

PLAYSPACE ROLLING PROGRAMME 2003/04

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information relating to maintenance costs and average installation costs for playspaces, so that these may be considered in relation to the Parish Councils.
- 1.2 To assist Members in consideration of their discussion with Parishes on playspaces, a copy of the report on the consultation exercise carried out with Town and Parish Councils is appended. This was considered by the Policy & Finance Committee at its meeting on 8 July 2003.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The report for 2003/04, playspace rolling programme was submitted to Community Services Committee on 1 July 2003. In that report the proposals for the programme included High Street, Great Wakering and Ashington Road, Rochford.
- 2.2 As part of the discussion at this Committee, Members felt that as the users of playspaces would be predominately local people, it would be appropriate for Parish Councils to pay half the associated playspace costs.
- 2.3 In previous years Parish Councils have been invited to take on the maintenance of newly refurbished playspaces. Parish Councils have declined to take on this maintenance since the beginning of the rolling programme.

3 INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE COSTS OF PLAYSPACES

- 3.1 The current rolling programme provides £50,000 per year, which allows the Council to refurbish two playspaces each year.
- 3.2 From the current grounds maintenance contract, the annual maintenance cost of a playspace is £1,760. This includes any minor repairs that are carried out on a regular basis.
- 3.3 Maintenance of additional play equipment per unit is £268, when new equipment is installed.
- 3.4 Playspaces are inspected twice weekly at an individual cost of £7.20 per inspection, with an annual cost of £748 per site.

3.5 An annual inspection is carried out by the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) at a cost of £70.00 per site.

3.6 The total annual cost associated with each play area equates to £2,578 per site per year.

4 OVERALL MANAGEMENT OF PLAYSPACES

4.1 In providing playspaces, the District Council takes on the responsibility for their safety and management. This responsibility requires regular inspection and maintenance of the sites.

4.2 Should Members consider the viability of refurbishment being dependent on whether a Parish Council is able to provide a substantial contribution to the cost, then Members should also be aware that if a Parish Council is unable to contribute, the refurbishment of the playspace might not go ahead. In this instance, Members may be asked to make a further decision on whether to go ahead with refurbishment at the total expense of the District Council, or whether the playspace should be closed.

4.3 If a playspace has risen up the priority listing to require refurbishment, this is normally due to health and safety issues which require replacement of much of the equipment and safety surfaces or removal of the equipment, with the consequential loss of play value of that playspace.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 Strategic Risk

5.1.1 Playspaces have inherent risk and therefore regular inspection and maintenance is absolutely essential, if children are to play in a safe environment. The level of inspection and regular maintenance cannot be reduced if this risk is to be managed.

5.1.2 The annual audit by the NPFA provides a complete inspection and an independent review of the risk inherent in playspaces. Risks that are identified through this inspection are dealt with on an urgent basis, as these clearly require attention.

5.2 Resource Risk

5.2.1 A significant sum has been invested in playspaces over the years and is currently funded through the playspace rolling programme and revenue maintenance budgets.

5.2.2 The investment requires regular inspection and maintenance if the resources already invested are not to be put at risk.

- 5.2.3. Should the investment not be maintained, then the Authority increases the risk of potential insurance claims, should an accident occur within a playspace.

5.3 Operational Risk

- 5.3.1 Residents of the District expect that a playspace should provide a safe and welcoming environment for their children to play. This can only be achieved through regular inspection and maintenance.

5.4 Reputation Risk

- 5.4.1 Rochford District Council has a reputation for providing good quality playspaces that provide for a range of ages across the District. Failure to maintain these playspaces to the requisite standard would bring the Council into disrepute.

5.5 Regulatory Risk

- 5.5.1 All new play equipment installed in the playspaces conforms to current British and European legislation. Regular inspection and maintenance ensures that equipment is kept up to this standard and potential shortfalls of new standards are identified.

5.6 Third Party Risk

- 5.6.1 All children's play must include an element of risk; otherwise play is not fun to the child. However, this risk is managed through British and European standards and through regular inspection and maintenance.

6 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The provision of play equipment can contribute to the reduction in crime and disorder issues.
- 6.2 All playspaces require an element of passive surveillance/regular passer-by etc. to improve the security of children using the playspaces.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Refurbishment of playspaces improves the local environment of an area and contributes to the well being of families within that area, by providing safe areas of play.
- 7.2 It encourages children and young people into the experience of quality play areas and also contributes to improved health and quality of life issues.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Playspaces are currently funded through capital and revenue budgets. This report would not increase the District Council's commitment to the provision of playspaces.
- 8.2 Land is a corporate resource. In the event of a playspace being closed, the Council is faced with the prospect of having a vacant plot of land that would require management in order to prevent nuisance to residents. Prior to any decision to close a playspace, it would be necessary to identify the alternative land uses in order that informed decisions may be made.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council has a legal obligation when providing play facilities to ensure they are in a safe condition. This rolling programme contributes to providing safe playspaces. As a back up to the normal inspection and maintenance of playspaces, a risk assessment is carried out annually by the NPFA on all playspaces.

10 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 In previous years, as part of the rolling programme, Parish Councils have been invited to taken on the maintenance costs following refurbishment. To date, Parish Councils have declined this invitation.
- 10.2 Not all Parish Councils may be able to take on the maintenance costs of a playspace or contribute sufficiently to the refurbishment of a playspace.

11 RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 It is proposed that the Committee **recommends** one of the following:-
- (1) That the playspace rolling programme proceeds with the District Council funding the whole programme.
 - (2) That the rolling programme is only carried out where a Parish Council is able to contribute to both the refurbishment of a playspace and take on the long term maintenance costs following the refurbishment.
(CD(F&ES))

Roger Crofts

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Background Papers:

None.

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APPENDIX A

Policy & Finance Committee – 8 July 2003

TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the responses received from the Town and Parish Councils in the District to a recent consultation exercise undertaken by the Authority.
- 1.2 The purpose of the exercise was to clarify the resources and capacity available at the local level and to receive some feedback on the mechanisms currently in place to facilitate partnership working.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 With partnership working around the delivery of services and the provision of facilities being an area of growing interest, a survey has now been carried out of the Town and Parish Councils in the District in an attempt to clarify the resources and capacity, if any, which might be available.
- 2.2 In looking at possible joint initiatives in the past, it is clear that this Council did not always have a complete picture on the planned activity, capacity, resources or views of the Local Councils concerned.
- 2.2 Last year an attempt was made to put together financial information based on the accounts of the Local Councils. Unfortunately this did not prove satisfactory, as a number of assumptions had to be made in relation to these figures.
- 2.3 Consequently a questionnaire was drawn up and sent to the Local Councils in April with a reminder sent in June.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Appendix A to this report shows the information on the replies received at the time of writing this report. Further information may be available at the meeting.
- 3.1 Members are aware of how variable the sizes of Parishes are. The amount of precept required shows that there are five who are below a precept of

£10,000. When thinking about service delivery and partnerships, therefore capacity is an issue, particularly for these Councils.

- 3.2 It is also worth noting that within those Local Councils whose precept is under £10,000 they contain the Parish with the lowest Parish precept per Band D (Rawreth - £17.25) and also the highest (Sutton - £46.85).
- 3.3 As far as questions 1 to 4 are concerned there appears to be moves to make the information more widely known e.g. through Parish magazines and website developments.
- 3.4 If Members would like to have ongoing information regarding the plans of the Local Councils a new request could be made for the information that they have considered in setting their precept to be sent to the District Council, at the same time when the precept is demanded of us.
- 3.5 As regards Question 6. One of the key reasons for this questionnaire was to identify the activity of the Local Councils to better inform the District regarding partnerships and the avoidance of duplication. Here comments are made on these issues.
- 3.6 Although the concept of avoiding duplication may be simple in that the District Council might wish to be responsible for strategic assets and services for the District and Local Councils responsibility for local assets and services, there are a number of factors that have to be taken into account.
- The resources available within the Local Council to fund and manage the facilities deemed local.
 - Defining what is a strategic asset or service.
 - Preferences of the District or Local Council as to whether they choose to manage an asset or service.
- 3.7 On question 7 the specific item are examples where partnership working could help. These specific issues will be taken up by the appropriate officers to identify what is involved within the request.
- 3.8 With regard to questions 8, consultation is a vital part of the evidence for the way that services are delivered. It is acknowledged that this process can be difficult for the smaller Local Councils. In addition the District Council knows the problems it faces when consultation deadlines do not fit into the established Committee timetable.

4 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The activities and inter-relationships with Local Councils have the potential to affect all services.

5 RECOMMENDATION

5.1 It is proposed that Members consider this report.

Dave Deeks

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Background Papers:

Replies from Parish/Town Councils.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire to Parishes	14 Parishes - 8 replies
Question	
1 What information do you publish regarding your precept demand and the estimates behind the demand	Precept information (1) All relevant minutes and Schedules (6) Annual estimates sheet (1)
2 How do you publish it	Parish Magazine/newsletter (3) Hard copy or by e-mail on request plus website being Developed (1) Attached to minutes of meeting (3) Information to local shops (1) Library and Web Site (1)
3 What information do you publish regarding your final accounts	Standard audit procedure (7) All relevant minutes and Schedules (1)
4 How do you publish it	Parish Magazine (1) Hard copy or by e-mail on request plus website being Developed (1) Annual statement (1) Noticeboard (4) Copies available in office (1) Library and Web Site (1)
5 What additional financial information would you like to see from Rochford	No or no comment (6) Sufficient thank you (1) Communication of joint projects or donations (e.g. Hockley Community Association issue) - (HCA) (1)
6 Are there any areas that you would like to see greater co-operation with the District Council on budgets or financial management	No or no comment (5) Partnership working to share/reduce costs (1) Maybe some assistance with end of year preparation (assume accounts) (1) Avoidance of dual taxation on items as street lights, cemeteries and churchyards (1)
7 Are there any areas that you would like to see greater co-operation with the District Council on contractors contracts and purchasing	No or no comment (7) Hire services through RDC for repairs and hedge cutting Would like to explore (e.g. Contract for the disposal of green waste) (1)
8 Have you any comments regarding the consultation process between the Council and yourself. For example areas to be added, areas to be deleted etc	No or no comment (3) Longer consultation period due to schedule of meetings(1) Consultation with all parishes is a valid process and there should be more of it (1) Find all areas of RDC supportive on requests (1) Little experience of direct consultation (1) Would like to discuss issues with RDC before decisions are made affecting the Parish (e.g. HCA) (1)
9 Any other comments	None