

**Scottish Government Funding for Children's Outdoor Play –  
Refurbishment of Play Areas 2023/24****Report by Derek Oliver, Chief Officer Place****Report for Decision****1 Recommendations**

Council is recommended to:

- Approve a capital expenditure budget of £0.197 million in the General Services Capital Plan, to be fully phased in 2023/24 and to be fully financed by £0.197 million of Scottish Government Capital Grant funding;
- Approve that the proposal to install and/or construct the outdoor play equipment be progressed; and
- Note the indicative proposals for expenditure of Scottish Government Capital Grant in financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26.

**2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to advise on the proposed expenditure of £0.197 million in Financial Year 2023/24 across the council play estate to replace equipment that has either been removed or requires replacement along with appropriate safety surfacing and, where possible, an access path to the refurbished play area in accordance with equalities legislation.

Additionally, it is intended to provide top up funds to enable the implementation of pump tracks at Rosewell and Roslin. The report also provides an outline plan of future funding of play areas for financial years (FY) 2024/25 and 2025/26.

**Date** 2 June 2023**Report Contact:**

James Kinch, Land Resources Manager

[James.Kinch@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:James.Kinch@midlothian.gov.uk)

### **3 Background/Main Body of Report**

**3.1** During financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22, £5m of capital funding for children's outdoor play was allocated by the Scottish Government and distributed between each of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland.

**3.2** Midlothian Council was awarded £98k in FY 2020/21 and £97k on FY 2021/22. The Capital Plan and Asset Management board (CPAMB) approved expenditure of the capital funding as follows:

- FY 2020/21 (£98k) – Equipment in Waterfall Park and Kings Park Dalkeith
- FY 2021/22 (£97k) – Removal and/or replacement of equipment including installing inclusive play kit, access paths and new surfacing (see detail in Appendix B)

**3.3** In August 2022, the Scottish Government advised that capital funding of £50 million was agreed to be distributed between each of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland. Distribution is based on population 0-14 (93%) and rurality (7%).

The £50m funding is allocated across Scotland as follows:

- 2023/24 - £10m
- 2024/25 - £15m
- 2025/26 - £25m

With Midlothian's allocation as follows:

- 2023/24 - £197k
- 2024/25 - £295k
- 2025/26 - £492k

### **Proposal**

**3.4** In FY 2023/24, the Scottish Government allocation to Midlothian is £197k of capital grant funding. It is proposed to prioritise play areas using the following criteria:

- where equipment is already removed due to risk level or because it is unrepairable, and replace with new, upgraded equipment offering a similar play experience;
- recommended for removal following play inspections and replace with new, upgraded, equipment offering a similar play experience;
- increase opportunities for accessible play by providing more equipment, paths and surfaced facilities that can be used by wheelchair users;
- top up the funding from developer contributions, that following the pandemic impacts; is now insufficient to finance the pump tracks at Roslin and Rosewell; to enable them to be completed.

The proposed sites are listed in Appendix C and a detailed costing for these projects will be prepared for the CPAMB in July 2023.

**3.5** In FY 2024/25 the proposal for expenditure is broadly as follows:

- replacement and upgrade of damaged surfaces of rubberised wetpour areas at 10 play areas; and
- introducing bound surfaces and paths, where required, to 8 play areas to reduce maintenance and create improved inclusivity for disability users.

The proposed sites are included in Appendix D and detailed costs will be provided during the third quarter of FY 2023/24.

**3.6** In FY 2025/26 it is proposed that the replacement and enhancement of feature play equipment across the play estate in Midlothian is prioritised. The equipment being considered for installation will focus on larger play areas in the main settlements and at Vogrie Country Park. The objective is to replace failing equipment and/or upgrade to more challenging equipment at these locations. The intention is also to replace non-functioning flying foxes/cableways at key locations. A plan for the proposals will be circulated to elected members in advance of the programme being put forward for final approval.

**3.7** In addition to the proposals in relation to the Scottish Government funding, there are developer contributions allocated for children's outdoor play at various locations around Midlothian consequent upon housing developments. During FY 2023/24, approval will be sought to expend funds allocated for play area renewals in Dalkeith and Gorebridge.

## **4 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)**

### **4.1 Resource**

#### Capital

The capital costs of the proposed supply and/or installation of play equipment are anticipated to incur expenditure of up to £0.197m, with the purchases/installations/works fully phased in the 2023/24 financial year.

The capital expenditure will be fully financed by £0.197m of Scottish Government Capital Grant. There is expenditure of £0.034m already accounted for from FY 2023/24 to address an overspend in FY 2022/23.

The proposed equipment to be installed will be amended to accord with the available budget once survey work is completed and tender prices are received. If more of the priorities for equipment and works contained in Appendix C can be accommodated, then these will be progressed up to the budget limit of £197k. Equally, if the prices returned exceed this sum the number of items will be reduced to bring final expenditure within budget.

Costed proposals for spend of the Scottish Government Capital Allocation in financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26 will be prepared for CPAMB in quarter three of the year preceding the year of proposed expenditure.

#### Revenue

As the capital costs are fully grant funded, there are no loan charges implications from the above. The ongoing maintenance of these facilities will be met from existing budgets.

#### **4.2 Digital**

N/A

#### **4.3 Risk**

The funds can only be spent on children's outdoor play equipment by the Council. The risk of overspend will be prevented by setting fixed budgets including contingencies as part of the procurement process.

The respective equipment/works will be procured in accordance with the council's procurement procedure.

Upon completion of the project, grounds maintenance going forward will incur little or no extra cost, since equipment is being replaced within existing play areas and the service is already maintaining these areas. Consequently, maintenance of each site will be met from the existing Land and Countryside Service budget.

The expected timeline for completion of the supply and installation of equipment is by 31 March 2024 and therefore in compliance with the timescale requirements set out in the Scottish Government Offer of Grant.

#### **4.4 Ensuring Equalities (if required a separate IIA must be completed)**

All the proposed play equipment is designed for inclusivity and where there is an opportunity to replace with equipment for use by people with mobility or disability issues, such as roundabouts which cater for wheelchair users, this is included in the programme.

#### **4.5 Additional Report Implications (See Appendix A)**

See Appendix A

### **Appendices**

**Appendix A – Additional Report Implications**

**Appendix B – Summary of works completed 2022/23**

**Appendix C – Provisional list of proposed play equipment 2023/24**

**Appendix D – Proposed locations for wetpour surfacing repairs 2024/25**

## APPENDIX A – Report Implications

### A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

This project will contribute to one of the long-term outcomes of the Single Plan 2022/23 for the Sustainable Growth theme under, “*Places – that are sustainable, and attractive to live and work*” within Midlothian while providing opportunities for healthy lifestyles.

### A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- ☐ Holistic Working
- ☐ Hub and Spoke
- ☒ Modern
- ☒ Sustainable
- ☐ Transformational
- ☐ Preventative
- ☒ Asset-based
- ☒ Continuous Improvement
- ☐ One size fits one
- ☐ None of the above

### A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- ☐ One Council Working with you, for you
- ☒ Preventative and Sustainable
- ☒ Efficient and Modern
- ☐ Innovative and Ambitious
- ☐ None of the above

### A.4 Delivering Best Value

No negative impacts.

### A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The programme of works focuses on replacement or equipment that has either been removed already or will require to be removed there is little scope for meaningful community consultation. Additionally, the pump tracks have been subject to community engagement which will continue until completed.

### A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The quality of Midlothian’s Open Spaces is a key measure in the annual Citizens Panel survey and the new equipment will add to the quality of the amenity. Delivering improvements to open spaces is embedded in Land and Countryside Services’ performance monitoring matrix.

### A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Replacing play equipment in existing outdoor equipped play areas and introduction of new pump tracks will mean communities do not suffer a diminution in amenity and consequent reduction in opportunities for healthy living with potential impact on reducing risk of poor health.

#### **A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development**

The projects support components of the Council's Single Midlothian Plan under the Sustainable Growth theme as described in Section 4.4.