



# Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel

14 August 2014

<b>Report title</b>	Reduction of Play Service provision	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Val Gibson Children, Young People & Families	
<b>Wards affected</b>	St Peter's, Fallings Park and Bushbury South and Low Hill	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Sarah Norman, Communities	
<b>Originating service</b>	Early Help 0 – 5 years	
<b>Accountable employee(s)</b>	Andrew Wolverson Tel Email	Head of Service  01902 551272 Andrew.wolverson@wolverhampton.gov.uk
<b>Report to be considered by</b>	Strategic Executive Board Cabinet	14 August 2014 10 September 2014

---

## Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Panel is recommended to:

1. Agree to maintain Old Fallings Adventure Playground through funding from Aiming Higher for Disabled Children grants and Public Health.
2. Agree to seek Cabinet endorsement for the closure of the Gatis Street and Scotlands Adventure Playgrounds, with sites being declared surplus and then promoted for a Community Asset Transfer.
3. Agree to support a proposal to begin a six week period of consultation with the public about the proposals for the future management of Gatis Street and Scotlands Adventure Playgrounds.

## Recommendations for noting:

The Panel is asked to note:

1. This item is being considered as pre-decision scrutiny and will therefore not be available to call-in once a decision is made by the Executive.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out proposals for a reduction in the current play service provision leading to the removal of funding for two out of the current three adventure playground sites.
- 1.2 The report will also outline proposals for the utilisation of funding from Public Health and Aiming Higher for Disabled Children grants in order to continue provision at Old Fallings Adventure Playground

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 Wolverhampton Play Service has been in existence since 1972. Until 2012 it operated six open access adventure playground sites across the City; however this reduced to three following savings requirements. In 2010 the Play Service secured funding from the Department for Education (formerly Department of Children Schools and Families) to develop a purpose built, state of the art play facility which was located in Low Hill.
- 2.2 The service has always targeted the most deprived areas of Wolverhampton bringing access to high quality play experiences that build self-confidence, self-esteem and socialisation skills. In addition to the adventure playgrounds this service has also been delivered through running open access holiday provision within local parks across the City.
- 2.3 The play service supports the Council in meeting its statutory duty to to secure, as far as is practicable, sufficient services and activities to improve the wellbeing of young people (section 507B of the Education Act 2006).
- 2.4 The review of the Play Service is necessitated as part of the overall Social Inclusion savings target for 2015/16 of £1 million and will result in savings of £456,000.

## **3.0 Discussion**

- 3.1 Cabinet requested to put proposals forward for the reduction of funding available for the play facilities currently offered at Gatis Street, Scotlands and Old Fallings Adventure Playgrounds.
- 3.2 In consultation with senior colleagues within Public Health, funding has been sourced to enable the continuation of provision from Old Fallings Adventure Playground in line with the desire to reduce obesity through increasing activity levels amongst families.
- 3.3 Old Fallings has been selected as the site to retain as it was purposely built through funding from the Department for Education (formerly DCSF) in 2010. In addition to this it has the widest range of facilities including specialist ones for children with disabilities.

- 3.4 The purpose of securing funding for a further one year period is to enable the completion of the re-commissioning of healthy lifestyles activities currently being undertaken by Public Health and to ascertain the viability of longer term investment in play opportunities as part of an on-going strategy.
- 3.5 It is intended as part of the proposal to undertake a six week public consultation which is likely to start in September 2014 (subject to the approval of the proposal by Cabinet to outline the proposals to the user and the local communities. This consultation will also be used to test whether any community groups would wish to operate the Gatis Street and Scotlands Adventure Playgrounds following a Community Asset Transfer.

#### **4.0 Financial implications**

- 4.1 The approved budget for these play areas is £456,000. This is funded entirely from mainline General Fund resources. It is proposed that the mainline resources are surrendered in full, in order to contribute towards the approved saving of £1.0 million from Early Help services in 2015/16.
- 4.2 It is proposed that the remaining play area would be funded entirely from specific grant funding: £120,000 from Public Health Grant and £29,000 from Aiming Higher for Disabled Children. In addition, it is hoped that a further £10,000 of external income will be generated through use of the premises by other groups.
- 4.3 The estimated cost of the revised service provision for a full year in 2015/16 is £112,000, comprising £107,000 staffing costs and £5,000 (non-centralised) premises costs. The available funding is therefore sufficient to fund the proposed revised service.  
[DK/08082014/W]

#### **5.0 Legal implications**

- 5.1 The Council is not required under any statute to provide a play service, however, given that it supports the Council in meeting its statutory duty to to secure, as far as is practicable, sufficient services and activities to improve the wellbeing of young people (section 507B of the Education Act 2006) a six week period of consultation will be undertaken with the public to outline the proposals.
- 5.2 If any of the service were to be taken on by a new provider consideration would need to be given as to the legal aspects of such a transfer. This would need to include, but not be limited to, whether the Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment (TUPE) regulations apply to those staff currently employed.  
[KO/12082014/J]

## **6.0 Equalities implications**

- 6.1 A full equalities analysis was completed for the previous reduction of adventure playgrounds. It is proposed that this analysis be refreshed and updated to reflect the new proposals. The outcome of the revised analysis will be taken into consideration when implementing the proposals.

## **7.0 Environmental implications**

- 7.1 There is the potential for any vacant building to attract anti-social behaviour for the period the building is unoccupied which may lead to deterioration in the fabric of the property. Also due to the nature of the adventure playgrounds consideration would need to be given to ensuring the safe removal external equipment to remove risk of injury to anyone accessing the site should it close.

## **8.0 Human resources implications**

- 8.1 The proposals in this report will lead to a reduction in staffing. The proposals will require the deletion of the following posts; 1 x Play Development Manager; 1 x Senior Play Development Officer; 6 x Playwork Assistants; 0.5 Stores Person; 1 x Administration Officer and 1 x Clerical Officer.
- 8.2 The proposed restructuring required to achieve the savings would follow the Councils procedures by completing a formal consultation process including ensuring that recognised trade unions are consulted and notified at every stage of the process.
- 8.3 In line with Council policy in order to mitigate against compulsory redundancy staff would be given an opportunity to leave the service through the voluntary redundancy scheme.
- 8.4 HR and legal advice would need to be sought as to whether staff would transfer to any new operators of the adventure playground under the TUPE regulations, including in circumstances where a Community Asset Transfer has taken place.

## **9.0 Corporate landlord implications**

- 9.1 If approved the proposals would result in the Gatis Street and Scotlands Adventure Playgrounds being declared surplus to the operational requirements of the Play Service. The land and property related savings of this proposal would only be fully realised on the disposal of sites or the re-use of the sites through a Community Asset Transfer.
- 9.2 If declared surplus the sites would initially be promoted as an opportunity for a Community Asset Transfer. This will give the Play Service the opportunity to work with community groups to develop a sustainable business case to support a Community Asset Transfer. If this is not achievable the approval from Cabinet (Resources) Panel would be sought for the disposal of the sites.

## **10.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 10.1 Five Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 to 2018/19, Cabinet, 23 October 2013.