

Background Notes for Meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee on 17th June 2002**Play Equipment Provision****1. Introduction**

Thought it would be helpful to outline a few background facts and current issues regarding the provision of Play Equipment

2. We inspect / maintain approximately 250 items of equipment throughout the District at 45 sites.
3. Only 8 of these sites are directly managed South Derbyshire District Council sites. At the others the arrangements can be confusing. From our viewpoint the equipment on parish council sites belongs to the parish council and they have responsibility for the 'day to day' management of the site. Use of the play equipment by the public should be covered by their own public liability insurance (they have been made aware of this on a number of occasions). Some confusion arises because there will always be someone at parishes who will take the view that the equipment was installed by SDDC in the distant past and is therefore SDDC responsibility. We always, at every opportunity, reinforce the notion that it is 'theirs'.
4. Our commitment at village based sites is to inspect and maintain the play equipment on behalf of parish councils. This work is funded through the 'concurrent functions' budget. Twice yearly inspections are undertaken by our insurance company and other inspections are undertaken by the Council's own staff (18 per year – 2 different types of inspection). The inspections undertaken by our insurance company are 'engineering' rather than risk assessments.
5. A majority of our equipment stock is over 30 years old. Our overall strategy is to replace / renovate whole sites rather than safety surface or try and update old equipment. For village sites we are reliant on partnerships with PCs based on 50 / 50 split of costs. Depending on size of village cost of a new site is between £20k and £35k. Success with some PCs but others reluctant. No real external grant funding available to fund this type of work. Situation made worse this year because we have no capital allocation. **(Bid resubmitted as part of current budgetary process)**
6. In 1998/99 we commissioned a detailed survey by an external consultant into the quality of our play areas. This identified priorities i.e work to be undertaken within 1 year, 2 years etc. A quick review indicates that we have probably undertaken approximately 80% of the work identified as priority 1. Where work has not been done it is because of a lack of response from PCs. At the time reasonably content with our approach because we had a strategy in place for bringing our play areas up to current standards. We still have large amounts of play equipment that does not conform to the latest standards.
7. The most up to date standards are BS EN 1176 & 1177, which effectively amalgamate the previous British and German, standards. Under existing health and safety legislation should carry out risk assessments of play equipment (confirmed HSE information sheet ET 11)
8. 'The new standards are not retrospective or a legal requirement but represent good practice in the event of an accident claim'
9. In the process of a 'mini' Best Value review on the service.

Current Issues

- Problems in delivering our commitments to parish councils. In the process of clearing back log of repair work so that we start with a 'clean slate'. Question whether we should continue to offer the service.
- Problems in completing actions identified in insurance inspector's reports within timescales identified.
- Need to update / review consultant's original report
- Traditional resource problem in completing repairs by DSO staff. Undertaken secondary to grass cutting. Problem on client side last year in placing orders for repairs
- Service development proposal for dedicated officer to carry out repairs not approved last year. There has been a background of reports to Members over the years over play equipment issues particularly following consultant's report. **(Modified Service Development Proposal re-submitted as part of current process)**
- Provision of safety surfacing means that cost of carrying out repairs far exceeds budget. 2002/03 budget for work at PC sites is £5100. Have safety surfacing repairs lined up to the value of approximately £6k **(Again, new SDP submitted)**
- Other factors i.e. age of equipment, increased vandalism are all exacerbating problem.
- Strategy in abeyance for reasons described in 5 above
- No one qualified to undertake risk assessments. Even if we did have is it something we can reasonably take on? **(New SDP submitted to undertake this work in this financial year)**
- Are recommending at some sites that PCs have equipment removed.