

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES**

#### **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND COMMUNITIES**

**Report prepared by Jason Taylor**

**Date Issued: July 2013**

#### **1. APPROVAL OF A NEW PLAY AREA STRATEGIC STANDARD**

##### **1.1 Issue for Decision**

1.2 To consider a new strategic standard for play area provision across the borough of Maidstone

##### **2 Recommendation of the Director of Regeneration and Communities**

2.1 That the Cabinet Member agrees to:

2.2 A new borough wide standard of play provision being "that most residents across the borough will live within 12 minutes walk of a good standard play area".

2.3 Available funding in future is targeted at these Strategically Important Play Areas.

2.4 That any non Strategically Important Play Areas be offered to the community.

2.5 After one year any Non Strategically Important Play Areas that are not taken on by the public will have the equipment removed, but will be retained as open space.

##### **3 Reasons for Recommendation**

3.1 There are currently 119 play areas in Maidstone Borough, 69 of these belong to Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) and 40 to Parish Councils.

3.2 The Parks and Leisure Team visit all of the play areas in the borough every 2 years and score them against accessibility, quality and usage. These results are recorded in a table and categorised as red amber and green play areas, red being the lowest scoring. The MBC Play Area Improvement Budget which is currently £100,000 per year is then used on the lowest scoring MBC play

areas.

- 3.3 Following the scoring of the play areas in 2011 it was identified that, with the average cost of installing a new play area being around £75,000, it could take up to forty years to replace all of MBC's play area. Taking into account that play areas last about 15 years on average it became obvious that the current situation was not sustainable and that the standard of play areas would continue to deteriorate.
- 3.4 With this in mind it was decided to be proactive and to carry out a complete review of all of the play areas in the borough. This play review, carried out in 2012, looked not only at the standard of all play areas but also their distribution.
- 3.5 The objectives of this review were to come up with recommendation for future standards for play provision, identify the cost to implement these standards and identify potential funding sources.
- 3.6 A summary of the findings of this review is as follows:
  - 3.6.1 51 out of 69 MBC Play Areas need, or will need, work within 5 years to reach/maintain green or amber standard.
  - 3.6.2 There is currently no set standard for play provision
  - 3.6.3 There are some areas of potential over provision.
- 3.7 Prior to any decision being made, the Cabinet Member for Communities and Leisure decided to take the findings of the Play Area Review and potential future management options to Overview and Scrutiny to get their input.
- 3.8 At the meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2013 future options were presented to the committee. The option chosen was as follows:
  - 3.8.1 Adopt the standard that "most residents across the borough will live within 12 minutes walk of a good standard play area".
  - 3.8.2 £1.8 million would be needed to get all MBC Strategically Important Play Areas to Green Standard.
  - 3.8.3 20 MBC Non Strategically Important Play Areas would not be invested in.
  - 3.8.4 Non Strategically Important Play Areas would be offered to Community Groups or Parish Councils.

- 3.8.5 MBC would offer support to these groups.
- 3.8.6 If these play areas are not taken on, equipment would be removed when it needs repair and all equipment removed within 5 years, and the area left as open space.
- 3.9 At this meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2013, the committee asked officers to come back to them with answers to a number of questions in the form of a Scrap report.
- 3.10 This Scrap report was brought back to the newly formed Leisure Services and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on July 16<sup>th</sup> 2013, where the committee agreed ...
- 3.11 It has been indicated that potentially the level of resources could be available to implement this new play standard. The maximum economies of scale are achieved through carrying out this work in one year.

#### 4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 4.1 Alternative action would be to continue with the current system of managing play across the borough. This is not recommended as it will result in the continued reduction in play area standards, which will ultimately result in much larger capital investment in the future. Research carried out as part of the play review has indicated that this amount is likely to be in the region of £5million required in the next 5-10 years.

#### 5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 5.1 The priorities and objectives in the Strategic Plan 2011 – 15 that the decision contained in this report will affect are:
- 5.2 For Maidstone to be a decent place to live;

#### 6 Risk Management

- 6.1 There is a risk that if these changes are not made to how the play areas are managed across the borough then there will be no adequate play facilities in the borough

#### 7 Other Implications

##### 7.1

1. Financial



2.	Staffing	X
3.	Legal	
4.	Social Inclusion	X
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	X
9.	Asset Management	X

7.2 Financial – Resources would need to be made available to carry out these recommendations.

7.3 Staffing – If the work is to be carried out in one year then an additional member of staff would be required for this period.

7.4 Legal - A lease agreement would have to be written by the Legal Section

7.5 Social Inclusion – The introduction of the 12 minute standards would ensure that the same standard of play is provided to all residents in the borough.

7.6 Procurement – Any additional play equipment would be purchased in line with current MBC procurement guidelines.

8 Background Documents

8.1 Borough Wide Play scoring table

8.2

**NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED**

Is this a Key Decision?    Yes        No   

Is this an Urgent Key Decision?    Yes        No   

[Empty rectangular box for additional information or comments]

DRAFT

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