

Education, Children and Families Committee

10am, Tuesday, 21 May 2019

School Grounds Update

Item number
Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Education, Children and Families Committee is asked to:
- 1.1.1 approve that two additional staff be recruited to the Council's Workshops to allow a saving of at least £270,000 to be realised and assist in the maintenance of school grounds and the manufacture of play installations for Early Years settings;
 - 1.1.2 note that these positions would be funded from capital projects including the Early Years Scottish Government grant allocation;
 - 1.1.3 note the ongoing work to improve the access the Council has to a range of inspection services with a view to establishing a more comprehensive framework by March 2020;
 - 1.1.4 note the intention to tender for inspection services in May to allow inspections of all Communities & Families establishments grounds to be undertaken in September/October 2019.

Alistair Gaw

Executive Director for Communities and Families

Contact: Robbie Crockatt, School Estate Planning Manager

E-mail: robbie.crockatt@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 3051

School Grounds Update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Play Services Ireland were appointed to undertake inspections of all Communities and Families school, Early Years and Community Centre grounds. The inspections were conducted in December 2018 and Play Services Ireland have provided reports in batches since February 2019. The process of working through the inspection reports provided by Play Services Ireland is ongoing, however, key findings and recommendations are that there are significant savings to be made by having the Council's inhouse Workshops team undertake the repair work and the installation of new equipment and that access to inspection services must be improved to ensure the return of quality reports.

3. Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on 9 October 2018 the Education, Children and Families Committee considered the ["School and Early Years Playgrounds Development"](#) paper which reported that the availability to Parent Council's and Community Groups of various funding sources in recent years has allowed school communities to undertake school playground improvement projects that may previously have been unaffordable. The report highlighted that improvements could be made in the way that the Council is involved in and supports the development of playground transformation projects.
- 3.2 The "School and Early Years Playgrounds Development" report included as an Appendix "School Playground Development Guidance" which sets out the process those wishing to undertake a school playground improvement project should follow and the "Vision for School Grounds" document that makes clear the Council's aspirations for school grounds.
- 3.3 Committee approved the appointment of inspectors to undertake a first annual inspection of all City of Edinburgh Council's school and early learning establishment grounds and noted the intention to return a report to Committee setting out the findings of the inspections undertaken. This report sets out those findings and

makes recommendations following the conclusion of this process and the lessons learned.

4. Main report

- 4.1 In November 2018 Play Services Ireland were appointed following a competitive tender process to undertake inspections of all 242 Communities and Families school, Early Years and Community Centre grounds. The inspections were conducted in December 2018 and Play Services Ireland have provided reports in batches since February 2019.
- 4.2 The School Estate Planning Team have been coordinating the actions arising from these inspections which have highlighted the unregulated way in which school and nursery grounds have been developed over many years. They include items built by parents and by school or nursery staff that fail to meet minimum safety standards and a lack of regular maintenance of installations and surfaces.
- 4.3 Where risks have been identified officers from the School Estate Planning Team have engaged with the establishment concerned and also with a contractor or the Council's Workshops Team to ensure that repairs and alterations that allow the installation to meet the necessary safety and quality standards are undertaken swiftly and in a manner that offers best value to the school and to the Council.
- 4.4 Where the risk identified has been high the installation has been closed pending repair or removal. The inspector undertaking the inspections in December was given the power to close an installation at the time of inspection if he/she deemed that this was necessary. Specific items of equipment were closed at ten schools until the appropriate repairs were implemented.
- 4.5 Officers from the School Estate Planning Team and from the Council's Workshops have also worked very effectively with schools to design and build alternative and new installations that meet the required safety and quality standards.

Key Findings and Recommendations

- 4.6 The process of working through the inspection reports provided by Play Services Ireland is ongoing, however, key findings and recommendations arising from this first round of annual inspections of Edinburgh's school and nursery grounds are set out in the following sections.

Value from In-house Providers

- 4.7 The manufacturing and installation work undertaken by the Council's Parks Workshop team in school grounds has been praised by Head Teachers. The Workshops teams, who are experienced in the design, construction and installation of play equipment that meets the necessary play and safety standards in public parks have provided confidence that the final product will exceed expectations. The pool of external contractors with experience of constructing or repairing play

equipment is small and cannot offer the same value that is offered by the Workshop Team.

- 4.8 The savings offered to schools – who must pay for any work arising from the inspection reports from their own budgets – has been significant. In some cases schools have sought quotes for works themselves prior to the Council's Workshops involvement and so in some cases it is possible to compare the costs provided by the Council's Workshops with external providers. Examples are listed below:

Establishment		Parks Workshop Cost	External Provider Quote
Cramond PS	Replace burned out installation.	£7,500	£26,000
Granton PS	Removal of play ship, jetty, boulders, sandpit and level ground.	£6,250	£26,000
Craigmillar EY Centre	Partial removal of fence, build and install gate for access to wooded area.	£300	£3,000
Kirkliston PS Nursery	Removal of existing sandpit roof and supports. Build and install new roof.	£2,000	£6,000
		£16,050	£61,000

- 4.9 However, the amount of work being generated through the grounds inspection reports has placed significant pressure on resources within the Council's in-house Parks Workshop team. Accordingly, to retain the service being provided within school grounds it is recommended that two further workshop staff be recruited. One skilled joiner and an apprentice would be sufficient to allow this arrangement to continue.
- 4.10 The savings this could provide are evidenced not only by the work generated through inspections but also in the delivery of the Council's new school and nursery buildings.
- 4.11 The outdoor areas for new Early Years settings must be high quality to meet Care Inspectorate standards and allow outdoor space to be registered as additional capacity. The new designs for Early Years facilities include wooden structures and installations that enhance play and contribute to the Council's vision for a quality outdoor learning environment. Comparing the costs provided by contractors for the

manufacture and installation of these products with the estimates provided by the Council's in-house Parks Workshop shows a potential saving of at least £270,000 across 6 new nursery and 3 new primary school projects. The Parks Workshop team have also advised that greater savings could be achieved through materials selection and more efficient design.

- 4.12 The additional resource proposed would be funded from capital projects including the Early Years Scottish Government grant allocation

Inspection Services

- 4.13 Play Services Ireland were appointed following a tender process within the Scotland Excel Playground and Artificial Surfaces framework. Play Services Ireland are one of only two on this framework. The other organisation did not submit a tender.
- 4.14 The inspection reports provided by Play Services Ireland have not met expectations in terms of the quality of the content or the breadth of the inspections undertaken. The exercise has exposed the weakness in the depth and quality of the independent inspection services available on the Excel framework.
- 4.15 School Estate Planning Officers are working with colleagues in the Council's Procurement Service and with those administering the Excel framework to identify ways in which this can be addressed. The Excel framework will be renewed in March 2020 and it is hoped that this will provide a higher quality of service provider. For the round of annual inspections to take place in autumn 2019, an open tender process will be undertaken.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Schools have been provided with copies of their Play Services Ireland inspection reports and School Estate Planning Officers are assisting schools in addressing any outstanding actions.
- 5.2 School Estate Planning Officers are working with colleagues in the Council's Procurement Service and with those administering the Excel framework to identify ways in which the depth and quality of the inspection services can be improved.
- 5.3 A tender process will begin in May to appoint an inspection service to undertake the next round of annual inspections. These inspections will take place in September/October.
- 5.4 If approved, the recruitment of two additional staff to the Parks Workshop Team would be progressed as soon as possible to allow work on the installations for new nursery buildings to proceed. This will require the completion of a business case to employ a modern apprentice before the summer.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The cost of employing one skilled joiner and an apprentice would be £48,000 per year. The savings in the first year are estimated to exceed £270,000. There would be ongoing savings associated with the annual maintenance works required to ensure compliance with the actions arising from annual inspections. These positions would be funded from capital projects including the Early Years Scottish Government grant allocation.
- 6.1 The cost of inspection services is recharged to individual establishments. The Play Services Ireland reports were less than £60 per site and it is anticipated that through the forthcoming tender process annual inspections will be no more than £180 per site.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 By undertaking regular inspections and responding to the actions arising from the resulting reports, the Council is ensuring the safety and quality of play provision within its school grounds. This provides a safe play environment for pupils and staff at the school and ensures that the Council fulfils its responsibilities and duties to the users of its facilities.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Education, Children and Families Committee, 9 October 2018: "School and Early Years Playgrounds Development"

9. Appendices

None