

Northampton Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny



Overview and Scrutiny

28 November 2016

Briefing Paper – Sustainable Provision of Play Equipment

Summary

There are a number of equipped unsupervised play areas throughout the town that are managed by the Environmental Services Contractor, Enterprise. This also includes the general maintenance and minor repairs of the play equipment.

Play equipment that becomes worn through use/age or is severely damaged by vandalism may not be replaced by Enterprise, as they are only required to carry out minor repairs/maintenance. If the cost to repair or replace a piece of equipment is substantial, then the equipment may be removed and not replaced. This is primarily because neither Enterprise nor the Council has a budget for the replacement of play equipment or for creating new play areas.

Newly equipped play areas are being installed in some parks and open spaces, but only if they fall within a catchment area where Section 106 funding is made available. There are also “Friends of Groups” that raise funding through events/grants and donations for additional play equipment to add to existing play areas.

Some existing play equipment is upgraded/replaced using General Fund Capital monies earmarked for Parks/Open Spaces/Cemeteries and Allotments, but the funds have to be prioritised across all those areas.

Current Provision and Maintenance of Play Equipment

The Council provides a number of equipped unsupervised play areas throughout the town that are managed by the Environments Services Contractor, Enterprise. Their partnership working arrangements include minor repairs and maintenance to the play equipment. In addition they are responsible for the cleansing of the play areas at a frequency determined by Enterprise, as some play areas need more visits than others. Some “hotspot” play areas will also be visited at the weekends to clear any litter and empty the litterbins.

Play equipment is inspected regularly by Enterprise to ensure that it is safe for continued use. Complaints of broken glass, build-up of litter, overflowing litterbins or damaged equipment

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reported to the Council will be forwarded to Enterprise, who will arrange for the play area to be inspected within one working day to resolve any problems.

Each year all play equipment will receive an independent inspection to make sure that they meet the British and European safety standards.

Over the years, play areas around the town have been funded from a number of different sources:

- The Council's then "Housing Services" installed small play areas on Council land adjacent to Council Housing Estates.
- The Council installed play areas in some of its larger sized parks.
- Some of the larger housing developments had play areas installed by the Developers', as part of their planning agreement.
- Friends of Groups have also provided additional pieces of play equipment to existing play areas through fund raising/grants and other donations.
- Small developments that didn't have the space to provide play areas would contribute "Section 106" money to the Council, so that the Council could provide such facilities in a neighbouring park or open space.

However, over time the play equipment does become worn through use/age or is severely damaged by vandalism. The equipment may not be replaced by Enterprise, as they are only requested to carry out minor repairs/maintenance. If the cost to repair or replace the equipment is substantial, then the equipment may be removed. Neither Enterprise nor the Council has a budget for the replacement of play equipment or for new play areas.

In the last couple of years, there has been an increase in the number of new play areas being installed in specific areas of the town. This is for a number of reasons:

- **Growing Together** - The "Growing Together" charity in the Eastern Area of the town has been given Lottery funding to increase community involvement and show other improvements in that area of town. As part of those improvements, the charity (community) agreed that new play areas and gym equipment should be installed.
- **Section 106** - The Customers & Communities Directorate have had a direct involvement through its Parks and Open Spaces Division to help decide where Section 106 money should be utilised, especially with regard to parks and open spaces where the criteria of the agreements with the Developers could be met, etc. However, this is site specific.
- **General Fund Capital** - Some existing play equipment is upgraded/replaced using General Fund Capital monies earmarked for Parks/Open Spaces/Cemeteries and Allotments, but the funds have to be prioritised across all those areas.

Conclusion

Given the number of play areas under Council control, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the resources available to the Council are insufficient to do anything other than manage the current play areas. In some cases, this management can involve the removal of some equipment, as and when it comes to the end of its safe maintainable life span.

Currently, the only areas that seem to be having new play areas installed are where new builds are taking place or new builds that are making Section 106 monies available.

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