

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 16 JULY 2013**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF LIFELONG LEARNING**

SUBJECT: **PLAY PROVISION: CHILDREN'S PLAY AREAS**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To report progress with the identification of sustainable play provision from April 2014 with reference to the maintenance and upgrading of children's play areas.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 During 2010/11, Leisure Services commissioned *Play Safe and Space Consultancy* to undertake a County-wide analysis of 172 fixed equipment play areas (including those maintained by Town and Community Councils) and 26 link sites (including wheeled play areas and multi-use games areas).

2.02 The play survey employed a traffic light system, recognised within the County Council as the 'RAG' system, to provide an instant overview of each site's survey conclusion. Out of the 172 play areas, 13 sites were identified in the 'Red' category, 141 in 'Amber' and 18 in 'Green'. The consultant's summary report suggested that without sufficient annual revenue and capital investment several play areas currently ranked 'Amber' would fall into the 'Red' zone each year.

2.03 The 2010 play survey provides the County Council with a considerable evidence base to inform its future investment programme for children's play areas, particularly in relation to the match-funding improvement scheme launched in 2010/11. This match-funding agreement between the Authority and Town and Community Councils is now in its fourth year and has resulted in more than a third of the current stock of play areas benefiting from upgrading works.

2.04 To date, the County Council has contributed £413,780 (a match-funded total of £827,560) to enhanced fixed play provision via the improvement scheme. A list of enhancements is at Appendix 1.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The play survey has not been updated (since its completion in

November 2010) to reflect the improvement works that have been completed in recent years via the match-funding scheme. However, Leisure Officers advise that individual sites have moved up within AMBER or moved from RED to AMBER.

- 3.02 For each of the four years of the match-funding improvement scheme, Leisure Services has written to all Town and Community Councils inviting them to participate in the programme, thereby offering equity of opportunity to enhance local fixed play provision. All subsequent expressions of interest received from Town and Community Councils have been met by the County Council via a budget allocation to Leisure Services.
- 3.03 However, investment is only being made in sites which are nominated for match-funding by Town and Community Councils. This is creating a lack of strategic direction, a consequence of which is that only six of the thirteen 'Red' sites have received investment (£73.5k from the County Council resulting in eleven upgrading schemes worth £147k). Seven of the thirteen 'Red' sites have neither received match-funding investment over the past four years nor been decommissioned. Moreover, the County Council has contributed £25,500 (a match-funded total of £51,000) to three 'Green' sites.
- 3.04 Whilst recognising the benefits of the match-funding approach, and promoting its continuation, play areas remain corporate assets and, therefore it is important that the County Council targets its future investment at those sites of greatest need in terms of play deprivation and strategic importance. Should further resources become available then individual play areas which are 'Red' sites may be considered for attention on an equitable basis, outside match-funding criteria.
- 3.05 Play areas that have benefited from upgrading works have proved very popular with children living in the towns and communities which they serve. This is evidenced by the increased level of wear and tear on component parts. It is important that the County Council supports its investment in children's play areas by making adequate provision for their ongoing maintenance.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 To consult with Scrutiny over renewal of the scheme for play area renewal based on the following principles:
- From 2014/15, the County Council aligns its match-funding improvement scheme to the findings of the play survey described in 2.01 above.
 - Each Town and Community Council will be invited to express an interest in participating in the match-funding improvement scheme for 2014/15 and beyond. In order to ensure that the

County Council's funding is directed at areas of need identified by the condition survey, Leisure Services will identify those play areas which will be in scope ('Red' and 'Amber' sites) and out of scope ('Green' sites). Approval of any proposed scheme will be:

- Dependent upon the level of capital funding made available by the County Council.
- Based upon a maximum contribution of £10,000 per scheme.
- Determined on a priority basis in accordance with the findings of the play survey with investment targeted to strategically important sites
- Confined to those play areas identified as red or amber

- From 2014/15, 10% of the fixed play match-funding budget will be allocated to meet the ongoing maintenance costs of the fixed play portfolio.

4.02 Officers will provide a further report on the potential decommissioning of play areas recognised as being in a poor state of repair and of low strategic importance.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 The strategy will be achieved within the existing revenue budget which for 2013/14 is £139,000.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 Children's play areas provide free access for all.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 The enhancement of children's play areas contributes to improvements in the local environment.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 The match-funding improvement scheme has, over the past four years, provided the opportunity to address DDA issues in children's play areas.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 Ongoing consultation with Town and Community Councils.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation has taken place with all Town and Community Councils involved in upgrading works as part of the match-funding scheme.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1
Children's Play Areas upgraded between 2010/11 and 2013/14 via the County Council's Match- Funding Improvement Scheme

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report (02.12.10)
Play Areas Survey.

Cabinet Report (23.04.13) *Flintshire Play Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan.*

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