

ANGUS COUNCIL

RESOURCES AND CENTRAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE

29 January 2004

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REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF PROPERTY SERVICES

No 128/04

OLD PARISH CHURCH OF ARBROATH – ARBROATH ACCESS OFFICE

Abstract

This report outlines the proposal to convert the Old Parish Church of Arbroath to the Arbroath ACCESS Office.

1. RECOMMENDATION

The Council is recommended to:

- a) approve the proposal to convert the Old Parish Church of Arbroath to the Arbroath ACCESS Office as outlined in this report
- b) to approve the estimated total cost of £450,000 (at out turn prices)
- c) note that £350,000 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 early in 2004
- d) note that the balance of £100,000 capital provision is to be made from the Housing Revenue Account for 2004/05.
- e) to note the revenue implications arising from this project (first full year 2006/2007) as contained in this report

2. INTRODUCTION

Angus Council has adopted a decentralisation policy, which includes 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 Arbroath including Social Work, Housing, Environmental & Consumer Protection and Leisure Services have been mainly provided from Dewar House. The layout of the building and staffing configuration have meant that the public have had to negotiate corridors, stairs and passageways to reach these services and this, from a customer care point of view, is unacceptable. It also makes for very difficult security arrangements. There is no single public counter on the ground floor to deal with all council enquiries. The property does not comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which requires access to all services by the disabled.

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.

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 five options including: do nothing; refurbishing Dewar House; alternative High Street premises; Abbey Health Centre and the use of the Old Parish Church.

The Old Parish Church was acquired by the former Angus District Council and is held on the Arbroath Common Good account. The building has not been used since acquisition apart from a short term lease to the Abbey Pageant Society. The Pageant Society uses the building to store costumes and props and they also have meetings and performance rehearsals.

The church is Listed category B and the internal wood linings and carvings have particular architectural merit.

A scheme design for the conversion of the ground floor to an ACCESS office has been worked up and is considered feasible. The Director of Planning and Transport has been consulted and is supportive of the outline proposals in that it brings an important town centre building back into good use. Essentially the ACCESS office provision is a self contained structure within the knave of the church with a transparent roof to retain views of the church roof and the stained glass window on the south gable. The structure does not interfere with the wood panelling and could in theory be removed to restore the building to its previous state if this should ever be required.

After careful consideration of all the options, this is seen as the most cost effective and is the preferred option. This project is now 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 fulfils 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	£360,000
Allowance for professional fees, supervisory, travel and administrative expenses and statutory payments and contingencies	£70,000
Equipment, furniture, IT etc	£20,000
Estimated total cost (at out-turn prices)	£450,000

The provisional capital allowance within the draft 2003-07 Financial Plan is £450,000 includes a contribution of £100,000 from the Housing Revenue Account in year 2004/05. The revenue costs attributable to the HRA will take account of this capital contribution.

ii) ESTIMATED PHASING OF EXPENDITURE

The expenditure of the estimated total cost of £450,000 is programmed as follows:

in 2002/03	£	23,000	
in 2003/04	£	20,000	
in 2004/05	£	320,000	(includes £100,000 HRA contribution)
in 2005/06	£	77,000	
in 2006/07	£	10,000	

iii) Revenue

Corporate Budget costs:

Loan Charges over 20 years £41,655 per annum

Loan charges will be a corporate charge and will be fully supported by Central Government grant.

Departmental revenue costs are:

Energy Costs	£4,500
Maintenance	£2,500
Rental to Common Good	£12,000
Rates	£16,000
Cleaning	£6,000
Total	41,000

The revenue charges listed above are based on the Council as 'tenant' of the Arbroath Common Good and being responsible for maintaining only the internal structure which constitutes the working ACCESS office area. The Common Good

as 'landlord' would continue to maintain the fabric of the church itself including wind and watertight repairs.

Savings to the Council will accrue through the closure of the Council Tax and Housing Benefits office in Market Place, when this function would transfer to the new ACCESS office. The current lease expires in July 2005 and the full years savings would be:

Energy, insurance, etc	£1,900
Maintenance	£500
Rent	£8,250
Rates	£3,350
Cleaning	£2,000
Total	<u>£16,000</u>

The lease expiry and the provision of the new facility should broadly coincide but if necessary it is envisaged that the lease can be extended by negotiation.

From the above a net cost of £25,000 in a full year is evident and this will be considered as part of the 2005/06 revenue budget preparation and beyond.

6. CONSULTATION

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

7. CONCLUSION

The development of the ACCESS office for Arbroath within the Old Parish Church will take advantage of a unique opportunity to make use of a building which has lain dormant for many years. It is in a central location and can be developed at reasonable cost. There will be no decanting required and Dewar House will become a back room office without any need for public access.

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

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