



PLACES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Subject Heading:

State of Children's Areas

SLT Lead:

Imran Kazalbash

Report Author and contact details:

James Rose

Policy context:

The Havering Vison

Place Outcome – Havering is a Green Borough

- *Investing in our parks*
- *Number of parks with Green Flags*

SUMMARY

This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with information on the management of parks and play areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

REPORT DETAIL

1. Background

Havering's Parks team are responsible for 100 parks and open spaces, 27 allotments, 6 war memorials and a network of Public Rights of Way.

There are 44 play areas, 19 ball courts, 21 outdoor gyms, 3 callisthenics areas, 2 parkour areas, 7 skate/bmx areas, and 38 tennis courts in our parks and open spaces. They vary from small locally equipped areas of play to large destination sites spread across the borough such as Hornchurch Country Park, Raphael Park and Central Park.

Play is an important part of children's physical and social development as well as and good play areas are an effective way of ensuring parks are well used by families. Therefore, resources have consistently been prioritised to maintaining and improving the areas in Havering. Careful consideration is given to the type of equipment in each site and the design based on the type of usage and landscape. All play areas have some inclusive play equipment, depending on the size of the area, so children of all abilities can play together.

Havering's parks have also got a varied range of recreation equipment for people of all ages. It is important not to just provide equipment for children but for teenagers, young adults and older people. This ensures that play areas are not misused and our parks provide facilities for the whole community. Having a varied range of areas and equipment that allows park users to participate in informal exercise assists in helping reduce obesity in young people and also GP referral schemes.

Havering has always been keen to introduce new types of equipment in our parks and some of first outdoor gym areas in London were installed in our parks before becoming so popular. Officers keep up to date with the latest developments in the industry and ensure when possible innovative and existing equipment is installed. In recent years this has seen Parkour (free running) and callisthenics (body weight exercise) equipment starting to be installed in our parks. There are also multi-use games areas, trim trails and outdoor gyms in several parks. The former are very popular with young people and the latter two with people of all ages who prefer not to attend traditional gyms.

2. Inspection and Maintenance

There is a parks monitoring system that is carried out by Parks Development Officers and covers both the grounds maintenance standards and condition of infrastructure. This includes regularly checking paths, furniture, fencing and gates.

Standards are assessed using a manual which has photos and descriptions for each area. This was produced using examples from within the borough and the London Parks Benchmarking Group's 'Quality Manual'.

Any required actions are recorded and either dealt with by the Parks Officer or reported to the relevant officer or contractor.

Play areas and exercise areas are subject to three types of inspection.

Basic visual inspection

This is carried out by RoSPA trained Grounds Maintenance operatives at specific frequencies throughout the week. Each inspection is logged on a visual inspection sheet, an example of which is in Appendix 10. These sheets are then fed back to the Parks Development Officers to be actioned as appropriate, e.g. repair, take out of action or monitor. The frequency of these checks varies as it is decided on a usage and fault finding basis. The large majority of repairs are carried out by the Parks Maintenance operative assisted by the Park Rangers. If necessary, a specialist play area manufacturer will be used.

Operational Inspection

This is a more in depth inspection and is carried out by the RoSPA trained Parks Maintenance Supervisor. They will check bearings, chains. Links nuts and bolts etc and have the equipment to carry out many repairs. These checks are recorded, example in Appendix 11, and any faults that cannot be rectified reported to the Parks team and if necessary the item taken out of use until repaired. The fitter carried out these inspections on a quarterly basis.

Independent annual check

This is carried out by a reputable organisation such as RoSPA on an annual basis. The outcomes of their report are used to set a work program in for the Parks Maintenance team and feeds into budget planning of the Parks Development Team. It is very rare that high risk items are found in our parks, unless they are related to inherently hazardous equipment such as skate parks. Therefore, mainly the medium risk items are prioritised for the year.

As well as the above there is also ad hoc inspections by the Parks Development Officers that back up the formal inspections and also ensure a quality check on the visual inspections.

3. Damage and Vandalism

The constant issues we face are around the following:

- Damage to safer surfacing (mainly wet-pour) being cut and dug out / pulled up.
- Cutting and removing the rope wrapped around basket swings.
- Damage swing seats (mainly by allowing dogs to bite them and then hang)
- Cutting of ropes on climbing frames

Where possible repairs are carried out in-house, e.g. replacing swing seats and ropes. However, some jobs require specialist contractors, e.g. wet-pour repairs, which can be expensive and take several weeks to schedule. To improve this process, we have recently provided the Parks Maintenance operative with the necessary materials for relatively small jobs. We are looking at how feasible it will be to extend this work to larger jobs to negate the need to use contractors.

Although we keep a good stock of spares for the standard jobs, it is necessary to order in spare and replacement parts for specific or specialist repairs. Depending on the supplier and part it can take several weeks for delivery.

When there is significant damage to equipment that is beyond repair, for safety reasons it is necessary to remove these items. We then have to replacement, either as part of a full or part site refurbishment or as a one-off.

As part of the Parks Capital Improvement Programme, there has been a regular allocation for both refurbishments and ad-hoc improvements, i.e. individual equipment replacement. However, all equipment is expensive and depending on the item this is not always possible that financial year.

4. Graffiti

Graffiti has always happened in parks but over recent years it has been increasing and also taking place in sites where it has never been a problem.

The majority is non-offensive however, there are some instances of offensive material that we prioritise the removal of.

Removal is undertaken by the Parks team or the Community Payback team when possible. It is also necessary to ask the Street Cleansing team to assist in some cases when specialist equipment is required,

5. Improvements

There has been a regular programme of capital improvements in parks in recent years that has included high profile projects such as the Harrow Lodge Park lake to various infrastructure works, e.g. fencing, bins, benches and signage.

The programme is informed by officer inspections and feedback from members and stakeholders, e.g. friends groups, sports clubs.

Within the programmes, we have included full and partial play area restorations as well as individual items being replaced.

We have used the Council capital as match funding to secure grants from the Veolia Environmental Trust for play area refurbishments and will continue to apply for external funding when possible.

6. Accessibility

Equal access in our parks is generally good with step free access at most entrances. Where practicable, accessibility is good within parks as there are networks of hard surfaced pathways that link facilities. We have a regular programme of pathway improvements subject to available capital funding.

In play areas, we ensure that there is an element of inclusive equipment, e.g. wide slides, basket swings, ground level roundabouts and springies with backs). These types of equipment are specified in all play area improvement projects.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

There are no implications from this report.

Legal implications and risks:

There are no implications from this report.

Human Resources implications and risks:

There are no implications from this report.

Equalities implications and risks:

There are no implications from this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There are no implications from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None