

**Report of: Head of Legal and Democratic Services**

**To: Executive Board**

**Date: 7 January 2008**

**Item No:**

**Title of Report : Community Scrutiny and Area Committee  
Recommendations on the Play Facility Action Plan**



### Summary and Recommendations



**Purpose of report:** To present to Executive Board recommendations made by Area Committees and the Community Scrutiny Committee on the Play Facility Action Plan.



**Key decision:** No

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Caroline Van Zyl, Sustainable Environment Portfolio Holder



**Scrutiny Responsibility:** Community Scrutiny Committee

**Ward(s) affected:** All



**Report approved by:** Andy Collett (Financial & Asset Management)  
Jeremy Thomas (Legal & Democratic Services)



**Policy Framework:** n/a



**Recommendation(s):** The Executive Board is asked to respond to the recommendations:



1. If it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations outlined.
2. If agrees when will the recommendations be implemented and who will take the lead?



3. If it disagrees why?

4. If more information is required from other officers when that will be considered?

### Background

1. A Play Facilities Action Plan report was submitted to every Area Committee in September 2007 setting out improvement plans for play areas. The Community Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15 November considered a report on the recommendations made by the Area Committees and made some recommendations of its own.
2. Originally it was planned to submit all the Area Committee recommendations to the Board when the report on Play listed in the Forward Plan was considered. However, the report has not yet come to the Board and I now have to fulfil my duty to report the recommendations to the Board without further delay.

### Area Committee Recommendations

3. Recommendations arising from the Area Committee meetings are listed below, together with officer responses to the recommendations.

Recommendations	Response
<b>Cowley Area Committee – 5 September</b>	
NO RECOMMENDATIONS	
<b>North Area Committee – 6 September</b>	
NO RECOMMENDATIONS	
<b>South East Area Committee - 10 September</b>	
<p>Resolved to pass on the following recommendations to Executive Board:</p> <p>(a) That the South East Area Committee noted the funding priorities outlined in the report to this area;</p> <p>(b) South East Area Committee rejected the idea of funding play areas by means of a “community begging bowl”;</p>	<p>The Play Area Action Plan report recommended the Area Committee agree an action plan for managing play areas within their area. A total of seven play areas in the SE Area will be refurbished in some form over the next four years utilising Council funding</p>

<p>(c) The Area Committee wanted to see a proper evaluation of play needs in its area which took community desires into account, and that this should be presented for consideration to a future meeting of the South East Area Committee;</p> <p>(d) Additionally, the South East Area Committee opposed the closure of play areas by stealth, and requested 2 years notice of any intention to close play areas in order to allow time to source additional funds to keep them open;</p> <p>(e) Members of the Area Committee were aware that some areas had to be closed at short notice owing to vandalism, but suggested that a contingency budget to deal with this issue could be created;</p> <p>(f) Areas listed should include details of the expected lifespan of play equipment, with special regard to meeting European safety standards, in order that unpleasant surprise closures through failure to meet those standards could be avoided</p> <p>(g) Officers should be asked to thoroughly investigate the matter of play provision in Littlemore, to ensure a coherent strategy agreed between the City and Parish Councils;</p>	<p>A detailed evaluation will be submitted to the Area Committee detailing condition and associated costs to refurbish for each play area</p> <p>No play areas will be closed unless they are found not to meet the European standards as part of the weekly inspection programme. It is difficult to identify a detailed timescale for expected lifespan but an indication will be included within the report to the Area Committee</p> <p>There is currently no contingency budget within the Parks revenue budget</p> <p>A detailed evaluation will be submitted to the Area Committee detailing condition and associated costs to refurbish for each play area. It is difficult to identify a detailed timescale for expected lifespan but an indication will be included within the report to the Area Committee</p> <p>The play area action plan requested the Area Committee identify an action plan to manage the play areas within their own area. As a result the committee could include Parish Council play areas within their plan and as a result would need to allocate or source appropriate funding</p>
<p><b>Central South and West Area Committee – 12 September</b></p>	
<p>NO RECOMMENDATIONS</p>	

<p><b>North East Area Committee – 18 September</b></p>	
<p>Resolved to agree on the following principles to guide further action on the proposals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consultation is essential with local communities about any future action for their play areas;</li> <li>2. Support and encouragement needed from the Council and Councillors to assist local communities;</li> <li>3. examination of partnership working and identification of additional sources of funding;</li> <li>4. officers to produce a programme for play areas for consideration by the Area Committee as a budget bid in the 2008/09 budget making process.</li> </ol>	<p>The Area Committee and ward councillors will be informed in advance of any decision related to closure of a play facility.</p> <p>The Area Committee is to work with community organisations to source external funding.</p> <p>A detailed evaluation will be submitted to the Area Committee detailing condition and associated costs to refurbish for each play area. It is difficult to identify a detailed timescale for expected lifespan but an indication will be included within the report to the Area Committee</p>
<p><b>East Area Committee – 19 September</b></p>	
<p>Resolved to: -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Note all comments made;</li> <li>(2) Notify to Executive Board the East Area Parliament's support for the reinstatement of the play equipment emergency fund;</li> <li>(3) Note that no play area in the East Area was under threat of closure;</li> <li>(4) Prioritise for attention the dangerous equipment at Meadow Lane;</li> <li>(5) Set aside £10,000 this year and £10,000 next year for remedial and other works at Meadow Lane play area;</li> </ol>	<p>There is currently a shortfall in funding and additional revenue funding would assist in reducing the backlog of repairs</p> <p>Funding is welcomed and the works will be included within next years refurbishment programme</p>

<p>(6) Ask the Area Co-ordinator to discuss with East Oxford Action and the East Oxford Adventure Playground Association what steps might be taken to attract funding, including outside funding</p>	<p>This work would assist in refurbishing additional equipment within the play area if additional funding was sought</p>
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## **Community Scrutiny Committee Recommendations**

### **4. Background**

4.1 Community Scrutiny was due to consider the Play Facility Action Framework in August, prior to its submission to the Executive Board. The Chair of the Committee requested that this was postponed to the next meeting as the document was only finalised a day or two before the meeting in August.

4.2 The Committee was informed prior to its meeting in October that the Play Facility Framework document was not finalised and later that the document was being withdrawn. A further Area Committee consultation would be conducted as a precursor to the development of area based play facility action plans.

4.3 Community Scrutiny requested to see the results of the consultation exercise and the recommendations from the Area Committees. The area - based reports were presented to the meeting in November. The Committee's concerns are detailed in the minutes below. Broadly the Committee felt that without an overarching strategy detailing: corporate priorities and evaluation criteria, the consultation process was fragmented and confusing.

4.4 Public concern had been expressed regarding imminent closures, which had not been allayed by the area-based consultation. A clear corporate vision on play areas would provide residents with greater clarity on the Council's future plans for all the Play Area Facilities.

4.5 The Community Scrutiny Committee resolved to: -

- (1) Thank Councillor Van Zyl and John Wade for attending.
- (2) Note the Area Committee recommendations but ask the Executive Board to acknowledge that it was not possible to take a view on them without a clear overarching strategy and vision for the future.
- (3) Ask the Leisure and Cultural Services Business Manager to submit the existing Play Facility Action Framework, upon which the report to Area Committees had been based, to the next meeting of this Committee on 10 January 2008.

**Comments from Portfolio Holder (Councillor Caroline Van Zyl)**

5. None received.

**Additional comments from the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services (on the Scrutiny Committee recommendations)**

6. The Play Area Facility Action Framework document will be submitted to the Community Scrutiny Committee on 10 January 2008, as requested in recommendation (3) above.

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**Background papers : None**