

**COUNCIL**  
**18 January 2007**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**12b**

**TITLE OF REPORT: REFERRAL FROM CABINET – 16 JANUARY 2007 –  
NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE PLAY STRATEGY**

*The following is an extract from the Draft Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 16  
January 2007.*

**143. NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE PLAY STRATEGY**

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Rural Affairs presented a report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services seeking endorsement of a proposed Play Strategy for North Hertfordshire. The report contained the following appendix:

Appendix 1 – Play Strategy: Executive Summary.

Cabinet noted that the Strategy linked with many other Council Strategies, and indicated the desire to promote a range of different opportunities to local children.

Cabinet was advised that the Scrutiny Committee had supported the adoption of the Play Strategy.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:** That the proposed North Hertfordshire Play Strategy 2007-2012 be adopted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To assist the Council in meeting its strategic objectives of promoting first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens; and targeting resources at areas of disadvantage in the District to reduce social exclusion and improve the quality of life for everyone.

*The following is the report to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 16 January 2007.*

**TITLE OF REPORT: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE PLAY STRATEGY**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL SERVICES

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR TRICIA GIBBS

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Play Strategy for North Hertfordshire.

**2. FORWARD PLAN**

- 2.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 1 December 2006.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The North Herts Play Strategy (2007-2012) is the first dedicated Play Strategy for the District Council. Its creation follows significant reforms of children's services in the preceding five years and will assist the Council in meeting its commitments to the 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme'.
- 3.2 The Government-commissioned document 'Making the Case for Play', produced by the Children's Play Council (2002), has highlighted the importance of play in children's development and raised its profile nationally. In 2005, central Government pledged £200 million to improve children's play facilities, and in November of that year the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) launched a £155 million Children's Play Initiative.
- 3.3 Each District Council has been allocated a proportion of the BLF Play funds, with North Hertfordshire entitled to up to £227,000 over three years. However, in order to draw down these funds, Districts have to make a written application setting out their intentions. Part of this criteria is that Councils have a Play Strategy and Play Partnership.
- 3.4 North Hertfordshire established a Play Partnership in December 2004 which has been proactive in assisting officers create this Strategy. The Children's Services Team hopes to be in a position to submit its application for its funding allocation in March 2007, following adoption of the Strategy by full Council.
- 3.5 The Council has also been instrumental in supporting the establishment of the District Children's Trust.

**4. NORTH HERTS PLAY STRATEGY**

- 4.1 The Strategy identifies a policy objective whereby:

"The Council supports the right of every local child to be able to enjoy a range of play activities, and is committed to working with all play providers (whether commercial, charitable, community-led or statutory agencies) to ensure a

wide choice of both organised and informal play opportunities. The Council recognises that play provides a wide range of development opportunities for both children and the communities in which they live.”

- 4.2 The Strategy links with many other NHDC Strategies (Play Area and Outdoor Youth Provision Strategy; Sports Development Strategy; Pavilions, Playing Fields & Sports Pitches Strategy; Rural Strategy and the Social Inclusion Strategy) and indicates the desire to promote a range of different opportunities to local children.
- 4.3 The Strategy links into the Council’s key aims, specifically:
- An increase in the number of young people engaging in sporting activities (Healthier).
  - We will work to develop an extended range of services for the young.... to reduce social exclusion (Equal).

In addition to the above, improved play services can also promote safer communities through the delivery of diversionary activities, and can also contribute to sustainable communities by making the built environment child friendly.

- 4.4 On a regional level the Strategy is referred to in the North Herts & Stevenage and Royston, Buntingford & Bishop Stortford’s PCT’s Health Improvement Plans, the North Herts Community Safety Strategy and the County’s Children and Young Peoples Plan. In addition, it links into national initiatives such as ‘Children’s Centres Initiative’ and the ‘Extended Schools Programme’. The Strategy will also assist the multi-agency North Herts District Children’s Trust Partnership achieve its objectives and outcomes.
- 4.5 The Strategy places NHDC in a position to facilitate the delivery of a range of services in partnership with other organisations. This will ensure that the Council works as part of a multi-agency approach to ensure delivery of the key outcomes detailed in ‘Every Child Matters’ - part of the Education Act 2004 which places a duty on a number of agencies to co-ordinate efforts for children’s wellbeing.
- 4.6 The Strategy details a number of key aims and objectives which will help deliver the following broad outcomes:
- Increased participation of children in play activities.
  - To encourage children to develop increasingly healthy lifestyles.
  - To improve children’s social, physical and intellectual development through a range of appropriate activities.
  - To increase the awareness amongst parents, carers and stakeholding agencies of the value of play.
  - To encourage communities to take ownership of the delivery and development of play activities.
- 4.7 In order to achieve these outcomes the Children’s Services Team will be taking action in the following areas:
- Working in partnership with NHDC’s Parks and Open Spaces Team to develop a range of outdoor activities on public land.
  - Deliver flagship events to encourage Town and Parish Councils to work in partnership and deliver more play opportunities locally.

- Improve provision for children with disabilities by working with agencies that specialise in both delivery of dedicated schemes and specialist staff training.
- Expanding and developing the existing rural play project and introducing a 'Play Ranger' provision across the district.
- Working with Herts County Council to develop 'children's centres' and out of school opportunities (extended schools).
- Develop a specialist children's facility in Bancroft Gardens which will link into existing youth provision.
- Improve and develop techniques for consulting with children.
- Proactively look for opportunities to draw down external funds for new projects.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications pertaining to this report.
- 5.2 The Cabinet Terms of Reference allow for the development of Council Policy in respect of various matters, including "leisure, sport, recreation and the arts".

## **6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial and risk implications pertaining to this report.
- 6.2 The cost to the authority to run Children's Services excluding sports development in 2006/07 is projected to be £194,440. In addition, the Children's Services Team also hosts the Rural Play project which is projected to cost £49,730, of which £41,070 is grant aided through the children's fund.
- 6.3 The Action Plan listed in the Strategy will predominantly be undertaken within the existing Children's Services budget and sourcing of external funds. However the Children's Services Team have highlighted the need to secure funding for the Rural Play project in the 2008/2009 financial year. A 2008/2009 growth bid was included in the Service and Financial Planning process, although as the growth bid is for 2008/2009, this is for information only and will need to be resubmitted as part of the 2008/2009 planning process.
- 6.4 By raising awareness of the importance of play there may be a future need for an increase and improvement in local children's facilities irrespective of who owns them.

## **7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no human resource and equalities implications.

## **8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS**

- 8.1 The draft Play Strategy has been discussed with the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and designated 'Children's Champions' representing all Council political groups. The North Herts Play Partnership has also been given the opportunity to comment on previous drafts of the Strategy with comments taken into account.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That Cabinet endorse the Play Strategy 2007-2012 and refer it to full Council for adoption.

## **10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 The Play Strategy helps the Council meet its strategic objectives to:
- Promote first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens.
  - Target resources at areas of disadvantage in the district to reduce social exclusion and improve the quality of life for everyone.

## **11. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Play Strategy Executive Summary

## **12. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Draft Play Strategy – copies available in the Members' Room and electronic versions are available on request from the Committee Services Section.

## **Appendix 1 – Executive Summary of North Hertfordshire Play Strategy**

### **Introduction:**

This strategy emphasises the significance of play to the learning and development of children and young people, and that North Herts District Council and its partners have a crucial role in encouraging this development. The Strategy also affirms that the provision of positive play opportunities can help the community meet its strategic objectives and help in delivering wider national government programmes. However this can only be achieved by working in partnership, both strategically and operationally, with a range of agencies.

### **New National Initiatives:**

During the last three years the Government has embarked upon one of the biggest reforms of children's services in recent times. The Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme, significantly alters the way services should be provided for children and young people. The five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes provide a clear vision for local authorities and those agencies that work with children and young people. This strategy is part of this vision.

At the last General Election the Government pledged £200 million of National Lottery funding to improve children's play facilities. The subsequent government report 'Getting Serious About Play' set out a national strategy to identify how this funding should be used. In November 2005, The Big Lottery Fund announced the £155 million Children's Play Initiative informing Local Authorities of the funding allocation that was available to develop and improve play provision in their area. The initiative, launched in March 2006, requires Local Authorities to have a play strategy and a Play Partnership. North Hertfordshire District Council has been invited to apply for £227,475 to create, improve and develop local play opportunities.

Nationally, and locally, there is a new drive to improve children's services and play. A play strategy will bring together the government directives and local priorities to provide better play services for North Herts children.

A play strategy for North Hertfordshire can assist in supporting many of North Hertfordshire District Council's strategic objectives. In addition to play being beneficial within its own right there are also many extrinsic benefits;

- Play can help encourage responsible citizenship and help create safer communities
- Play can promote positive behaviour and can be used as a tool to keep children and young people away from undesirable pursuits.
- Play can help children stay active and can steer them towards leading a healthy and active lifestyle
- Play can also help educate children and make them aware of the different communities and cultures represented in our population.
- Play provision can be targeted at areas of disadvantage and can help reduce social exclusion.

### Play Policy Objectives:

The North Herts Play Strategy has identified the following 7 policy objectives which will underline all play and leisure provision for children and young people in North Herts:

1. Every child and young person in North Herts will have access to good quality playgrounds, play areas and open spaces which meet their needs for variety, accessibility, choice, open space, adventure and play aspirations
2. To raise awareness of play provision in North Herts, the importance of play, to promote positive perceptions of play in the community and to provide access to accurate and comprehensive information on play opportunities within the district
3. To ensure that disabled children and young people have access to the widest possible range of play opportunities, and that play in North Herts conforms to the minimum requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act
4. To provide mobile play opportunities which can be accessed by those areas in the district where play provision is lacking
5. To assist the development of a play workforce in North Herts
6. Improve access to play service and provision through partnership working with local play providers and stakeholder agencies
7. Ensure the Council consults with children and young people on matters that affect them

These objectives state North Hertfordshire District Council's intent to work with its partners to provide better services for children. This strategy has identified a number of recommendations for action focusing on improving play services in North Herts. The full action plan can be found on pages 29-39.

The North Herts Play Strategy will come under ongoing reviews and revisions so that it stays relevant and up-to-date with developments in play and children's services within the district. The cost of these developments will be met from within existing internal budgets and external grant funds, by bidding for new funds, working with partners and by generating additional income and resources.