

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 28 July 2005

Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Knapman

Item: 5(b)

1. SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES - 2005/06

Recommending:

- (1) That a supplementary capital estimate of £100,000 (or such other sum reported following evaluation of tenders) be approved to meet the cost of the removal of asbestos insulation board and re-instatement works in the remainder of the Conder building;**
 - (2) That a supplementary capital estimate of £40,000 be approved in order to fund improved security arrangements at North Weald Airfield;**
 - (3) That a CSB supplementary estimate of £22,020 be approved to finance the restructuring of the Benefits Division;**
 - (4) That a DDF supplementary estimate of up to £100,000 be approved to allow the introduction of a squad to tackle a backlog of planning applications;**
 - (5) That a supplementary capital estimate of up to £15,000 be approved in order to meet a 50% of the cost of heating refurbishment work at Waltham Abbey Sports Centre; and**
 - (6) To consider any supplementary estimate required in support of any changes to the collection of garden waste arising from the Cabinet consideration of the implementation of wheeled bins on 25 July 2005**
-

Civic Offices Asbestos Removal Works

- 1.1 At its meeting on 19 May 2005, the Council approved a capital supplementary estimate of £20,000 to enable the removal of some asbestos material in parts of the Conder building where building adaptations were required to facilitate surface restructurings. At that meeting the Council was also advised that a detailed strategy would be developed and costed for dealing with the remainder of the asbestos material in the building.
- 1.2 There is an ongoing requirement for regular maintenance, routine repairs and operational changes as well as further accommodation changes in relation to service restructurings within the Conder building. All of these works will be hampered by the measures required to comply with the Control of Asbestos Works Regulations 2002 if the asbestos is left in situ.

- 1.3 The Cabinet has been advised by Technical Officers and the Management Board that it would be preferable to remove completely all of the remaining asbestos material within the building.
- 1.4 While this will incur higher costs and entail a greater degree of disruption when the works are carried out, it will provide a final resolution to the problem.
- 1.5 In order to proceed with the necessary works, tenders have been invited using Construction Line in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule C7. The tender documents have stated that the award of a contract will be dependent on the approval of the required budget which will be in the order of £100,000. Officers are undertaking an evaluation of those tenders received and the results of the evaluation will be reported at the Council meeting.
- 1.6 The capital supplementary estimate will enable the required works to be undertaken during 2005/06.

North Weald Airfield - Improved Security

- 1.7 Currently the Council's Airfield Operations Team manage the security of the airfield during the hours that aviation activities take place. When the airfield is closed, the main entrance barrier is locked in the open position as some tenants have a legal right to 24-hour access. A CCTV system covers the airfield during this period but the images from the black and white cameras are of poor quality.
- 1.8 Recently there has been a steady rise in unauthorised persons and vehicles entering the site at times when the Airfield Operations Team is not present. Incidents such as: high speed driving and manoeuvring; petty theft; arson, some serious; vandalism; fly-tipping; and unauthorised commercial and leisure activities have taken place. A risk analysis has been undertaken and there is the potential that these uncontrolled activities could lead to the Council being liable for prosecution if it could be proved that it had not exercised its care of duty.
- 1.9 Clearly it is necessary for the Council to secure the site in order to attempt to deny unauthorised access. Security can be improved by installing a new "magnetic lock" at the front gate with a "dropped down" curtain to restrict cycles and motorcycles, along with a keypad and remote entry system with phone link. The existing barrier would be moved to the site exit, fitted with a "dropped down" curtain, with a magnetic induction loop in the ground to allow automatic exit. On the industrial part, an additional CCTV camera would be installed, with a microwave link to the Operations Office and the current recording facility upgraded. The impact of these measures would be assessed over a six-month period in order to determine whether additional security features are required.
- 1.10 A supplementary capital estimate of £40,000 is required to undertake these improved security works.

Financial Services - Benefits Division Restructuring

- 1.11 The existing structure of the Benefits Division has been in place for several years without any major changes. Benefits legislation has continued to change and it has been necessary to be flexible with work allocations in order to cope with the changes.
- 1.12 The structure needs to be revised in order to improve the performance to statistics for the Department for Work and Pensions and the Best Value Performance Indicators.

A high score also needs to be achieved when an assessment is carried out of the Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit Performance Standards as this contributes to the overall CPA score.

- 1.13 Without amendments to the structure, the performance will not improve and, as other Councils improve their performance, this Council's own performance will slide down the league tables.
- 1.14 The proposed restructuring can mainly be carried out within existing resources. However, it is proposed to create two new posts and to delete one existing post.
- 1.15 The new posts have been evaluated by the Job Evaluation Panel and have resulted in the following:
 - (a) a new Grade 7 post of an annual cost of £30,860;
 - (b) a Grade 6 post being changed to a Grade 8 at an annual cost of £8,800; and
 - (c) one full-time and one part-time Grade 2 post being changed to Grade 3 at an annual cost of £3,740.
- 1.16 Due to the timing and the need to recruit to these posts, only £22,020 will be required in 2005/06. However, there will be additional income from overpayment recovery (estimated to be about £25,000) and additional income from the Department for Work and Pensions through an increase in rewards for fraud investigation (estimated to be about £10,000).
- 1.17 A CSB supplementary estimate of £22,020 is sought for the current financial year in order to implement the proposed restructuring.

Development Control Performance

- 1.18 This Council's Development Control Performance compares unfavourably with that of other Councils, despite many efforts being made to improve the situation.
- 1.19 Steps have been undertaken to improve or sustain performance in the past, and a major upgrade of the ICT systems in Planning Services is well underway.
- 1.20 Planning Applications not determined in eight weeks are recognised as a "backlog" and the scale of the backlog has not changed much for some time.
- 1.21 It is now proposed to use a short-term squad to remove the backlog. The squad would sit with other professional staff and would concentrate on taking new cases through the Development Control process. This will allow existing staff to concentrate more on clearing work that they have already commenced.
- 1.22 To clear such a backlog entirely would need the ability to process the 135 outstanding cases plus the same percentage of new cases that arrive, and assumes the existing complement of staff stays the same. Experience suggests that removing the backlog would improve morale and lessen the need for calls checking on progress.
- 1.23 The proposal is to employ a team of four people, starting in September and to keep them in post for up to six months. This would be the equivalent of two person years of work. The costs will be in the region of £100,000 and the intention would be

secure moving a number of Best Value Performance Indicators into the upper quartile.

- 1.24 A DDF supplementary estimate of up to £100,000 is sought in order to make a real impact upon Planning Services which would be noticeable to customers and staff alike.

Waltham Abbey Sports Centre - New Roof and Heating Works

- 1.25 Waltham Abbey Sports Centre is a dual use Sports Centre, located adjacent to King Herald Secondary School. The facilities have been managed since 1977 under a 30-year joint use agreement entered into in 1977 with the school and Essex County Council.
- 1.26 The Centre was excluded from the tender process for alternative management due to the joint use arrangements. The Centre will continue, therefore, to be managed in-house until any new arrangements are put in place at the expiry of the Joint Use Agreement.
- 1.27 In March of this year, the General Manager of the Sports Centre was advised by the Bursar of the school that they had received confirmation from the County Council of a capital grant to replace the Sports Hall roof and undertake some heating refurbishment. Despite a number of requests for further information limited feedback was received until 31 May when the Council was advised that not only would the Sports Hall be out of use all summer but also that the County Council had an expectation, that the District Council would contribute to 50% of the cost of the works. The County Council's Consultants have estimated a cost of £120,000 for the roof replacement and £30,000 for the Sports Hall heating, which is currently defective.
- 1.28 The Joint Use Agreement places a duty on the County Council, except in the case of emergency or urgent works, to produce annual estimates for building and maintenance works, to be agreed in advance by the District Council. Whilst the District Council has been aware of the problems with the roof and heating in the Sports Hall, no prior consent was sought to enable any provision to be made within the District Council's capital programme for 2004/05.
- 1.29 The District Council is not required to contribute towards the cost of improvements to the centre although investment has been made in new community facilities and decoration in order to meet the expectations of non-school users.
- 1.30 The County Council is committed to undertaking the work irrespective of the level of funding from the District Council. However, although the District Council has not had the opportunity to consider the matter and make provision in its capital programme it does appear that the heating is beyond economic repair.
- 1.31 Accordingly, it is proposed that a contribution of 50% of the anticipated cost of the heating refurbishment work be made subject to a limit of £15,000. As there is no provision in the capital programme for this amount a supplementary capital estimate is sought.

Garden Waste Collection

- 1.32 The Cabinet will have re-considered the implementation of wheeled bins and as part of those considerations has been asked to consider performance of green waste collection.

- 1.33 The County has recently provided the 2004/05 outturn figures for recycling performance. The Council's performance, at 21.54% is disappointing and we have slipped from being a top performer in Essex to an average one.
- 1.34 One clear area of concern relates to the collection of garden waste, where a number of authorities who are performing well are collecting significantly higher percentages of garden waste. Our collection rate has fallen for the second successive year. Whilst the amount of garden waste collected is to a degree weather dependant, there was also criticism at the recent public meeting on waste collection of the Council's decision to charge for additional sacks.
- 1.35 Cabinet has been requested to consider a change in the charging regime and to report to Council in the event that a supplementary estimate is required to cover the budget deficit that would arise. Details of any request will be tabled at the meeting.