



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks & Leisure Committee
Subject:	Playground Improvement Programme 2014 - 2015
Date:	13 June 2013
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Paul Barr, Landscape Planning & Development Manager

1	Relevant Background Information
	<p>The purpose of this report is to update Members regarding the Playground Improvement Programme for 2012 - 2014 and to seek approval to carry out a number of future refurbishments based on this year's cycle of independent inspection reports.</p> <p>In August 2011 the Committee agreed to an improved independent playground inspection process. This approach has continued to be effective in prioritising playgrounds in most need of improvement. This process has again been used to audit all 73 playgrounds in the city this year.</p> <p>Members will also be aware that in August 2012 the Committee agreed to a rolling two year programme of refurbishment works for 2012/13 and 2013/14 (see Appendix 1). The extended programme allowed for more efficient project management and improved information sharing with local communities. Year Two (2013/14) of the programme will result in refurbishment at the following sites by the end of March 2014;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clara Street Playground• Dover Street Playground• Michelle Baird Memorial Playground• Stewart Street Playground• Taughmonagh Playground• Ballysillan Park Playground• Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Playground

	<p>Year One (2012/13) of the improvements were complete by the end of March 2013, again proving very successful with the following playgrounds being enhanced and re-opened;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northlink Playground • Clarawood Playground • North Queen Street Playground • Victoria Park Playground • Ballymacarrett Playground • Mountforde Road Playground <p>The average quality score for these sites prior to improvement work was recorded independently as 3.7 (classified as poor), as a result of refurbishment the new average quality score is 9.2 (classified as good) this year. This demonstrates the desired improvement in terms of overall safety, quality and play value at each of the playgrounds.</p> <p>As a result of the ongoing independent inspection process and refurbishment work the percentage of 'poor' quality playgrounds has been reduced from 9% to 4%. Future planned improvements will continue to move the quality and safety of all selected playgrounds to that of a 'good' classification.</p> <p>This year's inspections were again carried out by 'Play Services Ireland' in April 2013 (see Appendix 2 – Typical Inspection Report). As before, a quality score and classification for all playgrounds was derived based on European safety standards BS EN 1176 & 1177, sites have then been prioritised for improvement using their quality score (see Appendix 3 – Priority Playgrounds 2013). Inspection reports also continue to identify and prioritise repairs to existing equipment for ongoing maintenance purposes.</p> <p>Based on this year's cycle of inspection reports a one year programme of refurbishment work has been developed for the financial year 2014 - 2015.</p> <p>Members should be aware that other Council playgrounds exist within the Development Department and that a number of additional playgrounds will transfer to Belfast City Council under Local Government Review. Officers are currently considering including all of the playgrounds within the Playground Programme. A further report will be brought to Committee on the outcomes of the review.</p> <p>Members should note that Community Park Managers and Parks Outreach Managers will continue to assist with the distribution of information relating to individual playground improvements to members, local communities and user groups.</p>
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2	Key Issues
	<p>In April 2013 this year's cycle of independent inspections was undertaken at all 73 playgrounds across the city. Inspection reports recorded;</p>

- 3 playgrounds classified as 'poor' (quality score 0.0 - 4.9)
- 35 playgrounds classified as 'fair' (quality score 5.0 - 7.5)
- 35 playgrounds classified as 'good' (quality score 7.6 - 10.0)

Playgrounds with the lowest quality scores will be prioritised for improvement. In line with budget considerations and construction programming the following playgrounds will be refurbished during 2014 – 2015 (see Appendix 4)

- New Lodge
- Queen Mary's Gardens
- Carnamore
- Lemberg Street
- Falls Park
- Cherryvale Playing Fields

Although ranked amongst the lowest scoring sites the following playgrounds have been omitted from the 2014 – 2015 programme for the following reasons;

- Belfast Zoo – to be refurbished as part of a larger capital scheme
- Willowbank – refurbished within the last three years
- Dover Street - part of the 2013 – 14 programme of improvements
- Stewart Street - part of the 2013 – 14 programme of improvements
- Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon - part of the 2013 – 14 programme of improvements

Members are also asked to note that a full planning application was submitted in March 2013 by South Belfast Sure Start for a new modular building within Stewart Street playground. The proposal for the new facility was agreed by the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on the 22nd February 2013.

Sure Start is a government led initiative which offers a broad range of services focusing on family health, early years care, education and improved well being programmes to children aged four and under. The proposal comprises the construction of a 27m x 9m modular building on the location of the existing senior play area (see Appendix 5). The estimated cost of the scheme is £250k with the target date for completion being July 2014.

Sure Start are leading on the project which has received support from the South Area Working Group. The scheme is to receive £150k of LIF funding from Belfast City Council subject to match funding being secured within twelve months.

As Members will note from the attachment, should the building be located as planned it will have an impact on the existing playground, with several items of 'senior' play equipment having to be removed. The playground will therefore require a redesign and more extensive refurbishment to ensure that detriment to the facility is minimised.

Members are asked to note that refurbishment of the playground was scheduled for 2013/14 with an estimated start date of November 2013. Owing to the Sure Start proposal the playground refurbishment work will need to be

	delayed until the building and associated site works are complete, or a decision is taken not to proceed with the Sure Start project.
3	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>All refurbishment work will be funded through the Playground Refurbishment revenue budget for 2014 -15 (£649,200.00 annually)</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>Staff from the Landscape Planning & Development Unit will continue to deliver the Playground Improvement Programme in partnership with City & Community Parks Managers and Parks Outreach Managers</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u></p> <p>As a result of refurbishment work all selected playgrounds 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 during 2014 -15 based on this year's cycle of playground inspections • deferral of refurbishment works at Stewart Street playground until the emerging Sure Start project is completed or a decision taken not to proceed.

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

7	Key to Abbreviations
	None

8	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – 2012 – 2014 Playground Improvement Programme Appendix 2 – Typical Inspection Report 2013 Appendix 3 – Priority Playgrounds 2013 Appendix 4 – Playground Improvement Programme 2104 -15 Appendix 5 – Sure Start planning application