

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 24th January 2011

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WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Cultural and Leisure – Councillor Chaudhry
Education and Children – Councillor Pantelic
Environment and Open Spaces – Councillor Parmar

PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

PLAY AREA DEVELOPMENT

1 Purpose of Report

To inform Members of the Cabinet of progress on the development and improvement of Slough's play areas and play development programme and seek approval to develop a Play Strategy for the next three to five years.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Cabinet is requested to resolve:

- (a) That the achievements over the two years in the provision of play and in the improvements made to the Council's play areas across the borough be noted.
- (b) That officers develop a new play strategy which will detail the strategic approach to be adopted for play area maintenance and development over the next three to five years.

3 Community Strategy Priorities

Celebrating Diversity, Enabling inclusion

The provision of new play opportunities for all children and young people in Slough will enable them to enjoy their younger years and to play in harmony.

Adding years to Life and Life to years

Children and young people who get the opportunity to be really active in their formative years will live longer.

Being Safe, Feeling Safe

All the new play areas enable children and young people to play in a safe environment whilst being able to explore and develop important skills vital to successful child development. All installations meet British Standards.

A Cleaner, Greener place to live, Work and Play

All the new play areas fully endorse the principles of a green environment with the majority of the facilities being laid to turf or surfacing which promotes grass growth.

Areas surrounding new play developments have been fully landscaped or returned to grass.

4 **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

£52K of additional revenue funding has been allocated from within existing departmental budgets to this year's parks and open spaces maintenance budget to carryout essential health & safety works and improvements works to a number of play areas, detailed in appendix 1.

The future play strategy will identify resource implications and source to include capital investment contributions through effective use of the HRA for housing sites.

(b) **Risk Management**

Recommendation	Risk/Threat/Opportunity	Mitigation(s)
Note progress on capital development programme	Delays due to adverse weather affecting sites, identified for Department of Education funding that as a result take the work past 31 st March 2011 and would not receive DofE funding.	Revise implementation programme and prioritise all DofE schemes over others for completion by mid March

(b) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

There are no Human Rights or other legal implications in regard of this report

(c) **Equalities Impact Assessment**

The current programme of play development and refurbishment is supported by a comprehensive equalities impact assessment. This highlighted a need to ensure all play areas were accessible for children and young people with disabilities. The new strategy will revise this EIA.

(d) **Workforce**

Funding for the Play Co-ordinator post ceases in March 2011. Through the Culture and Sports Delivery Team re-structuring, proposed for April 2011, proposals will incorporate play development functions into the revised service structure. There will be no cost implication to the Council.

5. **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 There are 86 designated play area sites in the borough. The Council owns and manages 80 of these, the remainder being Parish Council or privately owned. Slough in relation to neighbouring boroughs is well served for play areas. In contrasts the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead only manages 31 play areas and Bracknell Forest Council manages 26 play areas, with an additional 50 sites being managed directly by its parish and town councils.

5.2 Play Area Capital Programme

- 5.2.1 Over the past two years, up to May 2011, the Council will have successfully developed and upgraded 35 of its play areas. This equates to 41%.
- 5.2.2 27 of these are complete replacements of older outdated play equipment with new creative designs offering children and young people a range of new play experiences such as safe area water features, trampolines, climbing and 'aerial runways'.
- 5.2.3 Slough has secured over £1,400,000 in capital funding since 2008 to contribute to these improvements. This funding was initially earmarked for the upgrading of 24 play areas, including 2 flag ship areas based in Salt Hill and Upton Court Park. The use of section 106 and HRA capital has added a further three.
- 5.2.4 The capital funding has been supported by a £120,000 revenue grant to employ two specialist play development workers over a 3 year period.
- 5.2.5 In June during the final phase of the programme, the Department for Education announced that Playbuilder (DofE) funding would be frozen, leaving Slough with eight play areas short of its target. A further announcement on 20th October 2010 reversed this decision, enabling Slough to complete Phase 3, the development of a further eight play areas across the borough.
- 5.2.6 The revenue funding for the play development workers has not been re-instated and therefore funding for the Play Co-ordinators post will cease in March 2011.

5.3 Improvement Programme

In addition to the funding secured through the DofE the Council has been successful in securing a BIG Lottery bid, to the value of £322,000, which combined with Section 106 and HRA capital contributions has provided further investment delivering improvements to another 11 play areas, bringing the total to 35 by spring 2011. (See appendix 1)

5.4 Play Development Programme

- 5.4.1 In May 2009 the play development team was established using revenue grant funding from the BIG Lottery and the Department for Education. The Play Co-ordinator has been responsible for the delivery and project management of the capital programme alongside a community play programme, run at venues across the borough. They are supported by the Play Ranger.
- 5.4.2 Since July 2009 over 3,500 children have used the play ranger service in indoor and outdoor venues including parks, libraries and schools. The play ranger service has also hosted the following events:
- National Outdoor Play Week
 - Easter Egg Hunt and a family sports day linking in with National Family Week
 - Play Day – held on the 4th August in Salt Hill Park, attracting over 1,000 children and parents/carers.

- Mini Beasts event
- Willow weaving event with professional artists

Alongside this the team has joined in with a number of local events supporting community development and children's play.

5.5 Tellus4 Survey 2010

5.5.1 The Tellus national survey gathers the satisfaction levels and views of children and young people in Years 6, 8 and 10, on their life, their school and their local area. This includes satisfaction on play areas and parks.

5.5.2 Findings from the survey are used to inform policy development and to measure progress and performance, at a local and national level, across the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes. The survey supported five key national indicators including NI 199 'children's and young people's satisfaction with parks and play areas'.

5.5.3 Tellus4 results were published in February 2010 and there was substantial progress on the NI 199 indicator from the previous year, coinciding with the capital development programme. Slough results:

- Improved by 12.6% from 43.8% (Tellus3) to 56.4% (Tellus4).
- Improved at a faster rate than our comparators.
- The England average increased by 7.7% and the South East average by 7.2%.
- Slough's Tellus4 figure of 56.4% was 2.3% above the England average of 54.1%.
- Place Slough in the 3rd quartile of satisfaction

5.5.4 In June 2010 the Government announced its decision to stop the Tellus Survey as part of its commitment to reduce the burdens which data collection imposes on schools and local authorities.

5.6 Future Strategy

5.6.1 To ensure that we maintain the upgraded play areas and continue to improve provision across the borough the benefits of developing a new play strategy is recognised.

5.6.2 During October 2010 the Council undertook an audit of the remaining play areas across the town to gather background information to inform the future strategy. This identified the accessibility of play areas, the proximity of plays areas within neighbourhoods and the condition of the equipment and immediate surrounding.

5.6.3 Work is also underway to establish the true cost of play provision in the borough; including the annual costs of inspection, maintenance and repairs and future improvements and developments of play sites. This work is of particular importance in the context of financial pressures facing the Council and combined with the audit will inform and shape the future strategy.

5.6.4 It is proposed that a new play strategy for the town is presented to Cabinet in July 2011, following consultation, and sets out the Council's strategic direction for future

play provision. It will be a corporate strategy and will ensure that play provision is delivered in a way which integrates with other related functions of the Council; notably town planning, housing, parks and open spaces, sport and recreation provision and sports and arts development.

5.6.5 The strategy will aim to:

- Provide quality, appropriately located play opportunities which meet with local need identified by consultation with children, young people, parents and the community.
- Provide facilities accessible to all children and young people within a maximum of 10 minutes by foot.
- Provide facilities that are value for money, affordable and for which annual maintenance costs can be sustained
- Leverage where possible, additional capital and revenue funding into the Council to deliver the strategy

6 **Comments of Other Committees**

During the past two years a number of reports have been received by the Education and Children's Scrutiny Panel. Officer's recommendations have always received support.

7 **Conclusion**

Much work has been undertaken to improve the town's play provision using both external and Council funding. Over the last two years and up to May 2011, over thirty play areas, 41%, across all wards, will have received investment to improve the quality of play provision.

It is acknowledged that Slough is well served for play provision as compared to neighbouring authorities, and that Slough has high customer satisfaction rates as a direct result of the play improvement programme.

A new strategy is required in order to build upon this work and ensure that recent improvements and those agreed in the future are sustainable; particularly in the face of fiscal challenges facing the public sector, and provide play provision of quality to children and young people within a maximum ten minute walk of their home.

8 **Appendices Attached**

'Appendix A' Slough Play Areas - Scheme of work programme

9. **Background Papers**

'1' - Minutes and Agenda from the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panels held on 1st September 2008, 16th March 2009, 24th June 2009 and 1st February 2010