

ANGUS COUNCIL

RESOURCES AND CENTRAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

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STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE

3 February 2004

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF PROPERTY SERVICES

No 127/04

## **MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FORFAR – FORFAR ACCESS OFFICE**

### **Abstract**

This report outlines the proposal to refurbish the Municipal Buildings, Forfar as the Forfar ACCESS Office, including the provision of a new link to the Town & County Hall.

### **1. RECOMMENDATION**

The committee is recommended to:

- a) approve the proposal to refurbish the Municipal Buildings, Forfar as the Forfar ACCESS Office, including the provision of a new link to the Town & County Hall as outlined in this report
- b) to approve the estimated total cost of £800,000 (at out turn prices)
- c) note that £800,000 is provisionally made in the current review of the Financial Plan for 2003-07 which will be considered by the Resources and Central Services Committee as part of the 2004/05 budget setting process
- d) to note the revenue implications arising from this project (first full year 2006/2007) as contained in this report
- e) to note that an annual revenue contribution in respect of the office upgrade will be made by the Housing Revenue Account - the amount of the contribution to be determined by the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Director of Housing following completion of the alterations and determination of the services which are to be delivered by the Housing department from the upgraded facility.

### **2. INTRODUCTION**

Angus Council adopted a decentralisation policy, which included the provision of ACCESS Offices in each of the seven burghs of Angus. The main purpose of these offices was to provide convenient public access to all or most Council services from a single office centrally located in each town. The first ACCESS Office was provided at Monifieth in 1996 and Report 564/98 approved by the Policy and Resources Committee in September 1998 outlined a programme of provision in the other towns.

ACCESS Offices are now provided in Monifieth, Carnoustie, Montrose, Kirriemuir and Brechin with only Arbroath and Forfar remaining to complete the programme.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

Council services in Forfar are provided from a number of different offices including the main HQ buildings at County Buildings and St James House. The town centre has the offices of the Chief Executive, Elected Members, Housing, Environmental & Consumer Protection, Economic Development and Finance. This illustrates the problem of having separate public offices with members of the public having to move between various offices if they require more than one service.

The programme for the provision of ACCESS offices referred to above requires that a suitable office be provided in each town from where all council services can be delivered. The public should be able to make enquires, pay council bills and receive information on all aspects of the Council's services at the one enquiry point. They should also be able to discuss issues in confidence with officers or elected members (by appointment if necessary) in comfortable and welcoming surroundings. Public buildings must comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 by providing the disabled with access to services.

It has however, been established that many enquiries to the Council are made over the telephone or Internet and to address this trend, the Council has developed ACCESS Line. It is not anticipated that ACCESS Line will replace the ACCESS office but should be complementary to the provision of public services through local offices in each town.

### **4. OPTIONS**

A capital project appraisal study considered four options including: do nothing; refurbishing Municipal Buildings; adaptation of 7 The Cross and provision at St James House.

Municipal Buildings currently accommodates front line Housing and Environmental Health & Consumer Protection services. It is a prominent category A listed building in the town centre. It is held on the Forfar Common Good Account.

The Council's office accommodation strategy, which has recently been reviewed and will be the subject of a separate report, proposes that this building be developed on the ground floor as the Forfar ACCESS office and the upper floor as a civic gateway to the adjacent Town & County Hall. Disabled access to the ground floor would be provided by a ramp and to the second floor by a lift. This would also give access to the Council Chamber in the Town & County Hall via a bridge linking the two buildings. A separate study has shown that it is not practicable to have disabled access to the Council Chamber from within Town and County Hall.

Using the ground floor of this building as an ACCESS office has the advantage of continuing the building used by Housing as a rent office and as such is well known to the people in Forfar.

The upper floor would include provision for civic functions, receptions and toilets associated with the Council Chamber, which would be accessed via the bridge link.

The proposals have been worked up to scheme design stage in consultation with the Director of Planning & Transport and Historic Scotland. Both approve the proposals in principle at this stage.

The estimated cost including the works to the upper floor, the link to the Town & County Hall and some refurbishment within the Town & County Hall is estimated at £800,000.

Members should note:

- a) The existing Housing service would require decanting to an alternative office during the alteration works and the costs associated with this will be contained within the Housing revenue budget.
- b) Environmental & Consumer Protection will move to Ravenswood before the commencement of the works.
- c) To provide inclusive access for all customers at the main entrance of Municipal Buildings the steps leading up to the entrance would require to be moved outwards to accommodate the necessary space for people with disabilities at the top of the steps and to accommodate the ramped access. This in turn would displace the existing taxi rank and its possible relocation will be the subject of further discussion with the Director of Roads within the context of the traffic management scheme for the town centre currently under consideration. If it transpires that it is not possible to move the steps outwards, then the access for disabled people would have to remain at the rear of the building, which, although an option, is not a satisfactory solution in the context of social inclusion.

After careful consideration of all the options, the refurbishment of Municipal Buildings is seen as the most cost effective and is the preferred option. This project is identified in the Property Services Department's service plan for 2003-07 as one of its operational targets for March 2005. It supports the Chief Executive's operational target within that department's service plan for implementing the Council's decentralisation strategy. It also contributes to the Council's Corporate Plan objective of improving customer care and making services more accessible to the public as part of its future action as a best value local authority service provider.

Sketch plans of the proposed conversion are attached as an appendix to this report.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **i) Estimated Capital Cost**

The estimated total cost of this project is as follows:

Works	£650,000
Allowance for professional fees, supervisory, travel and administrative expenses and statutory payments and contingencies	£100,000
Equipment, furniture, IT etc	£ 50,000
Estimated total cost (at out-turn prices)	£800,000

The provisional capital allowance within the draft 2003-07 Financial Plan is £800,000.

### **ii) ESTIMATED PHASING OF EXPENDITURE**

The expenditure of the estimated total cost of £880,000 is programmed as follows:

in 2003/04	£	10,000
in 2004/05	£	283,000
in 2005/06	£	477,000
in 2006/07	£	30,000

### iii) Revenue

Corporate costs:

Loan Charges over 20 years	£74,000
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Loan charges will be a corporate charge and will be fully supported by Central Government grant.

Energy Costs, maintenance, rates and cleaning costs are likely to be the same as at present. The internal recharging of these costs, including to Housing, will be considered in a management review of ACCESS offices which will be the subject of a future report to committee and will be considered as part of the budget setting process for 2005/06.

An annual revenue contribution will be made by the Housing Revenue Account to reflect the Housing department use of the upgraded facilities.

## 6. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, the Director of Law & Administration, Director of Finance Director of Planning and Transport, Director of Roads, Director of Housing and the Forfar members have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The development of the ACCESS office for Forfar within the Municipal Buildings is recommended as part of the Office Accommodation Strategy. It is in a central location, making good use of an important category A listed building and can be developed at reasonable cost.

## 8. REFERENCES

Committee	Date	Report	Subject
Policy & Resources	8.9.98	564/98	Proposed Programme of Refurbishment of Local Housing Offices and Further Development of ACCESS Offices
Resources and Central Services Exec Sub	9.10.03	1113/03	Ravenswood First Floor Extension – Tender Report

M G Lunny  
Director of Property Services