



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
All Wards

COUNCIL

24th November 2016

PETITIONS FOR DEBATE BY FULL COUNCIL – SAVE OUR PLAYGROUNDS

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

1. INTRODUCTION

A petition has been received which asks the City Council to withdraw the proposed cuts to the nine adventure playgrounds around the city.

The Council's Petitions' Scheme (adopted in September 2014) states that any petition that receives 1,500 or more valid signatures, the lead petitioner may ask that it be subject to a debate at Full Council. The lead petitioner has indicated that they wish their petition to be subject to a debate.

The lead petitioner has advised that in excess of 14,000 people have signed the petition however the Council does not verify numbers of signatories once the 1500 threshold is reached.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is recommended to consider the petition and make any recommendations in accordance with the Petitions' Scheme.

3. REPORT

Officers have verified that the petition received from Leicester Playfair meets the criteria of 1,500 signatures of people who have provided an address in Leicester of where they live, work or study. The petition is in the following terms:

"We the undersigned are petitioning Leicester City Council to withdraw the proposed cuts to the nine Adventure Playgrounds. This petition is by Leicester Playfair, representing Braunstone Adventure Playground (AP), Woodgate AP, Goldhill AP, The Whatcabin, St. Andrews Play Association, Highfields AP, New Parks AP, Northfields Playbarn and Mowmacre Young People's Play Development Association."

The lead petitioners have been invited to speak on their petition for five minutes to be followed by a Council debate for a maximum of 15 minutes.

Following the debate, the Council can decide how to respond to the petitions and may decide to:

- Recommend to the Executive to either take or not take the action the petition requests.
- Recommend to the Executive a different course of action as a result of the debate.
- Commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee.

Following the Council meeting the petition organisers will receive written confirmation of this decision.

The Strategic Director for Education and Children's Services has provided some background information below:

Background Information to Petition

The city council's financial position is exceptionally severe, as a result of the Government's spending cuts. The grant received from the Government has fallen by almost 50% since 2010 (after allowing for inflation) and further cuts have been announced for the next three years. When the budget was set in February 2016, we estimated we would need to make further cuts of £55m by 2019. This is on top of the £100 million of savings we have already made. At the same time, we are having to find more money to pay for services where costs are rising.

The cost of looking after vulnerable children, for instance, has risen substantially, as has the cost of providing care to a growing, elderly population.

Over the past six months, we have been working closely with the early help managers to draw up proposals for where savings could be made. Children's Services have been asked to achieve £5 million by April 2018. On reviewing these proposals, the Executive felt that this could not be achieved and reduced the amount to £4 million, this means that the £1 million will need to be found elsewhere. No decision has been made about any of the proposals as they are subject to a 12 week consultation process which ends on the 6th December.

Proposal

Current situation

There are currently ten adventure playgrounds that provide a range of indoor and outdoor supervised play activities for children aged 5 – 15. These are run by different service providers who each separately receive a nominal grant allocation (totalling £1.1 million) from the council each year towards the running costs for services provided. The council owns all of the land and

buildings that the provision operates from with the exception of one provider and is responsible for the external repairs and maintenance.

Proposed option

The proposal is to implement a gradual reduction in the grant, starting in Spring 2017, leading to an eventual total recurring reduction of 50% (£550,000) by 2020. The council will work with adventure play providers to determine initial and eventual reduction levels, help them source alternative funding, expand their current range of services and support staff and volunteers with new skills training. The transfer of buildings to adventure playgrounds' ownership is also being considered.

Consultation process undertaken

There is a comprehensive communications plan in place. We are currently mid-way through consultation which started on the 14th September and will end on the 6th December. The methodology applied has been as follows:

- Online questionnaire
- Paper booklet questionnaire
- Forum discussions (Forum events/ meetings for parents using services, staff affected by proposals, stakeholders and young people's groups targeting hard to reach groups where there are representative forums already in place eg) Young carers
- Stakeholder events held at Voluntary Action Leicestershire
- Toolkit with background information developed to support group responses
- Individual meetings with services/ organisations/ community groups on request

All consultation responses are recorded and will be analysed to inform the post consultation decision report.

4. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Financial Implications

The council's spending review programme plans to deliver significant savings in order to meet the expected budget gap of £55m in 2019/20. The programme includes a review of children and young people's services and within the scope of services to be considered for review includes adventure playgrounds.

Alison Greenhill, Chief Finance Officer, 374001

4.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Any legal implications which may arise out of the substantive issue will be considered as part of any subsequent Executive decision.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph References Within the Report
Equal Opportunities	N	
Policy	N	
Sustainable and Environmental	N	
Crime and Disorder	N	
Human Rights Act	N	
Elderly/People on Low Income	N	
Corporate Parenting	N	
Health Inequalities Impact	N	

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None

7. CONSULTATIONS

None.

8. REPORT AUTHOR

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