

Report to:	STRATEGIC PLANNING AND CAPITAL MONITORING PANEL
Date:	8 July 2019
Executive Member/Reporting Officer:	Councillor Allison Gwynne – (Executive Member, Neighbourhood, Community Safety and Environment) Emma Varnam – Assistant Director (Operations and Neighbourhoods)
Subject:	INVESTING IN CHILDREN’S PLAYGROUNDS
Report Summary:	This report sets out details of the improvements required to children’s playgrounds across Tameside. As well as alternative options the report includes details of the proposed investment, project delivery details and the future maintenance programme for playgrounds.
Recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Council approves the £600,000 spend for the children’s playgrounds as detailed in the report. 2. That the Council agrees the scope and detail of the work as set out in the report.
Links to Community Strategy:	The proposals in the report will support the delivery of the Community Strategy in terms of creating a more attractive Borough, creating a Healthy Borough, School Readiness, a welcoming place to live.
Policy Implications:	The proposed improvements are helping to create an attractive Borough which will promote economic growth, employment opportunities and provide a nice place to live, work and visit. The proposed improvements will increase opportunities for children and their families to live healthy lives.
Financial Implications: (authorised by Section 151 Officer)	<p>In October 2017, £0.600m was earmarked in the capital programme to fund this project.</p> <p>In July 2018 Executive Cabinet received a report setting out the capital pressures that are facing the Council. The report recommended that the programme as approved in October 2017 would need to be reprioritised, and noted that the size of the capital programme would be dependent on the level of capital receipts realised.</p> <p>Following approval of the Capital Programme Methodology for Prioritisation at Executive Cabinet on 27 March 2019, this scheme was agreed to be progressed to the business case stage as this scheme scored highly due to health and safety risks.</p> <p>The procurement timescales are detailed in section 4.4, showing that the financial investment will be split over two financial years, 19/20 and 20/21.</p> <p>There is an existing net revenue budget of £0.129m for 19/20, which will still be required for repairing damage, replacement parts and regular inspections and with a grant secured of £0.039m from MHCLG there are not any additional pressures expected. The Council does not receive any income from the</p>

playgrounds, therefore there are not any VAT implications.

Legal Implications:
**(authorised by Borough
Solicitor)**

The Council has a statutory duty to deliver a balanced budget and any resources must be spent in priorities in an effective and efficient manner. The Council resources are finite so Members need to be clear that any expenditure will deliver better outcomes for residents and be implemented in a way that delivers the best return for money.

A strategic approach incorporating up to date safety standards will reduce the risk of successful challenge in the event of accidents or damage, which the report demonstrates. Council Insurers must at all times be happy with the approach taken.

Risk Management :

There are a number of risks related to the project which have been considered; these are mainly due to external factors outside Officers' control. All play areas are outdoor sites and are therefore on occasion subject to vandalism. During the course of the project we may need to re-profile spend to repair or replace play equipment and surfacing which has been damaged. In order to minimise risk Officers are selecting play equipment which conforms to E1176, the current European Standard for playground equipment. By choosing equipment which confirms to this standard and is well maintained the risk of successful litigation from users is minimised. All of the play equipment and safety surfacing are being installed outside and therefore are subject to delays due to inclement weather. Whilst spring and summer would be ideal for the work to take place these are also the busiest times in our play areas and therefore more work will be carried out in autumn and winter. The Greenspace Manager and Engineers will meet regularly to review the programme and keep delays to a minimum whilst also avoiding working during the school holidays.

Access to Information :

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Nick Sayers Head of Operations & Greenspace



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- 1.1 There are currently 37 Council owned play areas within Tameside. The existing play areas have not had significant investment for around 12 years and were designed and installed at a time when most parks were staffed and there was a greater maintenance budget. So for example some play areas include features such as sand, which is high maintenance and requires frequent checks – this was acceptable when there were staff based in all our parks but this is no longer the case. The play equipment at some sites is getting beyond economic repair and therefore requires removal or replacement.

Why are we proposing to do this?

- 1.2 Improvements to children's play areas will contribute towards giving all children in Tameside a healthy start in life. The improved play areas will encourage young people and their families to get outside, to be active and to spend time together. All the play areas are free to access and are open every day therefore there are no economic barriers to access as there are with commercial indoor soft play areas. This scheme will reduce the resources required for maintenance through replacing sand with wetpour on most sites. It may also reduce the risk of personal injury claims against the Council, which can result from accidents on poor quality play equipment. Whilst there is no statutory requirement for Councils to provide parks or playgrounds it is widely recognised that access to high quality open space is important for people's wellbeing. The Council has a duty of care as landowner to prevent injury to persons using their land and therefore it is important that we keep well maintained play areas. The Council commissions ROSPA (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) to undertake an annual survey of all playgrounds within the Borough and advise on works required and provide risk ratings. The reports undertaken in March 2019 have been used to inform the proposed changes to play equipment and have highlighted the need for significant investment to replace timber play equipment and replace grass matting and loose fill (sand and bark) surfaces with wetpour.

Proposed Investment

- 1.3 To improve the play equipment, safety surfacing, and infrastructure of playgrounds across the Borough.

Options for Investment

- 1.4 Option 1 is the preferred option based on the current financial constraints faced by the Council. The 'do nothing' option would provide a poor service to all the young people within the Borough and leave the Council at increased risk of personal injury claims. Option 2 would provide a fantastic opportunity to install new play equipment and safety surfacing across the Borough but is financially unviable at the current time.

Project Delivery

- 1.5 The project will be delivered by the Council's Engineers Service; some of the work can be delivered through existing framework contracts but other elements such as new play equipment will be procured through new contracts. The project will be delivered over 2 financial years and will be delivered to avoid work taking place during spring and summer school holidays.

Financial Investment Required

- 1.6 A capital contribution of £600,000 is required towards the improvement of Children's Playgrounds. This funding will enable improvements to all playgrounds within the Borough but will not allow all playgrounds to be completely renovated. The additional £39,000 recently received from MHCLG is required in addition to the £600,000 to enable all play areas to receive some improvements and reduce risks. There will be no impact on the level of annual revenue budget required as play areas will all still require regular inspections, repairs and replacement kit such as swing chains and seats.

Exit Strategy and Revenue Consequences

- 1.7 This project will replace play equipment rather than adding to existing play equipment and therefore there are no additional pressures on the revenue budget. However we cannot reduce the revenue budget as there will always be a need to replace items such as swing chains and seats which wear out as well as repairing damage to safety surfacing if it is vandalised. The play equipment will be robust and should last another 10 years once installed however not all play kit will be replaced and thus further funding will be required. All play areas which have either new kit or replacement surfacing will be inspected by ROSPA as an independent verification of the safety and risk levels of the play area.

VAT Implications

- 1.8 Finance Officers have confirmed that as there is no income from playgrounds this project will not have any VAT implications for the Council.

Project Management and Monitoring

- 1.9 The project management will be undertaken by the Councils Engineers. There will be a project team which will include Officers from Operations and Greenspace who will manage the sites in future and an Officer from Communications to assist with getting the positive news out to residents about the work being undertaken.

2. PROPOSED INVESTMENT

Existing Funding Arrangements

- 2.1 Within the existing playgrounds budget there is funds to cover the salary and associated on-costs of 2 x FTE Operatives, the cost of running 1 van and a net budget of £70,000 which is to be used towards spares, repairs and replacement kit on playgrounds. There is no dedicated capital funding towards playgrounds however s106 funding is available but this should be used for the enhancement of play areas not as a back-up to revenue funding or to replace items like safety surfacing.
- 2.2 The capital funding will make a big difference to the play areas but there will still be a need for the existing revenue budget to be protected in order to purchase spares such as swing seats and chains and to repair any damage resulting from misuse or vandalism.

Business Needs/ Council policies, Strategies and Plans

- 2.3 There are various local policies which are currently being drafted which set out the existing playgrounds in the borough and areas where we are deficient in play provision based on the guidelines of organisations such as the Fields in Trust. Whilst these have not yet been formally adopted via the Local Plan they need to be considered as influencing our commitment to playgrounds.

Benefits

- 2.4 Improvements to children's play areas will contribute towards giving all children in Tameside a healthy start in life. The improved play areas will encourage young people and their families to get outside, to be active and to spend time together.

Spending Objectives

- 2.5 The successful outcomes can be summarised as below.
- 37 improved play areas.
 - Reduced demand for maintenance such as raking of sand.
 - Robust play equipment.
 - Increased satisfaction in play areas.

Risks

- 2.6 There are a number of risks related to the project which have been considered; these are mainly due to external factors outside Officers' control. All play areas are outdoor sites and

are therefore on occasion subject to vandalism. During the course of the project we may need to re-profile spend to repair or replace play equipment and surfacing which has been damaged. In order to minimise risk Officers are selecting play equipment which conforms to E1176, the current European Standard for playground equipment. By choosing equipment which conforms to this standard and is well maintained the risk of successful litigation from users is minimised. All of the play equipment and safety surfacing are being installed outside and therefore are subject to delays due to inclement weather. Whilst spring and summer would be ideal for the work to take place these are also the busiest times in our play areas and therefore more work will be carried out in autumn and winter. The Greenspace Manager and Engineers will meet regularly to review the programme and keep delays to a minimum whilst also avoiding working during the school holidays.

3. OPTIONS FOR INVESTMENT

Do Nothing

Summary

- 3.1 This option would mean that play areas remain in an adequate but worsening condition. The play areas would become increasingly high risk in terms of their risk to the young people using them and risk to the Council from claims we could not defend. The Council would need to start removing play equipment when it became damaged or beyond economic repair. The Council may receive more complaints about the poor quality of its play areas.

Benefits

- 3.2 The only benefit to the Council would be that there would be a saving in terms of capital expenditure. There would be no benefits to Tameside residents.

Risks

- 3.3 The option to do nothing would increase the risk of accidents on children's play areas. It may result in an increasing number of personal injury claims against the Council which we could not defend. There would be a reputational risk to the Council of poorly maintained playgrounds.

Cost

- 3.4 Whilst there would be savings in terms of the capital outlay on playgrounds there may be an increase in costs of defending and paying out against claims. There would be costs associated with removing play equipment and making good safety surfacing. Revenue funded costs.

Wider Impacts

- 3.5 There would be wider impacts on things like school readiness, obesity, poorer community cohesion, people travelling out of the Borough for recreation and leisure time.

OPTION ONE

Summary

- 3.6 This option would involve spending £600,000 on improvements to children's playgrounds. All play areas would see some benefits and there would be reduced risk of successful claims against the Council. Residents would have greater satisfaction in play areas around the Borough and they would be better maintained. When vandalism or damage occurred the Council would have funding to cover the costs of repairing or replacing the play equipment.

Benefits

- 3.7 The benefits of this option are enhanced play areas, reduced risk of personal injury claims against the Council, reduction in risk associated with loose fill surfaces and better play opportunities for local residents.

Risk

- 3.8 The risks associated with this option are that playgrounds won't be completely redesigned and therefore there is a risk that the project will not meet everyone's expectations. There are risks that if tender prices are higher than expected not all the planned work will be deliverable and items will have to be removed.

Cost

- 3.9 The cost of this project is £600,000. The costs have been based on catalogue prices, quotes for similar work carried out elsewhere and Officers judgement. The procurement process still needs to take place therefore further detailed costings will be developed after the tender process.

OPTION TWO

Summary

- 3.10 This option would involve spending £2,000,000 on improvements to children's playgrounds. All play areas would see significant benefits and there would be a much reduced risk of successful claims against the Council. Residents would have greater satisfaction in play areas around the Borough and they would be simpler to maintain. When vandalism or damage occurred the Council would have funding to cover the costs of repairing or replacing the play equipment.

Benefits

- 3.11 The benefits of this option are enhanced play areas, reduced risk of personal injury claims against the Council, reduction in risk associated with loose fill surfaces and better play opportunities for local residents

Risks

- 3.12 There are fewer reputational risks associated with this option but it would involve higher project delivery risks. There would be a greater demand on Officers time to manage and deliver a project of this size. Play areas would need to be worked on simultaneously if it was to be delivered within two years and this would mean a lack of play provision. There would still be the risk that if tender prices are higher than expected not all the planned work will be deliverable and items will have to be removed.

Costs

- 3.13 The cost of this option is approximately £2,000,000.

	Do Nothing	Option 1	Option 2
Provide new signage at all play areas.	x	✓	✓
Provide new play equipment at all play areas.	x	x	✓
Provide new play equipment at some play areas.	x	✓	✓
Provide new safety surfacing at all play areas.	x	x	✓

	Do Nothing	Option 1	Option 2
Provide new safety surfacing at some play areas.	x	✓	✓
Infrastructure improvements at all play areas.	x	x	✓
Infrastructure improvements at some play areas.	x	✓	✓
Summary	Discounted	✓	Discounted.

4. PROJECT DELIVERY

- 4.1 Following the approval of this project the work packages will be procured via Engineers; some of these will be through existing framework contractors but items such as new play equipment will be through a new procurement competition.
- 4.2 There are no significant procurement risks associated with the delivery of this project as it will be in line with the Council's standing orders.
- 4.3 There are risks associated with delays to the project as highlighted above, factors beyond our control such as inclement weather but there will be a time allowance in the programme to mitigate these risks.

Procurement plan and Timescales

- 4.4 The package of work will be delivered over 2 years. Not all work will be done on site at the same time; for example there is a large piece of play equipment within Victoria Park which is currently in an acceptable condition but after another two years of usage and exposure to the weather it is likely to need replacing and thus will be replaced towards the end of the project. There is a need to carry out some safety surfacing repairs at Victoria Park fairly quickly so these would begin early in Year 1 of the project. The procurement will take place over two phases:

Year 1	
September 2019	Tender work on The Chest.
November 2019	Selection of suppliers.
January 2020	Start work on site.
Year 2	
September 2020	Tender work on the Chest.
November 2020	Selection of suppliers
January 2021	Start work on site.
December 2021	Completion of all work.

5. FINANCIAL INVESTMENT REQUIRED

Financial Case

- 5.1 The work will commence in January 2020 subject to getting approval for the project in June 2019. September to November will be the procurement period and then there will be a need to check and approve all the relevant documents such as insurance risk assessments, and method statements. It would then be worth waiting until January to commence work

rather than starting projects before Christmas when many contractors traditionally take a long break. See above for detailed table of spend.

- 5.2 There is very limited external grant funding for projects such as the renewal of play areas. Funding such as Playbuilder no longer exists and we already work with Friends' Groups to bring in external funding where possible but most funders won't cover the kind of work being delivered through this project. Section 106 funding is available through Developers however this should be spent on the enhancement of play areas and not routine maintenance or changes to safety surfacing. Section 106 funding is also not always available in the areas where it is needed most as it is dependent on the locations of development. Based on this information and the lack of external funding Officers are requesting the full £600,000 investment through the Council's capital resources.

6. EXIT STRATEGY AND REVENUE CONSEQUENCES

- 6.1 Once playground refurbishment work is complete each playground will be independently inspected by ROSPA who will provide a risk rating for each piece of play equipment and any further recommendations. Each play area will then be subject to fortnightly safety inspections by trained staff – these are recorded on a database and a Manager runs a fault report weekly to check for any repairs which cannot be undertaken by staff. This work is then given to a local provider to carry out. Annual maintenance work such as greasing bearings and applying moss killer to surfacing is carried out over the winter period when the playgrounds are quieter. More urgent work such as replacement of worn swing chains is carried out whenever it is required and picked up by fortnightly checks. The independent ROSPA inspections will still be commissioned every year.

2019/20 Revenue budget for playgrounds

- 6.2 The Revenue budget for playgrounds which includes staffing, vehicle and general playground equipment and repairs for 2019/2020 is £129,033.

7. VAT IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Finance Officers have confirmed that as there is no income from playgrounds this project will not have any VAT implications for the Council.

8. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING

- 8.1 The project will be managed by Operations and Neighbourhoods. The Operations and Greenspace and Engineers will work closely together to ensure that the project is delivered on time, on budget and at a high quality. The Project Working Group referred to earlier will meet regularly and there will be frequent updates via the Capital Monitoring document which goes to Strategic Capital Group.
- 8.2 Engineers have extensive experience of procurement, project management and monitoring external contracts.
- 8.3 There will be regular monitoring meetings between the teams and regular reporting will be provided for the Strategic Capital Group.
- 8.4 Updates will be provided to the key stakeholders such as Ward Councillors and Friends Groups as work progresses on sites in their area

- 8.5 Success will be measured by informal feedback from residents, ROSPA reports demonstrating reduced risk levels and fewer personal injury claims relating to playgrounds.
- 8.6 Within the project costs there is a 10% contingency allowance. This will allow for any unexpected costs such as additional ground work, dealing with one off incidents of vandalism and so on.

9. INFORMATION SHARING

- 9.1 Wards members will receive a photographic record of each play area within their Ward and will be advised in detail of the proposed work to each play area once final tenders have been received. Officers will also advise on lead in times for delivery of equipment

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Option 1 is the preferred scheme which will enhance and reduce maintenance liabilities across all Council owned playgrounds within the Borough. The project costs are £600,000 and the investment will be via the Council's Capital Programme.

11. RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 As set out in the front of the report.