

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	4.
Report No	CC/02/25

Committee: Caithness Area Committee

Date: 20 January 2025

Report Title: Scottish Government Play Park Funding

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Members agreed at Communities and Place Committee in November 2021 to allocate the funds received from the Scottish Government’s play park renewal fund, £60m over the lifetime of the parliament, be apportioned to Area Committees based on a blend of play park conditions and the criteria used by Government. In 2021/22 this was based on 95% 0 –14-year-old population and 5% on rurality and in 2022/23 and future years based on 93% age and 7% rurality. The Council’s allocation to 2026 is £2.9m.
- 1.2 This report proposes Members agree the allocation of the funding for the specific projects in the two Caithness Wards as discussed at the Service Supported Meetings.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to Agree:
- i. In Ward 2 £146,824 to be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at 6.5
 - ii. In Ward 3 £145,338 to be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at 6.6

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

In 2021 £2,918,000 of capital grant was allocated to the Council as part of the Scottish Governments commitment to play area renewal. The principles for investing this funding and reporting on its use were confirmed in October 2022.

Members agreed at Communities and Place Committee in November 2021 the allocation of the funds received from the Scottish Governments play park renewal fund be apportioned to Area Committees based on a blend of play park conditions and the criteria used by Government which was 95% based on the 0-14-year-old population and 5% on rurality and in 2022/23 and future years is based on 93% age and 7% rurality.

3.2 **Legal**

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.

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, artistic and cultural activities. The Council's approach to support these rights was set out in the Play Park Strategy agreed by Communities and Place Committee in November 2023. This recognises the value of informal spaces for play as well.

3.3 **Risk**

Inspecting and maintaining and/or replacing play park equipment will prevent injury to children and claims being made against the Council.

The approach to engaging locally on play area options with Members and other community bodies and children will enable honest conversations about prioritising resources. This not only reduces the risk of unreasonable public expectation given the importance of an affordable play estate, but it also enables joint problem solving and the identification of external funding and volunteering support.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)**

There are no risks arising from this report.

3.5 **Gaelic**

There are Gaelic implications for any new signage required ensuring it has bi-lingual content in keeping with the Council's policy.

4. **Impacts**

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Background

- 5.1 Playparks have positive social and mental health benefits for children and young people.
- 5.2 The Council has 319 play parks and over 2083 pieces of play equipment. Caithness has 49 play areas and 335 pieces of play equipment
- 5.3 The provision of play parks is not a statutory duty; but the inspection and maintenance of equipment once installed, is a mandatory requirement. For this reason, play parks are subjected to daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly inspection based on usage and risk, and an annual inspection carried out by an independent, qualified playground inspector.
- 5.4 Play park equipment has an average expected life expectancy of 10 – 15 years. In coastal communities where salt air accelerates corrosion, it can be challenging to reach or extend the projected life expectancies.
- 5.5 On a 15-year life equipment expectancy, on average annually in Caithness, 22 play items reach end of life, necessitating removal. This can be concerning and appear disproportionate for communities when all the equipment in a play park is of the same age and reaches the end of its life at the same time, sometimes this could be as many as 10 – 15 play items in a single play park requiring removal within a short space of time.
- 5.6 Although removal of unsafe equipment at the end of its life is essential, when this happens, the play park will remain open and can be used for relaxation, games and imaginative play, until such time as it can be refurbished with new play equipment.
- 5.7 Play Park refurbishments are often facilitated through community fundraising, and community groups, who can take leases, or take Community Asset Transfers of play parks to enable improvements from external funders. This has been successfully achieved for many play parks throughout Caithness.
- 5.9 Members allocated Place Based Investment Funds to improve and refurbish play parks throughout the county, these included Bignold, Hillhead and King George V in Wick. Castle Terrace and Beach Road in Thurso. In addition, this funding facilitated improvements and renovations to play parks throughout Caithness.
- 5.10 A place-based review of play parks is well underway and being taken forward in discussions with Members locally. 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.”
- 5.11 To comply with the conditions of capital grant from the Scottish Government's play park 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.

5.12 Any refurbishments and upgrades will require to be in line with the approved Play Park Strategy agreed at the Communities and Place Committee on 29th November 2023, to consider the needs and expectations of communities and supports the active play, wellbeing and social activity of our children and their families.

6. Budget and Investment

6.1 The annual revenue budget for play parks for the Caithness Area 2024/25 is £21,000. This includes labour, plant and fleet, materials, and some contractor costs.

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 play parks 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. The total allocation from the Scottish Government play parks renewal programme for the Caithness Area is £294,179, which has been split equally between the two Wards £147,090 per Ward over the five-year programme.

6.3 The remaining budget for Ward 2 is £146,824 and the remaining budget for Ward 3 is £145,338.

6.4 The following proposals were discussed with Members:

6.5 For Ward 2 a total commitment of £146,824

- Gillock Park Thurso (full refurbishment) £117,624
- Harland Road Castletown (sky carousel and a spring mobile) £4,200
- Dunnet (climbing frame) £19,000
- Scrabster (Sky carousel and a slide) £6,000

6.6 For Ward 3 a total commitment of £145,338

- Grizzly Park, Wick (full refurbishment) £145,338

6.7 Following approval, orders will be placed, and the money committed. Members will be updated with timescales on delivery and installation.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 6 January 2025

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: None