

Report of the Strategic Director, Place to the meeting of the Executive to be held on 5 September 2023

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Subject:

Bradford District's Playable Spaces Investment Programme Update

Summary statement:

This report provides a progress update on delivery of the Council's Playable Spaces Investment Programme, seeks approval for the third and final refurbishment phase, release of current earmarked capital funding for this phase and consideration within future budget setting arrangements for additional funding to complete the increased level of works identified as part of this phase.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

The Playable Spaces Investment Programme aims to deliver the objectives of the Council's Organisational Equalities Culture by ensuring that the playable spaces are well run, fit for purpose and fair and inclusive in their approach. The programme recognises and supports equality of opportunity between different groups through provision of relevant, accessible and in some cases bespoke playable spaces and facilities.

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Portfolio:

Healthy People and Places

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Regeneration and Environment

1. SUMMARY

This report provides a progress update on delivery of the Councils Playable Spaces Investment Programme, seeks approval for the third and final refurbishment phase, release of current earmarked capital funding for this phase and consideration within future budget setting arrangements for additional funding to complete the increased level of works required as part of this phase.

2. BACKGROUND

The Council's Parks & Green Spaces Service provides multiple opportunities for people from all backgrounds to enjoy recreational activity. Playable spaces and sports pitches are maintained to allow children, young people and adults to participate in either formal or informal physical activity. The Council Executive in June 2019 recognised the value of these facilities and their contribution to its Better Health, Better Lives outcome through the allocation of £20m to deliver the improvement and refurbishment works identified within the two Strategies.

£5m of this sum was identified to fund the delivery programme of the Playable Spaces Strategy together with the available Capital Section 106 monies already received, £1.329m, and Community Investment Levy (CIL) monies allocated by the Executive to determine an overall budget of £6.396m.

The Authority currently manages and maintains 292 play facilities across 163 sites through its Parks and Greenspaces Service. This number is predominantly made up of fixed play equipment facilities (150 total), skate parks, Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA's), single goal/ ball sports walls, 5-aside pitch goals and outdoor fitness trails/gyms.

The play stock is of mixed age and condition with many in a condition that requires heavy maintenance expenditure whilst a significant numbers of others require substantial 'capital' investment to refurbish or replace to meet current standards.

2.1 Playable Spaces Strategy

The Playable Spaces Strategy continues to be developed in recognition of the Investment Programme and provides a strategic policy against which requests for new play facilities or proposals for housing development can be measured and assessed in an objective manner to ensure a needs based and proportionate distribution of facilities across all parts of the District. The key principles together with the involvement of key partners for the strategy were approved by the Executive on 7 January 2020 and remain core to the delivery programme.

2.2 Investment Programme

In order to create confidence in achieving best value from the significant level of corporate capital investment required to refurbish the District's play areas and play facilities, the funding programme seeks to provide a network of refurbished/improved spaces and facilities that are sustainable in terms of maintenance together with:

- a. A dramatic reduction in the numbers of individual items of equipment being decommissioned for long periods of time or, in future permanently removed and not replaced.
- b. Reduction in the level of potential litigious claims for compensation in the event of an accident and/or injury on outdated or un-maintainable equipment.
- c. Provides a detailed refurbishment plan for the District that is financially sustainable within existing revenue maintenance budgets

3. PROGRESS

The first phase of the programme completed with the opening of the refurbished play area at Lister Park in July 2021. A series of consultations with ward members, key internal and external stakeholders and community groups on a District area by area basis completed in Autumn 2021. This was followed by individual ward area consultations with ward members, completed Summer 2022, to agree refurbishment programmes for the play areas and play facilities in their wards.

A second phase of refurbishments included the remainder of the larger play areas across the District, together with a proportion of accelerated sites that required more urgent refurbishment, at a total cost of £1.828m, was recommended by the Council's Project Appraisal Group (PAG) and approved by the Executive on 2 November 2021; the works completed in Easter this year.

The original proposed 5-year Investment Programme (ending January 2025) has been extended largely owing to the capacity restriction experienced from the pandemic lockdowns and the subsequent recovery period. The pandemic also led to far higher footfalls (when allowed) within play areas and play facilities across the District and in some cases increased and at times sustained Anti-Social Behavior incidents leading to damage to both equipment and safety surfacing.

The ambition of the third and final phase is to deliver the last stage of the previously agreed investment programme, together with an additional 29 equipped play areas that have been recently identified as requiring some refurbishment. In total, phase 3 works will include an element of refurbishment to 99 equipped play areas resulting in 90% of all such playable spaces receiving some investment from the overall programme.

Approval to proceed will ensure that the Districts play area provision is sufficiently refurbished/renewed to continue to provide fit for purpose, safe and more sustainable facilities.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The third and final phase of the programme is planned to be undertaken over three years to deliver the remaining refurbishments.

The successful delivery of phases 1 and 2 has cost £2.478m leaving £3.918m of the original budget remaining.

The inclusion of an additional 29 play areas that have been identified as requiring urgent refurbishment works, together with mitigation of recent inflationary pressures will require additional funding to complete the entire programme.

The Council's Project Appraisal Group (PAG) has considered the proposals for phase 3 of the Investment Programme and recommends the following approvals by the Executive: -

- To release the balance of the original approved budget (£3.918m) identified as a reserve within the Capital Investment Plan (CIP)
- To consider the approval of additional funding requirements as part of the 24/25 CIP budget discussion.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

- 5.1 Any significant and lengthy failure in the provision of playable spaces and facilities will cause reputational damage to the Council and damage to the health and well-being of its citizens.
- 5.2 The current revenue budget for play equipment repair is not sufficient to carry out the level of refurbishment required to the current playable spaces. A major increase in annual revenue budgets would be required, in the absence of capital investment, to prevent the need to isolate and/or remove a significant number of individual items of equipment that fail prematurely, come to the end of their viable lifespan or are vandalised.
- 5.3 The scheme will be referred to the Council's taxation advisor in order for VAT and the Council's VAT partial exemption risks to be accounted for although it is believed that such recreational activity is now outside the regulations.
- 5.4 Reporting to the Council's Project Appraisal Group (PAG) for the Investment Programme and each of the three subsequent refurbishment phases has been undertaken including a full review of the cost modelling together with all risks and the actions proposed to mitigate these risks.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

- 6.1 All procurement activity will be undertaken in accordance with Council's Contract Standing Orders and in line with internal governance requirements.
- 6.2 The Council has a duty of care to visitors of premises and users of Council services under various legislation which may be applicable to visitors to parks and users of play equipment, including the Occupiers Liability Act 1957 which requires the Council to take reasonable care to ensure the safety of visitors.
- 6.3 Playable spaces equipment and associated facilities are required to be kept up to date and safe to minimise harm to users and ensure compliance with external public liability insurance.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The strategy, delivery and investment programme seeks to deliver the most sustainable playable spaces provision achievable over a 5-10 year period and beyond through the capital investment programme.

7.2 TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS

Refurbishment of existing equipment and infrastructure rather than replacement will reduce the carbon footprint of this investment programme.

The intention to develop doorstep and local playable spaces will reduce car/bus travel and further reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

The provision of well-maintained playable spaces and facilities limits the exposure of the community to potential injury or harm.

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

There are no known Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

7.5 TRADE UNION

There are no significant staffing implications arising from this report although the Trade Unions will be consulted as required through the Council's IR Framework.

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

The strategy and investment programme are District wide and consultations have been conducted across the District through area based meetings with members. There have also been separate meetings with Ward Members to allow delivery programmes for each ward to be developed.

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Playable Spaces Investment Programme contributes to the Council's wider partnership ambition of creating a more child-friendly district. Article 31 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child includes; "Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child"

Research has also shown that low levels of physical activity during childhood and adolescence can have a negative impact on children and young people's academic achievements, social abilities and life skills, as well as their health. Born in Bradford

data has shown that 77% of 5-11 year olds don't do the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each day.

Being active does not only improve children's physical health, but also their emotional wellbeing, meaning that active children are more confident and happier. It is now widely recognised that being inactive is the fourth biggest cause of early mortality in the UK and physical activity patterns are established in childhood.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

Development of the Playable Spaces Strategy and the delivery and investment programme will not affect the current and compliant processes in place to ensure privacy of personal data in accordance with the legislation in place.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

9. OPTIONS

There are a limited number of decisions required within this report and they relate primarily to the Playable Spaces Investment Programme with two main options identified:

- To retain the current agreed level of corporate investment which will mean a reduction to the number and quality of play areas and facilities that the Council is able to refurbish.
- To provide additional capital investment to refurbish the District's play areas and play facilities to meet the full expectations of the ward members, internal and external partners and public.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Executive approves:

- 10.1 Implementation of the 3rd and final phase of the Playable Spaces Investment Programme with release of the £3.918m remaining balance of the total capital funding originally approved and held in reserves.
- 10.2 Authority be given to the Strategic Director of Place in consultation with the Director for Finance & IT to appoint the successful bidder(s) for the works required for the Investment Programme.
- 10.3 That consideration is given to further funding within the Capital Investment Plan (CIP) as part of the 24/25 budget discussion to allow delivery of the complete Phase 3 programme
- 10.4 Welcomes and supports the progress made to date on delivering the Investment Programme to refurbish the Districts playable spaces and play facilities.

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Examples of Phase 2 play area refurbishment projects

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

The District's evolving Playable Spaces Strategy (PSS):

<https://bradford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s28276/Doc%20AO.pdf>