

## Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

### Call-In Request Form

I/We request that the following matter be called-in for consideration by the Executive Scrutiny Committee for the reason(s) stated below.

I/We understand that a minimum of six Members of the Council excluding Cabinet Members, or two Education representatives with voting rights in respect of education matters, must submit this request before the call-in procedure is implemented.

<b>Decision making body i.e. Cabinet, Officer, or Joint Arrangement</b>	Cabinet
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<b>Details of decision</b>	Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Outdoor Play Provision 2025 (Part 2)
<b>Ref. number (if any)</b>	
<b>Date of decision</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2025

**We consider that the decision is not in accordance with the following principle(s) of Paragraph 1.35 of the Constitution for the reason stated -**

<b>Principle(s) (overleaf)</b>	<b>Reason(s)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers.</li> <li>• clarity of aims and desired outcomes; and</li> <li>• an explanation of what options have been considered and giving the reasons for decisions</li> <li>• relevant matters have not been ignored</li> <li>• clarity and explanation of information provided</li> </ul>	<p>The report to Cabinet on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2025 recommended that Cabinet approve <b>the full strategy document</b>, and that <b>Cabinet approve the site-specific recommendations</b>, subject to financial approvals of the additional £150,000 pa contained within the 2026/27 MTFP report to be presented in February 2026.</p> <p>This would enable 23 Council-owned play areas to be prioritised for retention, development or redevelopment, ensuring high maintenance standards and delivering good play value.</p> <p>A further 9 play areas will also be retained subject to availability of resources, while 11 sites would be subject to phased decommissioning and repurposing.</p> <p>That Cabinet note the series of additional cross-cutting actions relating to the development, design and management of play provision.</p>

	<p>The strategy followed scrutiny work undertaken by the Community Safety Select Committee in April 2024.</p> <p>The recommendations from that committee were,</p> <p>1) SBC ensures both revenue and renewal considerations are an intrinsic part of any existing and future outdoor play space proposal within the Borough to maximise the long-term sustainability of such sites.</p> <p><b>2) To encourage a greater sense of community ownership, consideration be given to approaching relevant Town / Parish Councils and the local business community within the vicinity of existing outdoor play spaces to potentially support the development / maintenance of a site.</b></p> <p>3) Regarding future proposals by developers for new outdoor play spaces:</p> <p><b>a) SBC takes all available steps to promote the support of existing play areas before an additional outdoor play space is agreed / approved.</b></p> <p>b) SBC does not adopt any site installed by a developer which contravenes the key outcomes from this review.</p> <p>4) Regarding inequality of outdoor play provision across the Borough, SBC clarifies where it is deemed there is little / no provision and possible steps to address these inequalities (including, in exceptional cases, the provision of new play spaces).</p> <p>5) As part of a required rationalisation process in relation to the existing outdoor play offer:</p> <p><b>a) Informed by the recent (March 2024) RoSPA assessments and an analysis of the distribution of existing outdoor play provision, proposals for the removal / repurposing of sites be developed with</b></p>
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	<p><b>the aim of reducing pressure on the overall parks budget.</b></p> <p>b) Complementing sub-section, a), SBC undertakes a piece of work around those sites requiring more urgent attention to ascertain costs of either removing the play area or raising it to an appropriate standard.</p> <p><b>c) Further detail be provided around the anticipated longer-term maintenance requirements of the new Stockton waterfront park and the impact that this may have on the available funds for maintaining other existing outdoor play spaces.</b></p> <p><b>d) With due regard to the SBC Powering Our Future initiative, appropriate consultation (particularly with Stockton Parent Carer Forum and SBC Ward Councillors) is conducted around any proposed changes to existing outdoor play provision.</b></p> <p>6) Reflecting the main outcomes from this review, SBC develops and publishes an outdoor play provision strategy which includes the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Council's aims in relation to the provision of outdoor play spaces.</li><li>• The locations and assessments of existing and outdoor play provision, as well as any planned developments.</li><li>• The key challenges associated with providing these spaces.</li><li>• How the Council will seek to address these key challenges (including guiding principles).</li><li>• Timelines for action and who will be accountable.</li></ul> <p>7) This final report be shared with the SBC Planning Committee.</p>
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	<p>It is submitted that several of the recommendations have not been adopted, whereas others have. No explanation is provided in the Cabinet report.</p> <p><b>The consultation with ward members has not taken place as outlined at recommendation 5 (d).</b></p> <p>Clarity is sought why this has not taken place.</p> <p>Further this recommendation was outlined in the draft strategy presented to Cabinet in July 2025.</p> <p>Sites where we will remove individual items of play equipment once they require repairs or would need to be replaced.</p> <p>The entire site may be decommissioned at an earlier stage <b>subject to local consultation.</b></p> <p>In all cases once approximately 75% of play units are removed it is recommended that the entire site is decommissioned.</p> <p>However, this wording was changed in the strategy document when presented to Cabinet on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October to read,</p> <p>Sites where we will remove individual items of play equipment once they require repairs or would need to be replaced.</p> <p>The entire site may be decommissioned at an earlier stage <b>subject to local engagement.</b></p> <p>In all cases once approximately 75% of play units are removed it is recommended that the entire site is decommissioned.</p> <p>Proposals for re-purposing sites to be <b>subject to engagement with local communities.</b></p> <p><b>Consideration could be given to potential asset transfer of play area to a third party such as a parish/town council.</b></p>
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	<p>Consultation and engagement have two different meanings,</p> <p><b>Engagement</b></p> <p>3.1. Approach to engagement While approaches to engagement can differ in terms of size, scale or importance, the principles by which you engage should remain the same. It is best to be honest, open, transparent and enable anyone who wants to take part in the project development process to do so. That doesn't mean that everyone has to take a central role in the decision-making process but that you give people an opportunity to have their say and include opportunities along the way for people to get involved in different ways.</p> <p><b>Consultation</b></p> <p>3.2. Why engage and consult? There are two core reasons for carrying out consultation and engagement. Firstly, it's a legal requirement to go through any statutory consultation process. Secondly, involving people to help develop schemes, and decide on options, leads to not only better schemes but a greater likelihood that the local community will embrace the proposal and enjoy the changes when implemented.</p> <p><u><a href="#">Best Practice Guide to Consultation and Engagement</a></u></p> <p>Some Parish and Town Councils have reported that no approach has been made to them by SBC as outlined in recommendation 2 from the select committee. Clarity is sought why this has not taken place.</p> <p>Principle 10 of the strategy reads,</p> <p>When considering the creation of a new play area <b>or the removal of an existing one, we will consult and engage local communities to fully understand the impacts of the change.</b></p>
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	<p>No engagement or consultation has taken place with the communities regarding the removal of the existing play areas highlighted in the Cabinet report.</p> <p>It is apparent that adoption of the strategy is caveated with the allocation of financial resources in the MTFP to be approved by Council in February 26.</p> <p>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; this 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. The full strategy adoption is dependent upon the MTFP being approved by Council in Feb 26; If this allocation was not agreed, the scale of sustainable play areas will have to be adjusted accordingly.</p> <p>It is suggested that this is simply a 'cart and horse' Approach and is further impacted/evidenced by the recent correspondence to the Executive Scrutiny Committee which reads,</p> <p>Dear Councillors</p> <p>At the last Executive Scrutiny Committee, the Committee discussed the <b>Community Safety Select Committee's previous review of Outdoor Play Provision</b>. Members asked whether a response had been received as to why maintenance costs had not been included in the original negotiations with the contractor for the <b>Stockton Waterfront Park</b>. The following response has been received:</p> <p><i>'It has always been the intention that maintenance costs are included for the play equipment, however they were originally included as part of the quote to Esh. It was subsequently agreed to remove this from the Esh contract as it would need to be SBC who would sign up to the maintenance contract with Timberplay, and not Esh. <b>This is why we are now dealing directly with Timberplay.</b> Meetings</i></p>
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	<p><b><i>are ongoing to agree the scope and duration of this maintenance package, and further details can be forwarded once available.'</i></b></p> <p>Clarity is sought why this information was not included in the Cabinet report whilst seeking additional financial resource for the proposed strategy.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that the recommendations by the select committee were balanced with members expecting them to be fully adopted. However, it is apparent that information has been lacking when presented, or the decisions not to follow the recommendations from the select committee or the proposed strategy have been adopted but not recorded.</p> <p>Information is sought as to why, the recommendation to adopt the full strategy was presented to Cabinet, when it was clear that it involved a financial budget (caveat) that could only be provided by full Council. Further, why the strategy principles around consultation of the play facilities to be closed had not been undertaken.</p> <p>Information is sought as outlined in the report that three further play parks are to be opened/delivered by SBC and what consultation/engagement has taken place, as recommended in 3 (a) of the Select Committees Report.</p> <p>Finally, we realise that members caseloads vary from ward to ward, however, our email boxes are heavily loaded with residents demanding to know what has taken place, why no consultation has taken place and why as members we did not have the answers they seek.</p>

<b>We request that the following Cabinet Member(s)/Officer(s) to be required to attend the Executive Scrutiny Committee</b>	
Cllr Lisa Evans, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Director Rueben Kench	
<b>Signed</b>	<b>Print Name</b>
	TONY ROOPER
	NIAMH INNES
	MUHAMMAD MAROOF
	HUGO STRATTON
	SALLY ANN WATSON
	ALAN WATSON
	SHAKEEL HUSSAIN

This form must be submitted to the Proper Officer (via Democratic Services) within four working days of the publication of the decision i.e. by 12 midnight on the fourth day.

Multiple forms (including faxed and e-mailed versions) may be submitted in respect of the same decision. If the form is e-mailed it must be subscribed to by one person only.

This form may be returned as follows:

By hand to any Democratic Services Officer

Email – 'DL Democratic Services'

<b>Office use only</b>	
Date received:	Initials:
Valid: Yes/No	
Reasons for invalidity:	
Reasons notified	
Executive Scrutiny Committee date:	

#### Extract from Constitution – Paragraph 1.35

Decisions of the Council will usually be made in accordance with the following principles:

- proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome).
- due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers.
- respect for human rights and equality of opportunity.
- a presumption in favour of openness.



- clarity of aims and desired outcomes; and
- an explanation of what options have been considered and giving the reasons for decisions
- relevant matters have not been ignored
- clarity and explanation of information provided

Please also see the guidance contained with the Scrutiny Toolkit, and Constitution.