



Subject:	Playground Accessibility Update
Date:	12 th May 2026
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Strategic Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Director Resources, Fleet and Open Spaces & Streetscene

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update members on issues relating to accessibility in playgrounds. Members are reminded that, as a result of a Issue raised at the People and Communities Committee meeting on 5th August 2025, it was agreed a report should be submitted outlining current standards of accessibility in playgrounds and what steps have been taken to date, an overview of engagement and research that has been undertaken with children directly, together with the potential of mapping the accessibility of play parks across the city for users.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	To note the work that has been delivered to date, or is currently underway, to improve accessibility in council-maintained playgrounds
2.2	To note the engagement and research that has been undertaken with children directly.
2.3	To explore the development of an online map showing accessibility of council-maintained playgrounds.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Current standard of accessibility in playgrounds</u>
3.1	In April 2024 council commissioned an external consultant to carry out an audit of play value and accessibility at all council-maintained playgrounds. The scores allocated for each playground relate to existing features, types of play opportunities available and their accessibility for a range of age groups and abilities. Site reports, produced as part of the audit, now provide a detailed breakdown of current standards of accessibility in all 105 council- maintained playgrounds (see Appendix 1 - Example Play Value & Accessibility Audit Report). Scores are now used to identify playgrounds most in need of refurbishment under our annual Playground Improvement Programme.
	<u>Steps to improve Accessibility within our Playgrounds Taken to Date</u>
3.2	Since 2012 we have refurbished over fifty of our existing playgrounds across the city, investing over £8 million under our annual Playground Improvement Programme, providing more inclusive places for children of all abilities to enjoy.
3.3	The Play Value & Accessibility Audit (2024) now informs sites selection under PIP and is used as a design guide to help deliver more accessible playgrounds going forward.
3.4	Council's Play Equipment Supply Contract (2021-2026) allows us to procure equipment for use in playground improvement works. The supply contract will be retendered in the coming months and will include an additional five items of accessible equipment e.g. wheelchair accessible, swing, see-saw and trampolines, providing a wider palette of equipment to improve accessibility in playgrounds.

3.5	Communication Boards, displaying symbols to help children with limited language skills express themselves, are currently being installed in all council-maintained playgrounds, work is expected to be complete by the November 2026.
3.6	In 2020 council installed special needs swing-seats in all playgrounds with suitable swing frames. There are now support swing-seats in more than 50 council-maintained playgrounds across the city. Installation of support swing-seats will continue to be delivered under PIP.
3.7	An Accessible Signage Working Group, comprised of council officers, consultants and representatives from Council's Disability Advisory Panel was set up in January 2026 to design a fully accessible entrance sign for use in the Reconnected Belfast project (Waterworks and Alexandra Park). It is hoped this sign could be used as a template in other parks and open spaces.
3.8	Capital funding has been secured to develop a new accessible, sensory play facility at Woodvale Park on the site of the disused bowling green. It is envisaged that this project can be used as a pilot for other projects moving forward.
3.9	Changing Places facilities have been agreed for Waterworks and Alexandra Park as part of the Reconnected Belfast project; a feasibility study is currently underway for another Changing Places facility in proximity to the Woodvale Park Sensory Garden site.
3.10	Capital funding has been secured to improve accessibility at Musgrave Park Therapy Garden. Improvements include installation of wheelchair accessible equipment and a sensory trail; completion is due in June 2026.
3.11	Officers participated in Council's International Day for People with Disabilities 2025, giving a presentation on accessible play equipment and receiving feedback from attendees, including requests for an online resource that could help parents / carers to locate suitable play facilities that cater for a range of needs.
3.12	Council Officers continue to attend quarterly meetings of the Regional Play Forum with other councils to share knowledge and guidance on improving accessible play provision.

3.13	<p><u>Overview of engagement and research that had been undertaken with children</u></p> <p>In 2024 Council commissioned Playboard NI to produce a Play Assessment Report, establishing a baseline of existing play provision across the city. As part of the process PlayBoard NI undertook consultation with children and received 142 online responses.</p>
3.14	<p>Consultation with children has been undertaken for all major capital schemes through local schools and youth groups e.g. Reconnected Belfast (Waterworks & Alexandra Park), this work is led by colleagues in Property & Projects Department.</p>
3.15	<p>Where feasible engagement with local users, including children, is undertaken for PIP, examples include drop-in information sharing sessions, on-site discussions and one to one meetings.</p>
3.16	<p>Consultation was carried out with representatives from Michell House School and Glenveagh School in 2025 regarding the design of council's communication boards for use in playgrounds.</p>
3.17	<p><u>Mapping accessibility of playgrounds</u></p> <p>The council website currently lists all council-maintained playgrounds, giving their location and opening times however there is currently no information on how accessible the playgrounds are. There is potential to create an online resource showing playground accessibility, however a detailed audit of all accessible equipment and its location would be required before developing a format to present the information online with guidance from colleagues in Corporate Communications and Digital Services.</p>
3.18	<p>Members should note Playboard NI are keen to develop an online, regional map that includes inclusive play provision, Council would have an opportunity to feed into this work and help create a central database for play across N. Ireland.</p>
3.19	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Development of a BCC online map for playground accessibility would require additional resource, to audit existing provision and create an online resource to inform potential users / visitors.</p>
3.20	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>

	None
4.0	Appendices
4.1	None