

Report to the Cabinet



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: C/044/2006-07.

Date of meeting: 4 September 2006.

Portfolio: Finance, Performance Management & Corporate Support Services.

Subject: Civic Offices Environmental Improvements – Comfort Cooling.

Officer contact for further information: Qasim Durrani (01992 – 56 4047).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 – 56 4470).

Recommendations:

(1) That, following the asbestos removal works, the current position implementing the Civic Offices comfort cooling works during 2006/2007 be noted;

(2) That further works to improve environmental conditions during the summer months by the provision of comfort cooling for the Civic Offices Complex be approved;

(3) That, subject to approval of recommendation (2), a DDF supplementary estimate for 2006/07 in the sum of £25,000 be recommended to the Council for approval; and

(4) That, in order to complete the comfort cooling works within the Civic Offices by March 2008, a DDF growth bid in the sum of £75,000 for 2007/08 be made.

Report:

1. The Cabinet has previously considered reports identifying the need to install comfort cooling into the Civic Offices Complex to combat excessive temperature and humidity levels during the summer months and approved works to be undertaken in the following areas:

- Planning Reception;
- Environmental Services;
- Research & Democratic Services;
- Electoral Services;
- Human Resources;
- Finance Services;
- Council Tax Office;
- Benefits Office;
- Housing Maintenance Office;
- Housing Needs Office;
- Housing Incomes Office; and
- The Southern side of legal and Admin Offices.

2. The Cabinet on 11 October 2004 gave approval for comfort cooling to be provided to the offices on the 2 floor of the Conder Building (Planning Control) and following completion of the asbestos removal works that took place between July 2005 and January 2006 tenders were invited and a contractor has been appointed with a view to starting the installation in August 2006.

3. The Safety Forum at their Meeting on 19 September 2003 discussed overheating and concluded that the whole of the Rear Extension were of particular concern with staff reporting temperatures of up to 90F during recent hot weather. The Minutes of the Safety Forum reflect this concern. Other offices that suffer similar temperatures are located in both Legal Services and Housing Services.
4. The cost of meeting all the aspirations of the Safety Forum is estimated to be in the region of £300,000 and it is requested that consideration is given to providing a budget of £75,000 to continue the previous annual works of installing comfort cooling the remaining areas, which are of concern to the Safety Forum, and other associated office area. A budget allocation of £75,000 for 2006/07 and 2007/08 would allow all the necessary comfort cooling works to be completed by March 2008. This would require a DDF supplementary estimate in the sum of £25,000 for the current year as £50,000 had already been budgeted for, and a £75,000 DDF growth bid for 2007/08.
5. Further to this it is proposed that competitive quotations are sought with the purpose of providing comfort cooling to offices in the Rear Extension and also offices in both Legal Services and Housing Services and for the works to be completed within the next two financial years.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

6. Management Board has, in the past, received robust representations about the high temperatures experienced and the affect this has had on staff performance from those Service areas that are located in parts of the Civic Offices Complex with no comfort cooling.
7. Over the past five years or so considerable progress has been made in providing comfort cooling on a priority basis and clearly there is an expectation by staff for this to continue. Therefore it is recommended that the funding requested be made available for 2006/2007 in order to contribute to the Council's medium term aim to *"develop services, staff and the working environment."*

Options for action:

8. To undertake works to improve environmental and comfort conditions in the worst affected parts of the Civic Offices Complex with the £50,000 DDF funding available in 2006/2007.
9. Accept that conditions will be uncomfortable for staff during periods of high temperatures and humidity during the summer months and do nothing.
10. Undertake all of the outstanding works during the current financial year, which would require a DDF supplementary estimate in the region of £100,000 for 2006/07.

Consultation undertaken:

10. Management Board.

Resource implications:

Budget provision: There is currently DDF funding of £50,000 in 2006/2007, which is for the comfort cooling in Planning Services that was delayed by the asbestos removal works. Additional DDF funding of £100,000 is now required in order to complete the comfort cooling works in the remaining areas of the Civic Office Complex.

Personnel: All supervisory work can be absorbed from within existing staff resources.

Land: Nil.

Community Plan/BVPP reference: Medium Term Aim to...“develop services, staff and the working environment.”

Relevant statutory powers: Discretionary.

Background papers: Minutes of the Safety Forum.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: Improved Environmental Conditions.

Key Decision reference (if required): N/A.