

## **PLAYSPACE POLICY**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Member agreement in respect of future policy regarding Playspace upgrading, maintenance and repair, in partnership with Parish Councils.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 During 2004/5 and 2005/6 a policy emerged whereby it was considered reasonable to request those Parish Councils that had a Council playspace in their area, to meet the cost of annual maintenance and repair. The District Council would continue to meet, in full, the Capital cost of upgrading and replacing equipment.
- 2.2 This culminated with the Parish Liaison Sub-Committee at the meeting held on 27 September 2005, instructing officers to enter into discussions with Parishes on this issue (minute 13 of that meeting refers).
- 2.3 Also during this period, the Playspace Sub-Committee was tasked with resolving a nuisance issue at the Sutton Court Playspace in Rochford and thereby providing a template for resolving any future issues.

### **3 MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR**

- 3.1 During the winter, discussions were held with the Parishes at officer level. Parish officers have since notified the Council that when the issue was raised at Member level, it was felt that contributions should not be made to what is primarily a District service. It was further considered that such a contribution would in effect be double taxation on the Parish area. One Parish, during officer discussions, did suggest that Parishes may be more able to attract external funding for upgrading playspaces.
- 3.2 The argument in respect of double taxation can be debated from both sides. The service is however, primarily a District service. The playspaces are in the ownership or care of the District Council and whilst equipment is provided, a legal duty exists to ensure the areas are maintained for health and safety reasons. In addition, with National policies concentrating more on children and young people, there will be continuing pressure for the District to provide and possibly enhance, this service.

### **4 WAY FORWARD**

- 4.1 It is suggested that the discussions with regard to Parishes contributing to maintenance and repair, be discontinued.

- 4.2 As mentioned at paragraph 3.2 above, play is receiving national attention. District Councils, in partnership with County Councils and the local communities, are being encouraged to bring forward strategies to identify specific schemes that will enhance all aspects of play.
- 4.3 Any schemes identified will be eligible for funding from the Big Lottery Scheme. Rochford has been advised that £200,000 has been earmarked for the District to help fund initiatives. Extensive work will be required by officers over the next few months, if this funding is to be accessed. A Play Strategy will be required which can be either be completed at County level, but will require large amounts of officer time to provide audit data, or a local strategy can be completed with partner agencies (Children's Centre organising group, Extended Schools etc.). Further information is required before a decision on this can be made.
- 4.4 A third strand of the Play England project is for "Regional Support and Infrastructure." A grant of £15 million was awarded to the Children's Play Council, part of the National Children's Bureau. Nine regional partnerships will be set up with a 5 year work programme that includes a strategic enabling service to local authorities and partners. It will increase policy, research and information communication and provide play strategy workshops.
- 4.5 In addition, Parishes will be able to access grants of between £10,000 and £250,000 from the "Playful Ideas" fund for innovative ideas for children's play. Such applications will have to demonstrate partnership working with the District Council, other agencies and the local community, to be successful.
- 4.6 Furthermore, 'Awards for All' can now award grants for £10,000 every two years, which could be used for play spaces, as long as the request meets the 'Awards for All' criteria.
- 4.7 In view of the above, a separate report on this agenda seeks Members' agreement to the playspaces to be upgraded/refurbished for 2006/07 and 2007/8. Parishes will then be consulted and requested to seek external funding for 2007/8, in order to assist the refurbishment programme and hopefully improve the playspaces to an even greater extent. This will enable Parishes to explore funding opportunities in good time prior to the 2007/08 programme. In 2007/8 Members will be requested to approve the 2008/9 programme and so on for subsequent years, in order that Parishes continue to have adequate time to explore external funding, in partnership with the District.

## **5 NUISANCE AREAS**

- 5.1 In tackling the problems at Sutton Court playspace, consultation was first undertaken with the following:
- Residents in the area

- Users of the playspace
- Youth Service
- Police
- Parish Council.

5.2 Following the consultation a site visit was carried out, followed by a meeting of the Playspace Sub-Committee at a local venue. Members of the public, including the young people that attended the meeting, were allowed to contribute to the debate.

5.3 In this particular instance, proposals were discussed; one short term low cost, to give some immediate response and one long term. The Parish Council agreed to meet 50% of the immediate low cost works. This work has now been completed. With regard to the longer term initiative, the Parish agreed to seek external funding in an attempt to provide 50% of the cost, with the District Council agreeing to provide match funding.

5.4 It is therefore suggested that the above provides a template for action, should the need arise in other areas with the District

## **6 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

### **Strategic Risk**

6.1 The Government looks to District Councils to provide the strategic leadership for play in their area.

### **Resource Risk**

6.2. Resource for maintenance and repair is included within the core revenue budget. The Council provides a rolling Capital budget of £50,000 per annum for upgrading and replacement of equipment. This could well be supplemented further by external funding.

### **Operational Risk**

6.3 It is essential to ensure that play areas are safe at all times. To this end inspection regimes are rigidly adhered to, and an annual inspection carried out by the NPFA.

### **Reputation Risk**

6.4 Should any playspaces be earmarked for closure, the public will look to the District Council in the first instance. Such criteria would need to be justified on service grounds. It is suggested that financial grounds would be secondary.

- 6.5 If the playspaces were not adequately maintained, there would be serious reputation risk if a user were to be injured as a result.

**Regulatory Risk**

- 6.6 Whilst the service is provided, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure the areas are kept safe.

**Third Party Risk**

- 6.7 If anyone was injured as a result of inadequate maintenance, the Council would be subject to action through the Courts.

**7 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Provisions of good quality play facilities can be shown to have a positive effect on behaviour, thereby reducing crime.

**8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Council would be held liable if an injury occurred as a result of inadequate maintenance.

**9 PARISH IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Those Parishes that have District Council playspaces in their area, will be affected by these proposals.

**10 RECOMMENDATION**

- 10.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
- (1) To adopt the actions set out in Section 4 of the above report, in respect of future development of playspaces.
  - (2) To adopt the actions set out in Section 5 of the above report in respect of nuisance.

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**Background Papers:-**

- Letters and emails from Parish Councils, following Officer discussions.
- Ashingdon Parish Council letter 9.11.05
- Rawreth Parish Council letter 12.12.05
- Great Wakering Parish Council email 10.1.06.
- Hawkwell Parish Council letter 19.1.06
- Rayleigh Town Council letter 24.1.06

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