



***Resources and Sustainable Communities  
Scrutiny Panel***

***Follow-up Review of  
Children's Play in Tameside***

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**Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council**  
**Resources And Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel**  
**Follow-up Review of Children's Play in Tameside**

**1. Chairs' Introduction**

It is crucial, if the scrutiny function is to have credibility and responsibility, that Scrutiny Panels follow up their reviews to examine whether their recommendations that were accepted for implementation by the Executive have been put into practice.



**(Cllr M Smith)**



**(Cllr B Walsh)**

The report that the Resources and Community Services Scrutiny Panel published in November 2003, was a turning point for scrutiny reviews in Tameside, not only by the quality and depth of the contents of the report, but also for the way it was presented. The review drew upon the expertise of national figures in children's play such as Issy Cole-Hamilton from the Children's Play Council and went to neighbouring local authorities to learn from good practice elsewhere. Its research identified the need to clarify officer and executive responsibility for children's play, led to changes to the monitoring of Section 106 planning developer contributions and pointed to an alternative way of receiving these contributions.

The report identified the need for greater investment in children's play sites and equipment and the increase in the number of sites when this became possible.

The strength of feeling amongst members of the panel with regard to children's play should not be underestimated and it was a difficult re-review report to conclude.

The Executive have responded very well in the provision of both additional capital and revenue funding. Although there is always a need for more investment, this has to be placed within the context of increasing demands on local government funding. It is essential that the greatest value is obtained from any additional funding and the Scrutiny Panel has made recommendations to cover this, as well as continued community involvement and efforts to reduce vandalism and anti-social behaviour that sadly is sometimes associated with these sites. We as the Chairs of the panel that undertook this re-review commend its contents to the Council and look forward to future progress in this area.

**Councillor Michael Smith**

Chair of the Resources and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel 2006 onwards

**Councillor Bernard Walsh**

Chair of the Resources and Community Services Scrutiny Panel 2004– 2006

## **2. Background To The Follow-Up Review Of The Scrutiny Panel's Report On Children's Play In Tameside**

2.1 The Resources and Community Services Scrutiny Panel published its Report on Children's Play in November 2003. The report presented 16 recommendations incorporating the following issues;

- Proposals for greater revenue and capital investment;
- The development of a long-term policy for the distribution and condition of children's play sites (taking into consideration the needs of users throughout Tameside and the best practice of other authorities);
- The clear demarcation of managerial responsibility for Children's Play, co-ordinated by a single management structure; and
- Measures to raise the profile of Children's Play as a Council priority.

2.2 The Executive Response accepted all 16 recommendations; and established actions and dates throughout 2004/2005 for their implementation.

2.3 Progress made towards implementing the recommendations contained in the Executive Response to the Scrutiny Review of Children's Play was considered at the meeting of the Audit, Capital, Finance and Policy Progress Working Group held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2005.

2.4 The Working Group noted that a substantial amount of additional funding had been allocated to Children's Play during 2004/5. However concerns were raised and recorded in the Minute 20 as follows:

- "The Executive Response requires amending to replace Jim Burns with Adam Allen, Head of Sport and Leisure, in order to realign actions and officer responsibility;
- A Children's Play Strategy needs to be produced and submitted to all District Assemblies;
- Many of the targets set for implementing the approved recommendations contained in the Executive Response have not been met and require re-visiting."

2.5 Consequently the Resources and Community Services Scrutiny Panel agreed to carry out an in-depth follow-up review of progress made towards implementing the Executive Response. This follow-up review is important as it provides the Scrutiny Panel with an opportunity to help ensure that the approved recommendations are implemented in a way that has positive outcomes for the users of the service. It also enables the Panel to consider the outcome of those recommendations that have been implemented and how effective they have been.

## **3. Terms Of Reference**

3.1 The aims of this follow-up review are;

- To monitor progress towards the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Executive Response to the Scrutiny Review of Children's Play, in order to help ensure that the approved recommendations are

implemented in a way that has positive outcomes for the users of the service.

- To produce accurate information on the level of additional capital and revenue funding allocated to Children's Play during 2004/5; and to assess the breakdown of expenditure in relation to value for money;
- To identify conclusions and any further recommendations

#### **4. Membership Of The Panel**

##### **2005/06**

Councillor B Walsh (Chair), Councillors Grundy, P Harrison, Hill, A Holland, M.J Smith, Wareing, Welsh and K Wright

##### **2006/07**

Councillor M Smith (Chair), Councillors Dickinson, Sidebottom, Travis, Walsh, Wareing, White, Whitley and K Wright

#### **5. Methodology**

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Panel met Adam Allen (Head of Sport and Cultural Services) and Andrew Mason, (Assistant Executive Director, Sustainable Communities) to discuss the policy and strategic development of Children's Play since the publication of the Scrutiny Review. Adam Allen and Andrew Mason were also asked to update the Executive Response by outlining achievements and planned actions in relation to each recommendation.
- 5.2 The Panel also met Daryll Maguire (Playground Manager) to find out about the impact of the Scrutiny Review from an "on the ground" perspective.
- 5.3 In addition, the Panel received information from the Borough Treasurer about the allocation and expenditure of revenue and capital funding for Children's Play during 2004/5 and 2005/6.
- 5.4 The Scrutiny Panel considered the progress made towards the implementation of each of the recommendations contained in its original report on Children's Play. The Panel's findings, together with additional conclusions and recommendations, are set out in Section 5 of this report.

## 6. Follow-Up Review Findings

### 6.1 Original Recommendation 1

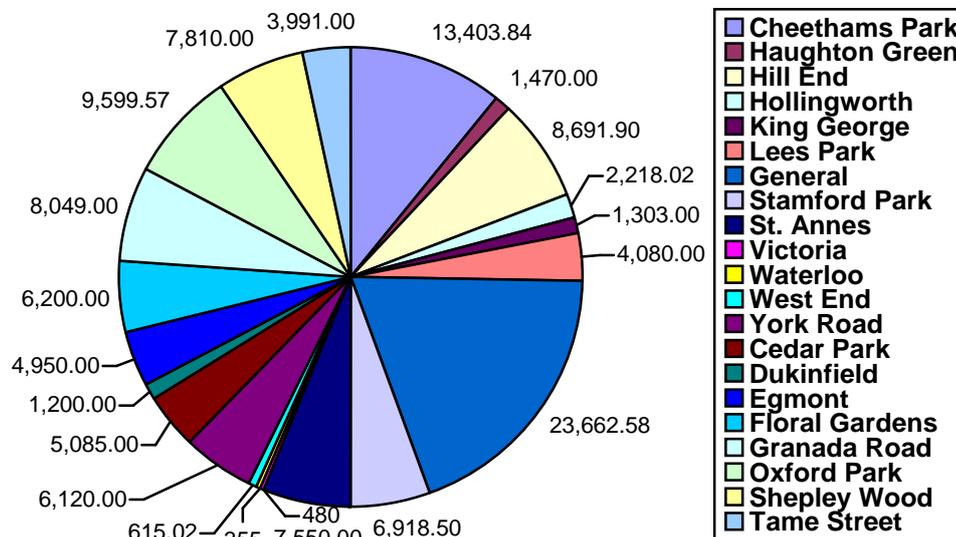
**That 30 equipped play areas be the minimum number of sites and that the allocated budget be sufficient for this number to be developed and maintained to a high standard.**

#### Executive Response Update:

This recommendation has been adopted and the revenue budget for maintenance has increased to £105k per annum from the previous figure of £26k.

#### Panel Findings:

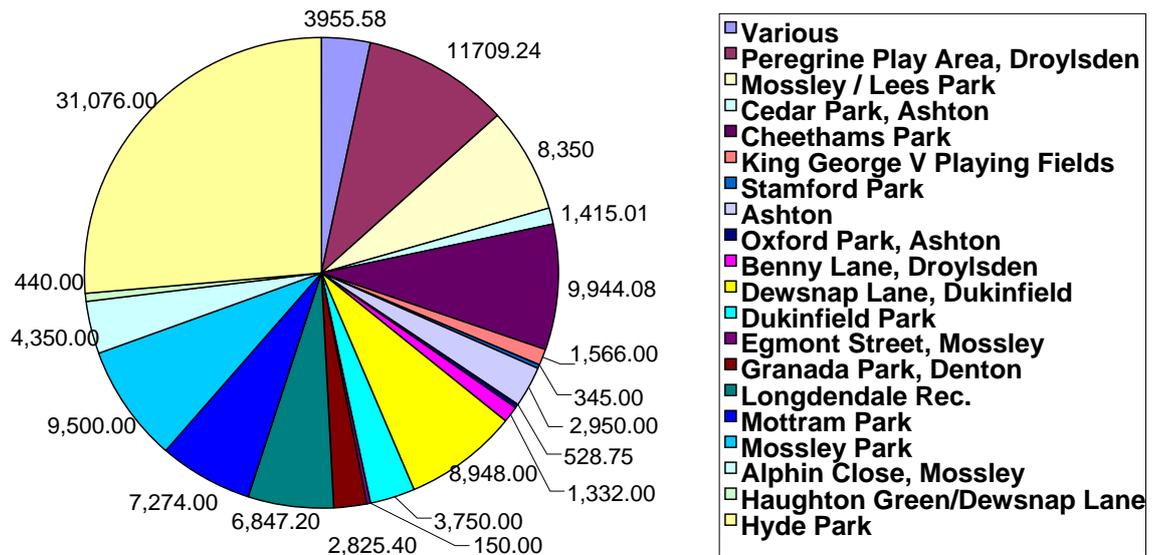
- 6.1.1 A substantial amount of additional revenue funding has been allocated to Children's Play since 2004/2005 to help maintain play areas and equipment. The revenue budget for maintenance has increased from £25,000 in 2003 to £105,860 in 2004/5 and £105,100 in 2005/6.
- 6.1.2 The recommendation contained in the Executive Response for an £800,000 capital bid for Children's Play funding over a four-year period between 2004/5 and 2007/8, was unsuccessful. However, £150,000 capital funding was allocated to the Service in 2004/5. There were however, no further capital allocations in 2005/6 or 2006/7. In 2005/6 a bid was made for funding from slippage in the Capital Programme and £250,000 was allocated to the Service. A capital bid for £50,000 in 2007/8 has also been successful.
- 6.1.3 The Panel received information from the Corporate Accountant regarding the breakdown of revenue expenditure for the maintenance of children's play sites and capital expenditure for children's play during 2004/5 and 2005/6. The breakdown of expenditure provided by the Corporate Accountant is summarised in the pie charts below and overleaf;
- 6.1.4 Revenue Expenditure for Maintenance 2004/5



The pie chart overleaf shows;

- During 2004/5 the actual revenue expenditure for the maintenance of children’s play sites was £123,752.43;
- This was an overspend of £18,752.
- 22 play sites throughout Tameside benefited from the additional revenue funding.

#### 6.1.5 Revenue Expenditure for Maintenance 2005/6



The above pie chart shows;

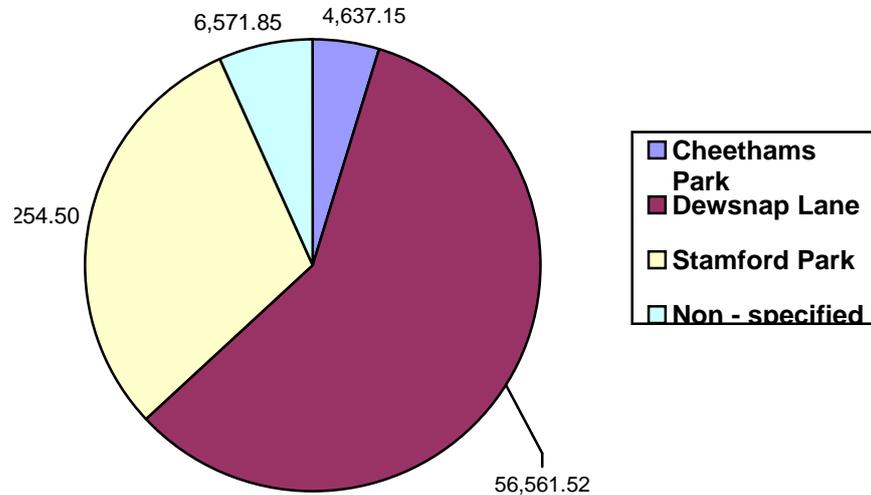
- The revenue budget for maintenance for 2005/6 was £105,100;
- During 2005/6 the actual revenue expenditure for maintenance was £117,256;
- This was an overspend of £12,156.

6.1.6 The bulk of revenue funding was used to finance essential safety improvements and general maintenance work, including resurfacing; the repair or removal of damaged equipment; the replacement of some equipment; repainting and the removal of graffiti. The Panel was informed that revenue works in 2004/5 and 2005/6 have had a significant impact upon the improvement of 6 of Tameside’s 10 strategic sites, bringing them up to an “acceptable standard.” Meanwhile revenue work around the remaining 20 sites will continue to have a substantial impact on the renewal of equipment and re-surfacing.

6.1.7 However the Playground Manager informed the Panel that budget constraints continue to restrict the scope of routine maintenance and improvement works. For example, the revenue budget for maintenance for 2004/5 was entirely absorbed in addressing the backlog of wear and tear and vandalism, leaving limited funding available for day to day repairs. Moreover, the Panel was informed that the ensuing maintenance requirements of newly developed or

extended play sites will further reinforce the burden already placed upon the revenue budget.

#### 6.1.8 Capital Expenditure 2004/5



The above pie chart shows:

- A total of £97,025.02 capital funding was spent on Children's Play during 2004/5;
- £52,974.98 capital funding was carried forward to 2005/6 to help fund priority schemes already approved by the Council.

#### 6.1.9 Capital Expenditure 2005/6

6.1.10 The total capital budget for 2005/6 was £303,000. This was allocated to fund the refurbishment of two priority sites and the development of a further two sites as approved by the Council.

6.1.11 During 2005/6 the total of £101,222 capital funding was spent on Children's Play. This was used to fund the refurbishment of the following two sites:

- £54,179 was used to fund a major refurbishment of the strategic play area at Hyde Park;
- £47,043 was used fund the refurbishment of the strategic play area at Victoria Park.

6.1.12 £201,778 has been carried forward to 2006/7. This sum will be used to fund the development of two priority sites already approved by the Council, as follows:

- £45,000 will be used to fund the extension of the Tower Street play site, Dukinfield. This scheme has been slightly delayed to enable consultations to be undertaken and will be linked into ongoing work with ward Councillors and local residents;

- £120,000 will be allocated to the development of a new strategic site at Medlock Street, Droylsden, to replace the strategic site at Lees Park. This scheme has also been slightly delayed due to the need to redesign aspects of the scheme in order to match the available budget.
- £36,778 will be reserved to provide additional capital support for the Medlock site if required.
- The expenditure of this funding will be carefully monitored to ensure that it is utilised appropriately.

#### **Follow up Conclusion**

1. **The Executive has responded well to this recommendation and made significant revenue and capital funding available.**
2. **Although there has been major additional funding allocated to Children's Play, there are still play sites that require development and improvement.**

#### **Follow Up Recommendations**

1. **That close liaison between the Borough Treasurer and District Assemblies be maintained to provide effective management of the enhanced budget for the provision of children's play sites.**
2. **That consideration be given to the allocation, as a matter of priority, of any funding that becomes available during 2006/7 due to slippage in the Capital Programme to enable new equipment to be acquired for existing play sites.**

## **6.2 Original Recommendation 2**

**In view of the number of children per play area, in the long term, 30 play areas are not sufficient and should be increased.**

#### **Executive Response Update:**

The sentiment of this recommendation is supported, however its implementation is predicated on monies being found to improve existing sites as a necessary first step.

In addition to the revenue budget increase, significant capital monies have been identified and separate work is going on to identify the role that funds from s.106 agreement contributions can make to improve play facilities.

### **Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel recognises the importance of improving the existing sites as a necessary first step.**

### **Follow Up Recommendation**

- 1. That in the short term, the revenue budget increase, additional capital monies and where appropriate funds from Section 106 agreements are used to raise the standard of and maintain existing play sites.**
- 2. In the long term the number of play sites should be increased, subject to sufficient revenue and capital funding being made available.**

### **6.3 Original Recommendation 3**

**That provision is made for young people as well as children, when play areas are introduced.**

#### **Executive Response Update:**

Within the current strategy, the amount of new play areas will be restricted. Progress is being made however, to provide additional facilities for young people at play areas and to locate new play sites near existing youth provision. Consequently the District Assembly Service feels that this recommendation is being met.

#### **Panel Findings:**

- 6.3.1 The Panel was advised that progress includes the teen shelter at Oxford Park which has been modified and re-panelled; a range of equipment suitable for all ages has been introduced at Cheethams Park; and an area intended for teen play has been introduced at Hyde Park. In addition, the play area at Haughton Green Playing Fields has been redesigned adjacent to existing youth facilities and the new play area at Tower Street, Dukinfield, will also form part of a site which contains youth facilities including a kick wall and “kick-about” area. Furthermore, the new Strategic Site planned for Medlock, Droylsden, will form part of the existing sport facilities provided at the Medlock Sports Centre.





(Cheethams Park, Stalybridge)

- 6.3.2 The new Strategic Site planned for Medlock will be located close to Jubilee Gardens Resources Centre for children with disability; and it has been suggested that this play area will incorporate facilities for children with disabilities.
- 6.3.3 However information received from the Manager of Jubilee Gardens Resource Centre indicates, due to the severity of their disabilities, the majority of children visiting Jubilee Gardens Resource Centre would be unable to use equipment planned for the Medlock play site. The Parents Support Group (OKE), based at Jubilee Gardens, is seeking separate specialist provision within the confines of the centre.

**Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel recognises that provision is being made for older children and teenagers alongside play areas for younger children at some play sites in the borough.**

**Follow Up Recommendation**

**That provision for older children and teenagers should be extended to most strategic play sites.**

**6.4 Original Recommendation 4**

**That the Council adopt the revised 1998 version of the Children's Play Council's Charter for Children's Play.**

**Executive Response Update**

The Council formally adopted the original Charter in 1995. An updated Charter was produced in 1998 but has not yet been adopted formally by the council. A newer version is also now in the pipeline and confirmation is required as to what this will include and when it will be available. Once

confirmation of this is available arrangements for its formal adoption can be put in place.

**Follow Up Conclusion**

The Scrutiny Panel would hope to see the latest version of the Children's Play Council's Charter for Children's Play adopted by the Council.

**Follow Up Recommendation**

That the Council adopt the latest version of the Children's Play Council's Charter for Children's Play when available.

**6.5 Original Recommendation 5**

That in developing a strategy for children's play, all organisations that can have an impact such as housing, transport, planning, Early Years, education, the voluntary sector and the commercial sector be involved.

**Executive Response Update:**

The Strategy is now complete and 30 sites have been identified. Once these 30 sites are established and of sufficient quality then future provision will be consulted upon with the interested parties mentioned. Further funding, both capital and revenue would be required to extend beyond the 30 sites.

**Panel Findings:**

- 6.5.1 The Assistant Executive Director (Sustainable Communities) informed the Panel that the list of sites identified includes 10 Strategic Sites (1 site in each town, plus Stamford Park), in addition to 1 Local Site and 1 Local Plus Site for each town in the Borough, with further sites in areas of greatest need.
- 6.5.2 The community have been given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the new play area at Tower Street, Dukinfield.

**Follow Up Conclusions**

1. The Panel is pleased that a strategy for children's play has been completed and that 30 play sites have been identified as a minimum number of sites.
2. The Panel welcomes the involvement of the community in the development of some children's play sites in the borough.

**Follow Up Recommendation**

That the community, Ward Members and any other organisations that can have an impact on children's play (see paragraph 5.5), be consulted regarding the development of any new play sites and the major refurbishment of any existing play sites.

## 6.6 Original Recommendation 6

**That a single champion for children's play be identified within the Cabinet, together with a dedicated identifiable officer co-ordinated by a single management structure.**

### **Executive Response Update:**

At the Executive Cabinet held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2003 the Council Constitution was reviewed. Cabinet Deputy Warrants of Office were amended and it was recommended that the Cabinet Deputy (Community Services) "be responsible for the provision of children's play".

The managerial responsibility for the Council's policy on Children's Play provision is now in need of review following the introduction of Children's and Young People's Services and the agreement of the play strategy.

### **Follow Up Conclusion**

**Due to more recent changes to Cabinet portfolios, responsibility for children's play remains unclear and responsibility at officer level still appears to be divided.**

### **Follow Up Recommendation**

**That responsibility for children's play at Cabinet level be clarified and responsibility given to a single service.**

## 6.7 Original Recommendation 7

**That a community fund for development of equipped children's play areas be established, together with a clear and transparent system to enable funding received through Section 106 Agreements to be identified and monitored**

### **Executive Response Update:**

Detailed planning guidance for a community fund will be drawn up following adoption of the replacement Unitary Development Plan. A system to identify and monitor Section 106 payments is currently in place.

### **Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel welcomes the implementation of a system to identify and monitor Section 106 payments and the development of planning guidance for a community fund.**

### **Follow Up Recommendation**

**That the Panel are kept informed of progress made towards the development and implementation of planning guidance for a community fund.**

**6.8 Original Recommendation 8**

**That the Council share and benefit from best practice of neighbouring authorities, especially with regard to policy, provision and maximising extensive funding for children’s play areas.**

**Executive Response Update:**

The Playground Manager keeps abreast of good practice by a number of actions and activities.

This includes visits and discussions with other Councils along with attendance at relevant seminars and exhibitions etc.

**Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel welcomes initiatives undertaken to identify best practice.**

**Follow Up Recommendation**

**That identified best practice is considered and applied, when appropriate, in the development of new and existing play sites.**

**6.9 Original Recommendation 9**

**That funding for children’s play is greatly increased to bring existing play areas to an acceptable standard.**

**Executive Response Update:**

Further capital bids have been made along with the allocation of Capital Fund slippage.

**Panel Findings:**

Refer to “Panel Findings” paragraph 5.1, for further information.

**Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel recognises and welcomes the substantial amount of additional revenue and capital funding allocated for Children’s Play in 2004/05 and 2005/06.**

**Follow Up Recommendation**

**That Children’s Play remains a Council priority for future funding.**

#### **6.10 Original Recommendation 10**

**The views of all stakeholders need to be included in formulating policy, particularly when identifying long-term solutions to problems.**

##### **Executive Response Update:**

The agreed policy is to provide 30 high quality play areas. Once the 30 sites are of sufficient quality and capital funding becomes available, the policy is to extend the number of play areas; further consultation will be required on the locations of additional sites.

##### **Panel Findings:**

The Panel has been informed that a new play site located at Tower Street Dukinfield is being planned with community involvement.

##### **Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel feels that community involvement could be encouraged further to help to identify solutions to long term problems.**

##### **Follow Up Recommendation**

**That the Council consult with the community in the development of new and existing sites, in order to help identify solutions to local problems such as anti-social behaviour and vandalism.**

#### **6.11 Original Recommendation 11**

**The underlying causes of some of the most common problems of anti-social behaviour should be addressed, working in partnership with other services.**

##### **Executive Response Update:**

Anti-social behaviour is being addressed through a number of channels; these include the crime and disorder reduction partnership, district assembly meetings and a number of schemes involving the youth service and sport service. The Local Public Service Agreement target for 2004-2007 is to reduce youth nuisance providing a strong driver to tackle this problem.

##### **Panel Findings:**

- 6.11.1 The Panel was informed that vandalism of play equipment is an on-going problem that places a constant drain on current resources. However a number of initiatives to help tackle anti-social behaviour have been successfully piloted at some of the borough's play sites. For example, the Panel heard that young people from the Youth Offending Team have contributed to refurbishment work at Oxford Park. In addition, the Playground Manager feels that the introduction of a teen shelter alongside equipment for

younger children in Longdendale has helped to curb anti-social behaviour in the area.

6.11.2 Furthermore, a protocol for the routine inspection and maintenance of play sites has been produced. This protocol aims to manage and reduce the damaging impact of vandalism. It specifies the following requirements;

- Strategic Sites
  - a) Visual check to ensure equipment is free from damage – daily, Monday to Friday;
  - b) Physical check to ensure equipment is physically sound – once a week;
  - c) Bark and sand areas inspected to a depth of 300mm – once a week;
  - d) Bark and sand areas – raked / aerated and topped up as necessary – daily, Monday to Friday;
  - e) Artificial surfaces including wet pour and rubber tiling – manually brushed clean – once a week.
- Local Plus and Local Sites
  - Items a) and d) as above but three times a week;
  - Items b), c) and e) as above.
- Urgent Works
  - In addition to the above any urgent works (e.g. the removal of broken glass) will be dealt with within the same working day;
  - Any defects or dangerous equipment will be replaced or made safe within the same working day.

#### **Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel welcome initiatives currently undertaken to monitor and reduce the impact of vandalism and other anti social behaviour.**

#### **Follow Up Recommendation**

**That Sport and Recreational Services and District Assemblies continue to work with the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to address the underlying causes of some of the most common problems of anti-social behaviour at the borough's play sites.**

#### **6.12 Original Recommendation 12**

**That the review of play provision being undertaken by the Recreation Service includes a thorough review of the distribution of play areas to ensure the needs of all children are met throughout the Borough.**

#### **Executive Response Update:**

In conjunction with District Assemblies, 30 play sites have been agreed and are being upgraded as funds allow.

**Panel Findings:**

- 6.12.1 The Panel was informed, that once 30 play sites have been established and are of the required standard, plans to extend the number of sites will be considered and interested parties will be consulted, as recommended in the Executive Response. However the Panel was informed that the development of new sites is dependant upon the allocation of further additional revenue and capital funding.
- 6.12.2 A new local plus play site at Tower Street, Dukinfield is included in the list of 30 play sites and is currently being developed.

**Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel welcomes the development of a new local plus site in Dukinfield.**

**Follow Up Recommendation**

**That a thorough review of the distribution of play sites is carried out in order to ensure that any additional funding is used to meet the needs of children throughout the borough.**

**6.13 Original Recommendation 13**

**That the Council establish criteria for the distribution of well equipped play areas in the Borough**

**Executive Response Update:**

Once the 30 agreed sites are of sufficient standard, criteria will be established to determine the location of additional sites.

**Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel recognises the importance of raising the standard of existing sites.**

**Follow Up Recommendation**

- 1. That revenue and capital funding is used to raise existing play sites to an agreed standard.**
- 2. That criteria for the distribution of play sites be established in order to ensure any additional funding is used effectively.**

**6.14 Original Recommendation 14**

**That the “Play as Culture” strategy be based on a thorough needs assessment.**

**Executive Response Update:**

This recommendation has been adopted and forms part of the “Play as Culture Strategy” and the resultant strategy for 30 play areas.

**6.15 Original Recommendation 15**

That the Council takes appropriate measures to prevent further reduction of equipped play areas.

**Executive Response Update:**

This has been adopted and the official strategy is to have a minimum of 30 play areas, which the District Assemblies manage and upgrade as funding allows.

**Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel welcomes the commitment made in the official strategy for Children’s Play to have a minimum of 30 play sites.**

**Follow Up Recommendation**

**That funding continues to be used to develop and maintain the 30 play sites identified in the Strategy for Children’s Play.**

**6.16 Original Recommendation 16**

**That the Council considers the contribution that play can make to achieving its high level priorities.**

**Executive Response Update:**

This work is continuing and the publication of a new cultural strategy will include consideration of how play contributes to corporate priorities. The creation of children’s services will also have a major bearing on how children’s play is incorporated within high level strategies.

**Follow Up Conclusion**

**The Panel welcomes the consideration of how play contributes to corporate priorities, which is to be included in the new Cultural Strategy.**

**Follow Up Recommended**

**That the Panel is informed of the completion of the new Cultural Strategy.**

## **7. BOROUGH SOLICITOR'S OBSERVATIONS**

There are no legal implications arising directly from the Report's conclusions and recommendations.

## **8. BOROUGH TREASURER'S OBSERVATIONS**

The report recognises that additional capital and revenue funding has been made available for children's play. The allocation of further capital resources would be dependent upon the relative priority assigned to children's play in future bidding rounds and to the total amount of resources available.