

**SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION
ON PLAYGROUNDS
IN CROYDON**



Haling Grove playground, South Croydon

By the

**Scrutiny Sub-Committee for
Working Living and Leisure**

Cllr Donald Speakman (Chairman)

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That the Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport should be presented with monthly reports of repairs outstanding and complaints regarding playgrounds in order for these to be addressed promptly and for equipment to be made good without delay**
- 2. That the Council should provide an adequate maintenance budget for playground areas in order to be able to carry out necessary repairs promptly**
- 3. That the Council should take appropriate measures to secure parks and playgrounds at night**
- 4. That the Council should make use of the full range of measures available to discourage graffiti or minimise the damage it can inflict on equipment. When practical, CCTV cameras should be placed in playgrounds.**
- 5. That the procurement process for new playground equipment should provide value for money and the assurance of effective Council control over the selection of equipment, leading to provision of high quality, robust and interesting playgrounds providing play opportunities for a wide range of ages. Future maintenance costs should also be considered when selecting new equipment.**
- 6. That the practice of advising suppliers of the sum of money available for playground projects should be reviewed. Tendering should be based on specifications put forward by the Council, with contracts being awarded on the basis of best value.**
- 7. That the Sports, Parks and Recreation team should explore ways of reducing the long lead time between the design and development of a playground scheme and installation of equipment.**
- 8. That the Sports, Parks and Recreation team should explore and use sponsorship of playgrounds as an additional way of resourcing playground development and maintenance**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At the 13th June 2006 meeting of the Working Living and Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee, Members agreed to carry out visits to playgrounds in the borough with a view to reporting findings on their equipment and condition and making recommendations for the future management and upkeep of these areas.
- 1.2 During the 2006-2007 municipal year, Members of the Working Living and Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee conducted visits throughout the borough and noted findings on the condition of 28 playgrounds, mostly by using the form shown in Appendix B.
- 1.3 Members invited Divisional Director for Culture Pauline Scott-Garrett to the Sub-Committee meeting of 23rd January 2007 to discuss the Council's plans for refurbishing playgrounds around the borough (see Appendix B: 12th February 2007 Cabinet Report on Play Development) plans).
- 1.4 They shared their findings and conclusions with officers managing playgrounds in Croydon at a meeting on 26th April 2007.
- 1.5 This report summarises the findings of this recommendations and Members' recommendations.
- 1.6 Members would like to express their thanks to the following Council officers for their assistance during the course of this investigation.
 - Heather Bonfield (Interim Divisional Director - Culture)
 - Barry Lambton (Green Spaces Manager)
 - Mary Ann Winterman (Technical Manager - Sports, Parks and Recreation)
 - Ian White (Technical and Development Officer - Sports, Parks and Recreation)
 - Ilona Kytomaa (Policy Officer - Scrutiny Support Team)

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON PLAYGROUNDS IN CROYDON

- 2.1 There are 55 equipped children's playgrounds in parks and open spaces across the borough (see appendix A for a full list).
- 2.2 New equipment is funded as the opportunity arises from a variety of different sources (e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, Section 106 contributions, etc.) as the opportunity arises. For instance, a Big Lottery Fund bid has been submitted for refurbishments to playgrounds in South Norwood Country Park and Coulsdon Memorial Park, and a decision is awaited in summer 2007. In addition, section 106 funding has been secured for refurbishments to playground equipment in Higher Drive and Rotary Field, Purley. However, most of these funding sources do not usually cover maintenance costs.

- 2.3 The Council is also about to commit very significant funds to this area. As detailed in Appendix D, a £900,000 capital sum has been ear-marked over a two year period for the refurbishment of the council's existing play facilities. The programme of works has been drawn up and prioritised on the basis of a recent report produced by RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) on the condition of Croydon's playgrounds, and information from the maintenance, inspection and condition reports produced by the Department of Environment, Sport and Public Protection.
- 2.4 The refurbishment of playgrounds needs to be backed up with an effective maintenance programme. The Council's programme currently includes:
- monthly technical inspections of all play equipment
 - grounds maintenance visits and grass cutting
 - additional visits following damage reports or complaints
 - a park ranger service in a number of sites which includes litter clearance, inspection, and some graffiti removal
 - risk assessments on every play area every 18 months
- 2.5 Playground safety regulations (listed in Appendix C) are displayed at playground sites for the benefit of the public. While there is no systematic enforcement of these, they can be invoked if a prosecution is to go ahead.

3 VISITS TO PLAYGROUNDS - FINDINGS

- 3.1 Members provided written feedback on visits to the 28 playgrounds listed on page 5.
- 3.2 Members reported that provision for different age groups was as follows (This information was not provided for 4 playgrounds marked * on the list on page 5).

Area	Number visited	Provision for 2-4 yr olds	Provision for 5-8 yr olds	Provision for 9-11 yr olds	Provision for 12+ yr olds
CENTRAL	1	1	1	1	0
EAST	9	8	9	8	3
NORTH	8	3	5	1	1
SOUTH	7	5	6	5	3
WEST	3	1	2	2	1
TOTAL	28	18	23	17	8

TABLE 1: Playgrounds visited and age groups catered for

Duppas Hill	Croydon Central
Addington Park	East
Addington Vale *	East
Edgecombe	East
Lloyd Park	East
Milne Park, New Addington	East
North Downs, New Addington	East
Queen Elizabeth Drive, New Addington	East
Rowdown Fields, New Addington	East
Shirley Church	East
Boulogne Road	North
Brigstock Road	North
Thornton Heath Recreation Ground, Melfort Ave	North
Norbury Park	North
Northborough Recreation Ground	North
Northwood Playground	North
South Norwood Country Park *	North
South Norwood Lake *	North
Alder Way, Pampisford Road *	South
Bourne Park, Kenley	South
Haling Grove, South Croydon	South
Purley Way	South
Rotary Field, Purley	South
Sanderstead Recreation Ground	South
South Croydon Recreation Ground	South
Valley Park	West
Waddon Pond	West
Wandle Park	West

TABLE 2: Playgrounds visited by Members in the course of this investigation

3.3 Playgrounds visited were equipped with the following equipment:

	CENTRAL	EAST	NORTH	SOUTH	WEST
SWINGS	1	8	5	5	3
ROUNDAABOUT	1	1	1	3	0
SEESAW	1	8	5	5	3
SLIDE	1	8	5	5	3
ZIP WIRE	0	2	3	1	0
CLIMBING WALL	0	3	0	1	0
CLIMBING FRAME	1	8	5	5	3
No OF PLAYGROUNDS VISITED	1	9	6	7	3

TABLE 3: Equipment recorded in Croydon's playgrounds

- 3.4 Table 2 shows that swings currently form an essential element of Croydon's playgrounds, and that most others also have slides, seesaws and climbing frames as standard.
- 3.5 Members reported that some playgrounds such as Haling Grove had a wide range of interesting activities, while others, in Wandle and in Brigstock Road, had a very poor selection of equipment.
- 3.6 As regards facilities for parents and carers, most playgrounds provided some form of seating, usually benches, but sometimes also a picnic table, or a shelter. However, no such facilities were available in Edgecombe and Milne Park (East), in Boulogne Road (North) and in Waddon Pond (West).
- 3.7 Overall, most were found to be in satisfactory condition except for graffiti (which was seen in 12 playgrounds), and litter, which was reported in 6 playgrounds (Duppas Hill, Edgecombe, Lloyd Park, North Downs, Northwood and Melfort Avenue playgrounds).
- 3.8 Members felt that some form of refurbishment or repairs were required in a number of sites (All the playgrounds marked with an R are due to be refurbished between 2007 and 2009):
- Addington Vale
 - Queen Elizabeth Drive (R)
 - Milne Park (R)
 - Rowdown Fields (R)
 - Edgecombe (R)
 - Melfort Avenue (R)
 - Northborough Road (R)
 - Northwood
 - Bourne Park (R)
 - Haling Grove
 - Purley Rotary Field (R)
 - Sanderstead Recreation Ground
 - South Croydon Recreation Ground (R)
 - Valley Park
 - Wandle Park
- 3.9 Vandalism was highlighted in Addington Park and Milne Park playgrounds, and anti-social behaviour at night in Edgecombe.

Positive findings

- 3.10 Members reported that children seemed to be particularly fond of equipment that provides something of a challenge, e.g. climbing frames and the balancing course in Haling Manor. Indeed, Haling Grove seemed to attract the most plaudits from visiting Councillors as it provided something for

everyone, and very popular equipment). Sanderstead and South Croydon recreation grounds were also very well liked, and a large number of parents and children were seen at these sites by the visiting Councillor.

- 3.11 In some cases, the attractive park environment added value to the playground, being a magnet for a wide range of age groups.

Negative findings

- 3.12 Feedback from Members focused on:

- Safety issues
- Repairs and replacements needed
- Equipment needed

- 3.13 Members suggested various improvements, such as CCTV and supervision by a park ranger.

Follow-up to Findings

- 3.14 Members' findings were forwarded to officers, who provided feedback on repairs carried or planned refurbishment work on the playgrounds listed above.

- 3.15 The meeting of 26th April 2007 gave Members an opportunity to discuss more strategic issues. Resulting recommendations are listed in the following section.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

That the Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport should be presented with monthly reports of repairs outstanding and complaints regarding playgrounds in order for these to be addressed promptly and for equipment to be made good without delay

- 4.1 While the majority of playgrounds visited were found to be in a satisfactory condition, Members noted that a number of sites were in need of attention. They observed litter, graffiti, and damaged equipment. Some playgrounds, in areas such as Edgcombe and Milne Park, contained very little equipment, much of it having been removed for health and safety reasons.
- 4.2 One piece of equipment in Purley Rotary field had been fenced off for many months as the damaged safety surface awaited repairs.
- 4.3 Another site, Purley Beeches, Sanderstead, does not contain play equipment but could offer opportunities for play if refurbished. It currently appears very poorly maintained, with shrubbery growing wild and boarded up toilets.
- 4.4 Members also highlighted the importance of a well maintained frontage in creating a tidy and attractive impression. As part of this, Members felt that signage in playgrounds needed considerable refurbishment to be restored to a satisfactory condition.
- 4.5 Members felt that leaving damaged equipment unrepaired for long periods of time leaves a very poor impression of the area, a sense that the site has been abandoned and that no one is currently taking responsibility for it. Such delays discourage pride and ownership of the area, and can attract further anti-social behaviour and environmental damage e.g. litter, graffiti, etc.
- 4.6 Therefore they recommend that damage reported in monthly inspections and complaints about playgrounds should be brought to the attention of the Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport. He should be made aware of the extent of repairs required in order that prompt action may be taken and that the Council should take proper care of its assets. In addition, such close attention to the outcome of inspections may lead to new initiatives to prevent or reduce vandalism and associated costs.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the Council should provide an adequate maintenance budget for playground areas in order to be able to carry out necessary repairs promptly.

- 4.7 The playgrounds maintenance budgets was discussed at length at the meeting of 26th April 2007.
- 4.8 Monthly inspections provide regular information on work required. Equipment which is found to be damaged on inspection is repaired when the budget allows for this. When this is not possible, the equipment is made safe or removed.
- 4.9 Officers advised Members that the maintenance budget for 2007-8 had been set at £30,000, £26,000 less than in 2006-7. The 2006-7 budget for monthly inspections and minor maintenance repairs had been £56,000, with an additional £20,000 for repairs to impact absorbing surfaces (6 sites).
- 4.10 It is recognised that the increase in capital spending on refurbishments may mitigate the need for costly responsive repairs in the next two years. However, the setting of budgets should take into account fact that many items of equipment can cost thousands of pounds to repair.
- 4.11 It is clear from this that efforts must be focused on preventing or reducing vandalism. The need for measures to minimise vandalism and its costs is addressed in the following two recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 3

That the Council should take appropriate measures to secure parks and playgrounds at night

- 4.12 Officers informed Members that, some years ago, they had been advised by the Police to leave parks open in order to get easier access to them if any problems arose at night. However, following many cases of vandalism in parks and playgrounds, twenty-seven parks are now closed every night. Other parks remain unlocked at night, including those which have low fencing, or none at all.
- 4.13 Members asked officers to explore ways of securing parks and playgrounds at night in order to reduce the incidence of vandalism. Measures might include involving the Council's 17 park rangers and/or local volunteers to open and close gates in relevant areas, or installing lockable gates and fences in areas where the existing configuration of the park or playground would make such work practicable and effective.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Council should make use of the full range of measures available to discourage graffiti or minimise the damage it can inflict on playground equipment. Where practical, CCTV cameras should be placed in playgrounds.

- 4.14 Damage to play equipment has already been mentioned above. In addition, in the course of their visits, Members noted that a significant amount of equipment was covered in graffiti. At the 26th April meeting, they were informed various new types of paint on the market make it much easier (and thus cheaper) for staff to remove graffiti than with traditional painted surfaces. Some enable officers to remove graffiti simply with water. Members urged officers to investigate the full range of solutions available, and to apply the most relevant and cost-effective measures available to discourage the proliferation of graffiti and vandalism on play equipment.
- 4.15 Following the 12th June meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee, Members were pleased to hear that two rapid deployment cameras have been ordered by the Sports, Parks and Recreation division and were due to be put into use in summer 2007. In view of reports of anti-social behaviour in a number of playgrounds, Members recommend that these cameras be used to identify the individuals committing these offences, and to confront perpetrators with evidence of breaches of relevant bye-laws and playground regulations.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That the procurement process for new playground equipment should provide value for money and the assurance of effective council control over the selection of equipment, leading to provision of high quality, robust and interesting playgrounds providing play opportunities for a wide range of ages. Future maintenance costs should also be considered when selecting new equipment.

- 4.16 At the 26th April 2007 meeting, Members were advised that a “Framework Agreement” is being developed by the Sports, Parks and Recreation officers with the assistance of the Procurement team. This agreement will guide the process of acquiring new equipment, its installation, and some refurbishment on relevant sites for up to 4 years.
- 4.17 As part of this framework, officers advise firms selling playground equipment that the Council will be spending £900,000 on play equipment in the borough. This type of procurement process aims to ensure better access to the very latest developments in playground equipment.
- 4.18 Members enquired why officers had not opted for a set design for all playgrounds which would provide for easier maintenance and economies of scale. They were advised that:-
- Sites can be quite different from each other and thus require different configurations of equipment
 - local residents need to be involved in the process of deciding what equipment should be chosen for their local playground, to have greater ownership of it. This in turn often means that the equipment and the area is

likely to attract more parents and children, be better cared for and less vulnerable to maltreatment and vandalism.

- 4.19 Members stressed that they wished to have assurances that officers would have full control over the choice of equipment to be installed as part of the refurbishment programme, and that the Council would get good value for money through robust and popular play equipment bought at advantageous prices.
- 4.20 Examples of popular playgrounds were discussed, and the equipment at Haling Grove was hailed as a model of good practice, with equipment for a wide range of tastes and abilities. Aerial runways and long slides e.g. the item in Lloyd Park were also said to be very well liked.

RECOMMENDATION 6

That the practice of advising suppliers of the sum of money available for playground projects should be reviewed. Tendering should be based on specifications put forward by the council, with contracts being awarded on the basis of best value.

- 4.21 At the meeting of 26th April 2007, it was stated that tenderers would be asked to provide proposals for playground projects to the value of £900,000. Members of the working groups felt that, while the mention of such a large sum may indeed constitute an incentive for businesses to put forward attractive proposals, this may not necessarily be a guarantee of quality or value for money for the Council and local residents.
- 4.22 With the prospect of large-scale contracts, the Council may face the risk of contractors not offering good value or good quality equipment over the whole of the contract. The risk could be particularly high if the *potential provider* is asked to put forward proposals, rather than the Council setting out the specifications it requires.
- 4.23 The Council needs to be assertive in stating its requirements regarding the type, quality and price of equipment to be obtained, by setting out the specifications e.g.
- the types of skills the equipment should aim to develop (e.g. climbing, physical co-ordination)
 - the type of activity the equipment should facilitate (e.g. dealing with heights)
 - the age range the equipment should cater for
 - the materials and quality of the equipment, and its resistance to damage
 - approximate number of items required in view of the size of playgrounds
 - costings based on research and discussion with potential providers
 - commitment to short-term or medium term maintenance

4.24 In detailing its requirements, the Council also needs to specify equipment whose components will all be highly resilient to vandalism and wear and tear and inexpensive to maintain. Officers should be wary of acquiring playground equipment which is popular with children, but very costly to repair and therefore unusable over long periods of time, as zipwires have proven to be.

RECOMMENDATION 7

That officers explore ways of reducing the long lead time between the design and development of a playground scheme and installation of equipment

4.25 Members were concerned at the long gap between the planning stage of a playground scheme and its completion. An example of this has been the refurbishment of the playground at Rotary Field, Purley, which Members were informed was going to be finished in time for summer 2007 but is as yet incomplete.

4.26 Members invite officers to identify and remedy the causes of such delays, and hope that refurbishments scheduled for 2007-2009 will be completed within the timescale specified in the Cabinet Report of 12th February 2007 (see Appendix D).

RECOMMENDATION 8

That the Sports, Parks and Recreation team should explore and use sponsorship of playgrounds as a additional way of resourcing playground development and maintenance.

4.27 The practice of sponsorship has been used to bring environmental improvements on the highway, with local businesses sponsoring roundabouts and providing planting schemes on these.

4.28 Members invite officers to:

- Explore how this practice could be applied to playgrounds
- Make use of this practice as and when the opportunity arises
- Publicise such sponsorship opportunities and encourage relevant businesses to take them up

5 - CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The issue of securing adequate resources to maintain playground equipment is a long-standing one and needs attention. Effective maintenance could save the Council money in the long term by minimising the need for replacement. It would also improve resident satisfaction. In addition, the image of the borough as a whole could be improved with properly maintained, attractive and safe equipment.
- 5.2 In terms of finance, the Council has to accept that adequate resources need to be set aside on a long-term basis to maintain this equipment. Many schemes, initiatives and funding sources offer the possibility of setting up new facilities or new equipment (Lottery funds, section 106 monies, the Council's own environmental improvement funding streams), but very few if any make provision for long-term maintenance. The need for such long-term provision is consistently overlooked.
- 5.3 As regards identifying additional resources or stakeholders who can assist in taking care of playgrounds, the Council is making use of the National Probation Service to paint its playground equipment. Park Rangers have a role to play in watching over playgrounds, and local residents do also contribute towards their care. This may well help minimise the risk of damage - indeed further efforts may be worth making, to find ways of reducing the risk and incidence of criminal damage, and to identify playground materials which are less vulnerable to vandalism or to wear and tear.
- 5.4 Substantial repairs, however, can only be carried out by qualified staff, and an adequate budget is required to finance such work. The long-term presence of damaged or unusable play areas can only send local residents and children a very negative message about acceptable standards of maintenance and appearance.
- 5.5 Scrutiny Members have been very pleased to hear of the Council's ambitious refurbishment plans for Croydon's playgrounds. However, the Council has to face up to its responsibility to select equipment which can be easily maintained, and to secure resources for the long-term care of a precious local resource for local children, which will have been obtained at considerable cost.

APPENDIX A: Children's Playgrounds in Croydon's Parks and Open Spaces

There are 55 Children's Playgrounds throughout our parks and open spaces. Some sites have traditional swings, slides and roundabouts; others have new modular equipment with towers, walkways, fireman's poles and nets.

All the equipment has impact absorbing surfacing under it.

EAST - Addington Park, Kent Gateway, Addington

CENTRAL - Addiscombe Recreation Ground, Bingham Road, Addiscombe

SOUTH - Alder Way, off Pampisford Road

NORTH - Apsley Road Playground, Apsley Road, South Norwood

CENTRAL - Ashburton Park, Addiscombe Road, Addiscombe

Ashburton Playing Fields, Coleridge Road, Monks Orchard

NORTH - Boulogne Road Playground, Boulogne Road, Thornton Heath

SOUTH - Bourne Park, Bourne Park Close, Kenley

NORTH - Canterbury Road Recreation Ground, Canterbury Road

SOUTH - Coulsdon Memorial Ground, Marlpit Lane, Coulsdon

EAST - Courtwood Playground, Courtwood Lane, Forestdale

CENTRAL - Duppas Hill, Cooper Road, Waddon

EAST - Edgecombe Playground, Edgecombe, Monks Hill

SOUTH - Ellis Road Children's Playground, Ellis Road, Old Coulsdon

NORTH - Gordon Crescent, Morland Road, Addiscombe

SOUTH - Grange Park, Coulsdon Road, Old Coulsdon

NORTH - Grangewood Park, Wharncliff Road, Thornton Heath

SOUTH - Haling Grove, St. Augustine's Ave, South Croydon

EAST - Hares Bank Playground, Hares Bank, New Addington

SOUTH - Higher Drive Recreation Ground, Higher Drive, Purley

NORTH - King George's Field, Gloucester Road, Selhurst

NORTH - The Lawns, Spa Hill, Upper Norwood

CENTRAL - Little Road Playground, Freemasons Road, Addiscombe

CENTRAL - Lloyd Park, Coombe Road, Croydon

NORTH - Mayfield Road Recreation Ground, Mayfield Road

EAST - Milne Park, Homestead Way, New Addington

NORTH - Norbury Park, Green Lane, Norbury

NORTH - Northborough Road Recreation Ground, Tylecroft Road, Norbury

NORTH - Northbrook Road Playground, Northbrook Road, Selhurst

EAST - North Down, North Downs Crescent, New Addington

NORTH - Northwood Road Playground, Northwood Road, Norbury
EAST - Parkfields, Cheston Ave
CENTRAL - Park Hill, Barclay Road
CENTRAL - Purley Way Playing Fields, Waddon Way
EAST - Queen Elizabeth's Drive Playground, Queen Elizabeth's Drive
SOUTH - Rickman Hill, Rickman Hill, Coulsdon
SOUTH - Roke Open Space, Roke Lodge Road
EAST - Rowdown Fields, Fieldway, New Addington
SOUTH - Rotary Field, Brighton Road, Purley
SOUTH - Sanderstead Recreation Ground, Limpsfield Road, Sanderstead
EAST - Selsdon Recreation Ground, Woodland Way, Selsdon
EAST - Shirley Church Recreation Ground, Shirley Church Road, Shirley
SOUTH - South Croydon Recreation Ground, Sanderstead Road, South Croydon
NORTH - South Norwood Country Park, Albert Road, South Norwood
NORTH - South Norwood Lake, Sylvan Road, South Norwood
NORTH - South Norwood Recreation Ground, Tennison Road, South Norwood
NORTH - Thornton Heath Recreation Ground, Melfort Ave, Thornton Heath
NORTH - Trumble Gardens, Brigstock Road, Thornton Heath
CENTRAL - Valley Park Play Ground, Valley Park, Waddon
CENTRAL - Waddon Ponds, The Ridgeway, Waddon
CENTRAL - Wandle Park, Cornwall Road, Waddon
NORTH - Westow Park, College Green, Upper Norwood
CENTRAL - Wilford Road Recreation Ground, Windmill Road, Croydon
SOUTH - Woodcote Village Green, Woodcote Village Green, Woodcote

APPENDIX B: FORM USED BY MEMBERS TO NOTE FINDINGS OF VISITS

VISIT TO PLAY AREAS
Location: area within borough _____ street within borough _____ Visited by: _____ on __ / __ / __
Equipment in place: Swings <input type="checkbox"/> Roundabout <input type="checkbox"/> Seesaw <input type="checkbox"/> Slide <input type="checkbox"/> Zip wire <input type="checkbox"/> Climbing wall <input type="checkbox"/> Climbing frame <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
Age ranges catered for (tick as many boxes as necessary) 2-4 years <input type="checkbox"/> 5-8 years <input type="checkbox"/> 9-11 years <input type="checkbox"/> 12 years and beyond <input type="checkbox"/>
Current condition
Facilities for parents
Visibility of entrance, exit, and users of facilities
Safety issues
Access issues
Other issues
Comment from users on site
Member observations (please continue on other side if necessary)
1
2
3

APPENDIX C: PLAYGROUND SAFETY REGULATIONS

- Playgrounds are provided for children under 14 years of age.
- Please do not ride bikes in the playgrounds
- Young children should be supervised on the equipment.
- Dogs are not allowed in the playgrounds.
- Safer Surfacing under the play equipment reduces the risk of serious injury; it does not prevent it. Children must be supervised at all times.
- The Council accepts no responsibility for damage, loss or personal injury whilst using the facilities, unless this arises from the Council's own negligence
- In the interests of the safety of your child and others, please report all damage or incidents to Sport, Parks and Recreation on 020 726 6900 Extension 62709 or 62707

APPENDIX D: CABINET REPORT ON PLAYGROUND REFURBISHMENTS

REPORT TO:	CABINET 12 February 2007
AGENDA ITEM:	10
SUBJECT:	Play Development
LEAD OFFICER:	Director of Environmental, Cultural & Sports Services
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Steven Hollands, Culture & Sport
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT:	
<p>Priority No.1 – Safer Streets – helping to make Croydon Safer</p> <p>Priority No.4 - Providing a sense of community – aiming to give everyone in Croydon a sense of belonging</p>	
FINANCIAL SUMMARY:	
<p>Subject to the approval of the draft capital programme 2007/8 and 2008/9, the recommendations of the report will commit the council to spending £450k each year on new and refurbishment of play ground equipment.</p> <p>Subject to final approval of the portfolio, the Big Lottery has allocated £884,076 to invest in play development in Croydon between 2006/2009.</p>	
FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.: 670 - This is a Key Decision as defined in the Council's Constitution. The decision may be implemented from 1300 hours on the 5 th working day after it is made, unless the decision is referred to the Scrutiny & Overview Committee by the requisite number of Councillors.	

For general release

1. RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The Cabinet is asked:</p> <p>1.1 to agree the proposed refurbishment programme for refurbishment the Council's existing play facilities, subject to the Council's approval of the draft capital programme for 2007/08 and 2008/09.</p> <p>1.2 To note the position regarding the proposed development of play projects subject to approval of the project portfolio by The Big Lottery Fund.</p> <p>1.3 To note the contribution of Section 106 funding towards the improvement of playgrounds.</p>

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report outlines a programme of investment in Croydon's play facilities over the next three years. The proposed programme of projects provides for the refurbishment of existing playgrounds and play areas, and the enhancement of new play initiatives which focus on the borough's areas of greatest need as determined by the Council's Play Strategy 2006-2009 approved in October 2006 and which form a submission to the Big Lottery Play Initiative Fund.
- 2.2 The investment in Croydon's play facilities will be derived from three sources: a £900k capital sum over a two year period for the refurbishment of the council's existing play facilities in parks and open spaces; and £884k over three years from the Big Lottery Play Initiative Fund for the development of play initiatives in areas of identified need within the borough.
- 2.3 A third funding source will be from Section 106 contributions of approximately £100k, these contributions can only be used in specified areas as part of Section 106 agreements with developers.
- 2.4 Play provision has a central role in delivering each of the five outcomes for children and young people specified in the government's Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme. Play provision is a cross-cutting policy issue tackling a number of important council agendas.

3. DETAIL

THE COUNCILS EXISTING PLAYGROUNDS

- 3.1 A recent report from RoSPA commissioned by the ECSS department confirmed officers' findings that much of the Council's play equipment is suffering from major wear and tear, has a limited life expectancy, diminished play value and is increasingly attracting vandalism.
- 3.2 By combining the information from the department's maintenance, inspection and condition reports with the RoSPA information, officers have identified risks and priorities and established a programme of refurbishment aimed at improving equipment, addressing DDA compliance, and improving access.
- 3.3 A refurbishment programme has been drawn up to either retain equipment with a life expectancy of over 10 years or replace old worn out equipment with new and exciting equipment to add play value to a playground. New play equipment and impact absorbing surfacing would meet BS EN standards and RoSPA and NPFA guidelines.
- 3.4 It is proposed that the programme of refurbishment will be carried out in two phases addressing the highest priorities and risk areas first.

- 3.5 The Council will commence a tendering process in January 2007 with a view to specifications being prepared for bidders by March 2007. The successful bids will determine the overall amounts ultimately allocated to each project, however officers have estimated the values for each project below based on knowledge of the sites as a general guide.
- 3.7 Projects will be continually assessed against risk and priorities as the work programme progresses to ensure that any changes in circumstances will be catered for.

Capital funding allocation Phase 1 2007/08 refurbishment of nine existing playground sites.

(N) Ashburton Playing Field	£50k	June/July 2007
(S) Selsdon RG	£25k	Sept/Oct 2007
(C) King Georges Field, Selhurst	£50k	Sept/Oct 2007
(S) Milne Park, New Addington	£50k	Sept/Oct 2007
(N) Norbury Park,	£50k	Sept/Oct 2007
(S) Rowdown Fields, Fieldway	£50k	June/July 2007
(S) South Croydon RG	£50k	Sept/Oct 2007
(N) Thornton Heath RG	£50k	June/July 2007
(C) Waddon Ponds	£50k	Sept/Oct 2007

Locations (N) = North (s) = South and (C) = Central

Capital funding allocation Phase 2 2008-09 refurbishment of a further 14 existing playground sites.

	£	2008/9
(S) Queen Elizabeth's Drive, Addington	£40k	Jun/Oct
(S) Bourne Park, Kenley	£30k	Jun/Oct
(C) Courtwood, Heathfield	£15k	Jun/Oct
(C) Edgecombe, Heathfield	£50k	Jun/Oct
(N) Grangewood, Thornton Heath	£40k	Jun/Oct
(C) Lloyd Park, Fairfield,	£40k	Jun/Oct
(N) Mayfield Road RG, West Thornton	£40k	Jun/Oct
(N) Northborough, Norbury	£45k	Jun/Oct
(C) Parkhill, Fairfield	£40k	Jun/Oct
(S) Rickman Hill, Coulsdon	£25k	Jun/Oct
(N) The Lawns, Upper Norwood	£25k	Jun/Oct
(N) South Norwood Lake	£20k	Jun/Oct
(N) South Norwood RG	£15k	Jun/Oct
(S) Tollers (Ellis Road), Coulsdon	£25k	Jun/Oct

In 2007, refurbishment and improvement on four more sites with Section 106 funding and new games wall facility installed:

(S) Rotary Field – new play equipment, improve entrances, signs, and refurbishment	Section 106 £55k	Mar/May 2007
(C) Purley Way PF – improve entrances, new play equipment, seats, facilities	Section 106 £42k	Mar/May 2007
(S) Higher Drive Rec – new enclosed play space, path links and equipment	Section 106 £?k	Mar/May 2007 (Subject to confirmation of funding)
(N) Apsley Road – new modular unit	Section 106 £10k	Mar/May 2007
(S) Bourne Park – new tarmac base for games wall	£10k + free games wall	Mar/May 2007

3.8 FUTURE PLAY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH BIG LOTTERY

- 3.9 In November 2005 the Big Lottery Fund announced details of the new £155 million Children’s Play Initiative to be launched in March 2006. It confirmed that Croydon is to be allocated £884,076 to invest in the development of Play in Croydon between 2006/2009, subject to a successful portfolio submission.
- 3.10 The Council, in partnership with local agencies from the play sector, has drawn up a portfolio of projects to focus on areas of greatest need identified within the Play Strategy 2006 – 2009, and which compliments the refurbishment and improvement programme referred to above. The final portfolio of projects will be submitted to the Big Lottery Fund by 12 March 2007 for approval, and the implementation of projects is expected to commence during September 2007 subject to final agreement. To qualify, projects need to demonstrate long term sustainability as part of the management of their schemes.
- 3.11 The Big Lottery Fund criteria require that the projects supported by this funding stream must be free to all children and young people, free for them to choose the activities they wish to engage in and free for the users to come and go as they please. All projects must be based on the needs of the users, with a commitment to the long term development of the project beyond the funding period established.
- 3.12 A play audit was conducted across Croydon to identify the needs and gaps in the borough, and a Play Development Group was established with partners from external and internal agencies to support the process. Information about the Big Lottery Funding was disseminated through the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership, Young People’s Network and Youth Matters Steering Group. 20 Expressions of Interest (EOIs) were received by the closing date of 28 July 2006.

- 3.13 A Play Development Officer was recruited in September 2006 to co-ordinate the submission and implementation of the portfolio of projects, and a steering group established to take the EOIs forward in partnership with both internal and external agencies and departments

From the original 20 projects being considered, nine have been referred to alternative funding streams or rejected for not meeting the criteria set by the Big Lottery Fund. Further work is currently being undertaken to finalise an additional project at Coulsdon Memorial Ground bringing the total number of projects under consideration by the Big Lottery Fund to 12.

- 3.14 Although the total amount for the portfolio of projects exceeds Croydon's allocation of £884, 076 the intention is to work in partnership with all 12 schemes, and include them in the submission to the Big Lottery Fund. The top nine projects total the amount allocated to Croydon in this funding stream. However, if any of the projects from 1-9 are rejected by Big Lottery Fund it provides them with an opportunity to consider supporting the remaining projects.

- 3.15 All projects have been discussed with the Big Lottery Fund, Children's Play Programme adviser:

1	Croydon Community Bus	£71,000
2	Croydon Playcare	£150,000
3	South Norwood Country Park	£180,000
4	Whitehorse Road Estate	£56,000
5	Handcroft Estate	£54,494
6	Longheath Gardens Estate	£61,297
7	Walton Green Estate	£60,607
8	Upper Norwood Recreation Site	£75,000
9	Coulsdon Memorial Ground	£100,000
10	Mobile Toy Library	£80,000
11	Play Plus	£260,000
12	Timebridge Junior Club	£50,000

- 3.16 Play is intrinsic to children's quality of life. It is how they enjoy themselves and is essential to their development. Research increasingly shows that for children and young people to stay healthy, be safe, enjoy their childhood, achieve their potential, contribute to society and achieve economic wellbeing they must have opportunities for free play and informal recreation throughout their childhood.

- 3.17 Evidence shows that there are increasing barriers to children's play especially outdoors where it is particularly beneficial. A major barrier that has been identified is the fear of crime and the 'stranger danger' perception. There is increasing recognition that well designed and managed play and open spaces contribute to people's quality of life and sense of security.

- 3.18 Parks & Open Spaces are committed to ensuring a safe environment for the community, with Park Rangers regularly patrolling and maintaining play areas.
- 3.19 The Crime and Disorder Strategy identifies the need to encourage young people to be safe and avoid criminal and/or anti-social behaviour. This strategic priority has close links with The Children's Act 2004 which places a duty on agencies to co-operate in focusing on improving outcomes for all children and young people.
- 3.20 Encouraging positive use of leisure time is one method of achieving this and therefore encouraging safe play during a child's informative years is an intrinsic part of creating better behaviour in the future.
- 3.21 With regard to reducing the fear of stranger danger; play areas that are popular with parents create the perfect environment to deter this particular type of crime.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation has already been undertaken and will continue throughout the duration of these projects. Representatives from the Play Development Group, Children & Young People's Network, Children's Network, Every Child Matters Group and other volunteer forums have been an integral part of the process. The results from the annual Parks and Open Spaces customer satisfaction survey together with customer comments have also been considered in developing these proposals.

5 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

It is proposed that for the purposes of procurement and to ensure value for money, both the play refurbishment and the play development schemes will be combined where appropriate, in order to benefit from economies of scale in purchasing and project management. It should be noted that the Big Lottery projects will be administered and provided predominantly by other agencies or partnerships, and will be required to meet the guidelines set down by the Big Lottery Fund, however the Council's procurement processes, good practices and financial procedures will be followed in delivering these projects.

All projects within the Play Development programme are required to ensure that the sustainability of schemes has been considered within their project outline and beyond the Big Lottery funding period.

1 Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations

	Current year	Medium Term Financial Strategy – 3 year forecast		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Revenue Budget available				
Expenditure	0	0	0	0
Income	0			0
Effect of decision from				
Expenditure	0	0	0	0
Income	0	0	0	0
Remaining	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Capital Budget available				
Expenditure	0	450	450	0
Effect of decision from				
Expenditure	<u>0</u>	<u>450</u>	<u>450</u>	<u>0</u>
Remaining	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>

2 The effect of the decision

Subject to the approval of the draft capital programme 2007/8 and 2008/9, the recommendations of the report will commit the council to spending £450k each year on new and refurbishment of play ground equipment.

The works to be funded from Section 106 monies will not be committed until the funding has been conformed and received.

The works identified to be funded by the Big Lottery will not be committed until final approval of the portfolio is received.

3 Risks

If the portfolio of development projects is not submitted to the Big Lottery by the 12 March 2007, there is a risk that the money will not be allocated. In addition the money will only be allocated for projects subject to agreement by the Big Lottery. Therefore a risk that some or all projects may not be achieved.

4 Options

There are no other options should the funding for these schemes not become available.

5 Future savings/efficiencies

The replacement and refurbishment of the existing playground equipment should result in reduced maintenance costs. An item was included within the ECSS Strategic Budget fro 2007/08 to reflect this saving.

(Approved by: Alan Langridge, Assistant Director, ECSS)

6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SECRETARY AND SOLICITOR

- 6.1 The Solicitor to the Council comments that it is understood that s.106 funding has already been secured for the developments proposed.

(Approved by: Gabriel MacGregor, Deputy Council Solicitor (Corporate) on behalf of the Council Secretary & Solicitor)

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 7.1 There are no Human Resource impacts arising from this report.

- 7.2 (Approved by: Terry Geater on behalf of the Divisional Director, Human Resources & Organisational Development).

8. CUSTOMER IMPACT

- 8.1 The refurbishment and development of play facilities will have a major impact on local communities by improving access to facilities and supporting the regeneration of the local neighbourhood. Quality of play provision has the potential to contribute significantly to improving health, tackling social exclusion and promoting social and community development.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)

- 9.1 Full Equalities Impact Assessments will be carried out as part of the procurement process however the refurbishment and development proposals will focus on children of all ages, from the early years, through the middle ages and right into young adulthood. It must take account of children's different abilities and disabilities, their age, gender, cultural backgrounds, social, family, economic and environmental situation.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL AND DESIGN IMPACT

- 10.1 There are no environmental and design impacts arising from this report.

11. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

- 11.1 This is of particular relevance to Croydon as young people are considered as one of the main offenders and victims of street crime. The improved and new play facilities within the borough will add to the 'play value' and maintain children's interest. The investment also supports the regeneration of the local areas by providing well maintained and attractive play areas which reduce the neglected and abandoned feelings that contribute towards vandalism.

12. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

- 12.1 For children to get the maximum developmental and experimental benefit from their play, they need to play in a variety of ways and gain 'play value' from play facilities.
- 12.2 Extending these opportunities to more children will help promote equality of opportunity and provide better access and improved outcomes for some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the borough.
- 12.3 Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by the UK Government in December 1991) recognises the importance of play of the child. It reads "State parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts".

13. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

- 13.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Council's Play Strategy 2006-9