



**Chester-le-Street**  
District Council

**Report to:** Council

**Date of Meeting:** 29<sup>th</sup> November 2007

**Report from:** Leisure Services Manager

**Title of Report:** District Play Strategy

**Agenda Item Number:**

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## 1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to submit for approval by Council a play strategy for the District which will replace the existing play areas strategy. The play strategy offers the District a strategic approach for providing children and young people with a range of free and accessible spaces offering high quality play opportunities. The development and formal adoption by the Council of a play strategy is an essential requirement of the Council's submitted application to the Big Lottery Fund for a grant of £200,000 towards children's play within the District. This is a one off grant opportunity with the funding available to support a 3 year action plan which is included within the strategy.

A copy of the final strategy has been placed in the members room for information, this contains only a small number of minor amendments from the draft strategy provided to members in August for consultation.

## 2. CONSULTATION

2.1 As the strategy has implications for all areas of the district copies of the draft strategy were circulated as follows asking for comments;

- All District Councillors
- The Director of Development Services
- The Director of Resources
- The Regeneration, Housing, Planning and Environmental Services teams of the Council
- Kevan Jones MP
- Local County Councillors
- Parish Council's
- Cestria Community Housing
- Sure Start County Durham

- Groundwork West Durham
- National Playing Fields Association
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
- County Durham Primary Care Trust
- Local Strategic Partnership
- Sacriston Community & Sports Trust
- Trustees of Pelton Fell Memorial Park

All comments received were considered and where appropriate incorporated into the final strategy.

### **3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES**

- 3.1 The proposed play strategy supports the corporate priorities of 'Working in Partnership to Deliver the Community Strategy,' 'Neighborhood Management', 'Regenerating the District.' and 'New Ways of Working in Leisure'. It also supports Priorities 5 and 8 of the Sustainable Community Strategy, namely 'Make the District a safer place to live, work and visit.' and 'Champion the development and promotion of culture, leisure, sport and the arts'.

### **4. IMPLICATIONS**

#### **4.1 Financial Implications and Value for Money Statement**

The main financial issues arising from this report are as follows;

1) The Big Lottery Fund has created a national funding scheme for play known as the 'Children's Play Initiative Programme' that is worth £155M and comprises three separate streams. The largest stream is the Children's programme where funding has been allocated to each Unitary or District Council according to a formula based on the number of children and the indices of multiple deprivation. Chester le Street has been provisionally allocated £200,000 subject to a successful grant application. The final submission date for grant applications was 10<sup>th</sup> September 2007 with an essential requirement being that the Council has an adopted play strategy. At the time of the application the play strategy had only been approved by Executive, this was accepted by the Big Lottery Fund at that stage, however they still require confirmation that the strategy has been formally adopted by Council.. A successful application will mean an additional £200,000 can be invested in children's play across the District over the next three years. This is over and above the existing levels of investment from the Council's capital programme and section 106 agreements/developer contributions.

2) The play strategy includes a three year action plan, this plan is costed and in addition to the use of the Big Lottery Grant if approved includes projects that will be funded by section 106 agreements/developer contributions that are already committed or likely. It also includes a provision for projects that would be funded

through successful annual applications to the Council's capital programme but makes clear that that funding cannot be guaranteed at this stage.

3) In submitting the strategy to the Big Lottery Fund the action plan needed to show the projects that this funding would be used for, the main criteria being that each project should be a minimum of £50,000 and be developed from the consultation process. The application details four projects based around the provision of ball courts, these projects cannot be changed or deviated from without the express approval of the Big Lottery Fund.

4) There is potential for some of the grant to be used to cover management costs in the implementation of the three year action plan. Guidance from the Big Lottery fund is still vague on this point but a percentage of the play officer's salary (likely to be between 5% and 10%) could be offset using this grant for the three year period which would have a beneficial impact on the Council's revenue budget.

The above demonstrates that the financial implications to the Council are entirely positive in that the report does not commit the Council to any additional expenditure but does provide an opportunity to realise significant additional investment in children's play.

### **Value for Money Statement**

The approval of the play strategy not only offers the Council the opportunity to lever in £200,000 of grant funding towards children's play but also provides a strategic framework to ensure that this and any other investment over the next three years addresses the identified needs of young people across the District in the most effective manner. The strategy supports key objectives in both the corporate plan and sustainable community strategy and by implementing the action plan real benefits will be achieved within local communities.

#### 4.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising from this report

#### 4.3 Personnel

There are no personnel implications arising from this report

#### 4.4 Other Services

There are no implications for other services arising from this report.

#### 4.5 Diversity

The play strategy does concentrate on young people under the age of 19 however within that range it caters for the needs of all age groups and considers

'accessible provision' to be a fundamental right for all young people. Accessible provision is defined in the following way 'Inclusive provision is open and accessible to all, and takes positive action in removing disabling barriers so that disabled and non disabled children can participate'. The aim of the strategy is to provide a wide ranging framework for play that has a number of different elements that are linked closely to the opportunities and needs of the local area.

#### 4.6 Risk

Even if the grant application to the Big Lottery Fund is successful the Council will be unable to draw down the funding without the strategy having been formally adopted by Council. Should this occur the Council's ability to implement the action plan identified within the strategy will be constrained and will inevitably take far longer to complete.

#### 4.7 Crime and Disorder

As the play strategy action plan identifies the continued renewal of equipped play areas for under 12's and the provision of facilities for teenagers it is anticipated that this will result in more young people using these facilities rather than simply roaming the streets which should have a positive impact on levels of anti social behavior.

#### 4.8 Data Quality

Every care has been taken in the development of this report to ensure that the information and data used in its preparation and the appendices attached are accurate, timely, consistent and comprehensive. The Council's Data Quality Policy has been complied with in producing this report.

#### 4.9 Other Implications

There are no other implications from this report.

### **5. BACKGROUND, POSITION STATEMENT AND OPTION APPRAISAL**

5.1 The Council adopted a play areas strategy in October 2002, this document has been crucial in directing the significant investment and improvements that have been made to the District's play area over subsequent period.

5.2 With the announcement of the Children's Play Initiative programme it became apparent that in order to access the provisional funding allocation to the Council of £200,000 a wider play strategy would be required. This strategy would replace the play areas strategy but crucially incorporates the main elements of that strategy into its wider remit.

5.3 The strategy has been developed following significant consultation with young people and other key stakeholders and offers a strategic approach for providing children and young people with a range of free and accessible spaces offering high quality play opportunities throughout their local environment.

5.4 The main priorities identified within the strategy are;

- A continued commitment to the ongoing replacement/refurbishment of equipped play areas until they are all brought up to modern European standards.
- The number of equipped play areas to only be allowed to increase if revenue implications for their management and maintenance have been considered, unless they are created as part of new residential developments where their provision is a planning requirement.
- Significant priority be given to the provision of free access activity areas for teenagers ie ball walls and ball courts as this is the most important gap in provision identified from the consultation exercise. This priority forms the basis of the projects to be funded by the Big Lottery Fund grant.
- Undertake a pilot programme of locating meeting points for teenagers next to free access activity areas and if ongoing monitoring demonstrates their effectiveness in meeting teenagers needs to ensure meeting points are provided with all future developments of this nature.
- Undertake further consultation with teenagers on their views on access to leisure facilities such that their feedback can be taken into consideration in future reviews of programmes and charges.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 Council is recommended to approve the play strategy

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS / DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO**

7.1 Play Areas Strategy 2002

7.2 Chester-le-Street Sustainable Community Strategy 2006 – 2016

7.3 Corporate Plan

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