



COMHAIRLE PLAYPARK RENEWAL PROGRAMME UPDATE

Report by Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to permit the Comhairle to consider further the matter of investment of Scottish Government Playpark Renewal funding and the mechanisms for investment in the playpark estate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 In August 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills confirmed a government programme that would provide funding to local authorities to invest in renewal of playparks with the aim of creating increased access for children to quality play in their own community.
- 2.2 The funding was provided in instalments over a period of five years from 2021 to 2026. Over the total period of the funding, the Comhairle is scheduled to receive a total sum of £372,000. The Scottish Government has placed a number of conditions upon the use and purpose of the grant funding.
- 2.3 Initially, it was agreed to use £30,000 of department funds (not grant monies) to appoint a short-term post of Playparks Project Officer with the task of evaluating current provisions and consult with children, schools and communities in the development of a renewal strategy using the grant fund to prioritise renewal of Comhairle owned and/or operated playparks.
- 2.4 In April 2023, a Report was presented to the Education, Sport and Children's Services Committee presenting the findings of the review undertaken by the Playparks Project Officer. It included a list of projects in priority order and a recommendation to allocate the grant funds in full to the completion of each project in that order until the funds were exhausted.
- 2.5 Upon embarking on technical appraisal and development of costings of the proposed projects, issues were identified with the sufficiency of the funding and complexities of delivery, resulting in a need for further consideration of proposals and to establish a decision about how to proceed.
- 2.6 Prompt action is required upon agreement of projects to ensure grant funding from previous years of the scheme is utilised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle:**
 - a) **approve the proposed playparks eligible for grant funding, as detailed in paragraph 6.7 of the Report, and**
 - b) **authorise the Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services and the Chief Officer, Assets and Infrastructure to agree improvements and allocation of grant funds to approved playparks based on technical appraisal and all available grant funds are distributed.**

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Appendix: Corporate Playpark Renewal Programme – Project Report
Background Papers: ESCS Committee Report: Corporate Playpark Renewal Programme 25/04/23

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	To-date the Comhairle has received funding of £123,000 for the renewal of playparks and is expected to receive a further £249,000, subject to confirmation of works being undertaken. This provides a total project budget of £372,000. In addition, £30,000 of department funds were committed to the appointment of the fixed-term playparks officer. It is essential, both in terms of retaining existing funds and in being able to draw down future funds, that very prompt progress is made in commencement of agreed projects.
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	It is a condition of the funding that it is used only on council owned, managed, or maintained facilities. The fund is available to improve existing assets but is not sufficient to undertake all required playground renewal across the Comhairle estate. Prioritisation is needed.
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	Strategic Risk Register: None Financial Risk: Failure to act quickly to progress renewal projects will result in default and forfeit of the grant.
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	Support Children, Families and Young People: - Support children and their families to be health and active.
Environmental Impact	Renewal of playparks in communities will enhance the amenity and improve the immediate local environment.
Consultation	The Playparks Project Officer has already undertaken extensive consultation with communities, including children, schools, community representatives and organisations in the compiling of the original report.

BACKGROUND

5.1 In 2021, the Scottish Government announced a programme of investment for local authorities to facilitate renewal of playparks across the country. This forms part of a wider commitment to ensure

all children have access to quality play in their own community. The programme, agreed between Scottish Government and COSLA leaders, committed £55m of funding, to be paid across five financial years from 2021 to 2026.

- 5.2 The intimated allocation of capital funding to the Comhairle as a share of the £55m is set out in the table below. Payments for the first three years have been received.

Year	Capital Allocation
2021-22	£29,000
2022-23	£32,000
2023-24	£62,000
2024-25	£93,000
2025-26	£156,000
Total	£372,000

- 5.3 The conditions of funding indicate that projects should be identified based on information already held about the council's playpark estate and evaluation of condition and sufficiency through Playground Sufficiency Assessments (PSAs). Inclusivity and accessibility are expected to be considerations when identifying renewal options and consultation with children and community are identified as important elements in developing a plan.
- 5.4 Upon receipt of the notification of the programme, it was agreed that the Education and Children's Serviced Department would act as the lead service for development and delivery of it.
- 5.4 In support of compliance with grant conditions, the Comhairle used existing department funds to appoint a Playparks Project Officer to undertake a review of the sufficiency and accessibility of the current estate, consult with stakeholders and use this information to develop a report that prioritised projects within the Comhairle playpark estate for investment.

DETAIL

- 6.1 The Scottish Government programme set out four principles to be applied by authorities when planning playpark renewal projects.
- **Principle 1:** Children, young people, and families are best placed to inform what quality play looks like to them, and should therefore be involved throughout the process, from the review of parks through to helping design the renewal of individual play parks. This is in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which sets out that every child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely. The views of children, young people and families provide valuable insight into how they interact with parks and facilities.
 - **Principle 2:** All children have the right to play under the UNCRC Article 31. Access to play should be as wide-reaching and inclusive as possible, ensuring that children, young people, and families have easy local access to play spaces where they feel safe and comfortable to use them. Inclusiveness looks different for everyone, so meaningful engagement with the children who will be using your play parks is fundamental.
 - **Principle 3:** Play parks and spaces should seek to bring together local communities, children and young people of all ages and abilities, creating a greater sense of place and cohesion. The design

and renewal of play parks should be done in a way that best meets the social and environmental needs of communities and its children and young people.

- **Principle 4:** The renewal programme will be strengthened by sharing and learning from best practice and making use of existing national resources. There are several other tools that can help local authorities to take a strategic and evidence-based approach to the design and renewal of their local play parks. Tools such as Play Value Assessments, an internal audit and inventory of play parks, and existing legislation and standards can provide a helpful basis for prioritising work.

6.2 In addition to the above principles, a number of important conditions were applied to the use of the grant.

- Identification of playparks should be informed by existing audit and inventory of the council's play estate.
- Renewal plans for specific playparks need to take account of the views of children and families that use or expect to use the facility.
- Prioritisation should be based on immediate need for renewal and take account of condition, time since built or last refurbished, user feedback, community demographics, availability of other facilities and degrees of accessibility.
- Projects need to consider inclusivity for all users, both in terms of equipment installation and wide amenity such as paths, surfaces, seating, toilets etc.
- Environmental sustainability needs to be considered when designing renewal plans and procuring equipment.

Furthermore, the Scottish Government defined requirements for all proposed projects. Funded playparks must be:

- council owned, managed, or maintained,
- be formally recognised as being designated for play,
- free to access,
- open to all, and
- primarily aimed at users aged 0-14.

It is expected that the grant is used on a 'direct spend' basis and intended to supplement the council's expected existing work on play sufficiency assessments. Comhairle planning officers are now undertaking these assessments.

MUGAs, ball courts or dedicated sports fields are excluded.

6.3 Grant conditions require that the council report annually in respect of the following:

- total number of playparks within the estate,
- the methodology for allocation of funding,
- the number of parks that have been identified for renewal,
- the number of those that have had work completed, and
- the nature of the work undertaken.

To date, the Comhairle has reported a nil return on the funding allocated and work undertaken. It is critical for retention of the grant that prompt work is undertaken upon confirmation of the decision of the Comhairle about how it wishes to proceed.

6.4 In respect of the grant requirements set out above, the Education and Children's Services Department undertook a review and consultation, supported by the Playparks Project Officer. This culminated in a

Report being presented in April 2023 that proposed a priority list of eleven projects in nine locations eligible for support, with funding allocated on the basis of that priority until all grant was distributed. The report was subsequently agreed by members.

- 6.5 Following approval of the Report, a technical appraisal of the projects was carried out that identified issues relating to difficulty of delivery in the way some works were specified and, critically, costs for the works proposed were very significantly above the total available grant through to 2026, with an estimate in the range of £530,000 to £780,000 required to complete all initially agreed works. This would have resulted in only a small number of the agreed projects being able to be funded from the grant and the majority would see no improvement or renewal.
- 6.6 In light of this appraisal, and in consideration of the consultation works already undertaken to satisfy the conditions of the grant, it is proposed to retain the playpark sites identified in the 2023 Report on an unprioritised list to receive grant funding. An allocation of grant to be made based on a fair distribution to each location considering technical assessment of what can be delivered at that site. This approach will ensure that more playparks will receive support for improvement in facilities.
- 6.7 The playpark locations identified for funding in 2023 were:
- Leverburgh
 - Cearns
 - Bayhead
 - Tarbert (Scott Road)
 - Castlebay
 - Daliburgh
 - Vatisker
 - Plasterfield
 - North Uist (Sgoil Uibhist a Tuath)
- 6.8 To-date, the Comhairle has received £123,000 and this funding will be allocated promptly to projects at the above locations based on technical appraisal of delivery. Further funding of £93,000 is expected in 2024-25 and £156,000 in 2025-26. Upon receipt of this subsequent funding by the Comhairle, as many as possible of the remaining sites will be allocated a share of the grant to undertake improvement works until all funds are distributed.
- 6.9 It is proposed that, in respect of the above, the Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services and the Chief Officer, Assets and Infrastructure are authorised to determine collaboratively the specific improvements and allocation of the share of the grant funding considering additional consultation, where that is required. In doing so, officers will ensure that as many projects as possible benefit from the funding. A Report will be presented to a future sitting of the committee detailing grant spend and works undertaken.

CONCLUSION

- 7.1 A decision from members is sought in relation to how the Comhairle wishes to proceed with the use of the grant funding. It is important that prompt work is then undertaken to ensure the grant is spent in compliance with its associated conditions.