



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Environment
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Localities and Prevention Director of Environment and Leisure
DATE:	9 November 2017

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Environment	Neighbourhood and Prevention Services
WARD/S AFFECTED:	All	
KEY DECISION:	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	

SUBJECT: Equipped Play Assets Strategy 2017-22

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of equipped play assets across the borough has grown significantly over the years and since 2010 the Council's resources have reduced, meaning decreased budgets to invest in maintaining and renewing facilities. Coupled with this the Council has had to deal with increasing demands to respond to damage from vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

The Equipped Play Area Strategy 2017-2022 provides a comprehensive review of play assets their classification, locations and accessibility. Review of the condition, risk rating and usage of the facilities identifies the strategic priority sites for Blackburn with Darwen in the form of Destination Equipped Area for Play (DEAPs) and Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAPS) to channel resources for improving the quality of play assets for the Borough. The review also identifies areas in the borough that would benefit with a strategic NEAP/DEAP equipped play facility. The strategy defines the borough's minimum standard of equipment for DEAPs in order for them to be classed as 'Destinations' for families and young people to travel to.

The next stage will lead to the implementation and development of the subsequent action plan in line with the strategy. As part of the implementation of the strategy and future action plan, consultation on the future development of the sites may be required to ensure health and safety is prioritised and the quality of equipped play assets are managed effectively across the borough according to the strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

2.1 Note the Equipped Play Area Strategy 2017-2022

2.2 Delegate authority to the Director of Environment & Leisure and Executive Member for Environment to implement the Equipped Play Area Strategy 2017-2022.

2.3 Approve the use of capital receipts from decommissioning of play assets to be recycled and used to fund the implementation of the strategy. A joint action plan to be developed with the Council's Planning functions to ensure improved alignment of Section 106 funding.

3. BACKGROUND

Parks, playgrounds and playing fields play a vital role in building healthy neighbourhoods, contributing to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of local people.

Local Authorities have been hit hard by Government cuts to public sector spending. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has had to manage unprecedented and severe reductions in funding from Central Government each year since 2010. The Council is forecast to face further financial challenges over the next four years, with increasing pressures of an ageing population coupled with significant reductions in central government funding. This places pressure on revenue budgets as well funding available for capital investments in buildings and facilities. Due to constraints in funding, the Council must complete a review of all areas of spending; this includes the costs of maintaining free outdoor play assets for the benefit of the local community.

The number of play assets across the borough has grown significantly over the years. In the past the council has had budget capability to review, renew, replace or even decommission play areas in consultation with its communities, stakeholders and elected Members. In most cases, due to the lack of funding, some of the facilities are in a poor state of repair and will require significant capital investment to make them safe for continued use. In order to improve the quality of play assets in the borough a review has been commissioned to ensure strategic management of equipped play facilities across the borough according to national standards.

The Equipped Play Area Strategy 2017-2022 has been developed from a comprehensive review of current provision that has considered the distribution, condition and use of every equipped play area within Blackburn with Darwen. The aim of the strategy is: *"To have a series of well-equipped, well-maintained play areas in the right locations for the young people of Blackburn with Darwen for which the Local Authority has the resources to sustain"*.

Utilising guidance from the 'Fields in Trust' and 'Play England' Standards, the play assets have been categorised as:

- **LAP** (Local Area for Play): A small area of open space specifically designated and primarily laid out for very young children to play close to where they live;
- **LEAP** (Local Equipped Area for Play): An area of open space specifically designated and laid out with features including equipment for children who are beginning to go out and play independently close to where they live;
- **NEAP** (Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play): An area of open space specifically designated, laid out and equipped mainly for older children, but with the play opportunities for younger children as well.
- **DEAP** (Destination Equipped Area for Play): These are play spaces within key sites that are aimed at attracting family and similar groups for a longer visit. They will tend to be larger than neighbourhood sites, have car parking facilities, a greater variety of fixed equipment, and access to facilities such as cafes and public toilets.

Categorisation and mapping allowed identification of the coverage and accessibility to the equipped play assets across the borough. Review of the condition, risk rating and usage of the facilities supported the identification of NEAPs and DEAPs as the priority strategic sites. The review also identifies areas in the borough that would benefit with a strategic NEAP/DEAP equipped play facility. The strategy defines the borough's minimum standard of equipment for DEAPs in order for them to be classed as 'Destinations' for families and young people to travel to.

The Strategy identifies priorities for the Council to manage equipped play assets in a way which utilises the limited resources available to invest in improving the quality of strategic sites to meet the needs of the local community to improve standards across Blackburn with Darwen. The review highlights LEAPs and LAPs sites have fewer pieces of equipment, serve smaller catchments, are generally of a lower standard due to vandalism, some attract anti-social behaviour and the majority are overlapped by NEAPs and DEAPs.

All of the Council equipped play assets are managed by the Environment Department who will undertake implementation and development of the subsequent action plan of the Equipped Play Area Strategy 2017-2022. As part of the implementation of the strategy and future action plan, consultation on the future development of the sites may be required to ensure health and safety is prioritised and ensures quality of equipped play assets are managed effectively across the borough according to the strategy.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

- The Equipped Play Area Strategy 2017-2022 provides a methodical approach to management and allowing the prioritisation of investment in strategic sites that improve the quality of equipped play facilities across the borough.
- The strategic sites identified will ensure that the borough has adequate play facilities across the Blackburn with Darwen, in line with national guidance.
- A number of equipped play facilities in the borough are in a poor condition due to vandalism and are a hot-spot for anti-social behaviour, causing concerns for health & safety. In the main they are overlapped by strategic sites and serve smaller catchments.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The Council has a health and wellbeing responsibility to ensure there is adequate play provision for its communities.
- The Council has to ensure that it safeguards its communities from harm. Damaged play assets pose a risk of injury. Other play assets that have become magnets for anti-social behaviour also present risks of young people being drawn into negative peer pressure or behaviour.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- This report recommends that Capital receipts from decommissioning of play assets are recycled and used to fund the implementation of the strategy and that a joint action plan is developed with the Council's Planning functions to ensure improved and better alignment of

Section 106 funding.

- Any revenue costs associated with the implementation of the strategy will be met from within existing portfolio resources.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- There is a variety of legislation covering the provision of playground equipment. This includes the Occupiers Liability Act 1957 and Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 as amended, with specific regard to the duty of care. The Occupier's Liability Act requires that people can expect to be reasonably safe when using a playground. Greater care is required where children are concerned.
- The manufacture, installation, inspection and maintenance of playground equipment and impact absorbing surfacing is regulated by British and European Standards BS EN1 176, BS EN 1177. Government and safety organisations such as ROSPA also publish guidance on playground safety.
- The Equalities Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against disabled persons in connection with the provision of facilities and services. A strategy and action plan for reviewing, risk assessing and managing our play equipment areas will demonstrate a system of monitoring and due diligence in the event of a legal challenge and will assist in discharging our statutory responsibilities.
- Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act enables a planning obligation to be entered into by agreement between a developer and a local Planning Authority. Very often the provision of a playground on sites proposed for major development is such a planning obligation. This is another legal mechanism to ensure adequate provision of such facilities in light of decreasing Council budgetary resources.

Any substantial proposed changes to service provision as a result of the strategy and action plan should be subject to public consultation and equality impact assessment.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Development of the action plan will be led by the Environment Team with support from Planning and Property colleagues.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

- Planning, Property, Education, Neighbourhoods, Resources, Environment and Leisure departments have been consulted and their views taken on board in the development of this

strategy where possible.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Sayyed Osman / Martin Eden
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DATE:	27/07/2017
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	Equipped Play Area Strategy 2017-2022
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