

# Crawley Borough Council

**Report to Overview and Scrutiny Commission**  
**Monday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

**Report to Cabinet**  
**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

## **The Future of Crawley's Adventure Playgrounds**

Report of the Head of Community Services and Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Culture  
**Report Number DC&PS/ 004**

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### **1. Purpose**

This report considers the findings from an extensive public consultation exercise into the Council's four adventure playgrounds, as well as the need for replacement of outdoor play equipment. It makes recommendations for future provision and investment in the town's adventure playgrounds.

### **2. Recommendations**

#### **2.1 To the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:**

That the Commission consider the report and decide what comments, if any, it wishes to submit to the Cabinet.

#### **2.2 To the Cabinet**

##### **2.2.1 The Cabinet is recommended to:**

- a) Consider the findings from public consultation and delegate authority to the Head of Community Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Cultural Services, to implement improvements to the Council's adventure playgrounds, as set out in Section 5.1.1.
- b) Note the actions that have taken place to ensure the future safety of adventure playgrounds in the Borough and also to note the application of a Capital Bid for replacement play equipment.
- c) Welcome a further report to Cabinet in twelve months that makes further recommendations for the future development of the Council's adventure playgrounds.

### **3. Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 3.1 The recommendations respond to the findings from public consultation, as well as the need to replace outdoor play equipment within the four adventure playgrounds.

## 4. Background

- 4.1 The Council manages four adventure playgrounds in the Borough and these are located in Broadfield, Bewbush, Langley Green and Furnace Green, with each offering both indoor and outdoor play space for children.
- 4.2 The adventure playground service has the following purposes:
- a). Children as customers: *“Provide me and my family with something fun, exciting and affordable to do after school and during the school holidays”*.
  - b). Parents as customers: *“Provide me with high quality, affordable childcare which enables me to work”*.
- 4.3 There are five strands to the adventure playground service:
- i). “Free Play” where children can turn up and play without booking in advance and there is no charge. This operates during week-days only and the hours of operation change throughout the year depending on the school timetable and daylight hours.
  - ii). “Holiday Playcare” where supervised play is provided at the adventure playgrounds during the school holidays. This operates during week-days only and the hours of operation are 08:30 – 17:30. There is a charge for this service of £18.00 per full day and £10.00 per half day. Sibling discounts also apply.
  - iii). “Children’s Parties” where the adventure playgrounds can be hired out at weekends and a supervisor is present. There is a charge of £124.40 for a three hour slot.
  - iv). “Outreach Play” where community play workers deliver innovative play programmes in key locations across the town, typically in areas that are not served by an adventure playground. The play workers also link with primary schools to encourage greater use of school playgrounds as an outdoor classroom environment.
  - v). “Third Party Hire” with other providers at adventure playgrounds, delivering children’s and youth activities e.g. Willow Tree Pre-School at Cherry Lane every term-time weekdays.
- 4.4 The adventure playgrounds have approximately 40,000 visits by children and their parents/ guardians per year. Last year 2013/2014 the total cost of providing the service was £485,000, with income of £60,000, giving a net cost of £425,000.

## 5. Description of issue to be resolved

### Consultation:

- 5.1 During 2013, consultation took place with children and adults who use the adventure playgrounds, as well as staff and non-users of this facility. This town-wide consultation started on 10<sup>th</sup> July and ran until 13<sup>th</sup> September 2013. 725 people took part in the survey. The main findings from the consultation are summarised below:
- a). The adventure playgrounds are much loved by current users, especially the friendly and enthusiastic staff and exciting outdoor play equipment.
  - b). They are not well promoted or marketed and many non-users did not know they exist and/ or the range of play services offered.
  - c). Some of the play equipment looks tired and run down, and the sites themselves do not look welcoming to new users.
  - d). The opening times are not suitable for all users and many would like them to be open earlier, longer and at weekends.

e). Some sites are used more by younger children and some by older children/teenagers. Facilities on site do not always reflect the age groups who are attracted to use them.

- 5.1.1 It is proposed to increase the promotion and marketing of adventure playgrounds using existing budgets and in-house expertise. In consultation with staff, adjustments have already been made to opening times, and further changes will be investigated to make the sites are more attractive to potential users. Discussions will also take place between the Head of Service, Portfolio Holder, managers and staff over the coming months to see how we can further improve the offer to residents, and therefore increase use and income. Once these discussions are complete, and some of the ideas are trialled, it is proposed that a further report comes forward to Cabinet in twelve months time for consideration.

#### Replacement of play equipment:

- 5.2 Despite regular inspections and maintenance by trained in-house staff, and independent safety inspections by a Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) qualified organisation, in April 2014 a piece of timber outdoor play equipment collapsed at Cherry Lane adventure playground. An eight year old boy was struck on the head by a pole and suffered a serious head injury.
- 5.2.1 A Health & Safety Executive investigation into this accident is ongoing, however the HSE is content with the actions taken by this Council to date.
- 5.2.2 Following this accident, similar items of play equipment were removed from all adventure playgrounds as a precautionary measure.
- 5.2.3 As the timber equipment had failed just below ground level, officers felt it was necessary to commission an independent below-ground structural survey of all timber play equipment within the four adventure playgrounds. Some bespoke built play equipment was recommended for removal and this has been undertaken. Some is having its life extended, up to five years, by fitting metal 'shoes' to support posts.
- 5.2.4 There are now many gaps at adventure playgrounds where play equipment has been removed, and much of the remaining items will need to be replaced within the next five years. It is recommended that replacements are sourced from suitably accredited suppliers rather than being bespoke built. Manufactured items are expensive, however they come with guarantees of at least twenty five years. The current timber equipment is around ten years old.
- 5.2.5 A bid for £480,000 has been submitted for consideration of the Budgetary Advisory Group for replacement of outdoor play equipment at three of the four adventure playgrounds, where equipment has been removed or is coming to the end of its life. This is in addition to £120,000 that has previously been agreed for replacement of equipment at Creasys Drive adventure playground. If recommended for approval, this will come before the Cabinet early next year. A further bid may come forward in future years for replacement of equipment at Millpond adventure playground.

## **6. Information & Analysis Supporting Recommendation**

- 6.1 The consultation report is available by following the hyperlink in Section 8 and is summarised in Section 5.1 of this report.

## **7. Implications**

- 7.1 There are no adverse revenue implications for the proposals, in fact income should increase. Promotions and marketing will be contained within existing revenue budgets and any new play equipment will be inspected and maintained using existing in-house staff.
- 7.2 The adventure playgrounds are a town-wide resource and therefore the views of Ward Members have not been sought.

**8. Background Papers**

[http://www.crawley.gov.uk/pw/Leisure\\_and\\_Culture/Children\\_and\\_Young\\_People/Crawley\\_Play\\_Service/index.htm](http://www.crawley.gov.uk/pw/Leisure_and_Culture/Children_and_Young_People/Crawley_Play_Service/index.htm)

<http://www.crawley.gov.uk/pw/web/PUB233341>

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