

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 6
10 JUNE 2013	Public Report

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services

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CHILDREN'S PLAY SERVICES

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress relating to the development of alternative play provision.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 For the Committee to consider the progress report on the development of alternative play provision in the city.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In March 2013 the council voted to further cut the Play Service budget. The savings required together with the unrealised savings identified in the 2010 Medium Term Financial Plan has meant that the continuation of the Play Service as a council funded offer is untenable. Play is not a statutory service and many authorities across the region have long since closed their play services.

- 3.2 It is recognised that the Play Centres are valuable community assets and the play activity that is delivered from them is of great benefit to children. It is desirable, therefore, that they remain as a central resource to the children, families and communities they currently serve. To that end Children's Services and Neighbourhoods have been working closely to secure a sustainable solution for each of the eight play centres so that they can continue to deliver some form of alternative play focused activity. The work being undertaken, predominantly by Neighbourhoods staff, to achieve this has involved:

- Initial meetings with potential and emerging community groups
- Second follow up meetings with these community groups
- Introductions to Can do Communities*
- Can do Communities workshops with community groups to support them in the understanding of the asset transfer process

The workshops with community groups will be completed by the end of May 2013. By that point decisions can be made in relation to the capacity of the individual groups to move forward with the transfer of the community play centres.

Decisions will also be made at the beginning of June in relation to actions needed to support those community groups who are not yet ready to assume the responsibility for the individual play centres. Plans will also be put in place to secure the continued running of some or all of these centres where there is a current lack of local capacity.

- 3.3 An up to date appraisal of the progress of the discussions with community groups in relation to the transfer of the Play Centre assets can be found in Appendix 1.

*Can Do Communities is a charitable organisation that works with community groups to provide them with the knowledge and skills to manage the process of asset transfer. The organisation Can Do Communities has been procured by Neighbourhoods to work with developing community groups to support them in the transfer of the Play Centre assets. In supporting groups they will offer advice and guidance in relation to the following:

Community Health Checks	Asset Transfer	Business Planning	Funding Advice
Capacity Building	Charitable Entity Options	Charity & Company Law	Community Buildings
Community Engagement	Community Participation	Employment Issues	Financial Management
Bid Writing	Governance Documents	Trustee Training	Lease Negotiation
Knowledge Exchange Visits	Marketing	Lease Negotiation	Charity Set Up
Template Policy Development	Skills Audits	Staff & Volunteers	Strategy Development
Income Generation	Relationship Reviews	Project Management	Mapping The Future

3.4 Children's Services has responsibility to support the children and members of staff during the period up to the closure of the council run play services. Play staff are currently in the middle of a consultation period which puts their jobs at risk of being made redundant. Managers are working hard to support play staff and to help them to find alternative solutions to compulsory redundancy.

Children who use the play centres have been supported by staff to understand the implications of closure. All of the play centres have received a small amount of funding to support a celebratory event which marks the contribution that play has made over the years to families and communities in Peterborough.

Protocols to support the closure process from the perspective of staff, children and buildings management can be found in Appendix 2.

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 The eight centres are:

- Chatteris Play centre, Welland
- Chestnuts Play centre, Eastfield
- Copeland Play centre, , South Bretton
- Crofts Corner Play centre, Essendyke, Bretton
- Paston Farm Adventure Centre,
- Spinney Play centre, Ravensthorpe
- Thistle Drive Play Centre, Stanground
- Tunnel Play centre

Not all of the community groups interested in running the play centres will have the capacity to assume this responsibility immediately.

Some of the play centres, because of the condition of the buildings, might not be viable to maintain long term.

Work still needs to be undertaken to secure the community vision for each centre and the nature of the activities, specifically some for alternative play, that it is hoped will continue to be delivered out of these centres.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Since April 2013 significant work has taken place to support emerging, and also established, community groups to assume responsibility for the running of the play centres. Work will continue to support these groups to go through the legal and practical processes of asset transfer. Supporting community groups to have the capacity to run, operate and deliver services from these centres is the only way that some form of alternative play activity can continue in these communities.

Interim management arrangements may need to be put in place to support those groups who are not yet ready to assume the responsibility of managing the assets. It might be necessary to close on a permanent basis some of the buildings due to their state of repair.

The council run Play Service has been recognised as offering valuable support to families and communities and this has been recognised through a series of celebratory events that took place in play centres during the last week of May.

Neighbourhoods and Children's Services will continue to work closely together to support community groups to secure the continued use of the play centre buildings for the delivery of an alternative play based offer.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Continued support of the work described in this report will ensure that the Play Centres remain viable facilities within the individual communities in which they are located.

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 Members are requested to endorse the processes described in this report and recognise the progress that has been made in securing a viable future for the Play Centres.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 8.1 None

9. APPENDICES

- 9.1 Appendix 1 Play Centre Summary Review
Appendix 2 Protocols to support the closure process

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