

CRIME AND DISORDER SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday 25 January 2024.

Present: Cllr Pauline Beall (Chair), Cllr Paul Rowling (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman and Cllr Alan Watson.

Officers: Iain Robinson, Mike Smith (R&IG), Stephen Bowerbank, Keith Jackson, Neil Mitchell (CS,E&C) and Gary Woods (CS).

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Sylvia Walmsley.

CD/29/23 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CD/30/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CD/31/23 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on 21 December 2023 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 21 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CD/32/23 Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision: Quality and Distribution, Maintenance, and Physical Accessibility

The third evidence-gathering session for the Committee's ongoing Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision: Quality and Distribution, Maintenance, and Physical Accessibility comprised consideration of a submission from the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Town Centres Development service.

Led by the SBC Assistant Director – Town Centre Development, and supported by the SBC Programme Delivery Manager, a report was presented in response to the following key lines of enquiry:

- Town Centres Development department's responsibility for development of new facilities (brief outline including key personnel and their roles): The team was made up of a broad range of roles with the focus on overseeing and co-ordinating the development, design and delivery of capital projects, predominantly under the funding umbrellas of the Levelling-Up Fund, Towns Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Future High Streets Fund, as well as town centre business engagement and market

management. The management and delivery of the new Stockton waterfront scheme required close liaison with the developers.

- Interdepartmental consultations on new facilities (i.e. how this works / what is the process?): The inclusion of formal play space and equipment within the new Stockton waterfront park was established as a fundamental element of the space at concept stage and through the preliminary design process in 2021. The SBC Town Centres Development team relied upon the expertise and knowledge of colleagues within SBC Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure as plans for the urban park were in development, particularly in regard to play equipment. This collaboration, along with public consultation in summer 2022, led to a design brief for the play space being developed by Ryder Architects in October 2022.

Since then, officers from both SBC Town Centres Development and SBC Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure have attended workshops and meetings to refine the design of the park, and have formed part of the appraisal panel for prospective play equipment providers as part of the initial procurement phase for play equipment from a quality, aesthetics, accessibility and sustainability (choice of materials) perspective – subsequent queries and challenge have been raised by both directorates in relation to guarantees, spares, play surfacing, play value and safety. The interrelationship between Council teams extended to site visits and individual design meetings, as required, alongside the architect design team.

Further refinement to specific elements of equipment and play areas were still to be made, with further input from SBC Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure colleagues intended. Given the Council was potentially oversubscribed in terms of equipment, identifying best 'play value' would be central to discussions.

- Summary of new and improved play / informal sport provision under the Town Centres programme (including new Stockton waterfront plans): Led by the Town Centres Development team, new and improved play / informal sports provision had been delivered, or was under development, at Stockton waterfront (with the intention of using naturally differing levels as part of the offer), Romano Park (complete), Victoria Park (complete), and Snaiths Field (still in preliminary design stage – likely to focus on enhancements of the existing offer).
- Understanding of revenue commitments around large-scale play facilities (historic and future projections): As part of the assessment process for Stockton waterfront play equipment providers, the sustainability and quality of materials was a key consideration in regard to minimising maintenance liabilities and the need to replace equipment. Warranties and guarantees on equipment, along with spare parts, had also been sought as part of the procurement / design of play equipment and play areas to cover any issues or defects with equipment in the short-term. Furthermore, allowance for some maintenance and repair / replacement packages had been included within the initial costing for equipment, minimising revenue commitments maintenance as far as possible in the early years of operation. Beyond this, longer-term revenue requirements would be picked up and included as part of the future MTFP budget-setting process, with detailed work undertaken already with colleagues across the Council to assess the revenue impact of the park in its entirety from its completion in early-2026.

Other play facilities referenced within the report would be maintained within existing revenue budgets for play and open space.

Whilst the report focused mainly on the new Stockton waterfront plans, the Committee began its questioning on the developments at Snaiths Field. It was reiterated that plans for this site revolved around building on what was already there (akin to what had happened at Romano Park), though Members were advised that fitness equipment aimed at adults was unlikely to feature since there was little evidence that this apparatus was well used – indeed, there was a desire to veer away from this type of provision due to the liabilities it carried and vandalism it can attract (Members subsequently noted evidence of both these aspects at Kiora Hall, Roseworth).

Staying with the Snaiths Field offer, Members asked if maintenance of this particular site lay with Yarm Town Council. Officers confirmed that SBC had responsibility for inspecting and maintaining the play area on behalf of the Town Council, and would consult with the latter regarding developments. The Committee drew attention to other outdoor play facilities in Yarm which were not maintained by SBC and queried why this was the case – officers committed to providing clarity after this meeting, though thought it may be linked to who originally agreed to install the play space.

Broad enthusiasm was expressed by Members on the proposals for the Stockton waterfront development, though the need for adequate security of the site was also highlighted. Officers stated that SBC was very conscious there may be individuals who did not wish to use the space as it was envisaged, and that whilst some aspects of anti-social behaviour were hard to stop, the Council must be mindful of those who spoil good intent. It was also noted that making play spaces open and visible can help minimise inappropriate behaviours, and that CCTV can assist in identifying issues but requires adequate monitoring. Officers added that fencing around the waterfront park was being considered in order to manage risk.

In terms of the Stockton waterfront plans, the Committee reflected on the fact that this would, ultimately, add another significant resource to the Council's portfolio which would need to be maintained. Given SBC was not in a position to maintain what it already had, and that Local Authority funding was likely to get even tighter, this would represent a further challenge regarding decisions on existing provision across the Borough.

Continuing this theme, the Committee acknowledged the ongoing developments around the Stockton blueprint to make it a more attractive place – however, it was also stressed that establishing long-term revenue costs was a key consideration in ensuring sustainable provision. Responding to a subsequent query around the consultation exercise on the Stockton waterfront, officers confirmed that feedback had indeed impacted upon the design of the play space and that it was hoped that this would ensure a positive visitor experience. After working on this for four years, there was confidence and excitement about the new development, and the introduction of risk / jeopardy in the play space remained important (particularly to teenagers), though did provide a challenge with regards modern regulations. Officers were subsequently asked if any visuals of the Stockton waterfront plans could be provided to the Committee following this meeting.

Mindful of the anticipation around the scale and content of the Stockton waterfront plans, Members asked if larger play spaces were inherently more appealing to users and whether the Council had any evidence of this. Officers felt that much would depend on the perceived play value associated with an individual site, but it was known that young people (and adults for that matter) travelled from greater distances

to use, for example, the skate park at Preston Park (even from outside the Borough). As had been discussed in previous evidence sessions for this review, resource limitations meant it was difficult to ascertain overall use for specific provision, and smaller offers may still have value for very young children or for those who were not as close to a larger 'destination' site.

When considering the appeal of larger play areas and the potential that this can lead to an overwhelming number of users, the Committee wondered if this could be managed by considering the level of equipment in smaller nearby sites which could be tweaked to appeal to a broader range of ages (thereby relieving pressure on the 'destination' locations). For those larger play areas, officers noted that the Council does try to make a space available and applicable to a spread of ages and needs.

Given the ongoing financial challenges faced by the Council, Members felt the Borough was in a fortunate position to have several sizeable play sites already in existence (with another imminent). As such, in order to safeguard these well used and much valued spaces, resources may need to focus on preserving the quality of such areas in the first instance, with smaller areas being addressed where and when funding and staffing allowed. The Committee did, however, also highlight the situation for those young children and / or their families who were unable to travel to larger sites – this would need careful consideration in terms of the overall future prioritisation of the Borough's outdoor play provision.

Concluding the session, the issue of accessibility was raised, with the Committee acknowledging the significant cost attached to certain equipment which was not necessarily compatible for all those with a similar need (e.g. wheelchair-users). Officers agreed that sourcing appropriate resources was difficult, but also noted innovative approaches that adapted spaces and promoted access for a wider range of users. The Council was aware of equipment options which could be used at different heights and also for the need for ramps / suitable surfacing to foster easier access.

Plans for the next (and final) evidence-gathering session were outlined. It was anticipated that information in relation to relevant external organisations would be presented at the next meeting in February 2024 – this would include research around the experiences of other Local Authorities who had considered outdoor play provision, as well as the views of the Stockton Parent Carer Forum on the Borough's existing offer.

AGREED that:

- 1) the information submitted by the SBC Town Centres Development service be noted.
- 2) clarity be provided regarding the maintenance agreements for outdoor play facilities in Yarm.
- 3) further information be provided in relation to the proposed visuals for the new Stockton waterfront play area.

CD/33/23 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2023-2024

Chair's Update

The Chair had no further updates.

Work Programme 2023-2024

Consideration was given to the current Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme. The next meeting was scheduled for 22 February 2024 and would feature the next evidence-gathering session for the ongoing Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision.

AGREED that the Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme 2023-2024 be noted.