

# CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL

Report to:-

THE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Date of Meeting:-

Agenda Item No:-

15(a)(i)

Public

Operational

Delegated: Yes

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## Accompanying Comments and Statements

Required

Included

Environmental Impact Statement:

N/a

Corporate Management Team Comments:

N/a

Financial Comments:

N/a

Legal Comments:

N/a

Personnel Comments:

N/a

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Title:-

**ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS – REVENUES &  
BENEFITS OFFICE**

Report of:-

Head of Commercial & Technical Services

Report reference:-

CTS 22/03

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## Summary:-

At the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2003, the Head of Commercial & Technical Services was requested to review the situation in the existing Revenues and Benefits Office. This related to a request to carry forward funding to introduce air conditioning. The key issue is not the need for improvement to the environmental conditions in this office, but the need to ensure any works are co-ordinated into the overall review of accommodation on the Ground floor which is currently under way.

## Recommendations:-

It is recommended that:

- a. Members re-endorse their decision to support the carry forward request in respect of uncommitted expenditure Category C made on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 2003, report reference RB12/03. With regard to the installation of the air conditioning within the Benefits Offices.

**Note:** in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

- b. Members support such installation with the proviso that the chosen equipment be such that it must be compatible with any future systems which may be introduced throughout the ground floor in the following years should the proposed re-organisation of the ground floor take place.
- c. The effects of installation be monitored closely to assess the "real benefits" in relation to anticipated decreases in sickness absence statistics within this business unit currently at a level of 7% (1150 working days lost 2002/2003).
- d. Members support the installation in the knowledge that the equipment will be available to whoever may use this office in the future, should its use be reallocated to another business unit after any proposed re-organisation of the ground floor.

**M Battersby**

**Head of Commercial & Technical Services**

Contact Officer Arup Mahji

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## **1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS**

- 1.1 The levels of sickness absence within the Revenues and Benefits is currently 7% (2002/2003) which equates to 1150 sick days taken. This is one of the highest sickness rates within the council and well outside the government targets.
- 1.2 On record employees have made numerous complaints to managers that the air quality is poor and that excessive temperatures within the benefits office are very difficult to work in and have been a contributory factor to ill health.
- 1.3 The issue of excessive temperatures are compounded by the under floor pipe work, which exits in the benefits office and heating fans within the ceiling of the benefits office.
- 1.4 The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulation 1992 requires the workplace to be ventilated by a sufficient quantity of fresh or purified air (reg. 6) and that a reasonable temperature during working hours is maintained with a minimum temperature of 16°C (reg. 7). There is no current upper limit on temperatures, though the government are reviewing the stated regulations in 2004 with a view to setting, where possible, upper limits on reasonable working temperatures.
- 1.5 The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 also identifies the need for users to work in suitable conditions. In the past dry eye syndrome, symptomatic of poor air quality and reduced airflow have tried to be alleviated by the introduction of humidifiers within the benefits office.
- 1.6 Temporary options have been explored to alleviate the lack of airflow and relatively high temperatures on occasions and these include the purchase of a number of chiller units to be sited within the benefits office. This option would necessitate the temporary introduction of building measures to allow ducting to external "fresh air" supplies. Chiller units without this ducting would effectively lead to cooler air within the Benefits office but the non-compliance with regard to legislation as a result of the non-effective re-circulation of "stale air". Experts were called in who assessed the number and cost of hiring mobile temporary units. They concluded that it would not be cost effective and that as many as 10 units may be required. This would cost at least £500 per month with a fixed minimum annual term contract, as well as the cost of the construction of suitable ducting holes to allow for the introduction of "fresh air" to supply all of these units. This was deemed as not a reasonably practicable measure and would not present best value in this situation.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 To allow the Council to fulfil its health and safety obligation to its employees within the benefits offices the installation of air conditioning would be seen as a reasonably practicable measure. It would demonstrate our commitment to improve working conditions and provide an excellent opportunity to assess such measures on the rates of sickness / absence.
- 2.2 Providing that the equipment provided is such that it is compatible with future air conditioning installations, which may be introduced as a result of the reorganisation of the ground floor there should be very few added cost implications.
- 2.3 Successful implementation and reduction in sickness absence will strengthen the case for future long-term consideration of air conditioning throughout the Civic Centre.
- 2.4 Short-term solutions may not provide best value or be compliant with current legislative requirements.

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