



Report to Partnership Meeting 8 November 2013

PARTNERSHIP

Proposed Office Relocation

PURPOSE OF REPORT

For the Partnership Board to consider a proposal to relocate from the existing main office site at Building 25, Inverness Airport to a location on Ardross Terrace in central Inverness.

BACKGROUND

HITRANS originally located at Building 25, Inverness Airport in January 2006. Originally the Partnership took the entire office space and meeting room covering a total of 136 sq metres. The rent rate for this building was originally set at £12,500 per annum. After a rental review proposed an increase in annual rent to £20,000 it was agreed to relinquish the meeting room and a single office within the building to secure a rent reduction to £9,720 per annum effective from January 2009. The reduced office space amounts to 54 sq metres.

In terms of the staff head count at the time this made little impact on office space with the three staff members in the office largely unaffected in terms of their day to day office activities. However this meant the capacity for hot desking by colleagues based in the Lairg office and Partnership Advisors was removed. It also meant a significant increase in meeting costs as the Partnership has had to rely on hiring meeting rooms for the majority of our external engagement events and all internal / stakeholder meetings since this time.

INCREASED PRESSURE ON OFFICE SPACE

The recent increase in head count within the HITRANS team has placed increased pressure on the existing office space. This has taken the establishment based at the Inverness office up to 4 permanent members of staff which was our staffing level prior to the office space reduction at Building 25. In addition to this we have made a short term appointment for the smart ticketing consultant who will be based out of the office for the next 11 months. Officers believe the space will be congested and while we have policies in place for hot desking and remote working the existing space will make for a sub optimal working environment. Officers have therefore taken the opportunity to investigate alternative office options including whether it would be possible to work with key stakeholders/partners on an office share or taking up vacant offices owned by partner Councils.

In considering possible locations all staff have been consulted, including those remotely based staff at Lairg. It has been agreed that on balance a move to central Inverness would be the best location for the HITRANS office. The reasons for this are:

- 3 of the 4 permanent staff will have easier access to the office as a result of their residential locations.
- Central Inverness will allow staff based Lairg to use the office space when transiting through Inverness or while on other business in Inverness.
- A central Inverness location will allow staff members to use active travel to work and improves public transport connectivity for staff travel.
- Improved access for Lairg staff will improve team cohesion which is already strong but would benefit from more regular contact among team members.
- A central Inverness location will allow Members and Advisors to use HITRANS office space and meet with HITRANS team members when they are in Inverness for other business.
- A central Inverness location will be more convenient for the smart ticketing consultant.
- A central Inverness location will be more convenient and accessible to key stakeholders headquartered in Inverness and its environs and travelling to meet HITRANS officers from the central belt.

On balance it was felt that there was sufficient need to consider alternative locations and in doing so that there may be an opportunity to secure better value than our existing office accommodation. It was agreed that the Partnership Manager would investigate options for office space that would meet our physical requirements and would ideally include a meeting room. In total 6 office sites were considered (both commercial and Highland Council premises).

The preferred option identified is at Ardross Terrace alongside the River Ness. This location is less than a 10 minute walk from Inverness Bus and Rail Stations. The second floor space is split into two office suites. The larger of which includes a meeting room and would be available at an annual rent of £9,000. There might be some room for negotiation on this but it would still be a lower rent rate than our existing office space at Building 25. The value for money would be a lot better as the Ardross Terrace office extends to 105 sq metres which will nearly double our office space. A further positive with this space is that Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) are interested in the second suite of offices and they would be prepared to share the cost of the meeting room with HITRANS. This should take the cost of the office accommodation down to no more than £8,500 (should the SCDI opportunity be realised) realising a minimum £1,720 saving on our annual rent. Co-locating with SCDI would allow us to build on the excellent relationship our organisations enjoy and could help both organisations improve our resilience in practical terms such as providing mutual telephone cover in the event of leave or other staff absence.

In considering impacts of an office move we would look to mitigate against any negative impacts. These have been considered and while they are minor issues the following action would need to be taken:

- Telephone – Our main office number is 01667 460464. This is a Nairn area code. We would look to retain this number and will investigate whether the introduction of a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system can allow us to retain this number and deliver a lower cost phone service than standard lines.
- Mail – A mail redirect service would be set up for the transition period and all stakeholders in our contact database would be sent details of the address change.

- Stationery – The HITRANS letter-headed stationery does not include the office address so this can be altered on the electronic letter template. The only anticipated stationery cost will be to staff business cards for the two Partnership Managers and Director. The Active Travel Project Officer business cards have not been ordered yet pending consideration of the office location.
- Staff travel – Daily travel access will be improved for 3 of the 4 permanent staff members at Building 25 by moving to central Inverness. However one member of staff will be adversely affected with their commute increasing from a 15 mile round trip to a 32 mile round trip. Despite this all staff are supportive of the proposed move but consideration should be given to minimising cost and impact for all staff through application of the flexible working scheme and other measures to be discussed by the Director the affected staff member.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked:

1. To consider the proposal to relocate from the Inverness Airport office to a new location at Ardross Terrace where we would intend to co-locate on a single office floor with the Scottish Council for Development and Industry.
2. If agreeable to approve the proposal to relocate the main HITRANS office site to Ardross Terrace, Inverness.
3. If Members approve the office relocation they are asked to delegate to the Director to manage the relocation process including staff relations.

Risk	impact	Comment
RTS delivery	-	No impact on RTS delivery.
Policy	√	No impact on policy but the central location will make it easier for Members to engage with officers in the application of policy.
Financial	√	The relocation will deliver an annual rent saving and will reduce the Partnership's meeting expenses.
Equality	-	The office will be centrally located however it is not any more accessible than the existing office.

Report by: Ranald Robertson
Designation: Partnership Director
Date: 29th October 2013