

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

**REVISIT OF THE FORMER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY PANEL'S REVIEW OF PLAY, PLAYGROUNDS
AND OPEN SPACES IN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE**

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To consider the report of the People Scrutiny Panel entitled "Revisit of the Former Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel's Review of Play, Playgrounds and Open Spaces in North Lincolnshire"

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Under the revised Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules agreed at the Annual Meeting of the Council on 25 May 2011, scrutiny reports must now be considered by cabinet. The People Scrutiny Panel have recently completed a Revisit of the Former Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel 2009 Review of Play, Playgrounds and Open Spaces in North Lincolnshire report.
- 2.2 It is considered good practice for scrutiny members to revisit previous reports to ensure that recommendations are being acted upon, that progress has been made and that, if required, further recommendations can be made. The People Scrutiny Panel therefore decided to receive an update from key officers in June 2012 in relation to this issue which resulted in this short report.
- 2.3 Following the review the panel have made eight further detailed recommendations. A copy of the panel's report including the recommendations is attached as an appendix to this report.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 There are no options associated with this report.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 4.1 There may be some resource implications associated with the recommendations when they are eventually implemented.

5. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)**

5.1 There may be other implications associated with the implementation of the recommendations which will be highlighted in any action plan.

6. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

6.1 The panel consulted widely with other members and officers and with young people in revisiting the original report.

7. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 That the report be received.

7.2 That the cabinet member for People and the Director of People consider the contents of the report and prepare an action plan in response to the recommendations for submission to a future meeting of cabinet.

DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND RESOURCES

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Report of the People
Scrutiny Panel



Scrutiny Report

Report of the People Scrutiny Panel

Revisit of the former Children and Young People
Scrutiny Panel's 2009 Review of Play, Playgrounds
and Open Spaces in North Lincolnshire

July 2012



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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR

BACKGROUND TO THE REVISIT



Cllr Elaine Marper
Chairman — People Scrutiny Panel

Play is an activity that is central to our way of life and an important part of our childhood and teenage years. It helps us to learn social norms, how to judge risks, how to win and lose with good grace, and put quite simply it is a source of great fun and enjoyment. It is also a crucial way to keep ourselves fit and active and adopt a healthy lifestyle. It is of benefit to us all if we, as a council, do all we can to encourage play and activity.

The People Scrutiny Panel chose to revisit this issue because of the importance that we, as elected members, put on supporting our communities. We found a service that has improved markedly since members first looked at this issue in 2008/09. A range of improvements were noted, including a range of excellent new facilities across North Lincolnshire, new modern playgrounds, and a host of activities tailored for our children and young people. Praise must therefore go to all of the members, officers, partners and local volunteers who have made North Lincolnshire a better place to live and play.

However, we are aware that services need to improve further still in a challenging environment. We must respond to what our children and young people have said that they want from the service; which includes providing activities at weekends and also exploring different types of activities. Methods of commissioning and delivery may need to change, but we should always keep in mind that, ultimately, our over-riding role is to provide services for our customers.

I would like to thank the Vice-Chair for his input to this short revisit review, and also pass on my appreciation to all members of the People Scrutiny Panel for their hard work on this report. Thanks should also go to the officers who provided evidence to the panel. We note the excellent progress on the previous recommendations, and hope to see a similar response to our new recommendations listed on pages 5-6, which aim to improve services even further.

Play is defined as “freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child. Play can be fun or serious.”

It is widely considered to be a positive activity, which can have a range of health, social and developmental benefits. However, there are barriers for some children and young people, including a lack of provision, poor transport links, inappropriate, damaged or vandalised equipment, and bullying. The former Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel agreed to look at this issue in depth in 2008 and, after consulting widely with children and key stakeholders, produced a set of recommendations in early 2009.

It was agreed that these recommendations would be built into North Lincolnshire’s Play Strategy ‘Taking Play Forward’, and this was subsequently adopted by the council in June 2010. The Children’s Trust Board have accountability for outcomes and a Play Strategy Group are responsible for delivering the objectives.

It is considered good practice for scrutiny members to revisit previous reports to ensure that recommendations are being acted upon, that progress is being made and that, if required, further recommendations can be made. The People Scrutiny Panel therefore decided to receive an update from key officers in June 2012, which resulted in this short report.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The panel recommends that the council's Planning Department robustly monitors the uptake of section 106 orders with reference to playgrounds, parks and open spaces.

Recommendation 2

The panel recommends that the Director of Places, in consultation with the Director of People and the Director of Policy and Resources, ensure that play services are aligned, as far as is realistic, to the wishes of the children and young people consulted during the recent consultation on youth services.

Recommendation 3

Building upon Recommendation 2, the panel further recommends that the Director of Places explores the cost and feasibility of what the council and its partners can do to provide more youth activities during weekends and school holidays and to engage more young people in sport, free play and structured play activities. To achieve this, the panel recommends that the council works closely with community and voluntary groups and other partners to deliver, and if possible extend, activities, where, and more specifically, when they are needed. Increasing supervised or guided activities would also have the added benefit of 'policing' any intimidation or low-level bullying that might prevent younger children from taking part in play activity.

Recommendation 4

The panel recommends that the Director of Places, in consultation with the Director of People and the Director of Policy and Resources, formulates a clear plan to explore all options to achieve the efficiencies agreed by full council, whilst protecting, and if possible enhancing, activities for children and young people.

Recommendation 5

The panel recommends that the Director of Places considers the effectiveness of the community grant fund since 2008 with regard to investing in play and youth engagement proposals and schemes.

Recommendation 6

The panel recommends that the Director of Places monitors the use of the free swimming sessions that are provided, in order to gauge take up and effectiveness in engaging young people and families.

Recommendation 7

The panel recommends that the Director of Places ensures that information on both On Target and Street Sport clarifies that both are available to those aged 8 to 18. The panel further recommends that the Director also consider whether there could be savings or more efficient, joined-up services if the two schemes were amalgamated.

Recommendation 8

The panel notes that, when asked about their preferred activities, 53% of young people stated that they just wanted to 'chill' with friends. The panel recommends that the Director of People explore whether there is a need to look at re-branding youth centres and look at the popularity of existing youth centres, including what seems to work in attracting youngsters to these centres.

We would wish to see each of these recommendations acted upon by three months from this report being presented to Cabinet (i.e. by December 31 2012).

FINDINGS

This section will consider the panel's original recommendations, along with relevant work that has been undertaken by the council to improve the situation in the meantime. It will include reference to some of the discussions that were held with key officers at the meeting of the People Scrutiny Panel on June 13 2012. The next section of the findings will expand on other issues that were raised during the meeting, and which form the basis of the panel's additional recommendations listed on the previous pages.

Background

Street Sport and On Target are both schemes that deliver community-based sport and activities for children and young people, generally from Monday to Friday. The schemes are funded separately, but are co-ordinated. Both schemes can provide opportunities for people to deliver the sessions, to take part in a range of training and to develop their skills.

Original Recommendations

Original Recommendation 1

That a process be implemented to ensure that children and young people are fully supported to participate in the future development and provision of recreation activities in North Lincolnshire.

Comment

During the development of the Play Strategy 'Taking Play Forward — a Play Strategy for North Lincolnshire', comprehensive consultation with children and young people took place. Specifically, consultation was part of the council's strategy during the Playbuilder scheme to improve local playgrounds, during the development of the Pods and the redevelopment of Central Park, and as part of the Street Sport and On Target schemes. Street Sport and On Target are schemes to engage children and young people in diversionary sport and leisure activities.

Original Recommendation 2

That a more up-to-date and comprehensive audit of playgrounds and open spaces provision be carried out across North Lincolnshire.

Comment

The council completed a survey of all playgrounds in North Lincolnshire, producing a league table of worst to best. This was then used to prioritise the allocation of Playbuilder funding. It is not clear if there was an audit of open spaces.

Original Recommendation 3

That an action plan be produced to explore ways of addressing the barriers to children and young people to access recreation activities, including fear of bullying and gangs, lack of transport, cost, lack of localised provision and lack of supervised provision.

Comment

One of the council's approaches to tackle exclusion based on bullying or intimidation has been via the use of supervised Street Sport and On Target sessions, which have expanded significantly in recent years. The council has also implemented 'Energize' sessions to provide supervised activities such as swimming, cycling, arts and crafts for children and young people during the school holidays. In April 2012 the council provided funding for free transport to Street Sport and On Target. Work is in progress to inform families and young people of this provision. The council is also considering the implications of providing schemes over the weekend. Some services have been planned specifically for children with additional needs, and a female-only swimming session has also been provided.

Original Recommendation 4

That as part of any planned playgrounds or activities, consideration be given to the various age groups and more challenging adventure play equipment, with the close involvement of young people and other stakeholders, through the process from location/selection of structure to planning application.

Comment

As outlined in the comments on the original recommendation 1, extensive consultation took place during the development of the Play Strategy, as part of the Playbuilder programme and on recent major developments. This has led to a range of equipment, which is designed to be suitable and appropriately challenging and engaging to all age groups and for those with additional needs.

Original Recommendation 5

That more work be undertaken to increase the marketing of play and activities to target all young people and their families across North Lincolnshire.

Comment

The council has undertaken a range of marketing activities to promote play and activities across North Lincolnshire. Examples include posters and leaflets, inclusion in the obesity and Children Feel Safe newsletter, etc. Officers recently started planning the use of social media to promote Street Sport and On Target.

Original Recommendation 6

That the council increases the levels of maintenance in parks and open spaces, investigating the increase in Park Wardens, concentration on anti-social behaviour, graffiti, broken glass and damaged equipment.

Comment

The council now employs two mobile park keepers, and there is a realisation that this number may have to increase in the future. The park keepers play a role in keeping the parks secure and clean, passing on more serious concerns to other relevant teams for action.

Original Recommendation 7

That consideration be given to the allocation of a specific budget to Neighbourhood Services for the provision and maintenance of parks and open spaces in North Lincolnshire.

Comment

There has been no specific ring-fencing of budgets allocated to parks and open spaces. However, when developments include the provision of playgrounds, open spaces or similar, they often include a ten-year section 106 requirement for funding. Section 106 Agreements are intended to legally require developers to incorporate facilities that would meet planning requirements or benefit the community within their schemes. This does not include maintenance costs, which tend to rise year-on-year as the number of these sites increase across North Lincolnshire.

Original Recommendation 8

That within the council's new Play Strategy for 2010, it is vital that there are clear lines of communication between council services and external agencies involved with the provision of play.

Comment

The Play Strategy lists a range of internal and external partner agencies that are relevant to the encouragement of play, and two groups (the Play Strategy Group and the Play Implementation Group) were identified to lead on engagement with all relevant partners. As described previously, there are many good examples of consultation and dialogue with these partners.

Original Recommendation 9

That Section 106 agreements be closely monitored and enforced where necessary.

Comment

Section 106 Agreements are monitored through the council's Planning teams and the Public Open Space Co-ordinator. However, it was acknowledged that, previously, enforcement activity could have been more robust, however, this situation has now improved.

Original Recommendation 10

That, as part of the Building Schools for the Future Programme (BSF), the council takes full advantage of the play facilities and opportunities available for all children and young people in North Lincolnshire.

Comment

The £86.3m BSF Programme of investment is focussed on the following schools:

- Melior Community College
- Brumby Engineering College
- Invenio Academy
- The St. Lawrence Academy
- Frederick Gough School
- St. Bedes VA Academy
- St. Hughs Specialist College.

When completed in 2014/15, over 40 new or improved play facilities will be provided, including sports halls, drama and dance studios, football pitches and amphitheatres. The council has calculated that around £10.5m of BSF Programme expenditure has been, or will be, spent on play and open space facilities and will directly improve opportunities for up to 5,146 pupils of these schools. Agreements have also been reached to ensure that improved facilities are available to pupils from other schools and the wider community, so these benefits are likely to impact on many more local people. Facilities provided as part of the BSF Programme are already being used to deliver part of the council's wider outreach service offer.

Original Recommendation 11

That the panel be kept fully up to date on the Playbuilder Project at all times.

Comment

The scrutiny panel's former Chairman was invited to sit as a member of the Playbuilder Board, and regularly updated the panel on developments on an informal basis. The panel also had sight of all reports that were considered by Cabinet colleagues.

Original Recommendation 12

That everyone involved throughout this review be thanked for their participation and contribution.

Comment

All witnesses and those providing evidence were routinely thanked, informally by the scrutiny team, and also formally via the original scrutiny report.

Other Issues

A number of other issues arose during members' discussions with key officer. These are summarised below, and form the basis of the panel's additional recommendations (see pages 5-6).

CONCLUSION

Consultation with young people

Between March and July 2012 the council ran a consultation with 2,220 young people from a range of locations across North Lincolnshire. This found that 50% of young people already have activities during the week, but that 38% wanted more to do. At weekends, 44% stated that they have activities, but 48% wanted more (some expressed no preference.)

As might be expected, the young people chose a range of possible activities. The most popular activity was 'chilling' with their friends (53%), followed by physical or sporting activities (46%), creative activities such as film, drama or photography (32%), a festival or concert (30%) then adventurous activity (24%).

Appropriate Activities.

The panel heard that one weekly session of swimming had been arranged for females only, at their request. The panel welcomes the ability to tailor activities for various groups, and would wish to see this extended if the children and young people ask for this. It may be that other activities, or specifically female or male groups are preferred. Similarly, activities should always be sensitive to cultural or personal wishes.

Weekend Provision

Officers explained that they were currently considering the costs and benefits of providing Street Sport, On Target and other activities at the weekend. This could help to divert young people away from anti-social behaviour during times when complaints tend to be highest. Such a review would need to carefully consider costs to the council, how services are planned and commissioned, and how qualified volunteers are recruited and supported to meet the requirements of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

The panel believes that there have been some very encouraging developments in the three years since the former Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel's original report. Most profoundly, the Building Schools for the Future Programme has funded a large number of modern, high-value assets for use by children, young people and the wider community. The various community-based sports programmes have also been very positively received by local children and young people whilst also enabling volunteers to gain additional skills, experience and knowledge. Finally, the Pods and the flagship playground in Central Park have swiftly become important fixtures, serving people from Scunthorpe and the whole of North Lincolnshire.

The panel is happy that services continue to develop. It is our hope that activities will increasingly be 'owned' by, and delivered in, the community with only a steering and support role given by the council. All of our children and young people deserve the ability to be able to play, take part in activities or simply meet with friends across North Lincolnshire, and the panel is encouraged that we have moved forward with this in recent years. We look forward to hearing of further progress.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1

Membership of the People Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Elaine Marper (Chairman)

Cllr John Collinson (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Jonathan Evison

Cllr Susan Godfrey

Cllr David Wells

Mr Neal Craven

Mrs Angela Dunkerley

Mr William Egan

Mrs Wendy Witter.

Cllr John Wardle was also involved in this review.

