

Executive response to OSC task group on the review of support to adventure playgrounds

1 December 2025

In February 2025 I made a decision to extend grants to play associations until March 2026. I welcome the formation of an OSC task group to review the wider support to the adventure playgrounds and its carefully composed conclusions.

For several decades the adventure playgrounds have given incredibly valuable play and educational opportunities for young people. Although most other authorities stopped providing support some years ago, Leicester City Council has continued to provide financial assistance while suffering an unprecedented loss of funding capacity and having to cease all comparable support to third sector organisations.

The financial risk that exists for the adventure playgrounds cannot be fully known to the local authority. Risks and financial liabilities may extend beyond the revenue that is needed to operate the playground. Given this, it is not possible to calculate and underwrite those risks. Sadly, given the financial outlook for the authority, cost reductions must be found in discretionary services. If the financial position were different for the council, the continuation of grants for commissioning of play activities would certainly be a very high priority. That is not the current reality.

As a result of the extension of funding, there has been scope within this year's grant allocations for play associations to use the funding flexibly, including using professional services such as bid writers to help seek further funds. That financial support does not need to be used in this financial year and the associations will be free to reserve money for such activity in future years. Certainly, if the authority becomes aware of funding opportunities, then we would pass that on to play associations and support applications.

With respect to security of tenure, the current provision of five-year licences has been entered into with all play associations based on business cases that demonstrate sustained viability. This provides a degree of security but with increased flexibility for all parties. It removes significant exposure to the groups, such as the responsibility for repairs and maintenance of the external envelope of the building.

Some groups have, however, argued that this five-year agreement hampers their fund raising and that longer term security is necessary. I am very sympathetic to this and, following a meeting with Locality, the community support organisation, have asked officers to write to all playgrounds asking them if they believe a longer-term agreement would be advantageous. I also asked officers to remind the playgrounds that such a longer-term agreement, or our community asset transfer, might present issues for the play associations in terms of repair liabilities and might, in some cases, be constrained where the playgrounds are on land that has parkland status or covenants.

Under the council's policy, community asset transfer would also require an open tender, which would of course be open to potential alternative providers and not just the current play associations.

I look forward to a day when councils like Leicester will again be able to support and to provide youth and play facilities. Sadly, the prospect of revenue being sufficient to do so does not seem likely in the immediate future.

Peter Soulsby

City Mayor