

Inclusive Outdoor Equipped Play Areas

Report by John Blair, Director, Corporate Resources

1 Purpose of Report

Following a survey of local authorities undertaken by the Scottish Government's Equal Opportunities Committee on *Inclusive Play* in June 2012 accessible by disabled children, the Scottish Government's Equal Opportunities Committee requested further information on Midlothian Council's approach. This report seeks to set out the prioritisation for any such new facilities.

2 Background

2.1 Previous Policy

In August 2004 Cabinet approved refurbishment of over 40 outdoor equipped play areas equipment due to the general lack of safety in existing provision. The equipment installed has lasted well and there have been almost no failures except for minor parts replacement over the last 8 years. The report to Cabinet set out the strategy for play and made reference to ensuring that *"play areas should be accessed by a range of users, and should be available to all"*. Therefore there was a presumption that play equipment was inclusive to all users including disabled users. This information was provided to the Scottish Government's Equal Opportunities Committee in November 2011. The Council's new policy will be submitted to the Committee for information.

The response from the Equal Opportunities Committee suggests that in the light of the survey of local authorities, Midlothian Council responds with a more explicit policy on Inclusive Play for people with disabilities.

2.2 Proposed Policy

In accordance with the Council's "Single Equality Scheme" the Council is committed to making sure that the Council provide equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination in all that we do.

In terms of provision of outdoor play equipment the Council must be mindful of its duties in respect of the various legislation relating to equal access to such facilities. The central issue therefore, is that there should be good play opportunities that are open and accessible to all and take positive action to remove barriers, promote integration, so that disabled children and non-disabled children can participate together in inclusive play. Access to free and enjoyable play spaces is especially important for disabled children and children living with other forms of social or economic disadvantage.

Taking these points into account it is proposed that given the distribution of Midlothian's settlements, the provision of bespoke inclusive play equipment should be prioritised at town centre parks where there is usually suitable nearby parking and appropriate path access to the play facility. At town centre parks where there is not sufficiently good disabled access to the play facility improved access be prioritised over new equipment.

It is proposed the town centre play parks and Vogrie Country Park are considered for prioritisation to include Inclusive Play facilities for disabled people are:

Bonnyrigg, King George V Park
 Dalkeith Kings Park
 Loanhead, King George V Park
 Mayfield, Mayfield Park
 Newtongrange, Welfare Park
 Penicuik, Penicuik Park
 Gorebridge, Vogrie Country Park

Other, non-town centre play areas, which includes all other Council owned play areas will continue to provide for all ages and abilities and opportunities to improve provision for disabled users will be identified through park quality assessments, actions prioritised accordingly and implemented as budgets allow.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no resource implications consequent upon this report over and above existing resources but developer contributions for play provision may in some cases be directed towards inclusive play where appropriate and in particular to off-site provision within town centre parks identified as the key locations for such facilities.

3.2 Risk

The risk of not adopting a clear policy on Inclusive Play may result in the Council not fulfilling responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 which require the Council to make reasonable adjustments to policy practice and procedures and make physical adjustments to allow, inter alia, access to adventure playgrounds, play areas in park.

3.3 Policy

Strategy

By providing a clear basis upon which to support inclusiveness in Midlothian's open spaces in principal settlements, will support:

Objective 3: Maintaining Midlothian as a safe place to live, work and visit.

Objective 4: Conserving and improving Midlothian's environment.

Objective 5 Improving Opportunities for People in Midlothian.

Objective 6 Delivering Responsive, Efficient and Effective Services to the People of Midlothian.

Consultation

No public consultation has taken place to date. The Council's Access Panel, Equalities Officer and Development Management have been consulted.

Equalities

The report aims to address the main priorities for providing better opportunities for disabled people to use Council key play facilities and comply with the Equality Act 2010.

Sustainability

The provision of Inclusive Play as budgets allow will enable the Council to introduce new play features on sustainable basis.

3.4 IT Issues

There are no IT issues.

4 Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:

Adopt the policy to prioritise the town centre parks as the key sites for locating Inclusive Play and to continue to improve access to play facilities through park quality assessments.

12 October 2012

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Background Papers: