

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO CABINET

14th January 2015

1. **REPORT TITLE** **Policy for Unsupervised Children's Playgrounds**
- Submitted by:** **Executive Director – Operational Services**
- Principal author:** **Head of Operations – Roger Tait**
- Portfolio:** **Environment and Recycling**
- Ward(s) affected:** **All**

Purpose of the Report

To update Cabinet on the current position in relation to the Policy for Unsupervised Children's Playgrounds.

To seek Cabinet approval for a programme of repairs and replacement of play equipment and associated items identified in the annual independent inspection report for 2014.

Recommendations

- a) That the programme of works as detailed in the 2014 inspection report is approved.
- b) That the Executive Director - Operational Services be authorised to seek and accept the lowest suitable quotations for the works in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling.
- c) That authority is granted to expend £31,042 from the existing approved provision in the General Fund Capital Programme for play equipment repair and replacement in 2014/2015.

Reasons

To ensure that children's playgrounds provided by the Council are maintained in a safe and fit for purpose condition, and in accordance with independent safety inspections and the adopted European Safety Standards

To minimise the Council's exposure to risk in respect of reducing accidents and improving the Council's ability to defend claims that may arise.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 The Council's Policy for Unsupervised Children's Playgrounds was adopted in February 2006 following a review process, which included consultation with residents, focus groups and key local organisations. The policy sets out the Council's approach to planning for, providing, managing and maintaining outdoor, unsupervised play facilities for children and young people in the Borough.
- 1.2 Provision for repairs and replacements to the Council's playground stock was made

in the General Fund Capital Programme for 2013/14 and 2014/15. There is currently a balance of £39,553 remaining in the approved budget.

- 1.3 Playgrounds are inspected weekly by Streetscene playground engineers, backed up by an annual independent inspection. Through this process, the need for repair and replacement of play equipment, impact-absorbing surfacing, fencing, hard surfaces and ancillary features is identified.
- 1.4 Advice given by Fields in Trust (formerly the National Playing Fields Association) is that playground providers should review the findings of the inspection reports and address any high-risk items in the short-term, tackle moderate items when finance is available and monitor low risk items.
- 1.5 Repair and replacement works are an ongoing requirement in order to maintain children's play equipment in accordance with the European Safety Standard, and ensure ancillary equipment and surfaces are fit for purpose.
- 1.6 The Council's latest annual inspection report was completed in February 2014 and 50 sites have been identified as requiring repairs, 11 of these sites have issues that are identified as of medium or high risk.
- 1.7 A significant number of these repairs have been completed by the Council's playground maintenance team in Streetscene to minimise any potential cost to the Council.
- 1.8 The remaining repairs and replacements which cannot be carried out by the playground maintenance team involve purchase and installation of items of equipment or specialist work covering 12 sites. A schedule of the sites and the detailed work required at each location is contained within appendix 1 attached to this report.
- 1.9 Since the last inspection some of the safer surfacing at the above sites has deteriorated and therefore the risk rating that was given at the time of the inspection is now greater:
Cheswardine Road, Bradwell and Arnold Grove, Bradwell have had seasonal issues with shrinkage of the rubber surfacing tiles leading to potential trip hazards which resulted in closure of the site between June and September.
Icky Picky, Cross Heath and Underwood Road, Silverdale also have seasonal issues of contracting surfacing.
Bradwell Dingle has had an issue with the 10 year old rubber surfacing wearing thin.
- 1.10 It is therefore proposed to repair or replace the worst of the bases at the above sites as part of the programme of repairs and replacements for 2014/15. The cost of this work has been identified and priced in the table above. The total estimated cost of the repairs and replacement work, inclusive of fees, is £31,042

2. Issues

- 2.2 The provision, location and quality of facilities for children's play remains a high priority for residents in successive consultations and residents surveys. This places a demand on the Council's finances and needs to be balanced against competing priorities for funding. In the majority of cases over the last ten years, the cost of providing new or replacement facilities has been secured via external funding either through grants or developer contributions. However, the long term cost of ongoing repairs and replacement falls to the Council to meet and has implications for revenue and capital budgets. Where playgrounds are provided through developer

contributions associated with a planning condition, a commuted sum for future maintenance is normally paid to the Council. This is a sum of money that will pay for the normal inspections, repairs and maintenance of the playground over a period of up to 15 years. After this period the Council has to meet these costs.

- 2.3 The estimated cost of the repairs and replacement work identified in the 2014 independent inspection and detailed in section 1 of this report is £31,042.

Provision that remains within the current General Fund Capital programme for the repair and replacement of playground equipment is £39,553. Therefore, the cost of the works can be met from within approved budget levels.

3. **Options Considered**

3.1 Option 1:

Continue to provide a similar level of play provision to that currently provided, and complete all repairs as identified in the inspection report.

Option 2:

Consider a different method of delivering play provision by focusing on providing a fewer number of larger multi-functional sites at major parks and open spaces and exploring provision by other providers. This would necessitate a review of the Policy for Unsupervised Children's Playgrounds, which could be undertaken following the planned review of the Green Space Strategy.

4. **Proposal**

- 4.1 Option 1 is proposed in the short term. This allows the Council to continue with the current level of playground provision in local neighbourhoods where demand exists. This ensures the availability and accessibility of safe and fit for purpose playgrounds.

- 4.2 Option 2 (and/or other options which members may wish to explore). Cabinet has recently approved a review of the Green Space Strategy. Children's play provision will be considered as part of the strategy review and upon completion, the current Policy for Unsupervised Children's Playgrounds will need to be reviewed to reflect the findings of the Green Space Strategy. This may present an opportunity to consider different methods of facilitating appropriate levels of children's play provision.

5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 5.1 Option 1 is proposed in the short term as this is the most likely option to improve customer satisfaction, maintain opportunities for residents to be able to access neighbourhood-based playgrounds and protect the community and the Council from exposure to risk.

6. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 6.1 Creating a clean, safe and sustainable borough

6.2 Creating a healthy and active community

7. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

7.1 The Council has a statutory duty to maintain the facilities it provides in a safe condition and to reduce the risk of injury to the public. It has adopted the European Standards (EN1176 and EN1177) applicable to children's playgrounds as its safety standard.

8. **Equality Impact Assessment**

8.1 It is considered that there would be a positive differential impact resulting from the project if it proceeds as it would ensure that the council can provide safe and accessible play and recreational facilities for children and young people.

9. **Financial and Resource Implications**

9.2 This project will be managed by in-house staff from the Operations Service and, therefore, there are no additional human resource implications arising from this report.

9.3 The estimated capital cost (inclusive of fees) of the repairs and replacement of playground stock identified in the 2014 independent annual inspection report is £31,042. There is currently provision of £39,553 remaining for playground stock repairs and replacements in the General Fund Capital Programme. Therefore, the cost of the works can be met from within currently approved budgets.

9.4 In respect of providing new playgrounds in areas which may be currently under served, external funding or alternative providers will continue to play a major role in delivering progress towards achieving policy objectives where opportunities arise.

9.5 It is not proposed to consider making financial provision for new play areas as part of this report. Rather, as and when new opportunities present themselves, separate reports including any funding implications for the Council will be brought forward.

10. **Major Risks**

10.1 A full risk assessment for the project has been prepared.

10.2 The major risks associated with the proposal relate to the possibility of accidents occurring whilst playgrounds are in use, and the Council's ability to defend any subsequent action.

In continuing to maintain playgrounds to the requirements of the European Standards applicable and to have a prioritized rolling programme of inspection, repairs and replacement, the Council exposure to risk is reduced.

11. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

11.1 Sustainability - none

11.2 Climate Change - none

12. **Key Decision Information**

12.1 The project has been included on the Forward Plan

13. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

Cabinet 23/07/08 resolution 219
Cabinet 22/05/13 resolution

14. **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Schedules of works proposed.

15. **Background Papers**

Policy for Unsupervised Children’s Playgrounds 2006-2011.
2014 Inspection Report

16. **Management Sign-Off**

Each of the designated boxes need to be signed off and dated before going to Executive Director/Corporate Service Manager for sign off.

	Signed	Dated
Financial Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Dave Roberts</i>		
Risk Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Mark Bailey</i>		
Legal Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Mark Bailey</i>		
Equalities Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Mark Bailey</i>		
H.R. Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Sarah Taylor</i>		
ICT Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Jeanette Hilton</i>		
Sustainability and Climate Change Implications Discussed and Agreed <i>Lead Officer – Joanne Halliday</i>		
Report Agreed by: Executive Director/ Head of Service		

Appendix 1.

	Site	Inspection comments and risk rating	Additional comments and proposal	Cost Estimate
1	Chesterton Park.	<p>Inspection comments Excessively boggy: Drainage works required</p> <p>Risk rating: 2: Low</p>	<p>Additional Comments Whilst the risk rating given is low, situation worsened since the inspection was made. All bases are periodically underwater.</p> <p>Proposal: Drainage Scheme</p>	£3500
2	The Wammy, Cross Heath.	<p>Inspection comments The site has been vandalised and requires attention or removal. The tunnel has been damaged and uprights have been torched</p> <p>Risk rating : 9: high</p>	<p>Additional Comments</p> <p>Proposal: Remove burnt out posts and repair tunnel.</p>	£1500
3	Underwood Road, Silverdale.	<p>Inspection comments Very boggy site. Surfacing requires pressure washing very slippery.</p> <p>Risk rating 4: low</p>	<p>Additional comments: This site has rubber tiled surfacing which is prone to shrinkage and distortion creating a trip hazard in the summer months. The surfacing beneath the swing appears to be in the worst condition, and the stone foundation has collapsed in places making the surface really uneven</p> <p>Proposal: Resurface swings only: 43m2</p>	£2365
4	Bradwell Dingle	<p>Inspection comments All matters identified in the report can be dealt by maintenance team</p> <p>Risk rating 5: medium (none of these matters relate to surfacing)</p>	<p>Additional Comments Holes in surfacing are not mentioned in the report; these will need addressing before the start to get bigger.</p> <p>Proposal 12m2 replace circular wear section only</p>	£1,370
5	Arnold Grove, Bradwell.	<p>Inspection comments Safety surfacing. Requires washing</p> <p>Risk rating 3:low</p>	<p>Additional Comments Site was closed between 28 July 2014-22nd September Monitor due to trip hazards caused by 'wet-pour' shrinkage Rhino half pipe is also now closed due to damage over the summer period.</p> <p>Proposal</p>	£4,000

			62m2 replace tiles with 'wet-pour'. Repair/replace Rhino half pipe	
6	Cheswardine Road, Bradwell.	Inspection comments Some tiles showing signs of movement, Tiles spreading in places monitor Risk rating 3:low	Additional Comments Site was closed during summer due to trip hazards caused by 'wet-pour' shrinkage Proposal Re-surface see saw (27m2) and multi-play unit(60m2) areas only.	£4,785
7	Woodhall Park, Kidsgrove.	Inspection comments Dish burnt out and bearing has excessive movement. Wet pour is damaged. Risk rating Risk rating 3: low	Additional Comments Proposal Purchase new spinner (to be installed by maintenance team) and 'wet-pour' repair (10m2)	£1800
8	Acacia Avenue, Knutton.	Inspection comments Damaged patch at the base of climber one small patch to monitor under swing. Risk rating Risk rating 4:low	Additional Comments Proposal Repair damaged patches	£1000
9	Rydal Way, Seabridge.	Inspection comments Remove old springy base Risk rating Risk rating 3:low	Additional Comments Proposal Purchase new Springy to be installed by playground maintenance team	£500
10	Icky Picky, Cross Heath.	Inspection comments Monitor wet pour edges splitting in Places Risk rating 3: Low	Additional Comments Proposal The poorest bases are Multi unit (60m2) and see saw (20m2), resurface.	£4,400
11	Thistleberry Parkway	Inspection comments Basket swing to replace Risk rating Risk 3: low	Additional Comments Surfacing is also missing from this unit Proposal Replace basket swing and reinstall surfacing	£3000
	Subtotal			£28,220
	Fees			£2822
	Total			£31,042