

**Parks and Recreational Spaces – Consultancy and Health and Safety works budget
(Community Services, Aadam Ahmed)**

Synopsis of report:

- 1) To brief Members on the requirements to begin the next steps of the work around the Members Working Party (MWP) Priority: Parks and Recreational Spaces**
- 2) To request approval from this Committee to recommend that Corporate Management Committee approves the use a total of £215,000 from the ring-fenced budget for 2022/2023, agreed at Full Council, following the cessation of the school transport service for the following purposes:**
 - commission a consultant to carry-out the necessary evaluations to inform our approach to delivering this work and to deliver an enhanced annual health and safety inspection**
 - Enable Officers to address health and safety concerns of existing play equipment, with a view to roll-over any remaining funds to be used for this priority in the next financial year**

Subject to the approval of the recommendations, the completion of the consultancy work is anticipated to enable Officers to develop a structured plan to deliver on the objectives Members have identified through the Health and Wellbeing Member Working Party.

Recommendation(s) that:

Community Services Committee recommend to Corporate Management Committee to adopt the following recommendations:

- I) the sum of £20,000 be approved for the use of a consultant to conduct the necessary evaluation of existing play equipment and to complete an enhanced annual health and safety inspection;**
- II) the sum of £195,000 to be used to address immediate health and safety repairs required, as identified in routine site assessments and via the work of the above appointed consultant; and**
- III) any unspent allocation from recommendation ii) as at 31 March 2023 be carried forward to the 2023/24 financial year to progress the works.**

1. **Context and background of report**

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Member Working Party on 26 September 2022, a report was presented which provided an outline of how Officers intended to deliver on the Parks and Recreational Spaces priority.
- 1.2 Members of the Working Party were provided with information on the play areas within the borough, both RBC owned and non-owned and were advised that Officers had identified three key issues which needed to be rectified, which are:
 1. A need to ensure all facilities are compliant with health and safety, with identified defects and risks addressed
 2. A need to implement a planned replacement schedule for playgrounds in the borough, given their age and condition
 3. Consideration of whether the rationalisation of play spaces needed to be considered to support the replacement programme.
- 1.3 Officers identified that the next steps in delivering on this priority were:
 1. Health and safety risks at play areas and recreation facilities in the borough are addressed through repair where possible or removal where unable to be repaired of financially unviable
 2. A consultant is appointed to support the work completed by officers, by undertaking an independent assessment of all play facilities, identifying further works required, the potential to rationalise facilities in the borough, support the creation of a replacement programme for the borough and provide indicative costs of replacing play spaces
- 1.4 Officers consider that the annual health and safety inspection can be included within the scope of the consultancy to expedite the amount of time to complete the two identified next steps.
- 1.5 There are several known potential health and safety concerns which have been identified as part of the monthly inspections. Therefore, as part of delivering against this priority Officers are requesting a budget which can be utilised to address these concerns.
- 1.6 In October 2022, Full Council agreed that the discretionary school transport service was not to proceed and that the budget for the service be allocated to Community Services for the development of leisure and recreation opportunities for children and young people across the borough.

2. **Report and recommendations**

- 2.1 In-line with the next steps proposed at the Health and Wellbeing Member Working Party, this report seeks to action the appointment of a consultant to support the work of Officers on delivering on this priority and to gain approval for a budget to be used to carry out remedial works to several identified health and safety risks.
- 2.2 The scope of the work to be carried out by the consultant includes to:

- conduct thorough health and safety inspections all play and recreation sites
 - Conduct a full DDA Assessment
 - Carry out a Play Value Assessment
 - Carry out an estimated life expectancy assessment
 - Provide guidance and insight to support decision-making on the potential rationalisation of play facilities
 - Provide guidance and insight to support decision-making on a replacement scheme, including the provision of indicative costs associated with such a scheme
- 2.3 In addition, the consultant will also be tasked with conducting an enhanced annual health and safety inspection, which will help inform Officer decision making on pieces of play equipment, which is of priority to repair/replace due to the likelihood of it deteriorating further.
- 2.4 The use of a consultant has been deemed necessary to support Officers in understanding the scope, potential scale and ambition of this priority, with part of the work being to ensure that spaces are fit for the future and refreshed to reflect current and anticipated trends within the targeted demographic.
- 2.5 Officers have identified that the £215,000 set aside from the former school transport initiative could be used to support the work on delivering in this priority, both for the consultant and for remedial works for health and safety concerns in this financial year and are requesting approval for the use of this money for this purpose.
- 2.6 The proposed split is:
1. £20,000 to be used for the consultancy work
 2. £195,000 to be used for remedial health and safety works
- 2.7 The request for approval to utilise the yellow buses budget for this purpose is aligned with the decision at Full Council regarding the de-continuation of school buses, where it was agreed that the budget should be ring fenced to focus on development and maintenance activity in relation to provision for children and young people. It is felt that the use of the current 2022/2023 budget to undertake some immediate maintenance works to play facilities, as well as provide a direction and plan delivery of play facilities is appropriate use of this funding.
- 3. Policy framework implications**
- 3.1 The work around this priority also aligns with the Corporate Business Plan, particularly around the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the role that this work will play in providing residents with leisure and recreational spaces.
- 3.2 By utilising these spaces residents, in particular young people, will benefit from being able to lead an active lifestyle, which in turn is anticipated to result in positive health outcomes for those residents; individuals who have an active lifestyle have, on average, been shown to require fewer medical interventions throughout their lifetime than those who have not.

3.3 The work around this priority explicitly links in with the vision and objectives which have been identified by Members as part of the Health and Wellbeing Member Working Party, specifically around ensuring that the borough has play and recreation spaces which are fit-for-purpose and relevant for residents within the borough.

4. Resource implications/Value for Money

4.1 It is anticipated that 2022/2023 provision of £215,000 set aside for the development of leisure and recreation opportunities for children and young people across the borough, will be fully utilised by this request. However, given the timing of this report and the need to procure contractors to undertake the necessary works resulting from the consultant's report, it is unlikely that the full £215,000 will be spent in the current year. Therefore, it is proposed to request that any unspent sums at the end of the year be carried forward to allow the works to be completed in the next financial year.

4.2 The recommendations outlined in this paper will provide a boost to the current budget assigned to this work and will enable the Council to progress its objectives in relation to play and recreational facilities. The recommendations also support the potential preservation of some existing equipment, where maintenance is required.

5. Legal implications

5.1 Ensuring our play equipment is safe for use is a legal duty that Runnymede Borough Council is expected to uphold.

5.2 Failure to ensure that play equipment is safe for use or failure to ensure that the equipment cannot be used, in instances where repair work is not immediately possible or viable, can result in significant legal challenges in the event of any accidents which occur through use, as well as reputational harm to the Council. These are in addition to the primary concern relating to the possible injury to children using facilities.

6. Equality implications

6.1 There are no specific equality implications that arise directly from this report.

6.2 As part of the wider work to address this priority Officers will be completing an equalities impact assessment once a plan has been formulated following the consultant's report.

6.3 It is recognised that when actioning any recommendations from the consultant's report consideration will need to be given to ensure that there are spaces which provide equitable access for a range of demographics and protected characteristics, relating to age, sex and disability.

6.4 Officers will actively engage with the Equalities Group to ensure that any equalities concerns are addressed and to ensure we comply with the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

7.1 There are no specific ecological implications which arise from this report.

- 7.2 However, it is recognised that there may be implications within this area when proposals and plans for any sites are considered at a later stage.
- 7.3 Where necessary, Officers will engage with relevant colleagues should implications arise within this area through the health and safety repair works.

8. **Timetable for Implementation**

- 8.1 Should this Committee and Corporate Management Committee approve the recommendations, work will begin to appoint a consultant at the earliest opportunity and officers will engage with colleagues within the procurement team, whilst work to address identified health and safety issues will also commence, utilising existing contractors.
- 8.2 It is the ambition of Officers that the consultant completes the work and delivers the final report by the conclusion of Quarter 2 2023. This depends on the timeframe for the appointment of the consultant.
- 8.3 Officers will confirm timescales for the completion of this work with the Health and Wellbeing Member Working Party, and the outcome of this work will also be reported initially to the Working Party at its next meeting in January 2023.

9. **Conclusions**

- 9.1 The outlined 'next steps' in delivering this priority and the recommendations are considered to be key to ensuring that work is progressed on this priority.
- 9.2 By agreeing the recommendations Officers will be able to gain access to the expert insight and guidance necessary to meet the ambition and scope of this priority.
- 9.3 The need to resolve some of the long-standing risks relating to health and safety which have previously been reported as less of a priority for repair, but which because of further deterioration etc., now required attention and focus is also evident and the agreement of this budget will support Officers in working to improve the current situation faced.

(To resolve)

Background papers

None stated.