



Subject:	'Play Value' and Accessibility audit for council-maintained playgrounds
Date:	5 <sup>th</sup> December 2023
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager

### Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

**After Committee Decision**

**After Council Decision**

**Sometime in the future**

**Never**

<input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	Officers are seeking approval to enhance our ongoing independent inspection process for Playgrounds. In addition to the annual suite of independent playground safety inspections, members are asked to approve an additional independent audit that will assess 'play value' and accessibility of all council-maintained playgrounds. It is proposed that 'Play Value' and accessibility scores arising from this additional audit will inform site selection for future Playground Inspection Programmes (PIP).
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	In addition to next year's planned suite of independent safety inspections Committee is asked to agree that an independent audit of 'play value' and accessibility is undertaken at all council-maintained playgrounds.
2.2	Committee is also asked to agree that 'play value' and accessibility scores will inform site selection for future Playground Improvement Programmes, replacing 'quality' scores derived from annual playground safety inspections.
2.3	Committee is also asked to note that potential infrastructure improvements (E.G Toilet Provision), identified by the audit, will be used to inform future capital projects in our parks and open spaces.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
	<u>Playground Improvement Programme</u>
3.1	Since its inception in 2012, playgrounds to be refurbished under PIP have been selected using quality scores from annual, safety inspection reports. This assessment method provided council with scores for each playground that helped rank play facilities in most need of improvement. The current inspection process focuses on the quality and compliance of existing play equipment but does not audit the types of play opportunities provided or how accessible they are.
3.2	Over the previous eleven years PIP has made a positive impact on the overall quality of the city's playgrounds. The first suite of independent, annual inspections in 2012 recorded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25% of all playgrounds were classified as 'poor' condition</li> <li>• 33% of all playgrounds were classified as 'fair' condition</li> <li>• 42% of all playgrounds were classified as 'good' condition</li> </ul>
3.3	Following more than a decade of investment, exceeding £6 million across more than 50 sites, the overall quality has dramatically improved. This year's suite of annual independent safety inspections recorded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1% of all playgrounds are classified as 'poor' condition</li> </ul>

3.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6% of all playgrounds are classified as 'fair' condition</li> <li>• 93% of all playgrounds are classified as 'good' condition</li> </ul>
3.5	<p>Following delivery of PIP 2023-24, in parallel with ongoing citywide operational maintenance and repairs, we anticipate that 100% of our playgrounds to be classified as 'good' by the end of this financial year. This will be the first time, since the inception of PIP, that all playgrounds will be classified as a 'good' in terms of existing equipment. This provides an opportunity for the Council to go beyond an assessment of safety compliance and quality of existing equipment and audit the 'play value' and accessibility of our playgrounds.</p>
3.6	<p>Officers are therefore proposing a new assessment approach that will be used to rank play facilities in terms of 'Play Value' and accessibility. 'Play value' and accessibility scores associated with the proposed audit would then be used to select playgrounds to be refurbished under future Playground Improvement Programmes (PIP).</p>
3.7	<p>If approved, members should note that independent annual playground safety inspections will continue each year to help identify essential repairs and ensure ongoing compliance with relevant safety standards (see Appendix 3) and ensure facilities remain in a good condition. These assessments would occur in tandem with the new assessment approach.</p>
3.8	<p>If approved the proposed audit will align with best practice guidance from consultants and organisations such as Playboard NI, Mae Murray Foundation, Play Services Ireland, Play England and Play Scotland. Council's Play Development Team, Landscape Planning &amp; Development Team and OSS Operational Managers have also helped inform the approach. Officers have held discussions with Playboard NI and Mae Murray Foundation and initial feedback to the proposal has been positive. Further meetings are planned for December.</p>
3.9	<p>Assessing play value and accessibility will allow council to identify playgrounds that, although good in terms of the quality and safety compliance of their equipment, would benefit from an enhanced range of play opportunities and accessible elements.</p>
3.10	<p>In terms of a strategic fit, improving the 'play value' and accessibility of council-maintained playgrounds helps deliver a key outcome in the Belfast Agenda around providing a city that is safe, fair and inclusive for all. This approach also aligns with key principles in the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy's that aim to provide welcoming shared spaces and improve health and well-being.</p>
3.11	<p>This proposal seeks to align the assessment of Playgrounds to a number of Notices of Motion. See Appendix 1.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice of Motion – September 2019 – Play Facilities for Children with Disabilities</li> <li>• Notice of Motion – June 2022 – Inclusive Play Parks</li> </ul> <p><u>'Play Value'</u></p>
3.12	<p>'Play value' is used to describe the value an environment, object or piece of equipment brings to a child's experience of play, with high 'play value' indicating that children can play in many different ways. Through play children learn and develop their cognitive skills, problem-solving, social skills, and their fine and gross motor skills.</p>
3.12	<p>Play is generally divided into three types:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical - rotating, sliding, rocking, swinging, climbing, balancing, bouncing, crawling and gliding</li> <li>• Sensory - tactile, auditory, cognitive, interaction with natural features / quiet spaces</li> <li>• Social – social / cooperative play and imaginative / themed play</li> </ul> <p>3.13 Each type of play is crucial to a child’s development and enjoyment of a playground. Going forward, we want to increase opportunities for all three types of play and for each type to be more accessible.</p> <p><u>Assessing ‘Play Value and accessibility’</u></p> <p>3.14 The proposed assessment template (see Appendix 3) is derived from a combination of tools used by Play Scotland, Play England and Play Services Ireland Ltd (see Appendix 4, template previously used by other councils in N. Ireland, Scotland and Dublin).</p> <p>3.15 In line with key recommendations set out in the ‘Let Me Play’ report, produced by PlayBoard NI and Mae Murray Foundation, we have expanded the proposed assessment template to include an evaluation of how accessible our playgrounds are for children of all ages and abilities.</p> <p>3.15 The assessment will allocate a ‘play value’ and accessibility score for each playground based on the types of play opportunities available and their accessibility.</p> <p>3.16 The independent audit will also include an assessment of entrances, parking and toilet provision. Whilst the existing PIP budget will continue to be focused on new play equipment and safety surfacing, potential infrastructure improvements identified by the audit will be used to inform future capital projects in our parks and open spaces.</p> <p><b><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>3.17 Subject to a competitive tendering process, we envisage ‘play value’ and accessibility assessments to be carried out by the consultant who will be appointed to undertake ongoing, annual playground safety inspections.</p> <p>3.18 The cost of the play value and accessibility audit is included within existing revenue estimates.</p> <p>3.19 The cost of potential infrastructure projects e.g. changing places facilities, car parks are not included within the budget estimates.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>3.20 None</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 & 2 – Relevant Notices Of Motion

	<p>Appendix 3 – Proposed BCC Play Value &amp; Accessibility Assessment Template Appendix 4 – Typical Playground Annual Safety Inspection Report or Example Play Value &amp; Accessibility Report (Play Services Ireland Ltd.)</p>
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