

ANGUS COUNCIL

RESOURCES & CENTRAL SERVICES COMMITTEE - 11 MARCH 2004

DEVELOPMENT OF TELEPHONE ACCESS LINE

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF LAW AND ADMINISTRATION

ABSTRACT

This Report advises of the increasing use of the ACCESS line facility by the citizens of Angus which has necessitated transfer of the facility to larger accommodation and identifies the requirement to increase the establishment to keep pace with the increased number of callers, within the budget resources previously agreed by the Council.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Resources and Central Services Committee is requested:-

- (i) to note the continuing success of the Telephone ACCESS line and the development of the service provided;
- (ii) to note the recent provision of additional space to allow an increase in number of work stations;
- (iii) to approve increases to the establishment as detailed in paragraph 3 to allow adequate resources to meet the demand for service from members of the public; and
- (iv) to delegate powers to the Personnel Services Manager, in consultation with the Director of Law and Administration, to authorise further adjustments to the establishment within budgetary provision if service demand so requires.

2. INTRODUCTION

The ACCESS line telephone service has been located on the ground floor of 7 The Cross, Forfar since November 1999 with the capacity to accommodate 3 workstations. As a result of gradual additions to the A-Z of Services on the Council's web-site, there are now over 300 services on which the ACCESS line operators can give information, respond to a service request or take payment. In the last 15 months, some 75 new services have been added.

The average calls received per month has risen from 1186 in the first year of operation to 3566 in the year to October 2003 - an increase of 301%.

Among the services now delivered on a daily basis by the ACCESS line staff are:-

- Disabled (blue) badge applications
- Job applications outwith office hours
- Special collections by debit/credit card payment arrangements
- Roads and street lighting faults through Clarence system
- Reporting of housing repairs
- Applications for free school meals and school clothing grants

The ACCESS Line Operators have also assisted Council Departments by conducting periodic telephone surveys of customers (eg recruitment of Citizen's Panel members, telephone answering standards throughout the Council and street lighting customer satisfaction surveys). The ACCESS line is also capable of carrying out one off services in response to particular circumstances such as school closures due to severe weather conditions (Snowline) and various welfare rights campaigns.

Due to concerns regarding the number of calls to this facility that were being lost (caller hanging up before operator answered) the Chief Executive agreed to relocate it in the Conference Room on the 1st Floor. This has enabled the introduction of a further 2 work stations and a supervisor position.

3. PROPOSAL

The increased number of workstations with the associated telephone and computer equipment now allows up to 5 ACCESS line operators to be on duty at any given time. To ensure maximum coverage is given at peak times and to address the lost calls situation, it is now necessary to reassess staffing levels.

It is considered that an additional full time equivalent of two operators is required. Whilst a greater degree of flexibility is provided by the appointment of part time staff, previous recruitment experience has found it difficult to attract suitably qualified part time staff. With their approval it is therefore proposed to transfer 3 existing part time operators (Post numbers LA06 J05/J06/J07) to full time status and recruit one additional part time operator. This will effectively provide the required addition to the establishment of 2 full time equivalent posts.

In terms of Report 321/03 (Personnel and Property Services Committee of 11 March 2003), it was agreed to integrate all central telephone services in larger, purpose built accommodation at Ravenswood House. However, as explained in Report 1474/03 (Council meeting of 18 December 2003), this did not happen and the single site for this facility is awaiting a development opportunity. The telephone operators are still therefore required to provide a service at the switchboard, located in St James House, on a rotational basis.

The proposed additions to the establishment allow for both facilities to be fully staffed under normal circumstances. No cognisance is taken of staff leave or sickness and, in addition, work is continuing to develop and promote the services being offered by Access line. In the light of further experience and continuing increased usage, therefore, it may be necessary to increase the establishment by up to one further full time equivalent post. It is therefore proposed that the Personnel Services Manager in consultation with the Director of Law and Administration should be authorised to approve further adjustments to the establishment within budgeted provision.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of transferring 3 part time operators to full time and recruiting an additional part time operator is £32,890. This additional staff cost will be met from the £40,000 provided for ACCESS Line within the overall sums identified for the Customer Care Programme in the 2004/05 Revenue Budget, which was approved by the Council at the Council Tax setting meeting on 12 February 2004. The remaining balance plus any savings made by reduction in additional hours payments to staff will be utilised to further enhance the establishment should the need arise.

5. CONSULTATION

The Director of Finance, Director of Information Technology and the Personnel Services Manager have been consulted in the preparation of this Report. The relevant members of staff have also been consulted.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS

There are no human rights issues arising from this Report.

CATHERINE A COULL
Director of Law and Administration

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.