

3rd July 2018

Community and Housing Committee

Play Area Strategy – Working Group

Report of: *Stuart Anderson – Deputy operations Manager*

Wards Affected: *All Wards*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 As Members will be aware Councillors recently approved the draft Leisure Strategy at the Community, Health and Housing Committee on 5th March 2018.
- 1.2 The strategy is an overarching document that draws together all the Council's leisure and recreation opportunities within the Borough and how this can be supplied and improved to meet current and future demand of residents.
- 1.3 One element of the strategy is to review the provision, supply and condition of play areas within the Borough, this work stream was identified early within the working process of producing the leisure Strategy and has been highlighted in previous update reports.
- 1.4 Whilst the Leisure Strategy takes a holistic view of the Boroughs leisure and recreation facilities it does not identify the specific work programmes that are required to address supply, demand and condition within each workstream.
- 1.5 To achieve this, supporting strategies are needed that focus more on the detail of the workstream. To this end it has been identified by Officers that there is a need to produce a Play Area Strategy focusing specifically on the provision, supply and condition of play areas within the Borough.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That members agree to the formation of a working group to aid in the development of a new Play Area Strategy to be brought back to a future Committee.**
- 2.2 That Members agree to and instruct Officers to commence and move forward with the refurbishment of the toddler area at Courage Playing Field, outside of the work stream for the Play Area Strategy. That this be achieved using existing resources within the capital works programme.**
- 2.3 That Members instruct Officers to undertake an 'audit' of the Council's play sites to determine those areas that require more immediate attention on individual items and to report the findings of this audit back to a future committee.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 The Council's most recent Play Area Strategy expired in 2010 having been produced in 2007.
- 3.2 That document gave direction and scope as to the provision of play facilities within the Borough, what these facilities would look like in terms of size, equipment mix and also where sites were no longer required or not fit for purpose.
- 3.3 Although great steps were taken to improve play provision during the time the strategy was active it has been recognised, via the Leisure Strategy, that a new updated Strategy is required that considers the changes that have occurred in the Borough both in terms of built environment and demographics but also the changing financial position of the Council.
- 3.4 The intention of the new Strategy will be to build on the work achieved under the previous document and ensure that the Council is providing fresh, safe, vibrant, exciting, accessible and engaging play areas for the residents of the Borough.
- 3.5 The new Strategy will need to address the very different backdrop the Council now finds itself with, increased development and

greater demands on resources will mean that the need for robust play provision within the Borough will be of significant importance to both residents and visitors to the Borough.

- 3.6 In order for an encompassing Strategy to be produced it is recommended that the development of the document be referred to the Leisure Strategy members working group and that the finalised document be brought back to a future committee for consideration.
- 3.7 The purpose of this working group will be to review the existing provision within the Borough from a holistic approach and to then focus on each site on a case by case basis to determine suitability, condition and future need.
- 3.8 From this work a Strategy and, more importantly a works programme can be derived for Officers to execute over the requisite time frame to ensure the Council strives and continues to provide the high level of play facilities that have been enjoyed for many years within the Borough.
- 3.9 However, it is also recognised that some key sites may need to have attention in terms of their immediate condition and provision before the work on the new Strategy is completed.
- 3.10 This need will largely be due to Health and Safety issues around condition and also reputational risk to the Council if an unsafe or deteriorated facility does receive remedial attention.
- 3.11 One such situation has been identified by Officers as needing more urgent and timely attention, this being the toddler play area at Courage Playing Fields.
- 3.12 As Members may be aware, Courage Playing Fields is one of only two open spaces in the heavily populated Ward of Shenfield. It is also the only publicly accessible play area in the Ward which in 2011 was estimated to have a population of 5,432 people. This number will almost have certainly increased since that time.
- 3.13 Although work was undertaken to enlarge the play in in 2015 there was not sufficient funds to refurbish the toddler area at the time. This facility is now over 20 years old with much of the equipment, although safe, now aged and needing replacing.

- 3.14 Parts for the ageing play equipment are no longer available and as these fail safety inspections or become broken there is little choice but to either fence off or, when resources allow, to remove items altogether.
- 3.15 It is felt that due to the strategic location of this site, the sheer number of potential users in the Ward and surrounding area and the current condition of the play area that more urgent works are needed to refurbish this facility outside of the work of the planned strategy.
- 3.16 Officers therefore seek permission to undertake a refurbishment of the toddler area and further enhancements to the existing older age group play area in the current financial year.
- 3.17 Funding for the project has been identified within slippage from the current Capital Works Programme for 2018/19 which was approved at the Policy, Projects and Resources Committee on 19th June 2018
- 3.18 If works cannot take place this current financial year then it is highly likely that over the course of the next 6 months that the facility will need to be closed to public access until such time as works can take place, this is due to the likely safety risk associated with the deteriorating equipment.
- 3.19 In addition to this it is recommended that Officers undertake an 'audit' of the Council's play areas so that a determination may be made as to those sites that require more immediate attention on individual items of equipment as oppose to full refurbishments. This focus will be in terms of replacing individual items that are beyond economic repair, where spares are no longer readily available or where a safety risk would be imminent if the item were not replaced. The results of this audit will then be reported to members at a future committee.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 The Council currently operates, manages or oversees some 29 play facility sites around the Borough.

- 4.2 In order for the Council to continue to provide safe, fit for purpose engaging and modern play facilities it is important that it has an active Play Area Strategy in place that has a robust and achievable work programme behind it.
- 4.3 If it does not then the Authority exposes itself to both reputational risk but also financial risk due to the potential for claims from faulty, damaged or unrepairable equipment or infrastructure.
- 4.4 Whilst the Leisure Strategy will take an holistic view of the leisure and recreation facilities within the Borough it is important that this is supported by service specific strategies focusing on specific areas with work programmes for improvements and enhancements. Without these work streams it is possible that needed improvements will not be achieved in a structured manner.
- 4.5 It is estimated that the works will cost in the region of £100,000 to £125,000. Any underspend on the project will be passed back to the capital works programme for redistribution on other play facilities.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 To ensure that the Council has a robust strategy in place for the future provision and refurbishment of its play facilities around the Borough.
- 5.2 To ensure that resources, both financial and staffing can be adequately planned for as part of the Council's medium to long term financial plan.
- 5.3 To ensure that the existing play area at Courage Playing Fields is refurbished and remains fit for purpose and use for the residents of Shenfield and the surrounding area.

6. References to Corporate Plan

- 6.1 To ensure the provision of efficient and effective services to our residents and businesses.
- 6.2 Providing increased customer satisfaction in the quality of Council services.
- 6.3 To Increase access to the Borough's leisure opportunities.

- 6.4 Making Brentwood a Borough where people feel safe, healthy and supported.

7. Implications

Financial implications

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- 7.1 £151k Slippage has been identified from 2017/18 for play area refurbishment and approved at Policy, Project and resources committee on 19th June 2018.
This expenditure is available to fund the required works at courage playing fields, to refurbish the play area.

The Play Area Strategy, will seek a long term view of our play provision within the borough, and will enable necessary works to be structured within our Capital programme, which enforces good financial management.

Legal Implications

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The purpose of this report is to set up a working group to develop a new Play Area Strategy and to refurbish the Courage Playing field pending approval of funding. All works will be required to be procured in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders relating to Contracts and the provisions of the Equalities Act 2010 and s17 Crime & Disorder Act 2010 to design out potential for anti-social behaviour and property crime / damage.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

- 7.2 **Health & Safety implications**

Name & Title: David Wellings, Health & Safety Officers

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A proactive working group to support the new Play Area Strategy will assist in the identification of known risks and enable planned management and prioritisation.

The play area highlighted above, needs investment to reduce the Council's risk level and potential claims. The Council's duty of care to persons not in its employ, using the Council's public open spaces facilities for play and recreation, should ensure safe play areas where provided. This proposal will address these risks and concerns as well as reduce the Council's risk exposure from aged and damaged play equipment.

8. Appendixes

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