

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Personnel Policy**REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF INCREASED BUDGET FOR THE ALTERATION OF THE GROUND FLOOR RECEPTION AREA OF THE COUNCIL OFFICES****1. Purpose of report**

This matter relates to ground floor refurbishment work needed to the reception area at the Council's offices and upgrades to the disabled toilet facilities in the office on the ground, first and second floors.

The purpose of the report is to provide Cabinet more detail of the proposed alterations to the ground floor reception area, to request an increase to the budget to carry out alterations to the ground floor reception area to the Council Offices and the disabled toilet facilities throughout the building.

By way of background, the Council approved a budget of £100,000 (£90,000 plus £10,000 against salaries) in 2020/21 to refurbish the ground floor office reception area but without significant detail. Some of this budget has been spent for redecoration and due to increased materials and labour costs since the original approval we are seeking approval to increase the budget to £150,000 based upon the proposals.

In addition, to regularise matters, we are seeking approval for works in the process of being carried out to the ground, first and second floor disabled facilities (estimated £10,000).

2. Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to RESOLVE that:

- 1. The proposed alterations to the Council Offices Reception alterations, including a revised total budget of £150,000, be approved in principle, subject to final scheme design and tender costs. The additional budget of £51,550 required in the 2022/23 capital programme is to be funded from prudential borrowing.**
- 2. The alterations to the disabled facilities at the Council Offices at a capital cost of £10,000 is approved, to be funded from General Fund Capital Contingencies 2022/23.**

3. Detail

Attached at Appendix 1 is a design brief, Appendix 2, a layout, Appendix 3, a series of illustrations to show the appearance of the proposals and Appendix 4, a breakdown of costs.

The current ground floor reception area, which provides access for staff, and visitors to the Council, Police and Citizens Advice Bureau is in need of refurbishment. The floor finishes are poor and there is a need to reconfigure meeting room space to provide additional facilities. There is also a need to improve the “front of house” experience that meets the needs of the customer and enables people to be properly directed to their destination or be met by their host. The original reception was moved as a result of COVID-19, to the current location which was the former cash office. It provided security and screening for staff but suffers from lack of visibility and a more open facility for visitors.

The need for safety of staff is very important and this has been a factor in the design now proposed. The scheme that has been proposed provides a new semi- circular reception desk with a lower disabled area as illustrated. From a security point of view, the desk is wide so that receptionists are set back from the customer however the layout allows for escape into a secure space if the staff feel threatened. Now that COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted it is proposed that there will be no screens however it is proposed that screens will be ordered at the same so that in the event of another pandemic or other event requiring additional security, they can be installed promptly when required.

The positioning of the reception desk is important as it is more evident when customers enter the building. This enables the Council to provide additional meeting rooms of varying size on the ground floor for visitor/community group meetings. The Council have a number of community groups providing important support to vulnerable groups needing this type of space and the Council are keen to support where possible.

The subdivision of the ground floor has also been introduced by use of moveable furniture and also floor finishes. Floor finishes must be easily cleaned and robust and so generally hard finishes using vinyl have been proposed. The reason for removable furniture is so that the overflow area used for the public to view Council meetings can be accommodated. The current arrangements provide screens, hearing loop etc. and so this avoids substantial reconfiguration.

Externally the proposal is to provide an up to date appearance and inviting entrance.

The original budget agreed in 2020/21 was in the sum of £100,000. Since this was agreed costs have increased substantially and at appendix 4 the draft costs schedule totals £150,000 which includes a 10% contingency.

In summary since COVID-19, the use of the ground floor by the public has changed and the Council have already recognised the principle of upgrading the ground floor reception area. The Asset Management team have therefore looked at solutions to provide an attractive, functional reception area to incorporate a new reception desk with disabled access, new floor finishes, and additional meeting rooms. In addition, the proposals look to improve the access and external features at the “front of house”.

In addition, refurbishment works were needed to the second floor disabled toilets and minor upgrades to the ground and first floor disabled facilities were also required, to allow for improved facilities for people with colostomy bags. The previous arrangements were undignified and inappropriate. The Council’s Aids & Adaptations officer was able to provide a specification of works for the refurbishment and competitive prices were obtained. An opportunity arose for works to the second floor to start promptly otherwise they would not commence until at least February 2023. After consideration with GMT approval to have the work carried out was agreed and this work is now approaching completion. This request is therefore seeking to regularise the position with a retrospective approval from Cabinet.

4. Financial Implications

The comments of the Head of Finance Services were as follows:

The Council approved a budget of £100,000 (including £10,000 capital salaries) in 2020/21 to refurbish the ground floor office reception area. This work was delayed by the pandemic with the unspent budget being rolled forward into the 2022/23 capital programme at £98,450. An increased budget of £150,000 has now been requested to complete the works. The additional £51,550 required would have to be financed from prudential borrowing with the subsequent cost of borrowing being added to future years General Fund revenue budgets.

The capital cost of the urgent alterations required to the disabled facilities at the Council Offices, as set out in the report, is £10,000. It is proposed that this capital costs are funded from General Fund Capital Contingencies in 2022/23 of which sufficient balance is available.

5. Legal Implications

The comments from the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal Services were as follows:

Whilst there are direct legal implications arising from this report, there will be procurement implications once the project starts and advice will be taken from the Council’s procurement as required

6. Human Resources Implications

Consideration should be made for any employees with disabilities or who require any reasonable adjustments, including appropriate DSE assessments once the new working area is built.

7. Union Comments

The new Reception area plans make it look very welcoming and provide areas to be rented out to generate income as well as areas for employees to meet with the public. We would assume that these spaces would have the relevant health and safety risk assessments and panic buttons as required.

After discussing the proposals with our members in Customer Services, they are happy with the plans on the whole. They raised a concern about the location of the Reception desk and the planned escape route. However, we understand that this is being addressed. They have also requested that they are able to use the office behind the Reception desk as a means of escape, and for general office items such as the photocopier, leaflets etc. This will leave more space in the Reception desk area.

Another concern they raised was about tea/coffee making facilities and a kitchen area. The only kitchen available on the plan is the one next to the Council Chamber, which would not always be practical to use as they would need to walk through the Council Chamber to access it.

It is positive to see that the new Reception area has been future-proofed by enabling the use of screens if required.

8. Equality Impact Assessment

Not applicable

9. Background Papers

Nil