

REPORT OF: Planning and Economy Manager

Reference:

To: Community and Resources

Subject: Play Strategy

Date: January 2019

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To request that Members authorise a budget for the commission of external consultants to deliver a play strategy for the Authority.

1. INTRODUCTION

The definition of play is to “engage in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose”.

Torrige District Council currently operates and maintains 34 play park facilities throughout the District. The Council recognises the benefits of having accessible, engaging play and recreation opportunities for children of all ages and abilities and also understands that play extends further and wider than just the provision of static pieces of play equipment.

2. REPORT

The Authority would like to ascertain the maximum potential regarding opportunities for the play areas, given the financial constraints that the Council faces. It is likely that The Council recognises that it is likely that difficult decisions will have to be made in terms of its investment into its fixed asset play facilities at a time when the Council is facing financial constraints given that investment is often limited in the main to the use of 106 development contributions. Decisions also then need to be made as to how these facilities are maintained and operated given the current financial challenges.

Whilst thoughts usually turn immediately to the provision and maintenance of fixed equipment such as swing parks and playgrounds it must also be recognised that play extends further in to all aspects of recreation opportunities and the Council needs to understand how with its financial constraints it can work with external organisations, groups and the community to broaden its remit and offer of play beyond just the provision of these fixed play facilities and to provide the best possible opportunities for play.

In order to achieve this it is advised that a non bias based approach to developing the opportunities for play be undertaken and officers therefore recommend that an external agency prepares and delivers a strategy for play, for the Council. The Authority’s previous play strategy ran between 2007 and 2012 and so the Council has not had a formalised, adopted approach to how it delivers and acts upon its play responsibilities for the past 6 years.



Such a document will intrinsically dovetail the Authorities already adopted built facilities strategy and the Northern Devon playing pitch strategy as a holistic means of recognising play in the wider context of service delivery such as recreation, health and outdoor physical activity. The works would incorporate an analysis of these other pieces of work and how the play strategy would support and even enhance these other aspects of service delivery. Such a strategy would also involve an audit of current provision and allow the Council to see where investment of both time and finances needs to be made.

The benefits of such a strategic piece of work extend beyond just play itself and by working alongside other internal departments and other external agencies within the community there are opportunities for wider economic and societal benefits to be created.

It is necessary therefore for the Authority to adopt a strategy that clearly defines its intentions for delivering and providing play opportunities and how it can remove barriers that inhibit the opportunities for play. The best means of doing this is to have the Authorities current assets, opportunities, provision and intentions for delivery moving forward scrutinised externally to allow progress to be made in a practical and efficient manner.

3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

N/A

Financial Implications

The cost to commission the works of the winning tender – It is recommended based on previous works that a budget of between £15,000-£20,000 is made available to tender for external consultants to undertake a play strategy for the Authority.

Human Resources Implications

N/A – Other than officer time.

Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications

The document will act as the Authorities official guidance document in regards to play, allowing officers and Members to determine its actions and intentions regarding play formally without bias.

Equality/Diversity

A non-bias assessment and analysis of the Authorities current play provision and intentions moving forward.

Risk Management

External involvement will allow for an independent perspective to be taken on the current situation regarding play in Torridge and provide a steer as to what agencies can be most effective to engage with to develop play.

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

The document will become the Authorities strategic document

Lead Members Views

Councillor J. Whittaker



4. CONCLUSIONS

The Council does not currently have a strategy in place for play and therefore does not have any tangible steer in terms of developing and providing play opportunities and hasn't had for the past 6 years. It is envisaged that a new strategy document would be able to serve the Council for the remaining period of the Authorities local plan and leisure strategies up until 2031.

The Authorities fixed play assets are aging and there will need to be decisions made by Members on an individual basis from facility to facility as to what is to be undertaken in terms of investment and maintenance. An external assessment with guidance will allow for the Authority to make an informed decision upon its play portfolio and the means of taking it forward.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Member's allow for a budget of between £15,000 - £20,000 to be made available from the Policy element of the Project reserve so that Officers can tender for and commission an external agency to undertake a play strategy for the Council.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Play strategy 2007 - 2012

Consultations: Date of Consultation – 21/12/2018

Officers Consulted
Steve Hearse
Sean Kearney
Staci Dorey

Members consulted – Cllr J.Whittaker

Contact Officer: James Jarroudi

