

EXCERPT OF MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICES
COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 OCTOBER 2000

AREA OFFICE ACCOMMODATION - AIRDRIE

AGENDA ITEM No. 4

6. With reference to paragraph 4 of the Minute of the meeting of this Committee held on 16 June 2000 when, inter alia, a revised structure for the Housing and Property Services had been approved, there was submitted a report (docketed) dated 24 August 2000 by the Director of Housing and Property Services regarding progress to date on the merger of the former Airdrie North and South Area Housing Offices (1) outlining the background to, and the need for, further consideration to be given to the location of the Airdrie Area Housing Office; (2) intimating within Appendix 1 to the report, the existing accommodation arrangements; (3) detailing within Appendix 2 to the report, three available options, of which option 3, in which all finance services would be delivered from the Bank Street Office, Airdrie and Housing and Property Services and Council Tax Account Enquiry Service delivered from Coats House was the favoured option, subject to suitable proposals for disabled access/parking facilities; (4) indicating that provision had been made within the Capital Programme 2000/2001 to commence the project, which was estimated at £502,700 for option 3, with the costs requiring to be finalised as the project progressed, and (5) proposing that (a) in the event that option 3 could not be progressed, that option 2 be favoured, and (b) as an interim measure, staff be relocated as necessary within the Bank Street and Broomknoll Street premises to allow the three Airdrie Area Housing Teams to be located at Broomknoll Street.

Decided:

- (1) that option 3 be approved in principle, at an estimated cost for building works of £502,700 on the proviso that the disabled access/parking proposals could be achieved, with the outcome reported to a future Committee;
- (2) that in the event that Option 3 cannot be progressed for the reasons outlined at Section 3.4 of the report, Option 2 be favoured and a further report submitted to a future Committee on the matter;
- (3) that the interim arrangements as detailed within the report be approved, and
- (4) that the report be remitted to the Finance and Social Work Committees for information.

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCILREPORTAGENDA ITEM No. **4**AGENDA ITEM NO.

TO:	HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICES COMMITTEE	SUBJECT: AREA OFFICE ACCOMMODATION - AIRDRIE
FROM:	DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICES	
DATE: 24 August, 2000	TMcK/CH/JAC	

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress of the merger of the former Airdrie North and South Area Housing Offices.
- 1.2. Reference is made to the report of 3 June, 1999 regarding the Housing and Property Services Departmental Establishment Review, which was approved by the Housing and Property Services Committee on 16 June, 1999.
- 1.3. Members will recall the specific reference contained within that report to the requirement for further consideration to be given to the location of the Airdrie Area Housing Office, as a consequence of the merger of the former Airdrie North and Airdrie South Area Housing Offices.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Since the merger was approved, the 4 Area Housing Teams have continued to operate from their existing respective premises:- 2 teams at Bank Street, 1 team at Broomknoll Street, and 1 team at the Chapelhall Sub-Office serving Chapelhall, Salsburgh, Calderbank and Gartness.
The Area Manager, 2 Assistant Managers and the majority of the Administration Team are now located at Broomknoll Street.
- 2.2. This situation is of course less than satisfactory, and from a management/operational viewpoint severe difficulties are being experienced in the day to day running of the offices. These difficulties are of course having an adverse effect upon Area Office performance, and service delivery. Moreover the existing accommodation arrangements as detailed at Appendix 1, do nothing to promote the "new" management arrangements with many service users still unaware of the merger which took place more than 12 months ago.

A further consideration is the duplication of resources and associated costs of running what is effectively 2 Area Offices and this clearly does not represent value for money.

- 2.3. In light of the above it is recognised that urgent steps are required to address the

situation, by means of identifying a suitable premises within Airdrie town centre, which will accommodate the 3 Area Housing Teams with the 4th team remaining at Chapelhall Sub-Office for the time being, with a review taking place and reported to Committee at a future date.

- 2.4 In addition and in line with the Council's commitment to the "One Stop Shop" approach it was considered appropriate to take this opportunity to explore the possibility of identifying accommodation which could accommodate a combination of Departmental Services.
- 2.5 To this end a number of options have been examined, these options with indicative costs are detailed at Appendix 2.

3 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 In consideration of the available options it should be noted that neither of the 2 existing Area Offices at Bank Street and Broomknoll Street is adequate in size to accommodate the merger of the Airdrie North and South Staff/Services.

- 3.2 Option 1 would involve the provision of an extension to the rear of the existing premises at Broomknoll Street. It must be said at this stage however that the Broomknoll Street premises is not ideal, with the circulation routes within the building being narrow and tortuous, also separation from the main reception area could present severe difficulties in achieving an open plan lay-out to accommodate a "team working" environment and efficient usage of floor space. The costs detailed at Appendix 2 are indicative only and given the difficulties outlined in relation to the existing internal lay-out of the building these may increase considerably as the project is developed, moreover it may not be possible in construction terms to achieve the desired lay-out.

The Bank Street premises would not be required in terms of this option and its future use would be considered under the Council's Property Utilisation Strategy.

- 3.3 Option 2 would bring all Finance functions - Municipal Bank, Council Tax Payment and Enquiries under the one roof at Bank Street, which has and continues to be the most popular location with service users, given its prime town centre location.

The remainder of the services - Housing Services and Repairs/ Maintenance, Housing and Council Tax Benefits, with a facility for Council Tax Account enquiries, could be located at Broomknoll Street. This option however would still require significant alterations to the premises at Broomknoll Street and would therefore be subject to the same difficulties as Option 1

The premises at Bank Street would also require significant works to the ground floor to increase/upgrade the accommodation for the Municipal Bank.

- 3.4 Arising out of these options a third option, that of alternative accommodation, has been considered.

The Council currently leases the property at Coats House Airdrie which is occupied by the Airdrie Area Social Work Team, and following preliminary examination of the accommodation it has been established that there is scope to locate additional services - Housing Services/Repairs and Maintenance, Housing and Council Tax Benefits and a Council Tax Account enquiry facility within the premises, albeit operational space requirements require to be the subject of further detailed discussion between the Housing and Property Services and Social Work Departments.

This could be achieved by utilising the basement area which is currently used as a means of disabled access to the building with parking provision for the disabled. This

facility would of course require to be preserved, and enquiries are currently being made with the owners of the property and the Department of Planning and Environment regarding proposals to create an alternative disabled access and relocate disabled parking provision externally at the rear of the property. The owners consent is of course essential to the progression of Option 3. In the event Option 3 is approved the future use of the Broomknoll Street premises would be considered under the Council's Property Utilisation Strategy.

Albeit the Finance functions cannot be accommodated at Coats House, as stated in Option 2, these services could be centralised at Bank Street and given the high level of usage of the existing Municipal Bank facility at Bank Street as detailed at Appendix 3, this would seem to be in line with the needs/wishes of service users..

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Provision has been made within the Capital Programme 2000/01 to commence this project, indicative costs are attached within Appendix 2 these would of course require to be finalised as the project progresses.

5 SUMMARY

- 5.1 The provision of Housing and Social Work Services under one roof would present the opportunity for future staff/service development and consequently improve the quality of service delivery to customers, and for this reason Option 3 is favoured, providing of course the proposals for disabled access/parking facilities are approved.

- 5.2 Each of the 3 options has been analysed against a basic criteria as detailed at Appendix 2 to determine which option would represent the most suitable solution to the current service delivery difficulties being experienced by the Airdrie Area Housing Team, and at the same time afford the opportunity for future staff/service development in conjunction with the Social Work Department.

- 5.3 In the event Option 3 cannot be progressed for the reason outlined at Section 3.4, then Option 2 would be favoured.

- 5.4 Both options would of course require to be the subject of further detailed examination/discussion, to ensure that the best possible outcome is achieved to meet the needs of staff and service users.

- 5.5 Given the timescale which could ensue, and to address the immediate service delivery difficulties, it is proposed as an interim measure, to relocate staff as necessary within the Bank Street and Broomknoll Street premises, to allow the 3 Airdrie Area Housing Teams to be located at Broomknoll Street

This would also present the opportunity to locate all Housing/Council Tax Benefit Staff, who are currently split between Bank Street and Broomknoll Street, into one of the 2 offices.

Given the current difficulties being experienced with Housing Benefit processing, centralisation of Staff would make a significant impact on the performance of the Benefit Team.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that Committee

- (i) Approve in principal Option 3, on the proviso that the disabled access/parking proposals can be achieved/approved with the outcome of this reported to Committee at a future date.
- (ii) Approve the interim arrangements detailed at Section 5.5 of this report.



T. McKENZIE
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICES

APPENDIX 1

EXISTING SERVICE PROVISION ARRANGEMENTS

LOCATION	SERVICES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE	AREAS SERVED
Bank Street, Airdrie former Airdrie North Area Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services/Repairs and Maintenance • Housing/Council Tax Benefits • Municipal Bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former Airdrie North area and villages • Former Airdrie North area and villages • Available to anyone wishing to use
Broomknoll Street, Airdrie former Airdrie South Area Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services/Repairs and Maintenance • Housing/Council Tax Benefits • Municipal Bank • Council Tax Account Enquiry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former Airdrie South Area (Town only) • Former Airdrie South Area including Chapelhall, Salsburgh, Gartness and Calderbank • Available to anyone wishing to use • Airdrie and surrounding villages
Chapelhall Sub-Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services/Repairs and Maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapelhall, Salsburgh, Calderbank, Gartness
Coats House Airdrie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airdrie Area Social Work Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airdrie and surrounding villages

APPENDIX 2

OPTIONS EXAMINED

OPTION	APPROXIMATE COST	ANALYSIS AGAINST CRITERIA *			
		1	2	3	4
1. All Housing and Finance Services delivered from Broomknoll Street. Bank Street premises not required	£265,000 - Building costs only	✓	✗	✗	✓
2. All Finance Services delivered from Bank Street. All Housing Services delivered from Broomknoll Street with Council Tax Account Enquiry Facility	£307,000 – Building costs only	✓	✓	✗	✓
3. All Finance Services delivered from Bank Street. All Housing and Social Work Services and Council Tax Account Enquiry Service delivered from Coats House Broomknoll Street premises not required	£502,700 – Building Costs only	✓	✓	✓	✓

* CRITERIA:

1. Improved Performance and Service Delivery
2. Meets needs of Service Users and Staff.
3. Affords opportunity for future Staff Service Development in line with Commitment to "One Stop Shop" approach
4. Represents Value for Money.

APPENDIX 3

CASH COLLECTION/MUNICIPAL BANK

SAMPLE TRANSACTION DETAILS

	Bank Street	%	Broomknoll Street 4 Teller Points	%
Week Ending 27/02/00	2,462	56%	1,861	44%
Week Ending 09/04/00	1,514	59%	1,020	41%