

## **Opportunities for Play Report**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. This report presents some initial information in support of this new scrutiny review on developing high quality play opportunities for children, young people and families across the city, and asks the Task Group to agree a method for progressing this review.

### **Background to Scrutiny Topic**

2. At a Decision Session in June 2016 the Executive Member for Economic Development & Community Engagement (inc. Play) agreed:
  - i. The play policy should be updated to provide a clear steer to direct resources for the development of future play opportunities
  - ii. Criteria for the release of the Council's capital programme for playground improvement
  - iii. Allocation of £30k of the capital funding as match funding for the Rowntree Park scheme
  - iv. A new playground inspection regime to reflect best practice and local experience
3. Ahead of the Executive Member's Decision Session, a discussion took place at a Scrutiny Committee Pre Decision Call-In, at which councillors agreed with the general principles of the paper and expressed hope the policy would clearly support the different play needs of both children and young people, and provide effective play areas to support children's natural inclination to play.
4. However, the discussion included a number of scenarios relating to the difficulties of developing play in community settings and the different perspectives that exist within communities.
5. Those conversations between officer and councillors indicated the need for this agenda to be taken up as a scrutiny topic, which in turn led to a scoping report being considered by the full Learning & Culture Policy &

Scrutiny Committee in July 2016. The Committee agreed to proceed with the review with the aim of developing improved play opportunities across the city and identifying ways of enabling communities to bring forward potential schemes. The Committee agreed to form this Task Group to carry out the review on its behalf and set the following review objectives:

- i. Examine national best practice and methodology and consider examples of recent good practice locally from engagement through to delivery of a project
- ii. Identify future positive ways to engage with children, young people and families in order to evidence local need and inform the development of play opportunities at a neighbourhood level.
- iii. Examine how best to allay resident's concerns and improve buy in from the whole community, thereby improving community/ward cohesion
- iv. Identify best ways (methodology) to bring forward/ develop potential new schemes.

## **Information Gathered to Date**

### **Objective (i) – National Best Practice & Local Good Practice**

6. National Best Practice  
The Government's Children's Plan 2007 and subsequent play strategy consultation 'Fair Play' in 2008 placed children's play at the centre of one of the great challenges of our time i.e. how better to recognise and respond to children and young people as stakeholders and users of public space.
7. Play England (national charity) aims for all children and young people in England to have regular access and opportunity for free, inclusive, local play provision and play space. It provides advice and support to promote good practice and works to ensure that the importance of play is recognised by policy makers, planners and the public.
8. The Government and Play England believe that children's well-being, safety, learning and social development, as well as their essential enjoyment of childhood, are affected by the extent and the quality of their opportunities to play. By the same token, the cooperation of many different professionals and roles is needed to ensure a cohesive and

effective approach. Council officers and members, children's services professionals, planners, developers, architects, housing managers, landscape architects and designers, play equipment suppliers, parks and recreation managers, community groups, health professionals and, of course, play practitioners, are just some of the people who have, or should have, an interest in promoting enjoyable play spaces that feel safe for children and young people.

9. Play space needs to be of high quality and good design to attract children and families and become a valued part of the local environment. Poor quality unimaginative space will not be attractive to children, will not be valued by the local community and will fall in to disuse and disrepair. Good design is a good investment. Play England's guide to creating successful play spaces (Design for Play 2008) explains how good play spaces can give children and young people the freedom to play creatively, while allowing them to experience risk, challenge and excitement. It also contains advice on how play spaces can be affordably maintained, and a number of case studies based on national examples of good practice – see Annex A.
10. Local Good Practice  
The latest version of City of York Council's Play Policy recognises the importance of play within communities, with a commitment to invest through the introduction of a capital programme. It provides a clear focus to respond in a targeted way and to direct funding to identified need. In addition, the policy outlines a strategic approach which recognises that play opportunities should be developed taking into consideration the importance of community involvement and reflecting best practice.
11. By taking a more localised approach to the development of play the policy states that play in the city should be progressed based on 5 key principles which build on the priorities established in the previous policy (2013-2016). Some specific examples of previous successful schemes will be provided at this meeting.
12. This is not the first time the Learning & Culture Policy & Scrutiny Committee has worked to support the Council's vision for play. In 2010 it carried out a scrutiny review to participate in the consultation on revisions to the Council's Play Policy (2010-2013). As part of that review it carried out a comparison of the play opportunities for 5-13yr olds across a range of different types of local residential areas/wards, and considered an update on the Playbuilder scheme ongoing at that time (see paragraphs 17-20 below for further information on Playbuilder).

13. In carrying out that review, the Committee recognised some of the same issues that we are aiming to address through this review e.g. that in some areas of the city there is zero tolerance towards children playing in open spaces near homes, and that there are barriers to play that needed addressing. As a result of that review it was recommended that Ward Committees, Parish Councils and Residents Associations reach out to their local communities and work with them to encourage a more positive attitude. It was also recommended that a pilot scheme be undertaken involving all the relevant agencies to:

- Work with children and parents through schools in the identified areas to identify what they perceive to be barriers to play
- Gather the views of other residents, local businesses and other interested parties
- Create a 'Safe Routes to Play' document for the pilot area
- Identify any improvements required to road crossings/markings to reduce the danger of traffic

**Objective (ii) - Identify future positive ways to engage with children, young people and families in order to evidence local need and inform the development of play opportunities at a neighbourhood level**

14. The pilot scheme recommended by the previous scrutiny review was subsequently taken forward by a 'Taking Play Forward' Strategic Board, and this provides one example of how the Council has previously engaged with children and young people on their issues/priorities i.e. through the introduction of Change Champions – see the update on the implementation of those recommendations provided to the Learning & Culture Committee in September 2011 at Annex B.

15. Moving forward, and in response to the changes in managing ward budgets, Councillors will in the future be an integral part of the process for bringing forward / developing potential new play schemes. In order to do this successfully councillors will need to talk more to children, young people and families in their local ward and may need further support/training to do so. This review provides an opportunity for this to be explored further.

**Objective (iii) – Examine how best to allay resident’s concerns and improve buy in from the whole community, thereby improving community/ward cohesion**

16. Considering how best to encourage buy in from local communities will be examined at a future Task Group meeting – see proposed timetable for future Task Group meetings at paragraph 27 below.
17. **Playbuilder**  
Playbuilder aimed to develop public open access to outdoor play spaces close to where children live that were safe, exciting, stimulating and accessible to all, and promote active, imaginative and adventurous play targeting predominately the 8 - 13yr age range. It was overseen by a multi agency steering group representing Play, Parks, Young Peoples Service, Extended Schools, City Development, Transport Safety, Grants and Partnership and Neighbourhood Management, North Yorkshire Police, PACT, CVS and the Executive Member for Children and Young People’s services.
18. In 2009, as part of their commitment to the play agenda, the then Government invested £235 million nationally to the Playbuilder Project. At the time of its introduction, York had a growing focus on the importance of play and the Playbuilder funding provided greater access to higher quality outdoor play areas which directly linked to York’s then play strategy ‘Taking Play Forward’, and assisted in the Council’s aim to raise the standard of play provision.
19. York was allocated £1,165,391, consisting of £1,120,453 capital and £44,938 revenue. The plan was to build 22 new and upgraded play sites across the city over a two year period, each to be developed in consultation, and with the participation of local children and young people, families, communities and representatives as appropriate.
20. However, following the general election and resulting change in Government, the Department of Education wrote to all Local Authorities announcing their need to identify savings from a number of capital budgets in 2010-11 where commitments were no longer affordable. This led to the Department of Education reviewing the planned spend on Playbuilder scheduled for the second-year of the project. In the case of York, a majority of the allocation had already been committed and therefore the Council was able to complete the planned works at 19 of the 22 sites – see list at Annex C.

## Consultation

21. In support of this review and in an effort to identify gaps in current provision, the Council's Operations Manager (Strategy & Contracts) will be in attendance at this meeting and will provide maps of the city which show current play sites for young children and those for teenagers. The Head of Communities & Equalities will also be in attendance.
22. In support of objective (ii) The Task Group is asked to consider the consultation feedback contained within the council's new Play Policy from prominent strategies and children and young people from across the city, which was gathered as part of the consultation process to develop the 2016–2019 Children and Young People's plan. These key messages highlight the need for play and its far reaching impact (see pages 7 - 12 of the Play Policy at Annex D).
23. Further consultation is also underway via the summer edition of Shine inviting suggestions from children and young people, parents and carers in York to identify potential capital projects.
24. At the same time the capital programme has been launched through Shine, and an application form and supporting information has been made available for communities, groups and organisations to apply to the fund. If money is sought to create a new play area, this would only be considered if the location has been identified as being deficient in play provision in Open Space and Green Infrastructure Final Report September 2014.
25. Completed applications are due to be considered, alongside feedback received from children and young people through the Shine consultation, by a multi-agency panel consisting of representatives from the Council, parish councils, play organisations and young people's forums. The panel will recommend a final list of schemes to the Executive Member for formal approval in September 2016.
26. To ensure that money is allocated to those play areas with most need, it has been agreed that play areas that have been in receipt of Playbuilder, or significant lottery or section 106 funds since 2008 will not be eligible for consideration.

## Proposed Timetable for Future Task Group Meetings

27. Below is a suggestion for some future meetings:

Proposed Meetings	Purpose
Meeting 2 - September (date to be agreed)	In support of Objective (iii): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider previous schemes in detail, examining feedback on good and bad experiences from different stages</li></ul>
Meeting 3 – Early October (date to be agreed)	In support of Objective (iv): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review list of successful schemes approved by Executive Member in September 2016</li><li>• Examine unsuccessful schemes to understand why they were refused</li></ul>

28. Requirements for further meetings will be identified as the review progresses.

### Implications & Risks

29. Associated implications and risks will be identified as the work on this review progresses and will be included in the draft final report arising from this review.

### Council Plan 2015-19

30. This scrutiny review supports the following council priorities:

- All York's residents live and thrive in a city which allows them to contribute fully to their communities and neighbourhoods
- Delivering frontline services for residents is the priority
- All children and adults are listened to, and their opinions considered
- Every child has the opportunity to get the best possible start in life
- Residents are encouraged and supported to live healthily
- Focus on the delivery of frontline services for residents and the protection of community facilities.
- Focus on cost and efficiency to make the right decisions in a challenging financial environment.

## Recommendations

31. At this early stage in the review, the Task Group are recommended to:
- i) Note the update information on previous steps to encourage play provided in this report.
  - ii) Consider the consultation feedback contained within Annex D and identify any further consultation required.
  - iii) Agree the timetable of future meetings at paragraph 27 and identify specific meeting dates.
  - iv) Outside of what is already planned, identify any further information required in support of this review

Reason: To progress this review in line with scrutiny procedures, and protocols.

## Contact Details

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**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** None

**Wards Affected:** List wards or tick box to indicate all **All**

For further information please contact the author of the report

**Background Papers:** None

### Annexes:

**Annex A** – National Examples of Good Practice

**Annex B** – Update on Implementation of Recommendations from previous Play Scrutiny Review

**Annex C** – List of Playbuilder Sites

**Annex D** – Play Policy 2016-19