


Report To:	STRATEGIC PLANNING AND CAPITAL MONITORING PANEL
Date:	27 November 2017
Reporting Officer:	Emma Varnam – Assistant Director, Operations & Neighbourhoods
Subject:	INVESTING IN CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS
Report Summary:	There are 35 Council owned playgrounds within Tameside. They are very well used and an important asset for the community. They have not had significant capital investment for almost 10 years so are now in need of an injection of capital funding to renew play equipment and safety surfacing. This will improve the play offer to Tameside's younger residents as well as reducing the risk to the Council of personal injury claims due to accidents on poor quality play equipment.
Recommendations:	It is RECOMMENDED to Council: that £600,000 capital funding is allocated for improvements to children's playgrounds across Tameside Council.
Links to Community Strategy:	Playground improvements will support a number of Community Strategy priorities including supportive communities, a safe environment, a prosperous society, learning community and attractive borough.
Policy Implications:	Council needs to consider reviewing capital programme to accommodate.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)	<p>There is currently no financial resource allocated to the funding of this proposal. The Three Year Capital Programme recommended for approval on 9 October 2017 did not include a scheme for Children's Playgrounds, and consequently there is currently no resource allocated to support this scheme.</p> <p>Funding this scheme will either require reprioritisation of existing schemes on the programme, or identification of additional resources. Additional resources could include the realisation of additional capital receipts through further asset sales or through borrowing, which has revenue implications of around £12,500 per annum per £100,000 borrowed on schemes of this nature.</p> <p>The request for funding of £600,000 is at this stage an initial estimate and further work is required to establish the exact nature and costs of the proposals.</p>
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	Continuing investment in accordance with up to date health and safety advice is a key priority in this area to ensure the Council protects children who frequent its playgrounds from adverse safety conditions thereby avoiding successful claims against it, the alternative to which should be to close them down.
Access to Information:	The background papers can be obtained from the author of the report, Emma Varnam, Assistant Director, Operations and Neighbourhoods by:

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Children's playgrounds are an important feature of many of Tameside's parks and open spaces. There are 35 distributed throughout the Borough.
- 1.2 These playgrounds vary from a strategic playground such as Hyde Park with over 15 pieces of play equipment aimed at children from toddlers to young teenagers to small local playgrounds such as Benny Lane, Littlemoss which features a swing and slide for younger children.
- 1.3 In 2008 the Council was awarded Government funding of £1.2million which was part of the Play Builder Grant towards the refurbishment of Council Playgrounds. There were strict criteria for how the funding could be spent and therefore some of the equipment and infrastructure it funded was relatively high maintenance and didn't offer high play value. For example funding was aimed at natural play so inclusion of boulders within playgrounds, sand and bark as play surfacing and the inclusion of timber play equipment.
- 1.4 It is now timely to reinvest playgrounds within Tameside in order to ensure that they continue to be safe and enjoyable for all young residents to use.

2. THE VALUE OF CHILDREN'S PLAY

- 2.1 Children learn and develop through play – it is an important part of their physical development and learning skills such as balance and co-ordination. Whilst this play can take place indoors there is increasing awareness that playing outside is very important for the mental and physical wellbeing of the child.
- 2.2 The Play Strategy for Scotland 2013 says: 'Open space allows children to be physically active and challenge themselves so they sleep and eat well and form healthy habits that will stay with them for life.'
- 2.3 Investment in playgrounds will not only benefit the lives of young children at the time it will have much longer term health benefits for those children.
- 2.4 Most children do not visit playgrounds on their own – they are taken to a playground within a park by a close relative or carer and that responsible adult also benefits from physical activity and the mental wellbeing from time spent outdoors.

3 FINANCE

- 3.1 The funding request is for £600,000 which will be spent across playgrounds in Tameside. Officers are currently undertaking an audit of all playgrounds within Tameside and the results of this audit will inform how the funding is spent.
- 3.2 The priorities for funding will be: replacement of play equipment which is at the end of its useful life; replacement of safety surfacing; improvements to infrastructure such as railings, gates and paths.
- 3.3 The funding will be profiled over two financial years – 2018/19 and 2019/20. Officers will need to programme the playground works carefully to ensure that playgrounds are open during the school holidays. Some safety surfacing work cannot be done on very cold days as it would not set so the programme will also need to factor this in.

- 3.4 Play equipment which meets the relevant European Safety Standards, is durable, and easy to maintain appears expensive but it can last over 10 years and provides great play value. Examples of costs are included at Appendix 2.
- 3.5 Officers from Greenspace will be procuring all the work through the Council's Engineers to ensure that the projects are delivered to a high quality, on time and within budget. Officers will run a procurement exercise to determine the provider of the new play equipment. There will be a maximum of 3 suppliers to ensure that in future we can bulk buy spares and Playground Maintenance Operatives will have good technical knowledge of the play equipment on site.
- 3.6 The funding will only be spent on children's playgrounds – it will not be used for Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) or outdoor gym equipment.
- 3.7 The £600,000 will ensure that playgrounds are at a good safe standard however further capital investment will be required in the future.
- 3.8 A report will be brought to the next Strategic Capital Meeting which will set out the proposed works and associated costs to be spent on each play area based on the audit currently being undertaken.

4 RISKS

- 4.1 All our playgrounds are very well used therefore it is essential that we have an effective inspection and maintenance regime in place. This reduces the number of personal injury claims the Council receives and also enables the Council to defend claims robustly.
- 4.2 The Council must remove play equipment which is no longer fit for purpose and safe to use. If safety surfacing is not fit for purpose or damaged the play equipment above it must be removed until the site has been resurfaced or repairs completed. If the Council were to leave substandard equipment in place it would leave itself liable to claims.
- 4.3 Playgrounds are in parks and open spaces and therefore subject to vandalism. Fortunately this isn't common at most sites but there are some sites where bins are set alight on safety surfacing, swings are smashed and safety surfacing is deliberately damaged. At these sites we will be providing alternative safety surfacing and robust play equipment. We also report these incidents to the Police so they are aware of on-going issues and work with partners to tackle anti social behaviour.

Current Maintenance and Inspection Regime

- 4.4 The Council has a robust maintenance and inspection regime for all playgrounds to ensure that they are as safe as can be.
- 4.5 Each play area is inspected weekly by our Playground Operatives; there is then an annual inspection by Zurich who insure the Council and an independent annual inspection which we procure from ROSPA.
- 4.6 There is 1 full time Playground Operative with an additional Operative working with him from March until October. These and 6 other staff have received full ROSPA training in Visual Playground Inspection.
- 4.7 There is an annual Children's Play revenue budget for spare parts, new play equipment and repairs to safety surfacing of £70,000. Whilst this is sufficient for minor repairs and replacement of small pieces of equipment it does not enable the significant investment required to keep our playgrounds safe and high quality.

- 4.8 As part of the Play Builder funding safety surfaces such as sand and bark were included – these are high maintenance requiring regular topping up, raking of the sand, and are not liked by many parents. In the past when there were Grounds Maintenance Operatives based in parks they would carry out raking and inspection of sand on a daily basis but since new systems of working have been introduced we no longer have staff based in most parks.

Consultation and Engagement

- 4.9 The replacement of play equipment, particularly if it is on a like for like basis, is popular with most residents. The public recognise the importance of playgrounds and are keen to see the Council invest in facilities for our young residents.
- 4.10 Once the audits of playgrounds have taken place and costs received for work Officers will consult with Ward Members on the work planned for playgrounds within their area.
- 4.11 Following consultation with Members Officers will notify residents of planned work to the playground by displaying posters around the playgrounds illustrating the work to be done and planned timescales for the work.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 As set out on the front of the report.

APPENDIX 1



Kompan Multi Deck Play Tower with Steel posts and steel slide.

Multi Deck Play Tower Unit	£6550
Removal of old piece of kit and installation of new unit.	£3600
New wetpour safety surfacing	£3000



Replacement of grass matting with wetpour under double swings at Dukinfield Park £2500