

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

17th July 2025

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET KEY DECISION

Portfolio Title - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Nigel Cooke

Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Outdoor Play Provision 2025

SUMMARY

Following the Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision, in April of 2024, the Crime and Disorder Select Committee (now renamed) recommended that officers should prepare a strategy (later approved by Cabinet) which includes the following elements:

- The Council's aims in relation to the provision of outdoor play spaces.
- The locations and assessments of existing and outdoor play provision, as well as any planned developments.
- The key challenges associated with providing these spaces.
- How the Council will seek to address these key challenges (including guiding principles).
- Timelines for action and who will be accountable.

Following extensive consultation with officers and evidence gathering the initial sections of the Strategy for Council Outdoor Play Provision 2025 have been prepared (attached).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

Cabinet is asked to consider approval of the initial sections of the strategy and the principles contained within. This will enable officers to undertake a detailed analysis of the Borough's play provision based on those agreed principles and taking account of the budget allocations. This information will be presented to Cabinet as a final version of the strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Cabinet approve the first stage strategy document including the principles set out in Chapter 5 of the strategy document.
2. That Cabinet note the requirement of additional revenue funding of £150,000 per annum from 2026/27 onwards. This would enable the Council to retain approximately 30-35 play areas in good condition, in addition to the new play area at Stockton Waterfront urban park. Approximately 7 to 12 play areas would be subject to removal of play equipment at end of life and repurposing of sites for recreational open space. Funding will be considered as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan Update & Strategy report to Council in February 2026.
3. That Cabinet agree to consider, at a later stage, a second report and final version of the strategy. This will include an assessment of play provision (adopting the principles and overall approach outlined in this first stage strategy) and make recommendations for specific sites.

DETAIL

The Borough currently has 56 play areas which are available for the public to use free of charge at all reasonable times:

- 40 are owned and managed by Stockton Borough Council,
- 9 are owned by town / parish councils but managed by the Borough Council.
- 7 are owned and managed by housing developers / management companies.

There are currently plans for a further 12 play areas to be delivered over the next few years (3 to be provided by the Council and 9 to be provided by housing developers) although this is subject to change.

Following the Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision, in April of 2024, the Crime and Disorder Select Committee (now renamed) recommended that officers should prepare a strategy (later approved by Cabinet).

This strategy sets out the Council's approach to the management and development of outdoor play provision owned by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. It aims to:

- Maintain a range of good quality play areas and informal sport facilities
- Achieve a fair and equitable distribution of outdoor play provision across the Borough
- Deliver welcoming, accessible and inclusive play spaces, while acknowledging that not all sites can cater for all needs and abilities
- Ensure the overall scale of provision is at a level which is sustainable in terms of Council resource

By allocating an additional £150,000 pa to the parks, open spaces, cemeteries and allotments budget, the council will be able to retain approximately 30-35 play areas in addition to the new play provision planned for the Stockton Waterfront urban park. Approximately 7-12 sites would be subject to phased de-commissioning.

Recommendations for specific sites will be included in the final version of the strategy following detailed analysis of play provision using data referenced in Chapter 6 (page 19) of the first stage strategy document.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

By adopting the principles outlined within the strategy document the council will 'aim to achieve an equitable distribution of play sites, informed by need and at locations likely to serve the most users.'

The council also aims 'to have a network of outdoor play provision which, taken as a whole, provides play opportunities to all our residents (including consideration of age group relevance and physical/sensory accessibility).'

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

This report does not contain corporate parenting implications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

To enable the recommendations in this report, the allocation of resources is required which will be fully reflected in the Medium Term Financial Plan report which will be presented to Cabinet and Council in February 2026. The additional investment required is estimated to be £150,000 per annum from 2026/27 onwards.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council is under no legal obligation to provide outdoor play provision (excluding some sites funded by developer contributions).

RISK ASSESSMENT

A comprehensive risk assessment will be considered at the final stage of strategy preparations.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

All wards.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A: Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council outdoor play provision 2025.

All other background papers are identified within the attached first stage strategy document.

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