

**28<sup>th</sup> February, 2023**

**8**

## **Play Area Improvement Programme**

**Ward(s):** All

**Portfolios:** Health and Wellbeing

### **1. Aim**

- 1.1. The aim of the play area improvement programme is to improve the quality of play provision and the accessibility of fitness provision across the Borough, thereby improving the health and wellbeing of residents.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. That the scrutiny committee note progress on the play area improvement programme.

### **3. Report Detail – Know**

- 3.1. The health and wellbeing of the residents is of prime importance to the council. Through a process of improving the quality of play and fitness provision, the council will encourage more young people and adults to use their local open spaces for play, sport and exercise.
- 3.2. The importance of parks and green spaces was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Visitor numbers dramatically increased over the lockdown period.
- 3.3. Cabinet received a report in February 2022 which set out options for a play improvement programme as part of a wider programme of providing green spaces for health improvement.
- 3.4. The report set out the background in play investment over the last 10 years, which had been limited. The proposals also identified a way forward for prioritising the way to improve the play infrastructure in the borough over the next few years.
- 3.5. A programme of delivering outdoor gyms in the strategic parks was also identified to ensure that the infrastructure for healthy lifestyles is improved. This delivers on the main objectives of the healthy spaces team to encourage people to use their green spaces for improved health, fitness and wellbeing.

- 3.6. A capital programme of play improvement was agreed, costing £1,644,000, which was made up from council capital and external funding.
- 3.7. A total of 13 play areas were selected for the first phase of improvements, although 29 sites in total were identified in need of improvement. A further 9 sites were in need of review to assess whether they were still fit for purpose and located in the right place, and 6 new outdoor gyms were programmed for delivery across the strategic sites in the borough.
- 3.8. The healthy spaces team are currently consulting on the proposals using the new online platform Common Place, which can be accessed using the address below:  
  
<https://walsallparksandgreenspaces.commonplace.is/en-GB/proposals/play-area-improvement-programme/step1>
- 3.9. The consultation will close in the middle of March, currently there have been over 3,500 visitors to look at the proposals and over 500 responses to the proposals. Over 70 of these responses have been about other sites not covered by this investment the largest percentage being about Arena Park in Palfrey, which will be improved through the Palfrey Big Local funding.
- 3.10. The consultation also involved a large leaflet drop to ensure that people local to these play facilities and parks were aware of the consultation online.

***Financial information***

- 3.11. Improving the 13 most poorly equipped sites with new equipment and safety surfacing and 6 outdoor gyms would be £1,644k. Please see the table as shown below:

<b>Expenditure types</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>
Play areas: 13 with new equipment @ £80k each	£1,040,000
Outdoor gyms: 6 @60k each	£360,000
Contingency and professional services	£244,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,644,000</b>

***Reducing Inequalities***

- 3.12. The project will provide the improvement of play and sports provision for children and young people with additional needs by providing more accessible play equipment as part of the programme.

**4. Decide**

- 4.1. The option to do nothing would have resulted in play areas deteriorating further and this will result in further vandalism and anti-social behaviour. This would have been likely to have had a knock-on effect of reducing pride in areas which look neglected and may result in further decline.

- 4.2. The option of improving the worst 13 play areas and reviewing 9 areas in need of urgent attention will cost over £1m but should be considered alongside the delivery of 6 outdoor gyms to increase the opportunities for people to exercise in a cheap and effective manner at their local strategic park.
- 4.3. A further option of improving the remaining 29 sites which need further improvement maybe considered as a second phase of this project.

## **5. Respond**

- 5.1. Comments from this committee can be discussed with the Portfolio holder for Health and Wellbeing and actions decided upon
- 5.2. The initial consultation phase will close in March and the implementation phase will then start. The delivery phase should take approximately 12 months.

## **6. Review**

- 6.1. As part of the programme regular reviews of progress will be carried out and reported to senior management and portfolio holder for Clean and Green.

## **Background papers**

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