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## **SUTTON COURT PLAYSPACE, ROCHFORD**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report advises Members of anti-social behaviour within and around the Sutton Court Playspace and seeks Members' views on possible courses of action.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 Sutton Court Playspace is a well-established playspace with a range of facilities, including a teen shelter. The latter was erected a few years ago in response to the natural gathering of youths in the area.
- 2.2 Recently, allegations have surfaced that the teen shelter is being used inappropriately, often as a hiding place, allegedly for the illegal consumption of alcohol and the use of drugs. It is also being used to create noise disturbance in the general area through youths banging on the roof of the shelter. These activities occur from dusk onwards.
- 2.3 The playspace has also been used as a makeshift football area and this has resulted in neighbours complaining of balls being kicked into their property, on occasions causing damage to their property. Whilst attempts have been made to curtail ball games, through the erection of bollards, this seems to have proved largely ineffective.
- 2.4 Recently the incidents of anti-social behaviour have escalated and this has impacted on the surrounding area. Incidents include the smashing of residents' windows and food being thrown at walls in the area.

### **3 PUBLIC MEETING**

- 3.1 In response to growing public concern, the Chairman of this Committee, local Ward Councillors and officers held a public meeting in December, to which local residents were invited. As a result of that meeting, volunteers came forward to lock the playspace at night time, although this was recognised as a short-term solution. However, there is a need to try and provide a more durable solution to the problem, either through formalising arrangements to secure the playspace at night time, or perhaps through removing all or part of the playspace altogether. Those residents present at the public meeting advised that they did not allow their children to use the playspace, because of the problems associated with it.

#### **4 POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

- 4.1 It is clear that the use of volunteers to lock/unlock the play area is very much a temporary solution and, therefore, in the longer-term one solution might be to formally lock/unlock the area by the use of Council staff and/or external contractors employed by the Council. However, in looking at this as a potential solution for this area, Members should be aware that similar situations have occurred and continue to occur at other play areas across the District from time to time. Up to now, in response to the problems in these other play areas, the Council has relied on voluntary assistance from the adjoining residents. If the Council was to decide to use its own staff and/or external contractors in this instance, then it is likely that a similar demand would be made in respect of other play areas. Thus, it is important that no decision is taken in isolation.
- 4.2 The Council has considered the locking and unlocking of play areas on many occasions in the past, with costs quoted of £20,000 plus, to provide a locking/unlocking service 365 days of the year. On previous occasions Members have decided to rely on voluntary support, rather than formalise the procedure in a more structured way.
- 4.3 The Playspace Sub-Committee has only recently concluded its review of play areas, but it may be that the Sub-Committee should be reconvened as a matter of urgency to specifically look at this play area to focus on the management of anti-social behaviour issues. In examining detailed solutions around this play area, it might be possible to develop a template which could then be applied to other similar areas. The detailed costs, in relation to both this play area and the wider implications in terms of other play areas, could also be examined. The Parish could also be asked for its views on how to address the situation and whether it has any resources which it could contribute.

#### **5 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

##### **5.1 Strategic Risk**

The play areas represent a major asset of the Authority, at the same time their appearance and management could well impact on the reputation of the Council in terms of its ability to tackle specific anti-social behaviour issues in a positive and cost effective fashion.

##### **5.2 Resource Risk**

The opening and locking of the gates at Sutton Court Playspace, if undertaken on a contractual basis, would incur a cost to the Authority, which could be in excess of £5,000 per annum, for which there is no funding allocated in the budget at present. To roll out a more formal system District-

wide could cost in excess of £20,000 per annum, as more playspaces were incorporated in to the scheme.

**6 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 These have been highlighted in this report.

**7 RECOMMENDATION**

7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) To request that the Playspace Sub-Committee be reconvened to look specifically at the issues emerging at Sutton Court and to devise a plan of action for addressing these issues, with a view to developing a working template which can be applied District-wide, including consideration in detail of the resource implications.
- (2) To seek the formal views of Rochford Parish Council in specifically addressing the problems of this playspace and potential solutions.  
(CE)

Paul Warren

Chief Executive

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**Background Papers:-**

None

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