

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

16th October 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 (Part 2)

SUMMARY

Following approval of the recommendations contained within the initial report to Cabinet on the 17th July 2025, officers have enacted the agreed principles against our play estate and completed the final sections of the Strategy.

The resulting information contained in Section 7 of the Strategy (pages 21 to 30) are the officers' recommendations for specific Council-owned play areas, utilising the data collected during the investigation phase of strategy development whilst understanding Cabinet's recommendation to allocate a further £150k in next year's MTFP.

This will result in a decreased play estate, which is sustainable and ensures a fair distribution of sites across the Borough when viewed in conjunction with play areas provided by third-parties such as parish/town councils and housing developers.

The Strategy also recommends a series of cross-cutting actions regarding the development, design and management of play provision. These are set out in Section 8 of the Strategy.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

Cabinet is asked to consider approval of the completed Strategy document which has been developed using the principles agreed by Cabinet on the 17th July 2025. This has been developed using detailed analysis of the Borough's play estate, whilst understanding Cabinet's recommendation for a further allocation of revenue budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Cabinet approve the full strategy document.

2. That Cabinet approve the site-specific recommendations, subject to financial approvals of the additional £150,000 pa contained within the 2026/27 MTFP report to be presented in February 2026. 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. 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.
3. That Cabinet note the series of additional cross-cutting actions relating to the development, design and management of play provision.

DETAIL

Cabinet is reminded that the Council's approach to the management and development of outdoor play provision owned by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is 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.

The Borough currently has 57 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,
- 8 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.

If approved this strategy will result in a total of 32 Council-owned sites, with 11 scheduled for phased decommissioning with the resulting land identified for alternative public use. This provision is complemented by the 17 play areas already provided by third parties and the additional 9 which are planned as part of new housing developments.

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; 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 dependant 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.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

RISK ASSESSMENT

A risk assessment will be completed for each planned decommissioned site.

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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