

PLAY STRATEGY REPORT
(Report by Head of Environmental and Community Health Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is a preliminary report with outcomes clearly dependent upon funds been made available by the Big Lottery. The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval for the proposed Play Strategy and also to seek approval in principle for the submission of a bid to the Big Lottery Fund, in October 2007, for funds to allow implementation of some of the proposals.

2. THE STRATEGY

- 2.1 This 'Play Strategy' will form part of the District Council's Culture Strategy, which is currently being developed. The Culture Strategy will also include strategies and action plans for Open Spaces, Arts and Culture, Recreation and Leisure Development and Recreation Centre Services.
- 2.2 The 'Play Strategy' provides an opportunity for the authority to access The Big Lottery funding where it identifies schemes that meet the funding criteria. Additionally it will enable the authority to communicate a vision for future play development that will enable access to funds arising from the growth agenda.
- 2.3 Presently there is no lead officer within the authority for 'play' and no capacity to take on additional work in this area has been identified. If the strategy and action plan submitted to The Big Lottery are not successful so that it proves impossible to fund a Play Co-ordinator post, then many of the proposed actions cannot be delivered. In the absence of the necessary external funding the strategy will provide a vision. The vision will serve as a guide to those developments that can still be delivered as part of the authority's normal business, eg allocation of capital via S106, grant aid for play/village hall provision.
- 2.4 The Big Lottery Fund announced details of its new £155 million children's play initiative in March 2006. The amount of funding made available for Huntingdonshire District Council to access is £300,184. The aim of the fund is to create, improve and develop children's and young people's local play spaces.
- 2.5 It is a condition of The Big Lottery Fund award that prior to any funds being made available to an authority that local authority must have in place a play strategy. The 'Play Strategy' must identify and establish clear policies for play. These policies will be the basis on which access will be created and improved and by which all children will be provided with the chance to enjoy a range of quality play and recreation opportunities.
- 2.6 This strategy has been informed by a range of consultations with children, young people and parents (see Appendix 1) and takes account of local and national policy initiatives and organisational priorities (see Appendix 2). The strategy has to be submitted to The Big Lottery Fund

by the end of October 2007 with an action plan detailing how the allocated funds will be spent over a three-year period.

2.7 The attached strategy document sets out the following:-

- ◆ Purpose of the Strategy;
- ◆ Vision for the strategy;
- ◆ Definition of play;
- ◆ Core values; and
- ◆ Key points identified.

3. THE ACTION PLAN

3.1 The strategy has to be submitted to The Big Lottery Fund by the end of October 2007 if funding is to be sought from this source. The submission must include an action plan detailing how the allocated funds will be spent over a three-year period. Following the various consultation exercises and workshops undertaken with individuals and partner agencies a number of initiatives were identified that could be undertaken with The Big Lottery funding.

3.2 The ideas that may be necessary to develop in the action plan include: appointment of a Play Co-ordinator; further engagement with children and young people in specific areas; continued support for successful established schemes; and an improvement programme for those areas identified as lacking suitable play equipment.

3.3 Play Co-ordinator: For delivery of the 'Play Strategy' there is a need for a co-ordinator to work with partners to move the initiative forward. Currently there is no corporate officer-lead for play issues and therefore it is proposed the authority appoint a Play Co-ordinator. This post-holder will be able to lead the implementation of the strategy and support council officers in developing other projects; particularly those related to spatial planning and linked to the growth agenda. The proposed post would be Full-Time with an initial contract linked to the length of the Big Lottery funding award.

3.4 Further engagement: To refine proposals to meet identified needs further engagement will be needed with children and young people, in specific geographic areas, eg Yaxley, Sawtry and Ramsey (OCYPS area). This work will be necessary to involve them in refining the needs assessment and generating and testing proposals for delivery of improvements. This work could be commissioned from partner agencies.

3.5 Continuation and support for successful established schemes: There is already some specific play provision; either mobile/portable equipment or holiday schemes already established in key priority areas, eg Oxmoor and Eynesbury. The Action plan would seek to retain and build on this success rather than replace schemes with new initiatives.

- 3.6 Improvement programme: For those areas identified as short of equipment consideration will be given to an improvement programme, eg Stilton and Stukeley Meadows skate park initiatives.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Members are requested to agree the content of the draft play strategy (attached).
- 4.2 Members are requested to agree in principle the proposed main points for the action plan, as set out in points 3.3 to 3.6 of this report. Also to consent to officers costing the initiatives, being mindful of the limits of the Big Lottery Fund award.
- 4.3 Members are requested to accept that a further report be provided to Cabinet this summer. This report to set out an action plan (with costs) detailing how allocated Big Lottery funding would be spent over a three-year period.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Consultation documents set out in Appendix 1 of strategy document.

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