



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Playground Maintenance and Inspections</b>
<b>Date:</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> December 2017
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Nigel Grimshaw, Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department, ext 3260
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director, City & Neighbourhood Services Department, ext 3460 Alan McHaffie, Senior Woodland/Recreation Manager

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

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the improvements made in the inspection/maintenance and management of playgrounds and how the Council is striving to make all playgrounds as inclusive and accessible as reasonably practicable.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>consider the update set out in the report and to note the positive collaborative work between C&amp;NS and Legal Services to address risks associated with a growing culture of litigation related to our parks.</li></ul>

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>The Council’s playground portfolio has increased significantly over the past number of years to 99 playgrounds and this has occurred primarily as the result of Local Government Reform in 2015 when the Council took on the ownership and maintenance of an additional 15 playgrounds from Lisburn and Castlereagh Council. In addition to this, other new playgrounds have been added to our playground portfolio as part of environmental improvement projects such as the Connswater Community Greenway scheme.</p>
3.2	<p><b>Playground Inspections</b></p> <p>City and Neighbourhood Services has been reviewing the way in which the Council’s playgrounds are inspected. Previously the Council recorded playground checks by way of a paper inspection sheet for each individual playground, each day of the year however this method of recording playground inspections proved to be very labour intensive, but yet the Council is legally obligated to archive this information for up to 21 years from the inspection dates.</p>
3.3	<p>Our Department has since introduced a digital system for playground inspections which has been operating for the last two years. The new hand held digital system allows Playground Inspectors to undertake checks on every individual piece of playground apparatus along with the ability to attach multiple photographs. This new paperless inspection system has proven to be very successful and has removed the cumbersome task of archiving paper inspection sheets. In addition to this, the new digital inspection system allows our Playground Inspectors to electronically send Priority one repair requests directly to Facilities Management along with photographs of the defective equipment. This new method on inspecting playgrounds and generating instant repair requests has greatly increased the turnaround time for the more urgent repairs.</p>
3.4	<p>In addition to our own in-house playground inspections, our Department employs an independent Playground Inspector to inspect all our playgrounds on an annual basis, ensuring that all our playgrounds comply with the European safety standards BS EN 1176 &amp; 1177. The independent inspection reports are also used to identify and award an overall ‘<i>Quality Score</i>’ for each individual playground which assists when deciding where we recommend allocating the annual capital budget for the following year’s playground refurbishment programme.</p>

**Playground Repairs**

3.5 Our Playground Inspectors have been equipped to undertake their own small scale minor repairs and maintenance operations which has reduced the amount of work requests going to our colleagues in Facilities Management and helps maintain the quality of service. Monthly meetings continue to be held between C&NS and Facilities Management which allow us to review and monitor on-going/outstanding repairs.

**Playground signage/Frequency of Inspections & Accessibility**

3.6 We have recently reviewed the playground inspection programme. To inform this, over a period of time we reviewed playground usage and repairs and developed a risk profile for each playground. We undertook a benchmarking exercise with Birmingham City Council, as they had devised a specific risk assessment criteria for playgrounds which looked at the size of the Park and where the playground was situated as well as any history of previous vandalism etc. (See Appendix 1 – risk assessment used by Birmingham City Council to categorise frequency of playground inspections). We undertook a similar exercise in collaboration with our Park Managers and Playground Inspectors using the Birmingham City Council’s model and established our own recommended frequency of playground inspections (See Appendix 2 – BCC proposed frequency of playground inspections).

3.7 As part of this process Legal Services carried out a vital challenge role and endorsed the approach as one which would help defend future public liability cases. Legal Services also asked us as part of our ongoing review to look at *playground signage*, in particular how we communicate the appropriate age range for items of equipment to parents and users. It would be our intention to roll out the new signage and revised inspection frequencies by the end of March 2018.

**Accessible playground equipment**

3.8 We currently have an ever increasing element of accessible playground equipment in all of our playgrounds, however we acknowledge there is much more work to do to make them even more inclusive. That said we continue to install playground equipment that is challenging, fun to use and inclusive for everyone (See Appendix 3 – some examples of inclusive playground equipment)

**Finance and Resource Implications**

3.9 None.

3.10	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></b></p> <p>The process in this report will be subject to the Council's existing equality screening process.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Playground risk assessment format used by Birmingham City Council</p> <p>Appendix 2 - BCC proposed frequency of playground inspections</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Examples of 'Inclusive' playground equipment installed in BCC playgrounds</p>