of £100,000 for 1998/99.

4. IT TRAINING

Report 125/99 recommended a reduction in the staffing of the Section's IT Training section from 3.5 posts to 2 post, with the two remaining instructors employed on a temporary basis to allow assessment of the performance of the section in its rationalised form, before a decision regarding making these appointments permanent was taken.

In the last year the section has continued to deliver IT Training to elected members, Council employees and to trainees - both those pursuing specific IT vocational qualifications and those studying IT as part of a wider qualification within Skillseekers, New Deal and Training for Work programmes. The section has expanded the range of courses it offers and is currently finalising with the Director of Information Technology details of courses in the use of the Council's Intranet and the Internet.

IT training is regarded by the European Union as a priority issue and this has allowed the section to attract considerable funding to support its operations. In the last year grants of approximately £30,000 have funded the purchase of over 20 personal computers and related hardware.

The section recently gained accreditation as a training and test centre for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). The ECDL is a new Europe-wide qualification which certifies a holder's competence in a range of computer skills and is likely to become the most widely recognised qualification in the field of IT training. Enquiries from Council Departments and businesses have already been received about this qualification. Additionally, the Directors of Personnel and Cultural Services are currently discussing delivery of this qualification to Cultural Services staff under the auspices of the New Opportunities Fund's Information and Communications Technology Training for Public Library Staff Initiative.

In the past, there have been uncertainties about predicting the medium to long term demand for the IT facility's services and consequently, its capacity to generate income and financial viability. The measures taken to promote its services, to demonstrate their quality and to align its staffing with demands have addressed this. There will be a continuing need for training to update the IT skills of Council employees, local businesses and unemployed people who wish to secure sustainable jobs. The benefits in investing in new information technology cannot be wholly realised if those using it are not fully trained. The experience of the last year, discussions with current and potential new customers, and the plans for developing training in new areas, including the ECDL, all indicate that there will be a substantial and sustained demand for the training offered.

IT Training is a key part of the operations of ACTS and has contributed to the operational and financial success of the unit in the past year. Without this in-house training facility the overall integrity of the service which ACTS provides would be seriously weakened. Consequently, it is recommended that the two posts of IT Training Instructor, currently temporary, be established as permanent within the Personnel Department. It should be noted that because of various earlier reviews, one of the instructors has been employed on a series of temporary contracts since 1996.

5. RECYCLING PROJECT - ESTABLISHMENT OF TRAINING PROJECTS SUPERVISOR

Report No125/99 reduced the number of Training Projects Supervisors within ACTS from six to three in line with the level of training activity at that time. Since then, numbers undertaking training have increased and, significantly, the number of discrete projects being undertaken which require a dedicated supervisor has increased. Among these is a recycling project which is being undertaken in partnership with the Environmental & Consumer Protection Department. This project is an element of the Council's environmental strategy involving the collection and recycling of material from all over Angus. The project aims to achieve a number of benefits, eg improvements to the environment through the promotion of recycling, delivery of good quality training and, and it is hoped, eventually the establishment of a community recycling business.

The project will be undertaken by between eight and ten participants on the New Deal Programme who require a dedicated supervisor. This cannot be provided from ACTS' current

resources. It is therefore proposed that the post of Training Projects Supervisor (grade AP3) be established to progress this project.

One employee, formerly a Training Projects Supervisor, remains supernumerary. He has the skills, qualifications and experience to undertake this role and it is therefore proposed that he would take up the post should its establishment be approved.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Provision for the employment of two IT Training Instructors was made in the Personnel Department's revenue budget for 2000/2001. There are therefore no financial implications arising from the establishment of these posts.

The cost of establishing a Training Projects Supervisor post would be £20,158 in a full financial year. Part of this cost will be offset by monies received from the Employment Service for managing and administering the New Deal trainees. The Director of Environmental & Consumer Protection has agreed to make up any shortfall in these costs through income received from recycling activities.

7. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Law & Administration and Director of Environment & Consumer Protection have been consulted on the terms this report.

8. CONCLUSION

Angus Council Training Services has made significant progress during the year 1999/2000 in terms of continuing to deliver high quality training and addressing its budgetary difficulties. It is hoped that this progress will continue and that the proposals set out in this report will help to achieve this.

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Director of Personnel

NOTE 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.