

Agenda Item	9.
Report No	CP/12/22

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 17 August 2022

Report Title: Playpark Funding Update

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Scottish Government made a manifesto commitment to renew playparks across Scotland, so all children have access to quality play in their own community, backed by £60 million over the period of the Parliament.

Highland Council's allocation of the first round of £5m capital funding in 2022/21 was £234,000.

The second phase of the funding for 2022/23 is £5m and Highland Council's allocation is £245k. The slight increase is due a change in the allocation criteria.

- 1.2 This report provides an update to the comprehensive report presented to Communities and Place Committee in November 2021 which set out the scheme in full detail and updates Members on;

- I. progress with improving playparks during 2021/22;
- II. additional funding for playparks during 2021/22 and 2022/23;
- III. the allocation and distribution from the Scottish Government for 2022/23 and future years.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to **NOTE:**

- I. The full details of the Scottish Government grant as set out in the report to Communities and Place Committee in November 2021;
- II. The allocation and distribution of funding for 2022/23;
- III. £232k of the Scottish Government grant was carried forward from 2021/22 to spend in 2022/23;
- IV. The Scottish Government has stated that the remaining £50 million of funding requires to be allocated to local authorities by the end of this parliamentary term in May 2026;

- V. Funding is for capital works relating to refurbishing playparks, and not intended for ongoing maintenance costs;
- VI. The additional funding from Area Committees for 2021/22;
- VII. Progress made in improving playparks during 2021/22;
- VIII. Playparks are within scope of the amenities review being considered by the Redesign Board and that as the play parks strategy develops progress reports will be considered by the Board before being finalised;
- IX. A time-limited post with full costs recovered from the award was approved by Community and Places Committee on 10 November 2021. The allocation of £15k for 2021/22 was not spent and has been rolled forward to 2022/23. Estimated costs for 22/23 are £22.5k reflecting that the recruitment process is not yet complete.

2.2 Members are asked to **AGREE:**

- i. The ongoing consultation with communities regarding the investment in playparks.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

There is no Council capital budget for play parks. The backlog of repairs and replacement reported to Communities and Place committee in November 2021 was estimated to be £3.7m. The estimate for 2022/23 is £3.5m. Spend on replacing bark safety surfaces contributed this this reduction.

The Scottish Government has stated its intention to present proposals for a multi-year settlement later in 2022. This will enable better planning in terms of consultation with communities and procurement of play equipment. The Play Park Strategy will reflect this multi year approach and set out the Council's ambitions and key targets.

- 3.2 During 2021/22 Area Committees allocated £79,727 from covid ward funds and £696,931 from place based funds towards play areas in their Wards.

3.3 Legal implications

Play areas are not a statutory service; however, where they are provided, we must comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 for employees and members of the public attending play areas. We must also comply with our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Fairer Scotland Duty.

The Council supports communities to fund raise and apply to external funders to provide additional play areas and/or equipment. Officer support communities with design and procurement process and carry out the necessary statutory inspections.

- 3.4 Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to relax and play, and participate in a wide range of cultural, and artistic activities. The Council's earlier approach to support these rights was set out in the [Play Strategy 2016-20](#). This recognises the value of informal spaces for play as well.

- 3.5 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications
Work continues with Members ensuring a place-based approach to reviewing all the play areas within a Ward, and to widen the engagement with park users, which is a condition of the grant.
- 3.6 Climate Change implications
In line with the Council's net zero targets, consideration will be given to the environmental impact of new pieces of play equipment, with natural play equipment being considered where appropriate.
- 3.7 Risk implications
Inspecting and maintaining and/or replacing playpark equipment will prevent injury to children and claims being made against the council.
- 3.8 Gaelic implications
There are Gaelic implications for any new signage required ensuring it has bi-lingual content in keeping with the Council's policy.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Council has 321 play parks and over 2500 pieces of play equipment. The provisions of playparks is not a statutory duty; but the inspection and maintenance of equipment once installed, is a mandatory requirement.
- 4.2 The Scottish Government made a manifesto commitment to renew playparks across Scotland, so that all children have access to quality play in their own community, backed by £60 million over the period of the Parliament.

Highland Council's allocation of the first round of £5m capital funding in 2022/21 was £234,000.

- 4.3 In November 2021 a comprehensive paper was presented to members setting out the Scottish Government's ambition and recommended the mechanism by which the funding would be allocated across Highland.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/79017/13_investment_in_play_parks_and_developing_a_play_park_strategy

- 4.4 Three options were presented with a recommendation to accept option 3.

The options were to allocate the funding according to:

1. Backlog maintenance or
2. Scottish Government criteria (95% based on the 0-14 year old population and 5% on rurality.) or
3. A combination of both.

Members agreed to option 3.

- 4.5 Following this agreement, the same criteria was used to allocate the 2022/23 award of £245k and this is set out at Table 2, will be used for future years.

5. Progress to Date

5.1 A place-based review of play parks is underway and being taken forward in discussions with Members locally, with any reporting required to the Area Committee. This is aligned to the Council agreement in January 2021 that:

“Budget and decision-making are devolved to Area Committees to enable a place-based approach that uses local knowledge, community effort and resources alongside Member views and staff advice to solve problems together and to identify possibilities for a more sustainable approach to the play estate.”

5.2 Amenities staff have been working with local Members over the course of the last year to design a programme for improvement of playparks within each ward across Highland. There are differences between areas in terms of the number of play parks, the condition, and future requirements, The review has considered if some play areas have reached the end of life and are no longer needed but also to prioritise certain play areas within a community i.e. creating destination sites.

5.3 Members have identified the playparks in their areas that will be invested in going forward. To enable this more focused approach, Members have agreed to the reduction in sites in the following areas:

- Badenoch and Strathspey reduced from 23 to 20
- Inverness reduced from 93 to 85
- Lochaber reduced from 35 to 34
- Skye and Rassay reduced from 9 to 8
- Dingwall and Seaforth reduced from 14 to 13
- Easter Ross reduced from 33 to 32

5.4 Officers are encouraging communities to look out with the Highland Council for funding. This could be by local fundraising initiatives, or applying for windfarm community benefits funding, where available. The Amenities team has developed a web page to support local communities by signposting them to funding opportunities, such as the National Lottery, and advising them on suitable equipment choices, site layout and inclusive provisions for play parks.

<https://www.highland.gov.uk/playareas>

Communities can also adopt former play areas and use them for other purposes locally e.g. food growing projects.

5.5 To comply with the conditions of capital grant from the Scottish Government’s playpark renewal programme, wider engagement is required along with reporting back on how the investment is being deployed. Wider engagement will align well to the principle of inclusion above and support Members in their local decision-making. In some Wards interested groups have already been involved. The need for wider engagement is set out in the four national principles for the playpark renewal programme and in the supporting guidance provided.

5.6 It is worth noting that playparks are in scope within the amenities review and this reports to the Redesign Board. The development of the playparks strategy will be reported to the Board.

5.7 The Scottish Government has set up a forum for local authority officers responsible for the Playpark Renewal programme. This facilitates discussion of progress, enables officers to exchange ideas/learning/share good practice and possible collaborations across local authorities.

6. Budget and Investment

6.1 The revenue budget for playparks in 2022/23 is £176,900. This includes labour, plant and fleet, materials, and some contractor costs. There is no provision within the current capital programme for play areas.

6.2 Following consideration at the Community and Place Committee on 25 November 2020, the Council agreed in January 2021 that budgets and decision-making for playparks would be devolved to Area Committees. This has involved more local discussions with Members within their Ward, given the Ward funds available and to enable a more local consideration as part of the place-based approach.

6.3 In the Council meeting in January 2021 the local funds highlighted that could be used for playpark use were:

- any unspent COVID ward funding towards playparks, along with a further £240,000 allocation to make sure each Ward had the same amount of Covid ward funding available;
- an additional £110,000 for each of the 21 wards for discretionary spending (£2.31m); and
- other local sources of funding with examples including coastal communities funding, Common Good funds, any appropriate national funding streams as well as local donations.

These funding options can all be considered for playparks and other local priorities. Members consider this in their Wards for decisions to be made in Area Committees.

6.4 During 2021/22 Area Committees allocated funds for play parks. Some of the money allocated was required to be spent on revenue maintenance, in particular the replacement of bark safety surfaces. The funds available below can be spent either on revenue or capital items.

Table 1 details money allocated by Wards to play parks during 2021/22.

Ward	Covid Ward Funds	Ward Place Based Investment
Ward 1		50,000
Ward 2		40,000
Ward 3		40,000
Ward 4		80,000
Ward 5*	10,000	11,322
Ward 6	15,000	45,000
Ward 7	10,000	45,650
Ward 8		10,000
Ward 9		25,000
Ward 10		
Ward 11*	1,432	65,000

Ward 12		20,000
Ward 13		36,000
Ward 14		55,000
Ward 15	10,345	
Ward 16	12,950	55,000
Ward 17		50,000
Ward 18		10,000
Ward 19		
Ward 20		8,959
Ward 21*	20,000	50,000
Total	79,727	696,931

*These include grants to communities for play provision as well as to the amenities team

6.5 There was an underspend in the Scottish Government grant, and area allocations, for several reason:

- The grant was awarded on 5 August 2021;
- There was a requirement for Members to agree how the grant was to be allocated to areas, and this was done at the Communities and Place committee in November 2021;
- Before the procurement process could begin, discussions had to be finalised with Member to agree the items of play equipment to replace in this first phase.

6.6 The additional contributions from Ward and other funds have been welcome. However, there has been a delay in spending on playparks as issues have been experienced in manufacturing and delivery delays of replacement items and it is anticipated this will continue during 2022/23.

6.7 Numerous repairs have been carried out. Most sites have had the play bark replaced, swing seats, chains, gates, fencing, and wet pour repairs have been carried out. Replacement climbing nets, bearings painting, weeding, climbing frame repairs, and some small items have been replaced.

7. Playpark renewal capital funding in 2022/23

7.1 Members are reminded that Scottish Government funding is for capital works relating to refurbishing playparks, and not intended for ongoing maintenance costs. Given the backlog for replacement of items, the focus will need to be on replacing play items rather than purchasing additional items. This is because there are revenue consequences for maintenance and inspection of purchasing additional new play equipment and these resources are constrained.

7.2 Members can also invest in items other than play equipment to make visiting parks more enjoyable and inclusive. This is listed as extra seating, suitable surfaces, toilet facilities, planting, improved access points and circulation routes, and water fountains.

7.3 In 2021/22 the criteria for awarding the Scottish Government grant of £5m was:

- 95% based on the number of children aged 0–14-year-old population
- 5% rurality

£234k was awarded to Highland Council.

The criteria for 2022/23 has been changed slightly:

- 93% based on the 0–14-year-old population
- 7% rurality

£245k has been award on this basis and the area breakdown is set out in table 2.

7.4 Members are reminded that funding has been set aside to fund the Play Park Co-ordinator post. This post will ensure engagement and evaluation of plans involve children and young people. The Co-ordinator will develop the Play Park strategy. Because of the recruitment timescales only 6 months of funding has been allocated for the second half of this year. Any underspend will be rolled forward to 2022/23.

7.5 It is recognised that a multi-year settlement would be welcome for the remaining years of the funding, and it is Scottish Government’s intention to present proposals on a multi-year settlement later in 2022.

7.6 Table 2 Area allocation of Scottish Government Funding

Area Committee	No. of play parks	Mid-point between Play Park Condition and SG Award Criteria
Badenoch and Strathspey	20	£8,945
Black Isle	11	£8,103
Caithness	50	£23,898
City of Inverness	84	£67,987
Dingwall and Seaforth	13	£7,727
Easter Ross	32	£22,449
Isle of Skye and Raasay	8	£7,864
Lochaber	34	£40,225
Nairnshire	9	£8,121
Sutherland	39	£13,122
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	21	£14,059
Highland	321	£222,500*

*£22.5k retained for the Play Park Co-ordinator post.

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