

# Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 19 May 2005

Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Knapman

Item: 12 (a)

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## 1. SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES - 2005/06

### Recommending:

(1) That a supplementary DDF estimate of £8,300 be approved in order to meet the cost of accommodation works to the Willingale Road Allotments, Loughton requested by the Allotment Association;

(2) That a supplementary CSB estimate of £6,600 be approved for the provision of a Strategic Environmental Assessment Monitoring and Assessment Service by Essex County Council;

(3) That a supplementary capital estimate of £20,000 be approved for the removal of asbestos insulation board and subsequent reinstatement in parts of the Conder building and the former boiler room under 323 High Street House; and

(4) That a Supplementary DDF estimate of £10,400 be approved to meet the cost of an Audit Commission/Standards Board Ethical Governance Audit toolkit and facilitated workshop.

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### Willingale Road Allotments, Loughton

- 1.1 The Cabinet has agreed to the transfer of the allotment land at Willingale Road, Loughton to Loughton Town Council.
- 1.2 Part of the land being transferred is subject to a covenant requiring that the land shall not be used for any purpose other than allotments and a covenant on another area requires that it shall not be used for any purpose other than urban open space.
- 1.3 Part of the land to be used as urban open space is currently let to the Debden Horticultural and Allotment Association and used as allotment land. Discussions have taken place with the Allotment Association to agree the works that the District Council would need to carry out in order to permit the relocation of the allotments.
- 1.4 The land has already been cleared and ploughed in order to provide a cultivated surface. However, in addition the Allotment Association has requested that the site should be fully prepared and the individual plots made ready for occupation.
- 1.5 The further works required are:
  - (a) preparation of paths and allotment plots - £3,200.
  - (b) reinstatement of fencing on southern site boundary - £1,000.

- (c) reinstatement of wooden sheds - £3,000.
- (d) contingency fund 15% - £1,080.

**Total:           £8,280.**

- 1.6 It is considered that the District Council should undertake these additional works at its expense in order to facilitate the transfer of the site to the Town Council on the agreed terms. The alternative would be for the District Council to take legal action against the Allotment Association to obtain possession of the site. However, Court proceedings could be protracted and expensive leading to further delay in the transfer of the land to the Town Council.

### **Essex County Council Strategic Environmental Assessment Monitoring and Assessment Service**

- 1.7 In consultation with other local and district councils, it has been established that a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is required, by virtue of an EC directive, for any plans and programmes which are likely to have an impact upon the environment.
- 1.8 The County Council has proposed that it undertakes the work required to identify and monitor baseline environmental conditions in partnership with individual districts and boroughs. The County Council already holds a considerable proportion of the required information and its collation and analysis is already an on-going process.
- 1.9 The County Council estimates that, if all councils, including the two unitary authorities, subscribe to the proposed service, annual costs will be £5,703. If only district and borough councils subscribe, the cost will be £6,579 per annum.
- 1.10 The County Council has much of the needed expertise and long-established relations with other relevant organisations in order to ensure that an adequate and up-to-date environmental baseline can be established. It is unlikely that the requirements of this new process can be met from within existing District Council resources and, in any event, a degree of impartiality as far as assessment is concerned would be advantageous.

### **Civic Offices Asbestos Removal Works**

- 1.11 The presence of asbestos content in wall panels covering boxed sections, which extend around the outer walls on all floors of the Conder building, has been known for sometime and there is an ongoing programme of removal and replacement of the contaminated panels. The final few panels will be replaced during the current financial year and the cost of this work has been contained within the annual maintenance budget.
- 1.12 During the latter part of 2004, whilst a refurbishment project was underway on the second floor of the Conder building, further asbestos was discovered in the linings of the upright steel columns of the building structure. An immediate embargo was placed on carrying out further works anywhere in the Conder building and a specialist company was employed to carry out a full survey of the building in order to ascertain the full extent of the problem.

- 1.13 The report has been received and has identified asbestos content in other parts of the building. It should be emphasised that there is no immediate risk to staff or contractors. However, the Council does have a duty under the Control of Asbestos Works Regulations 2002 to manage the situation in order to prevent exposure to risk.
- 1.14 The embargo on works is holding up completion of two sets of accommodation moves which have ongoing implications for further accommodation moves and changes to day-to-day operational matters.
- 1.15 An estimate has been obtained to undertake remedial works in the areas of Planning and Building Control and ICT so that the outstanding accommodation moves can be completed. The estimate also includes for works to clean up the redundant boiler room under 323 High Street House as periodic access is still required to that area for inspecting and maintaining electrical services.
- 1.16 The supplementary estimate now sought will enable the delayed accommodation projects to be completed and allow time for a detailed strategy for dealing with the rest of the building to be developed and costed.

#### **Audit Commission - Audit and Inspection Plan - 2005/06**

- 1.17 The Committee on Standards in Public Life recently published its tenth report "Getting the balance right - Implementing Standards in Public Life".
- 1.18 One of the recommendations is that all local authorities should consider using the Audit Commission/Standards Board Ethical Governance Audit toolkit and facilitated workshop in order to self-access their arrangements for ensuring ethical standards.
- 1.19 As ethical governance has not been identified as a specific risk in this authority by the Audit Commission, this work will not be undertaken within the Audit Plan for 2005/06. However, the work can be undertaken as voluntary improvement work by the Commission at an additional cost.
- 1.20 The Standards Board for England has drawn attention to the significant benefits to councils of undertaking this work and the Council's Standards Committee supports the initiative. The Cabinet is also of the opinion that this work is well worthwhile as it will enable the Council to work out how well it is performing in maintaining high standards and identifying ways of improving performance.