



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks & Leisure Committee
Subject:	Playground Improvement Programme 2012
Date:	14 June 2012
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Paul Barr, Landscape Planning and Development Manager

1	Relevant Background Information
	<p>The purpose of this report is to inform Members regarding the Playground Improvement Programme for 2012 - 2013 and to seek approval to carry out a number of new playground refurbishments based on the latest cycle of independent inspection reports.</p> <p>Members will be aware that the refurbishment and improvement of playgrounds is a key commitment in the people, communities and neighbourhood section of the Council's Investment Programme. In August 2011 the Committee agreed to an improved independent playground inspection process. This approach proved effective in prioritising the sites that were refurbished under the 2011– 2012 programme.</p> <p>Last year's refurbishment programme proved hugely successful with the following 10 playgrounds across the city being enhanced and re-opened by the end of the 2012 financial year (see Appendix 4 - Playground Refurbishments 2011 - 2012).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finlay Park• Tir Na Nog• Marrowbone• Alexandra Upper• Highfield• Glassmullin• Lenadoon• Knocknagoney• Tommy Patton• Grampian Avenue

The average quality score for the sites selected at the outset of last year's improvement programme was recorded as 3.0 (classified as poor), as a result of refurbishment the average quality score for all ten sites has been recorded this year as 9.3 (classified as good). This clearly demonstrates the desired improvement in overall safety, quality and play value at each of the sites.

As a result of the independent inspection process and refurbishment programme the percentage of 'poor' council maintained playgrounds has been reduced from 25% of all facilities to just 9%. Future improvements will continue to move the quality and safety of all selected playgrounds to that of 'good'.

Following the success of physical improvements on site staff carried out a review of the process used to deliver the programme. A number of improvements are proposed for this year including;

- inclusion of Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGA's) and outdoor gyms as part of the annual inspection process
- plan refurbishment works for the next two financial years (2012-13 & 2013-14) based on this year's cycle of independent inspection reports
- share information with local communities earlier to assist with planning and design
- establish a new 3 year tender for the supply of playground equipment commencing in April 2013

This year's inspections were again carried out by 'Play Services Ireland' consultants in May 2012 (see Appendix 1 – Typical Inspection Report 2012). As before, a quality score and classification for all playgrounds was derived based on European safety standards BS EN 1176 & 1177. Playground sites have been ranked in line with these scores, helping to determine which are in most need of refurbishment (see Appendix 2 – 2012 Mean Quality Scores). Inspection reports continue to identify and prioritise essential repairs to existing equipment and will be undertaken annually.

This year's inspection process has been widened to include all existing Multi - Use Games Areas (MUGA's) across the city. The condition of these facilities has been assessed against the current European safety standard BS EN 15312.

Members should note that MUGA's are not part of refurbishment works under the Playground Improvement budget. Essential works to these facilities will need to be prioritised and funded independently. As a European standard for outdoor gym equipment does not exist independent inspections will assess these items on a risk based approach.

Based on this year's cycle of inspection reports a two year programme of refurbishment work has been developed (2012-13 & 2013 -14). It is envisaged that planning works for the next two financial years will allow for improved

	<p>information sharing with communities and more efficient project management by staff.</p> <p>Community Park Managers and Parks Outreach Officers will continue to assist with the distribution of information relating to individual playground sites to local community groups and users.</p> <p>Members should note that the current 'playground equipment' tender has recently been extended until April 2013 helping staff to deliver refurbishment works more efficiently.</p>
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2	<p>Key Issues</p> <p>The 2012 independent playground inspections covered a total of 79 sites across the city. Inspection reports recorded a total of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 playgrounds classified as 'poor' (quality score 0.0 - 4.9) • 34 playgrounds classified as 'fair' (quality score 5.0 - 7.5) • 38 playgrounds classified as 'good' (quality score 7.6 – 10.0) <p>Members should note that low quality scores have been recorded because of a combination of vandalism, outstanding repairs and general wear and tear of equipment and surfacing. The key to maintaining high standards on newly refurbished sites will be through continued daily safety inspections and prompt and comprehensive repairs and maintenance.</p> <p>As before sites which have the lowest quality scores will be priorities for improvement. In line with budget constraints the following playgrounds will be refurbished as part of a two year programme (see Appendix 3 – Playground Refurbishments Map 2012 – 2014)</p> <p>In Year One (2012 - 2013) playgrounds at the following sites will be improved;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. North Queen Street 2. NorthLink 3. Victoria Park 4. Belfast Zoo 5. Clarawood Millennium Park 6. Ballymacarrett 7. Mountford Road <p>In Year Two (2013 – 2014) playgrounds at the following sites will be improved;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clara Street 2. Dover Street 3. Michelle Baird 4. Stewart Street 5. Taughmonagh 6. Ballysillan Park 7. Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon
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	<p>Although ranked amongst the lowest scoring sites the following playgrounds have been omitted from the programme for the following reasons;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dunville Park – part of a wider regeneration scheme 2. Woodvale Park - part of a wider regeneration scheme 3. Orangefield – part of Connswater Community Greenway 4. Avoniel - part of Connswater Community Greenway 5. Willowbank – investment made within the last 5 years 6. Ardoyne Community Centre – outstanding repairs required 7. Moyard – investment made within last 5 years 8. Olympia Leisure Centre – part of a wider regeneration plan for national stadium 9. Geeragh Community Centre – maintained under alternative budget
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3	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial</u> All refurbishment work will be funded through the Playground Refurbishment revenue budget (£649,200.00 annually) each year for the next two years.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u> Staff from the Landscape Planning & Development Unit will continue to deliver the Playground Improvement Programme</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u> As a result of refurbishment work all selected playground sites will move to the new classification of 'good' (quality score 7.6 – 10.0) when re-inspected.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
	The processes proposed in this report will be subject to the council's existing equality screening process.

5	Recommendations
	<p>Committee is asked to approve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the list of playground sites to be refurbished based on this year's independent inspection process • refurbishment of these sites as part of a two year construction programme

6	Decision Tracking
	Officer responsible: Paul Barr, Landscape Planning & Development Manager

7	Key to Abbreviations
	None

8	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Typical Inspection Report 2012 Appendix 2 – 2012 Mean Quality Scores Appendix 3 – Playground Improvement Programme Map 2012 – 14 Appendix 4 - Playground Refurbishments Map 2011 - 12