

Casual Play Opportunities Scrutiny Review – Final Report

Background

1. In coming to a decision to review this topic, the Committee recognised certain key objectives and the following remit was agreed:

Remit

To participate in the consultation on the revisions to CYC's Play Policy, and carry out a comparison of the play opportunities for 5-13yr olds, within a number of residential areas/wards (one city centre, one suburban and one village)

Objectives

- i. to understand the different types of provision suitable for each type of area
 - ii. to assess the potential space within the identified areas/wards that could be utilised for play
 - iii. to recommend a strategy for the provision of suitable play opportunities within the identified areas
 - iv. To be consulted on the revisions to the Council's play policy and if appropriate, the Local Development Framework (LDF)
2. At a meeting in January 2010, Members agreed to focus their review on St Pauls (central), Fishergate (suburban) and Deighton (village), and to carry out informal visits to those schools to gather the views of parents on the opportunities for casual play in their area.

Consultation

3. The Head of Play & Young People's Cultural Entitlement provided support to the committee throughout the review. The Head of Parks & Open Spaces also participated in the review and in April 2010, the Committee held an informal meeting to consult with representatives from Playspace.
4. In addition, members of the committee carried out a number of informal visits to schools to gather the views of parents on the opportunities for casual play in their area.

Information Gathered

5. Members received an information pack before an informal meeting on 13 April 2010, to inform their discussions. The pack contained the following:
 - York Playspace 'Mobile Playspace Report 2009'
 - The results from the TellUs3 and TellUs4 survey
 - Feedback from the completed parents questionnaires
6. York Playspace

Representatives from Playspace discussed with Members their delivery of play opportunities for children throughout the city (in both urban and rural areas). Their Summer 2009 report gave details on the mobile and venue-based playschemes they provided during summer 2009, together with information on how these were funded, attendance levels and a summary of the feedback received from parents/carers and children. Many of the locations used by Playspace have been used for 14-15 years. These are well known and well advertised and therefore the take up is always high. Playspace recognise that when introducing a playscheme in a new area, the take up is likely to be poor at first, and that they will need to persevere in order to build a relationship with families in the area based on mutual respect and confidence in the play opportunities they provide. That is why one-off visits to a site are often unsuccessful e.g. Cleveland Street / Danebury Drive.
7. In regard to Deighton, Playspace confirmed they had previously worked with individuals in the area to identify a suitable space for children to play. The local Hall was deemed to be unusable due to its size and the lack of appropriate toilet facilities, and there is no suitable public outdoor space available. Local Farmers had been approached to ascertain if they were prepared to make available any small piece of land close the village centre but this had proved unsuccessful. Playspace had therefore suggested the village work with another village in the area i.e. Wheldrake, to perhaps pool their resources and provide some space for play that way.
8. Chill Out Zones (aimed at children aged 8-13) – unlike playschemes, Playspace provide these 46-48 weeks of the year, and they are venue based in three specific areas of the city – Tanghall Community Centre; 68 Centre; and Moor Lane Youth Centre. They provide children with open access to child led activities, in a safe environment. As well as receiving funding from the Play Team (40k), the Tanghall and 68 Centre chill out zones are also well supported by ward committee funding. The Moor Lane zone is not as well supported by the relevant ward committees, and therefore it is partly funded by a play grant from City of York Council. Feedback from parents shows that they are at ease knowing adults are on site supervising the activities.
9. Training of staff and volunteers – Playspace currently have funding from North Yorkshire Learning Consortium to provide training for their volunteers over the next six months. They have already trained five volunteers who are now actively supporting the three Chill Out zones across the city, and are hoping to train a further twenty. They would also like to develop this further by offering training to volunteers working with other smaller play organisations in the city.

10. TellUs Survey Results
Members had intended comparing the survey results from 2008-09 (TellUs3) and 2009-10 (TellUs4), in order to identify and investigate the reasons for any changes in the views of children and young people over the two year period. Unfortunately, the number of questions relating to play and out of school activities had been seriously reduced in the TellUs4 survey making it difficult to carry out such a comparison – see Annex B.
11. Parents Questionnaires
The responses from parents with children at St Pauls School and Fishergate School are shown at Annex C. Members recognised that the perceived barriers to play would need to be addressed to achieve a marked increase in the take up of casual play opportunities.
12. In response to the ‘Barriers to play’ identified in the completed questionnaires, the Head of Play provided information on a number of CYC initiatives currently ongoing and scheduled for 2010-11 which aim to address these issues of concern – see Annex D.

Analysis

13. Evidence gathered nationally shows a marked decline in the extent of outdoor play for children as their freedom to roam has been curtailed compared with previous generations. 71% of adults used to play near their home every day when they were a child compared to only 21% of children today. A recent nationwide poll showed that 83% of British adults think the next government should have policies that ensure children can play outside more.
14. With this mind, Play England and its partners have produced a ‘Manifesto for Children’s Play’ calling for the next government to make play a priority (see copy at Annex E). It asks all political parties to make 3 simple pledges for all children and young people to have the freedom and space to play enjoyed by previous generations:
 - To make all residential neighbourhoods child-friendly places where children can play outside
 - To give all children the time and opportunity to play throughout childhood
 - To give all children somewhere to play - in freedom and safety - after school and in the holidays
15. The nationally developed Playshaper training event held in York in 2009 brought together multi agency representatives including Play, Police, Housing, Parks and Open Spaces, the voluntary sector, City Strategy, Transport and Planning, all of whom have an impact upon children’s quality of life.
16. The training focused on child-friendly design, planning and management of public space and enabled local authority colleagues and other stakeholders to consider how design, planning and management of public space can help deliver on a range of local priorities including community cohesion, health targets, regeneration aims and how addressing the needs of children, young people and their parents in the built environment can potentially reduce crime, fear of crime and accidents.

17. For York, there were a number of outcomes from the event which included:
 - Identifying new partners who pledged to assist in the development of play opportunities in the city
 - The formation of a new strategic board to ensure the development and implementation of the 'Taking Play Forward' policy
18. In carrying out the review, the Committee recognised that in some areas of the city there is a zero tolerance towards children playing in open spaces near homes. Members suggested that Ward Committees, Parish Councils and Residents Associations may be able to reach out to their local communities and work with them to encourage a more positive attitude. For example, the replacement of negative signage like 'No Ball Games' with positive signage like 'You Can Play Here'.
19. With this in mind and in order to recommend a strategy for the provision of suitable play opportunities within specific types of area within the city (in line with objective (iii) of this review), the Committee agreed to recommend that a pilot scheme be undertaken involving all the relevant agencies (as listed in paragraph 13 above), to include:
 - Working with children and parents through schools in the identified areas to identify what they perceive to be barriers to play
 - Holding a public meeting to gather the views of other residents, local businesses and other interested parties
 - Building on the school's travel plans to create a 'Safe Routes to Play' document for the area
 - Identify any improvements required to road crossings/markings to reduce the danger of traffic
20. Identifying the right pilot areas and communication with residents in those areas through their ward committee, was identified as being key to a successful pilot scheme.
21. Their ideas around the introduction of a pilot scheme were considered at the first meeting of the new 'Taking Play Forward' Strategic Board, which met for the first time late April 2010. They agreed with the suggested approach and as an outcome from their meeting, officers were asked to:
 - Send the board a draft version of the 2010 Taking Play Forward, play policy.
 - Gather relevant information to help inform the selection of a suitable pilot area in line with the outcome from the scrutiny review on 'Casual Play Opportunities - suggestions, included number of 5-13 years olds per ward, areas of deprivation etc - see attached
 - Invite other representatives to the next meeting including tenancy federation, disability and the play voluntary and community sector
 - Feed back to the YorOk Board about the Playshaper and new Play Policy
 - Arrange for a representative from Housing to participate in future meetings
 - Liaise with Police to work with the Police Architectural Liaison officers

22. CYC Draft Play Policy

As part of this review and in support of objective (iv), the Committee wanted to be consulted on the draft Play Policy that officers were working on earlier this year. Following the general election and the resulting change in government, the Play Team took the decision to wait for information before finalising their work on the draft policy, to ensure it properly reflected the expected changes to government policy. The Committee therefore agreed to conclude their work on the review and identified the recommendations shown at paragraph 31 below.

23. Subsequently in October 2010, the Committee received an update on the Playbuilder scheme and took part in the consultation process for the draft Play Policy. Overall they were happy that the policy reflected their views on the provision of play opportunities and therefore no further recommendations were agreed and they signed off this review.

24. Other Issues

The committee acknowledged that as part of the council's ongoing organisational review, officers were looking at a more joined up way of working around 'area based service delivery', involving all services provided by the council including the work of the Play Team and those CYC services identified in paragraph 14 above. They agreed with the idea of piloting this new working approach in one area of the city first, and the decision to carry out the pilot in a large section of the west of the city.

25. Finally the committee agreed that the pilot scheme being recommended as a result of this scrutiny review would benefit from being incorporated into this new organisational approach to service delivery, as officers from all of the relevant services will be involved, preventing any duplication of work. Also, the west of the city (as chosen for the pilot scheme referred to in paragraph 24) would also be suitable for, and benefit from, the scheme being recommended as a result of this review.

Options

26. Having considered all of the information contained within this report and its associated annexes, Members may amend and/or agree the suggested recommendations and identify any amendments required to the draft final report.

Implications

27. There are no known significant Financial, HR, Equalities, Legal Crime & Disorder, Property or Other implications associated with the recommendations from this review. However, there may be some minimal administrative costs associated with introducing a pilot scheme as recommended below.

Corporate Strategy

28. The review of this topic supports the Council's corporate aim to inspire residents and visitors to free their creative talents and make York the most active city in the country, by providing high quality cultural and sporting activities for all.

29. It also supports the Council's aim to make York a 'Healthy City' by improving the provision of facilities for children and teenagers to participate in active play.

Risk Management

30. There are no known risks associated with the recommendations arising from this review.

Recommendations

31. The Committee recommend that the Executive authorise officers to:
- a) support the introduction of a pilot scheme by working with the new 'Taking Play Forward' Strategic Board to:
 - identify 3 diverse areas within the 'area based service delivery' pilot area which would benefit from such a scheme
 - identify all the relevant parties from within the council, external organisations, and from within the identified area of the city to participate in the scheme
 - draft a framework for the scheme for the Executive's consideration
 - b) encourage ward committees, parish councils and residents associations to promote the value of outdoor play and take up any opportunities for encouraging community buy-in to play opportunities in their locality

Reason: To conclude the review in line with scrutiny procedures and protocols

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Interim Report Approved **Date** 2 July 2010

Specialist Implications Officer(s) N/A

Wards Affected: All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

- Annex A** – Playspace Summer 2009 Report
- Annex B** – TellUs Survey Results
- Annex C** – Parents Questionnaire Responses
- Annex D** – CYC Projects & Initiatives
- Annex E** – Play England's 'Manifesto for Children's Play'