

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 22 MAY 2012
title: FUTURE PLAY PROVISION
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise Committee of the current condition of its Play Areas, and the issues facing us in maintaining current standards and meeting future community needs/aspirations.
- 1.2 **Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:**
- to help make people's lives safer and healthier:
 - to improve the opportunity for young people to participate in recreational and sporting activity;
 - to combat rural isolation

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In January this year, Committee received a report outlining the issues associated with open space provision within the new Core Strategy.
- 2.2 In terms of Play Areas, historically, funding through Section 106 agreements has helped construct a range of play facilities across the Borough, with the Council taking responsibility for their future management/maintenance.

3 CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 We now find ourselves responsible for 18 facilities spread throughout the Borough, varying in size and target age group. There has been provision in revenue budgets and, more recently, within the capital programme to maintain these and replace equipment when it becomes either obsolete or unsafe.
- 3.2 It was recognised in the January report that this practice would not be sustainable in the future, as the Core Strategy has identified a potential increase in developments over the twenty years, and these will increase demand in open space provision for children and young people.

4 ISSUES

- 4.1 In order to address future provision, the report identified 3 priority areas –
- within large scale developments, the responsibility of provision and ongoing maintenance sits with the developer;
 - within small scale developments, there would be an expectation for developers to make a contribution to the nearest existing facility;
 - current provision is heavily biased towards younger children, so future investment needs to include teenage facilities.
- 4.2 Whilst external investment in existing facilities is to be encouraged, it will not provide a complete solution to the Council's investment requirements, as it will focus on facilities closest to developments, and these are likely to be clustered

in the main population centres around Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley. Developers will also submit robust challenges on what would be classed as improvements, and what is merely ongoing maintenance requirements.

4.3 It is, therefore, important that we develop an investment rationale for our Play Areas to identify where and when investment will be required, rather than continue with our current reactive approach.

4.4 In order to have a robust rationale, we will need to carry out a detailed assessment of our play area stock in terms of:

- Location
- Target age group
- Condition survey
- Play value
- Investment needs

4.5 The analysis should also make an assessment of whether they fulfil the need they were originally intended to serve. We have a number of small facilities within development that, at the time of construction, accommodated families with young people. As the population make-up of a particular estate changes, Play Areas have not developed to meet such changes.

5 **RISK ASSESSMENT**

Approval of this report may have the following implications:

- **Resources** – since 2005/06 financial year, the Council's capital programme has been the main source of funding for play area maintenance improvements. Within the current financial year, the figure is only £6,500, if proposed slippage from the 2011/12 programme is approved. Whilst external investment will help, it will not deliver all the funding for our future investment requirements. We recognise that funding the ongoing capital programme will remain a significant challenge, and, therefore, any future bids will need to be backed up with robust evidence.
- **Technical, Environmental and Legal** – As members will appreciate, there are health and safety implications with the operation of Play Areas, ensuring that facilities are safe to use. All our Play Areas are also subject to annual independent safety inspections to satisfy the Council's insurers.
- **Political** – If Committee wishes to continue to provide the same level of play provision, then future investment will be required, but it is recognised that it will be in competition with other investment needs across the Council.
- **Reputation** – play provision is a high profile activity, and generally well received by local communities. Any changes may need community consultation in order to avoid/minimise negative reactions.

6 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

Notes the contents of the report, and endorses a review of current provision to support a rationale for future investment.

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For further information, please ask for Chris Hughes 01200 414479