

REPORT OF **Head of Communities & Place**

To: **Full Council**

Subject: **Play Strategy**

Date: **14th June 2021**

Reference:

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To seek resolution following a difference of opinion on the allocation of a specific budget for the maintenance of play facilities between Community and Resources Committee and the Scrutiny Committees.

1. INTRODUCTION

On the 1st February 2021 the Community and Resources Committee resolved to approve the Play Strategy and that it should become a guiding document in the delivery of play services for the Council. Overview and Scrutiny (External) Committee had performed a steering function in the preparation of the strategy and formulated the recommendations that were presented with the draft strategy to Community and Resources Committee.

2. REPORT

Community and Resources Committee

At Community and Resources Committee on the 1st February 2021, the Head of Communities & Place presented the appended report, the purpose of which was to present to Members the draft Torridge District Council Play Area Strategy for adoption, and to consider the recommendation from External Overview & Scrutiny Committee in relation to finances associated with its delivery.

During the debate, the primary concerns raised included:

- Responsibility and the maintaining of play areas
- To consider working jointly with Parish and Town Councils and/or communities re maintenance of play areas
- Cost and contents of the Play Strategy document

Councillor Christie raised an enquiry regarding monies given to Torridge when he had been Mayor of Bideford and match funded by Bideford Bridge Trust for the maintenance of play equipment. The majority of this money remains unspent. The Head of Communities & Place advised that for a long period of time the Council had not had a Community Engagement Officer. That situation had now changed, and the now appointed Officer will work more actively in partnership with the communities.

The Chair of Community and Resources Committee proposed that a separate vote be taken on each of the recommendations within the report.

It was proposed by Councillor James, seconded by Councillor Lock -



Resolved:

- That there be no allocation of a maintenance budget for play areas.

A recorded vote was taken.

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Brenton, D			
Bright, C			
Bushby, D		X	
Craigie, R		X	
Christie, P		X	
Dart, A			X
Hicks, R	X		
Hutchings, J			
James, K	X		
Laws, N	X		
Lock, R	X		
McGeough, D		X	
Wiseman, R	X		

(Vote: For 5, Against 4, Abstentions 1)

It was proposed by Councillor James, seconded by Councillor Lock -

Resolved:

That the Play Area Strategy be adopted.

A recorded vote was taken.

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Brenton, D			
Bright, C			
Bushby, D		X	
Craigie, R		X	
Christie, P			X
Dart, A			X
Hicks, R	X		
Hutchings, J			
James, K	X		
Laws, N	X		
Lock, R	X		
McGeough, D			X
Wiseman, R	X		

These resolutions were subsequently the subject of an approved call in request from the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny External.



Cllr Pennington's comment:

The Play Strategy should go before Int. O & S as it is a finance matter.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Internal)

At Overview and Scrutiny (Internal) on the 16th March 2021 the Chair invited Councillor Pennington to address the meeting and explain his reasons for calling in the decision. Councillor Pennington stated that not having an allocated budget for the maintenance of play areas was fundamentally wrong.

The Head of Communities & Place explained that the Council do have to maintain facilities to ensure they are safe and there is a budget for this, but not specifically ring fenced for play. The Council is not negligent in looking after play areas, if there are safety issues the area will be closed until repairs are carried out.

Following further comments made in relation to health & safety, the Head of Communities & Place again reiterated his comments made above and gave assurances that the safety of play areas was budgeted for.

Additional issues/concerns raised included:

- Inspection of play areas – Members were informed these are carried out weekly as part of the Grounds Maintenance Contract
- Until the Strategy is decided it will be difficult to put a figure on what maintenance fund is required.

Councillor Pennington recommended that the wording on the Decision Notice be amended to say that there are funds available for maintenance of the parks from other budgets and should not say “no allocation of maintenance budget”. The way forward and amended wording for the Decision Notice was discussed with advice being given by the Head of Communities & Place and the Head of Legal & Governance.

The Finance Manager & S151 Officer clarified what funds are available to maintain the play areas but added that to ring fence monies for parks would be too restrictive for the Council.

The Chief Executive summarised what had been established by this Committee, namely that in order to continue maintaining the play areas there is a budget available and that there is no separate budget for the continual replacement of obsolete equipment at play areas.

It was proposed by Councillor Newton, seconded by Councillor Watson that the decision of Community & Resources Committee stands.

A recorded vote was taken.

COMMITTEE MEMBER	F O R	AG AIN ST	ABS TAI N
Cllr Boughton, R	X		
Cllr Cottle-Hunkin, C			
Mr S Dengate		X	
Cllr Gubb, J		X	
Cllr Hames, P		X	
Mr I Harper	X		



Cllr C Hawkins		X	
Cllr Inch, A		X	
Cllr Langford, S		X	
Cllr Manley, J	X		
Cllr Newton, S	X		
Cllr Watson, P	X		

(Vote: For 5, Against 6)

The motion was lost.

Following further discussion and advice being given by the Chief Executive and Head of Legal & Governance, it was proposed by Councillor Inch, seconded by Councillor Hames and –

Resolved:

That this Committee does not agree with the resolution of Community & Resources Committee that there will be no allocation of maintenance budget for play areas.

A recorded vote was taken.

COMMITTEE MEMBER	F O R	AG AIN ST	ABS TAI N
Cllr Boughton, R	X		
Cllr Cottle-Hunkin, C			
Mr S Dengate	X		
Cllr Gubb, J	X		
Cllr Hames, P	X		
Mr I Harper	X		
Cllr C Hawkins	X		
Cllr Inch, A	X		
Cllr Langford, S	X		
Cllr Manley, J	X		
Cllr Newton, S	X		
Cllr Watson, P	X		

3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

As set out in the previous reports.

Financial Implications

To achieve a specific play maintenance budget the planned maintenance budget would need to be reduced by the corresponding sum for the Council to maintain a balanced budget over all.

Human Resources Implications

As set out in the previous reports

Sustainability Implications

As set out in the previous reports



Equality/Diversity

As set out in the previous reports

Risk Management

As set out in the previous reports

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

As set out in the previous reports

Ward Member and Leader Member Views

As set out in the previous reports

3. CONCLUSIONS

The Play Strategy has been adopted as that specific resolution of Community and Resources was not the subject of Call in to Overview and Scrutiny (Internal).

As there is a difference of opinion on the matter of the specific allocation of a budget for play facility maintenance between the Scrutiny committees and Community and Resources Committee the matter is referred to Full Council for resolution.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members consider the resolutions of Community and Resources Committee on the 1st February 2021 in relation to budget and the subsequent resolution of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Internal) on the 16th March 2021 and resolve accordingly.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Consultations: Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Governance, S151 Officer
Contact Sean Kearney
Officer:
Background
Papers:

