



**Decision Session – Executive Member for
Economic Development and Community
Engagement (Deputy Leader)**

24 May 2016

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities, Culture & Public Realm)

Review of Play Policy, Playground Investment and Maintenance

Summary

1. This report sets out an update to the city's play policy together with specific proposals for the improvement of playgrounds.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member is asked to agree:
 - a) The updated play policy in order to provide a clear steer to direct resources for the development of future play opportunities
 - b) The criteria for the release of the Council's capital programme for playground improvement
 - c) The allocation of £30k of the capital funding as match funding for the Rowntree Park Skatepark scheme
 - d) The proposed new playground inspection regime which reflects best practice and local experience

Reason: To ensure that the Council's approach to play remains up to date and resources are used to the best effect.

Background

3. In 2002, the Council formally launched the 'Taking Play Forward' play policy, a collective vision for play in the city. The policy document was again updated in 2007, 2010 and 2013. The latest version of the policy recognises the importance of play within communities with a commitment to invest. With this in mind the policy 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.

Progress since the last review

4. Play successes since 2013 include:
 - Working in collaboration with community groups to develop play opportunities at a neighbourhood level, including the following play areas: Aaron Place, Cornlands Road, Grange Lane and Clarence Gardens
 - Working with local volunteers to complete phase 2 of the Rawcliffe Country Park Bike Track and to start on phase 3
 - Through the Better Play Grants (2013-2016) to distribute up to £87k per year of funding directly to the play sector in York to improve the quality of play experiences and to help support voluntary and community sector groups
 - Working in partnership with voluntary sector organisations to celebrate National Play Day on an annual basis
 - Securing £120k of external funding to upgrade Rowntree Park Skate Park facilities: work to commence later this year with the replacement of the worn out metal ramps with new concrete structures, and installation of new boundary fencing. To complete the work £30k is requested towards the cost from the capital programme as match for the external funding

Consultation and policy development

5. The 2016 play policy reflects a number of key messages from prominent strategies. It also includes feedback from children and young people from across the city 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. They will be considered alongside the 5 Key Principles contained within the ‘Taking Play Forward’ policy when developing future play opportunities.
6. The key messages:
 - Health and well-being and play: The Chief Medical Officer recommends that: “All children and young people should engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes and up to several hours every day. Through promoting the values and benefits of active play we will improve health outcomes for our children and young people.”

Appendix 1

- City of York Child Poverty Strategy 2011–2020: Priorities in the plan include ensuring that all children and young people and communities have access to and are involved in the development of local, safe and freely available quality play experiences that are within easy walking distance.
- Children and Young People’s Plan 2016-2019: Involving children and young people and hearing their voice is a well established part of how York works to deliver the best possible outcomes for families.
- The annual “Review of Voice”, completed in April 2015, brings together key messages from young people gathered through one-to-one work, participation groups, surveys and consultations. These include:
 - More places to hang out with friends
 - Cheaper access to things like cinemas, bowling alleys and gyms for children and young people
 - More activities aimed at young people who identify as LGBT
 - More support for disabled young people to be social (carers are not always available to support them to go out in an evening or see friends)

The ‘Taking Play Forward’ policy 2016

7. The 2016 Taking Play Forward policy (Annex 1) takes a more localised approach to the development of play and states that play in the city should be progressed based on 5 key principles which build on the priorities established in the 2013 policy. These will underpin identifying the need to develop play opportunities through to the implementation and delivery of play opportunities within the city.
8. **The 5 Key Principles:** Play opportunities will:
 - 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

Investing in play opportunities

9. Within the Council's capital programme for 2017/18 there is £295k for play area improvements. This 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 from The Taking Play Forward Policy 2016-19, as outlined in paragraph 8, which will form the funding criteria for allocation of the Council's capital programme for playground improvement schemes.
10. It is proposed that the summer edition of Shine will launch an engagement process inviting suggestions from children and young people, parents and carers in York to identify potential capital projects. (Money cannot be used for revenue purposes). In addition to the launch of the capital programme through Shine, an application form and supporting information will be made available for communities, groups and organisations to apply to the fund.
11. 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.
12. It is proposed that completed applications 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. This panel will recommend a final list of schemes to the Executive Member for formal approval.
13. To ensure that money is allocated to those play areas with most need it is proposed that play areas that have been receipt of Playbuilder, or significant lottery or section 106 funds since 2008 will not be eligible for consideration. A list of known ineligible sites is detailed in Annex 2; others may be identified through the short-listing process.

Timetable for the process

Task	Date
Launch of the scheme	June 2016
Closing date	End of August 2016
Shortlisting	By end September 2016

Appendix 1

Formal approval by Executive Member	October 2016
Scheme development and implementation	October 2016 onwards

14. Officers from Communities and Equalities and Public Realm will work with groups to develop and implement schemes where help is requested, for example, by supporting groups to top up the money through grant applications. If the investment is to be on a City of York Council site officers will take the lead in procuring the investment.

Proposed new playground inspection standards

15. To ensure that council managed play areas remain safe and well cared for, it is proposed that all equipped play areas have a combination of visual and physical inspection at least fortnightly undertaken by a qualified inspector, the current standard being Registered Play International Inspector.
16. Currently all 51 play areas receive a weekly visit by the Council's Registered Play International Inspector irrespective of how much equipment is present, the complexity of the units, and evidence of wear and tear or misuse. As well as an inspection of equipment, time is also spent on maintenance including replacing damaged seats and worn chains, oiling bearings and repairing timber work. It is proposed that from now on a more targeted inspection regime is adopted based on:
- The extent and complexity of the equipment
 - History of use e.g. wear and tear, erosion
 - History of misuse e.g. damage to equipment, graffiti, litter
17. Sites will be categorised as follows:
- Category A sites - these are sites with high use and will be inspected weekly. Examples include Acomb Green, Rowntree Park, Cemetery Road
 - Category B sites – these are sites with lower use and will be inspected fortnightly. Examples include Rufforth, Littlethorpe Strensall, Laburnum Farm Hessay, and Forge Close Huntington.
18. Most sites will fall into Category A; however, the proposed changes will free up time to be spent on improved maintenance and will create capacity to inspect new sites (at least three more play areas are likely to be transferred to the Council over the coming years).

19. A comparison exercise has been undertaken with other authorities in the region. Whilst this reveals that there is no common approach or standard in operation it is clear that the approach set out in paragraph 17 will be one of the most frequent and comprehensive in the region. Any emergency issues that occur between inspections will continue to be dealt with through the Rapid Response Team as at present.

Options

20. The principal options open to the Executive Member are to:
- Suggest any amendments to the new play policy
 - Propose any amendments to the suggested criteria for allocation of the Council's capital programme for playground improvement

Analysis

21. The 'Taking Play Forward' document provides a clear steer for the development of play in the city and enables the authority to develop play opportunities against defined principles to ensure that limited resources are maximised and clearly targeted to areas of identified need.

Council Plan

22. The 'Taking Play Forward' policy contributes to the following Council Plan 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.

Implications

23. **Financial:** The budget was £295k, made up of £200k Council capital funding and £95k external funding dependent on anticipated S106 receipts; however, £120k of external funding has already been committed and therefore there is potential for the budget to be increased to £415k.
24. **Equalities:** The Taking Play Forward policy advocates and promotes inclusive practice throughout the document.
25. **Crime and Disorder:** The development of future schemes will take into consideration the Taking Play Forwards 5 key principles ensuring that there is clear need and involvement from the local community, thus promoting and enabling local ownership. Scheme are required to be reflective of best practice, and will take advice from key guidance documents including Play England's, Design for Play 2008, Better Places to Play through Planning 2009 and Secured by Design.
26. There are no **Human Resources, Legal, Information Technology, Property** or **Other** implications.

Risk Management

27. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified associated with the proposals contained in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives and to deliver services, leading to damage to the Council's reputation and failure to meet stakeholders' expectations. The level of risk is assessed as "Low". This is acceptable but means that regular monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

Contact Details

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Specialist Implications Officers:			

Wards Affected:	All	✓
For further information please contact the author of the report		

Annexes

- 1: Taking Play Forward Policy
- 2: Ineligible Sites
- 3: Community Impact Assessment

Abbreviations:

LGBT - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender