

Issues and Conclusions

Provision for People with Disabilities

3.1 DFAT's submission stated that:

With some exceptions the existing Chancery makes provision for people with disabilities...[and] Areas of deficiency will be rectified as part of the mid-life upgrade and new fit-out.¹

3.2 At the public hearing, the Committee asked DFAT to outline the current deficiencies and to explain how the new fit-out would overcome them.

3.3 DFAT informed the Committee that currently, neither the lifts nor the toilet facilities conform to modern requirements. In addition, the door to the consular interview room is not wide enough to admit a wheelchair.² DFAT added that it intends to install a unisex disabled toilet on the second floor, and that the upgrade would remedy all other impediments to access.³

1 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 21.1

2 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 3

3 *ibid*

Removal of Hazardous Materials

- 3.4 The DFAT submission referred to the need to remove hazardous materials from the current building.⁴
- 3.5 At the hearing, the Committee inquired about the nature of this hazardous material and asked what safety measures would be put in place to ensure its safe removal.
- 3.6 DFAT explained that asbestos sheeting had been used externally in the construction of the building's eaves and there was a need to remove and replace this sheeting with nonhazardous material. DFAT assured the Committee that the major tenderer will be required to engage an appropriately qualified and licensed person to undertake these works to the highest safety standards.⁵

Other Options and Reasons for Preferred Option

- 3.7 DFAT's submission indicated that GHD Pty Ltd had supplied it with three accommodation options for consideration in relation to the Chancery upgrade project.⁶
- 3.8 The Committee was interested to learn more about these three options and why the selected option represented the best choice.⁷
- 3.9 The Department said that the final three options examined whether using the first floor, the second floor, or a combination of both, would be more appropriate to meet the accommodation requirements of DFAT and Defence, with a view to consolidating the fit-out as much as possible.⁸ DFAT outlined why consolidation of the fit-out on the second floor was the more attractive option. Essentially:
- ...consolidating on the second floor, which was the original secure floor...is the safest and the most remote from threat and it has the square metres that are required.⁹
- 3.10 The Committee requested that DFAT provide it with a copy of the GHD Pty Ltd report into the accommodation options.¹⁰ The relevant

4 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 12.1

5 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 3

6 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 2.7

7 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 4

8 *ibid*

9 *ibid*

10 *ibid*, page 9

details from that report were supplied subsequent to the public hearing.

Security Provisions

- 3.11 According to DFAT's submission, the Department had reviewed the Chancery's security arrangements and was developing them in conjunction with DFAT's Diplomatic Security Branch (DSB).¹¹
- 3.12 Without revealing confidential information, the Committee wished to know what broad measures the Department will take to ensure the security of staff working in the building, and why the preferred option represented better security.
- 3.13 DFAT told the Committee that the Chancery already had a number of specialist security measures in place and that one of the advantages of the selected option was that these would remain in situ – the other options would have required replication of those features on different floors.¹² The new fit-out will enhance security with a number of additional features, including more rigorous access arrangements at the main entrance to the High Commission. A DFAT representative stated that:

“We will be incorporating some specialist features, which I will not go into, but some of the more common elements we will be putting into the area are a metal detector and some other control features to improve entry to the building. We will also be handling reception arrangements in a more secure manner.”¹³

Base Building Costs

- 3.14 At an earlier confidential briefing, the Committee asked DFAT a number of questions in relation to the project costs. The Committee was particularly interested to learn how the total figure for the base building works component had been calculated. The Committee requested that the Department supply it with a breakdown of that lump sum figure.

11 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 25.1

12 Appendix D, Submission No. 1, page 5

13 *ibid*

- 3.15 DFAT later provided the Committee with a detailed list of the line items comprising the base building part of the works.

Space

- 3.16 The Committee wanted to know whether there was sufficient space for the High Commission staff to continue working in the building whilst the refurbishments took place or if they would need to be relocated for the duration of the works. The Department confirmed that there was enough room to stage the works as it would
...be moving staff out of their existing offices, refurbishing those offices and then moving staff back in.¹⁴
- 3.17 The Committee commented that once the fit-out had been completed, there would be quite a bit of spare space in the building. DFAT agreed that that was the case and noted that this allowed for additional expansion.¹⁵

Usage of the First Floor

- 3.18 DFAT's evidence stated that the first floor of the existing Chancery will be refurbished as an office shell suitable for a future tenancy fit-out, or moth-balled to minimise energy and building management costs.¹⁶
- 3.19 At the hearing, the Committee asked the Department to clarify its position on the future usage or possible usage of the first floor.
- 3.20 DFAT reiterated that the activities of the High Commission will be consolidated primarily on the second and ground floors.

The first floor will be refurbished to just a shell condition and sealed off. It is available for future expansion should other government agencies require representation in the capital, Wellington. We are not able to... make it available for commercial use under the terms of the diplomatic lease that we hold on the site. So we are restricted to use for future expansion by agencies.¹⁷

14 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 6

15 *ibid*

16 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 12.3

17 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 6

Seismic Building Codes

- 3.21 Given the seismic activity that occurs in the Wellington region, the Committee was interested to learn what measures the Department had taken to ensure that the building meets the appropriate Australian or New Zealand standards in this regard.
- 3.22 DFAT told the Committee that the New Zealand codes were applicable for the obvious reason that that country has significant earthquakes and Australia does not. The Department said that its consultants, GHD Pty Ltd, had undertaken a detailed structural audit of the building in 2002 and that this had included an examination of the differences, if any, between the building's original earthquake code (NZS 1900 Chapter 8 1965) and the current code (NZS 4203: 1992). GHD Pty Ltd had determined that the differences were not significant and therefore the building does not require strengthening.¹⁸
- 3.23 The Committee asked the Department to elaborate on the differences between the codes and whether they were significant.
- 3.24 DFAT replied that the differences were fairly technical but were outlined in some detail in GHD Pty Ltd's 2002 report. The Department undertook to supply the Committee with that material.¹⁹
- 3.25 Subsequent to the hearing, DFAT provided the Committee with information on the differences between the original and subsequent earthquake codes, and compliance with current standards.

Energy Efficiency

- 3.26 The main submission outlines a range of energy conservation measures which DFAT intends to incorporate into the proposed fit-out.²⁰
- 3.27 At the hearing, the Committee enquired whether the Department had consulted with the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO) to ensure that energy efficiency will be a priority in the refurbished building.

18 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 7

19 *ibid*, page 8

20 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 19.2

- 3.28 DFAT assured the Committee that, while it had not consulted with the AGO, energy conservation has been given considerable emphasis in this fit-out.²¹
- 3.29 The Department described a range of energy saving measures which it intends to implement. These include the installation of greenhouse gas compliant chillers, water saving features such as control flow devices, intelligent lighting and a state-of-the-art building management system for the buildings' services.²² Further efficiency will be achieved through glazing the voids between the ground and first floors, subdivision of the large ground floor area so that the main lobby can be isolated and heated or cooled separately, moth-balling the first floor, and construction of a terrace enclosure to act as an additional barrier to thermal gain and loss from the harbour side.²³ The Department noted that, with these measures, it expects to save 20 per cent of the current expenditure on energy costs.²⁴

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the proposed mid-life upgrade of existing Chancery at the Australian High Commission, Wellington, New Zealand, proceed at the estimated cost of \$9.309 million.

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Chair

11 August 2004

21 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 8

22 *ibid*

23 *ibid*

24 *ibid*