
REPORT TO:	COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 6+7
DATE OF MEETING:	29 TH JULY 2002	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CHRIS MASON 5794	DOC:
SUBJECT:	FORMAL PLAY PROVISION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 That Members note the report

2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 To provide background information on some of the issues pertaining to the provision of formal play facilities for young people

3.0 Executive Summary

3.1 The report covers many issues relating to the provision of formal local facilities. Many of these require further explanation and discussion at the meeting. An obvious tension exists in reconciling poor and underfunded existing provision with the desire to provide new facilities aimed specifically at teenagers.

4.0 Detail

Existing Children's Play Provision – Background

4.1 We inspect / maintain approximately 250 items of equipment throughout the District at 44 sites.

4.2 Only 8 of these sites are directly managed South Derbyshire District Council sites. At the others the arrangements can be confusing. From the Council's viewpoint equipment on parish council sites belongs to parish councils and they have responsibility for its 'day to day' management. Parish councils do not always accept this view.

4.3 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 at rural sites and 33 per year at sites in the urban area). The inspections undertaken by our

insurance company are 'engineering' rather than risk assessments.

- 4.4 Some of our equipment stock is over 30 years old and our strategy has been to replace / renovate whole sites rather than safety surface or try and update old equipment. Over the past 5 years new renovated sites have been provided at:

Netherseal, Etwall, Egginton

In addition completely new sites have been provided at:

Findern, Swadlincote Woodlands and most recently Newhall Park

- 4.5 For village sites we are reliant on partnerships with parish councils based on a 50 / 50 split of costs. Depending on the size of village the cost of a new site varies between £20k and £35k. Some parish councils remain reluctant, for a variety of reasons, to pursue the modernisation of their play sites. Funding modernisation is further hampered by the fact that no real external grant funding is available for this type of work. Our modernisation strategy has 'stalled' because no capital funding has been made available in this year's capital programme. However, while we could continue to upgrade the Council's own sites, we do not have a waiting list of parish councils keen to upgrade their sites (particularly those where sites need upgrading).
- 4.6 In 1998/99, a detailed survey was commissioned into the quality of all of the District's play areas. This identified priorities i.e. work to be undertaken within 1 year, 2 years etc. To date, approximately 70% of the work identified in the report has been undertaken. Where work has not been done is because of a lack of response from two PCs. In particular.
- 4.7 The most up to date standards are BS EN 1176 & 1177, which effectively amalgamate the previous British and German, standards. We still have large amounts of play equipment that does not conform to these standards. The new standards are not retrospective or a legal requirement, but represent good practice and would be a good defence in the event of an accident claim.
- 4.8 In addition to the modernisation of an ageing stock of play equipment other factors are placing increasing demands on the service. Public expectation and awareness (particularly of safety issues) is increasing all of the time. Providing and maintaining safety surfacing, together with increasing levels of vandalism place ever greater pressure on revenue budgets that have remained static for years. The need to deliver more recent requirements, such as site risk assessments, also adds to this financial pressure.

Performance Standards

- 4.9 Over recent years it has been necessary to record and publish Best Value performance indicators relating to play equipment provision. A summary of these indicators together with our performance compared to others is contained in Annexe A.

Issues arising from our Management of the current stock of Play Equipment.

- 4.10

- Problems in delivering our commitments to parish councils. 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 carrying out required inspections and completing repairs by DSO staff. Undertaken secondary to grass cutting.
- Service development proposals for increased budget to carry out repairs more efficiently not approved by Members.
- Service development proposal for increased budget to undertake essential repair work to safety surfacing has not been approved. (approx. £6k value of work outstanding at present)
- Service development proposal to undertake risk assessments at all of the District's sites has been approved. As soon as this is confirmed by Committee work will be progressed. Assessments are likely to identify a large amount of work that requires undertaking.
- At sites at Melbourne and Linton, parish councils have been recommended to have the play equipment removed. This may be something we have to consider at other sites.
- Commenced a 'mini' best value of the existing service.
- Demands for new facilities (particularly for teenagers) when existing stock of equipment is in such a poor state.

Provision for Teenagers

- 4.11 One of the greatest demands on the service at the present time is the requirement to make specific provision for teenagers. These requests are being made to a variety of agencies and individuals including the Youth Service, District Councillors, the Police and Parish Councils (aware of demand at Repton and Willington, but probably many more). Making formal provision for teenagers is also a major issue for strategic partnerships, particularly the Crime and Disorder Forum.
- 4.12 The demand is predominantly for the following facilities:
- BMX, Skateboarding & rollerblading
- 4.13 No strategic study has ever been undertaken to ascertain the true level of demand or indeed how it could be accommodated. All that can be said, with some certainty, is that the above activities are not passing 'fads' that will disappear. The demand for skateboarding and rollerblading can be met at the same site. Generally, BMX provision needs more space. A BMX site in one of Derby City's parks occupies an area approximately the size of a football pitch.
- 4.14 Inevitably the demand to provide a suitable location falls on this Council. In identifying a suitable location the following key issues need to be considered :
- accessibility

- conflict with residential areas and other activities
- cost (generally, all skateboarding and rollerblading provision require a flat area of hardstanding). To provide this, where it does not exist, can account for a large share of the capital cost of provision. In addition to capital cost there are also revenue cost implications for new provision.

- 4.15 In 1999 / 2000 skateboarding equipment (to the value of £13,000) was provided in the multi-play area in Newhall Park. Initially, this was very well used. However, there was a marked downturn in use, although it still remained a relatively well used facility. Unfortunately, the equipment was badly vandalised making it necessary to remove what remained from site.
- 4.16 In strategic terms, an appropriate way of considering a new facility would be to view it as tiered provision. This would start at a local level with say up to £20,000 invested in 'local' provision. In urban area terms this would mean small-scale provision in Newhall, Swadlincote and Gresley (our urban parks are already viewed in this way). The next tier would be area provision that would be a slightly larger facility, say up to the value of £40,000. Logically, this would be located in the Swadlincote urban area. Regional provision would probably be the major private sector facilities that already exist in Derby City.
- 4.17 In 2000 it was thought that private sector funding was going to be available to provide a purpose built BMX facility in the Swadlincote urban area. At the time an option appraisal was undertaken to ascertain possible locations for the facility. This has been slightly amended and is included at Annexe B. Based on the options, and in terms of the tiered provision described in 4.16, Woodhouse Sports Ground car park would be the most suitable location for an area facility. Local facilities could be provided fairly easily at Newhall and Gresley Parks because they have existing areas of hardstanding. Provision at Eureka Park would be less easy. In the 'tiered' approach it may be more practical and appropriate to provide the more meaningful 'area' facility before making local provision.

5.0 Financial Implications

Play Equipment

- 5.1 In terms of capital, to modernise all of the District's existing sites would cost in the region of £400k to £500k. This assumes that there is no rationalisation of the number of play sites (difficult when the majority of sites are village based).
- 5.2 The current revenue implications of managing our play sites has really been encapsulated in the recent Service Development Proposals i.e. £20,000 to improve repair service & £6,000 to carry out immediate repairs to safety surfacing. The current budget allocation for repairs at village based sites is £5100.

Skateboarding, BMX and Rollerblading Provision

- 5.3 Very difficult to quantify. To provide small local facilities, based on areas that have a suitable area of existing hard standing would cost in the region of £20,000. More meaningful area provision would cost in the region of £40,000.
- 5.4 Whatever is provided will have ongoing revenue implications in the form of inspection, maintenance and supervision costs.

6.0 Community Implications

6.1 Many local surveys have identified that the provision of formal play facilities is high on the list of the local community's priorities

