

**Play Opportunities Scrutiny Review - Interim Report**

**Purpose of Report**

1. This report provides an update on the work carried out to date in support of this scrutiny review, and presents information on engagement techniques for ward councillors to use when engaging with children, young people and families in their local ward.

**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.
- v. Identify where lack of community capacity makes identifying need more challenging.

### **Consultation**

6. In support of this review and to assist in the identification of any obvious gaps in current provision, at the first meeting of the Task Group in August 2016, the Council's Operations Manager (Strategy & Contracts) provided maps of the city showing current play sites for young children and those for teenagers.

### **Information Gathered**

7. Background to the Play Agenda  
The Children's Plan 2007 introduced by the Government of the time 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.

8. 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.
9. 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. This requires 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.
10. 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.

***Objective (i) – Examine national best practice and methodology and consider examples of recent good practice locally from engagement through to delivery of a project***

11. At the first meeting of the Task Group in August 2016, Members considered information on National Best Practice and received information on local good practice from the Head of Communities & Equalities.
12. National Best Practice  
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. The Task Group viewed the guide containing advice on how play spaces can be affordably maintained, and considered a number case studies provided within the guide as national examples of good practice – see a sample of those case studies at Annex A.

13. In 2009, as part of their commitment to the play agenda, the then Government invested £235 million nationally in a national Playbuilder Scheme. Its aim was 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.
14. Local Good Practice  
The Task Group received information on a previous scrutiny review carried out in 2010 through which scrutiny members participated in the consultation on revisions to the Council's Play Policy (2010-2013), together with an update previously provided to the Learning & Culture Committee in September 2011, on the implementation of the recommendations arising from that review. The Task Group noted that as part of that review, a comparison was undertaken of the play opportunities for 5-13yr olds across a range of different types of local residential areas/wards and consideration was given to the National Playbuilder Scheme ongoing at that time – see paragraph 13 above.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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 below.

18. Play Areas with Major Investment Since 2008

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Funding source</b>	<b>Investment Date</b>
Acomb	Viking Road	Playbuilder	2009/10
Bishopthorpe	Keeble Park	Playbuilder	2009/10
Clifton	Ashton Avenue	Playbuilder	2009/10
Dringhouses & Woodthorpe	Leeside	Lottery	2008/09
Guildhall	Clarence Gardens	106	2015
Haxby and Wigginton	Mancroft (Haxby)	Playbuilder	2010/11
Heworth	Barfield Road	Playbuilder	2009/10
	Bell Farm Adventure Playground	Playbuilder	2010/11
	Arran Place	Housing Revenue Account and 106	2014
Heworth Without	Stray Road	Playbuilder	2010/11
Holgate	Balfour Street (Back Park)	Playbuilder	2009/10
	Sowerby Road	Playbuilder	2009/10
	Garnett Terrace	Playbuilder	2010/11
Hull Road	Hull Road Park - main	Playbuilder	2010/11
	Hull Road Park – small	Housing Revenue Account	
Huntington & New Earswick	Orchard Park	Playbuilder	2009/10
Rural York West	Brecksfield (Skelton)	Playbuilder	2009/10
	Copmanthorpe Recreation Ground	Playbuilder	2010/11
Osbaldwick & Dunnington	Dunnington Recreation Ground	Big Lottery Fund	2010
Strensall		Playbuilder	2010/11
Westfield	Chesney's Field,	Playbuilder	2009/10

	(Foxwood Lane)		
	Grange Lane	Playbuilder and Yorventure	2010/11
	Acomb Green	Big Lottery Fund	2012
	Cornlands Road	106 & Yorventure	2014
Wheldrake	Naburn	Playbuilder	2009/10
	Elvington	Playbuilder	2009/10
		Playbuilder	

19. Recent Successful Schemes in York

Since 2010 there have been four successful major refurbishment projects in York, each requiring major investment between £25k and £55k:

- Acomb Green – lottery funded. Community lead with Communities and Public Realm support
- Arran Place – HRA and 106 funds. Public Realm with significant Residents Association input
- Cornlands Road – HRA and 106 funds. Public Realm with support from the local Residents Association and York High School via a public consultation process.
- Clarence Gardens – 106 funds. Public Realm with support from Haxby Road Primary School.

20. The Task Group received detailed information on each of the schemes listed above, which highlighted the application of the strategic approach to developing play opportunities outlined in the latest version of City of York Council's Play Policy (Taking Play Forward 2016-19) i.e. that play opportunities should be developed taking into consideration the importance of community involvement and reflecting best practice. This was evidenced by the similar approach taken for each of the above schemes:

- Step 1 - Interested parties, local groups, schools in the vicinity etc were consulted on what they did and did not want, and a standard contract specification was adapted to meet those local community aspirations
- Step 2 - The community signed off the tender documents
- Step 3 - CYC ran the tender process which included an opportunity to meet community representatives

- Step 4 - CYC gave consideration to which of the designs met the specification and addressed CYC's needs and aspirations best e.g.:
- Renovation as specified
  - There was at least one significant feature item.
  - There was new and varied seating included
  - The predominant material used was metal; for longevity and to match the immediate surrounding equipment.
  - Appropriate safety surfacing was to be provided; with a bias towards grass matting
  - The design offered value for money
- Step 5 - CYC shortlisted 3-4 submissions and carried out post tender consultation with the local community to choose the winning design.
- Step 6 - CYC oversaw the installation

## 21. Funding

The current policy (Taking Play Forward 2016-19) recognises the importance of play within communities. This administration's commitment to invest is through the introduction of a capital programme, which provides a clear focus to respond in a targeted way and to direct funding to identify need.

22. That Task Group learnt that within the capital programme for 2017/18 there is £295k for play area improvements, £30k of which has been allocated as match funding for a Skatepark scheme at Rowntree Park. The remaining money is available to be spent on play areas that are either in the Council, Town or Parish Council control. It is proposed that its use should be guided by the 5 key principles within the current policy, as outlined below:

- Meet a clearly identified need
- Be developed through inclusive involvement and participation that empowers and encourages the community to take a lead
- Be based on the right of the child to access inclusive, quality and locally based play opportunities
- Promote and recognise the benefits of play and its impact on health and development of the child
- Be reflective of best practice

23. These principles form the funding criteria for allocation of the Council's capital programme for playground improvement schemes. Outside of this, Ward Councillors may also choose to allocate monies from their ward budgets to fund improvements to play areas in their wards.

***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***

24. Recent Examples of Engagement

In support of objective (ii) the Task Group considered the consultation feedback contained within the council's 2016-19 Play Policy received 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.

25. In addition the Task Group learnt that completed applications for future schemes are due to be considered alongside feedback from children and young people, and that to support this approach there had been a recent consultation exercise undertaken by Shine<sup>1</sup>. This was publicised through the Shine newspaper, going out to all schools and libraries as well as associated websites and social media pages, and all ward Councillors were informed via email. A questionnaire was then made available, which some Ward Councillors distributed through their preferred community engagement processes. It was also distributed to various groups and individuals upon request - see copy of questionnaire at Annex B.
26. At the same time the capital programme was launched through Shine, and an application form and supporting information was made available for communities, groups and organisations to apply to the fund. The Task Group learnt that applications will only be considered if the location:
- Has been identified within the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Final Report September 2014, as being deficient in play provision.
  - Has not previously been in receipt of Playbuilder, or significant lottery or section 106 funds since 2008
27. Finally, the Task Group noted that at the end of the process, the Shine panel will recommend a final list of schemes to the Executive member for

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<sup>1</sup> Shine - A multi agency panel consisting of representatives from the Council, Parish Councils, play organisations and young people's forums



formal approval, to ensure that money is allocated to those play areas with most need.

28. In considering the strategic approach to developing play opportunities detailed in paragraph 19 above, the Task Group received a detailed example of the stage 1 consultation/engagement undertaken for the refurbishment of Clarence Gardens play area, which involved children at the local school being consulted on:

- what age range and ability the new equipment should be for.
- what type of play activities were wanted e.g. swinging, climbing, spinning.
- whether several pieces of equipment or a few larger ones should be installed.
- if the equipment should have a theme e.g. trains or boats.
- should the equipment be mostly wood or metal.
- what other things would make the play area better – more seats for example.
- how we can improve the entrance to the play area.

## **Analysis**

29. Having considered the maps showing the plays areas across the city, the Task Group recognised the limited opportunities available to teenagers, and noted that the proposed skate park for teenagers at Rawcliffe Country Park had stalled following feedback from residents regarding the scale of the proposals. The Task Group were pleased to note that the council is pursuing alternative proposals for a site upgrade for the skate park at Rowntree Park.

30. In support of Objective (ii), the Task Group recognised that moving forward, 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. They therefore agreed that in order for Councillors to participate successfully in the process for bringing forward / developing potential new play schemes, Councillors would need to engage more with children, young people and families in their local ward and may need further support/training to do so. With this in mind the Task Group requested further information on suitable engagement techniques – see ‘Additional Information Gathered’ section below.

31. Having considered information on the previous play scrutiny review undertaken in 2010 (see paragraph 14 above), the Task Group recognised some of the issues identified at that time were the same as those they were trying to address as part of this review i.e. that in some areas of the city there was zero tolerance towards children playing in open spaces near homes, and that there were other barriers to play that needed addressing. The Task Group noted that as a result of the previous 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.
32. The Task Group were therefore keen to learn of the findings from the planned pilot scheme, particularly in relation to the perceived barriers to play and the views of other residents etc, as they agreed it would support their consideration of objective (iii) of this review i.e. 'To examine how best to allay residents concerns and improve buy in from the whole community' etc. However, having considered the information provided on the implementation of the recommendations arising from that earlier Play scrutiny review, the Task Group recognised it would not be possible to draw on any earlier findings, due to the way the work had been aligned into the pilot. The pilot introduced a new method for communities to bring forward schemes within their wards.

### **Additional Information Gathered**

33. Engaging Children & Young People  
The active involvement of children and young people works best when there is a visible commitment to their involvement, and their involvement is valued. YorOk<sup>2</sup> has produced an Involvement Toolkit of Resources to

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<sup>2</sup> YorOK is the name of York's Children's Trust arrangements. Children's Trusts are local partnerships that bring together all partners and organisations responsible for providing services for children, young people and families, together—focusing on a shared commitment to improving children's lives.

support and encourage the engagement of children and young people, which contains a series of 'Listen to Me' booklets providing practical and innovative examples of how children can be encouraged to express their views. There is also a booklet aimed at parents and carers who are eager to help their children participate – see copy of Booklets at Annex C.

34. The Toolkit also provides a range of factsheets on different methods of engagement, and some extra support and guidance when involving disabled children and young people in participation and decision making activities – see Annex D.

### **Progressing the Review**

35. **Objective (iii)** - *Examine how best to allay resident's concerns and improve buy in from the whole community, thereby improving community/ward cohesion*
36. As part of the previous Play scrutiny review, the Task Group undertook to consult with parents in their wards to understand and identify the barriers to play. At that time parents highlighted concerns around safety, busy traffic and bullying as reasons for not allowing their children to freely access play. In response the authority produced a leaflet 'Playing Out: A Guide for Parents' to help inform parents of the benefits of free play which contained a myth busting section – see copy of leaflet at Annex E.
37. As part of this review and in support of Objective (iii), it is suggested that in order to identify ways of improving tolerance towards children playing, the Task Group focus on the concerns of residents living in the vicinity of play areas and open spaces, and gather feedback from partners involved in previous schemes on their good and bad experiences at the different stages of the process, to evidence lessons learnt, and identify examples of how community cohesion / consensus has been achieved.
38. There may also be alternative examples of community cohesion being generated in support of other local issues the Task Group could learn from.

**Objective (iv)** - *Identify best ways (methodology) to bring forward/develop potential new schemes.*

39. In regard to this objective, the Task Group have already received detailed information on both the strategic approach to developing play opportunities outlined in the 2016-19 Policy, as applied to a number of recent successful schemes, and the method used to apply that approach (see paragraph 19). In order to gauge how successful that method was, the Task Group could choose to gather feedback from those consultees involved at the different stages in the process.
40. It is also suggested that the Task Group review the list of successful schemes as they are approved by Executive Member and examine any unsuccessful schemes to understand why they were refused.

### **Implications & Risks**

41. 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**

42. 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**

43. At this interim stage in the review, the Task Group is recommended to:
- i) Note the information contained within this report, including the new information contained within Annexes C, D & E.
  - ii) Agree a method for gathering information on the concerns of residents living in the vicinity of play areas and open spaces, and feedback from partners and consultees involved in previous schemes, in support of Objectives (iii) & (iv).

- iii) Explore and agree a method for achieving Objective (v) i.e. Identifying where a lack of community capacity makes identifying need more challenging.

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

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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** – Sample of National Examples of Best Practice
- Annex B** – Shine Consultation Questionnaire Issued July 2016
- Annex C** – YorOK ‘Listen to Me’ Booklets
- Annex D** – YorOK Factsheets on Different Methods of Engagement
- Annex E** – ‘Playing Out: A Guide for Parents’ Leaflet