

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO CABINET

22nd MAY 2013

1. **REPORT TITLE** **Policy for Unsupervised Children's Playgrounds**
- Submitted by:** **Head of Operations – Roger Tait**
- Portfolio:** **Culture and Leisure/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 2013.

To make financial provision in the General Fund Capital Programme for the cost of repair and replacement of play equipment and associated items identified in the annual independent inspection report for 2013-14 and to consider provision for future works in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

Recommendations

- a) That the programme of works for 2013-2014 is approved.
- b) That the Executive Director- Operational Services be authorised to seek and accept the lowest suitable tender or quotation for the works.

Reasons

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

To minimise the Council's exposure to risk in respect of reducing accidents and improving the Councils 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 On 23rd July 2008, Cabinet resolved to make provision of £300,000 in the General Fund Capital Programme (£150,000 for 2009/10 and £150,000 for 2010/11) for future repair and replacement requirements to the Council's playground stock. Following completion of repair and replacement work arising from the previous independent inspection reports since this provision was made; there is now a balance of £117,576 remaining in the General Fund Capital Programme.

- 1.3 Subsequently, further provision for emergency repairs and replacements to the Council's playground stock have been made in the General Fund Capital Programme for 2013/14 of £25,000.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 The Council's latest annual inspection report was received in February 2013 and 50 sites have been identified as requiring repairs, 11 of these sites have issues that are identified as of medium or high risk. One site (Wroxham Way) was rated as low risk in the inspection, has since suffered damage to surfacing resulting in its closure, raising its risk rating to high.
- 1.8 A significant number of these repairs can be completed by the Council's playground maintenance team in Streetscene to minimise any potential cost to the Council.
- 1.9 The remaining repairs and replacements which cannot be carried out by the playground maintenance team in Streetscene involve the purchase and installation of items of equipment or specialist work. This work covers the following 6 sites:

Site	Description	2013 risk rating	Cost Estimate
Bradwell Lodge Skatepark: (Closed Play Area)	Repairs/replacement of Skatepark Equipment	8: high	£14,000
Orme Road Skatepark	Repairs/replacement of Skatepark Equipment	7: medium	£34,000
Wood Lane	Repairs to surfacing	7: medium	£4,200
Bathpool Park	Replacement rocker	5: medium	£800
Ilkley Place	Replacement surfacing	7: medium	£4,000
Wroxham Way (Closed Play Area)	Repairs to surfacing	3: low (recent damage/ closure raising risk to high)	£4,000
		TOTAL (inc 10% fees)	£67,100

In addition to the 6 sites listed above, the inspection report identifies a number of issues relating to the playground at Cotswold Avenue in Knutton and Silverdale ward. The estimated cost of repairs and replacement equipment for this site is £36,300 inclusive of fees. The site has suffered from repeated vandalism over a number of years and is currently closed due to the extent of the damage which has occurred. It is intended to carry out a review of this site with local ward members and other appropriate stakeholders to determine the best approach to children's play provision in the locality. Therefore it is proposed to make financial provision in the general fund capital programme

for the cost of repairs to the site, which can be utilised towards the preferred solution which is developed from the review.

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 cost of ongoing repairs and replacements has fallen to the Council to meet and has implications for revenue budgets. (Where playgrounds are provided through developer contributions, a commuted sum for future maintenance is normally paid to the Council. This can be for periods up to 15 years).

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:

Reduce the current level of play provision by ceasing to repair or replace items which fail to meet the safety standards and opting to remove such items. Focus on providing a fewer number of larger multi-functional sites at major parks and open spaces.

4. **Proposal**

- 4.1 Option 1 is proposed. 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) would require a significant policy shift away from local provision to more centralised provision and would necessitate a full policy review preceded by public consultation. The financial and human resource implications of this option have not been estimated at present, but are likely to be significant.

5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 5.1 Option 1 is proposed as this is the most likely option to improve customer satisfaction, maintain opportunities for residents to be able to access neighbourhood-based playgrounds and make further progress towards the local standards contained in the Policy for Unsupervised Playgrounds and the urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy.

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 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 accessible play and recreational facilities for children and young people.

9. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 9.1 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 of the repairs and replacement of playground stock identified in the 2013 independent annual inspection report is £103,400.

There is currently provision of £117,576 remaining for playground stock repairs and replacements in the General Fund Capital Programme from the allocation in July 2008.

Provision is also allocated in the General Fund Capital Programme for 2013/14 for urgent repair work (£25,000).

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

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 – Wherever possible, sustainable and or recycled products will be used.

11.2 Climate Change – There or none relating to this report.

12. **Key Decision Information**

13. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

Cabinet 23/07/08 resolution 219

14. **List of Appendices**

15. **Background Papers**

Policy for Unsupervised Children's Playgrounds 2006-2011.