

## **Report to the Leader of the Council**

**Subject:** Reopening of outdoor play facilities

**Date:** 26 June 2020

**Author:** Acting Chief Executive

### **Wards Affected**

All

### **Purpose**

To seek approval to reopen outdoor play facilities including outdoor gyms and play parks from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 in line with government guidance and as detailed in the report.

### **Key Decision**

This is a key decision as it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the borough.

### **Recommendation(s)**

**THAT THE Leader of the Council:**

- 1) Authorises the reopening of the Council's outdoor play facilities including children's play parks and outdoor gyms as detailed in this report from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020.**
- 2) Delegates authority to the relevant Director to ensure all appropriate operational measures are taken to ensure re-opening is in accordance with government guidelines as detailed in the report.**

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, the decision was taken to close all Council operated children's play areas and play facilities in Council parks and

open spaces from close of business on that day. In addition, the decision was also made to close the Gedling Country Park café and all Council operated public conveniences. These decisions were taken in response to government measures at that time to reduce social contact and try to limit the transmission of Covid-19. The government subsequently made regulation to ensure closure of playgrounds, outdoor gyms and other facilities, namely the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 (“the Regulations”).

- 1.2 On 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020, following some relaxation of the government’s social distancing measures, the decision was taken to reopen the Gedling Country Park Café for the provision of takeaway food and drink, and public conveniences in some parks were also re-opened. A delegation was also given to the relevant Director to open some sporting facilities in parks if permitted by government guidance such as ball courts and bowling greens, when appropriate safety measures were in place.
- 1.3 On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020, the Prime Minister announced that from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020, playgrounds and outdoor gyms would be able to reopen. The government then published guidance on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2020 as to how the reopening of these facilities should be managed to ensure usage is safe.
- 1.4 The guidance requires risk assessments to be undertaken to ensure playgrounds and outdoor gyms open safely. The social distancing guidance has been reviewed and whilst 2m distancing is still best practice this can be reduced to 1 metre where 2 metres is not viable and risk mitigations are in place. The guidance also suggests potential measures that could be put in place to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission including; ensuring appropriate signage is displayed communicating the maximum number of users allowed on the play area/gym at any time, ensuring that outdoor gym equipment where possible is stationed 2 or 1metre apart, considering the implementation of queuing systems to access equipment or creating one way systems around outdoor gyms or equipment. Regular cleaning of equipment is suggested as is encouraging users to bring their own hand sanitiser or wipes, and promoting regular handwashing for 20 seconds, particularly at the end of play.
- 1.5 The guidance also provides information to protect staff involved in managing outdoor play areas and equipment and gives guidance around PPE and face coverings.

## **2 Proposal**

- 2.1 As the government guidance indicates, playgrounds and outdoor play facilities are a valuable asset that provides the public, and in particular

children with a stimulating and tactile experience to exercise and learn through play. Making them available again for public use provides opportunities for physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. In line with government announcement and guidance, it is proposed that authority is given to reopen the Council's outdoor children's play facilities and outdoor gyms from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

- 2.2 As indicated in the guidance, the re-opening of these facilities needs to be done in a way that limits the transmission of Covid-19. Risk assessments will be undertaken and appropriate measures put in place, which may vary depending on the size of facilities. In order that operational measures can be taken to ensure a safe reopening of outdoor play facilities, a delegation is sought to the relevant Director to authorise any measures necessary.

### **3 Alternative Options**

- 3.1 The Council could keep outdoor play facilities and gyms closed. This would prevent use of those areas which may reduce the transmission of Covid-19, however, these facilities provide vital exercise and development opportunities for children and the public generally. The government have indicated that reopening is acceptable (taking into account guidance) from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020. With appropriate measures in place, it is considered appropriate to re-open these facilities.

### **4 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any measures necessary following risk assessments of play facilities can be met from existing budgets and are unlikely to be significant.

### **5 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The Regulations previously prohibited the opening of outdoor play facilities and outdoor gyms. These Regulations will no longer apply to enable reopening from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020. The Council will ensure government guidance is considered and undertake appropriate risk assessments before the facilities reopen. It is entirely within the Council's discretion as to whether to reopen these facilities. The government guidance does not replace any existing duties the Council has in relation to health and safety, employment or equalities.

### **6 Equalities Implications**

- 6.1 The reopening of play facilities and outdoor gyms provides opportunities for all residents to participate in outdoor activity. There are likely to be positive impacts to those within the protected characteristic of disability

as play parks provide important stimulus to children who may have complex needs.

## **7 Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct implications in relation to carbon reduction or sustainability implications. The reopening of the play areas may encourage more visitors to our parks arriving by car, however given the number of open spaces available in the borough, most residents will have play facilities within easy walking distance.

## **8 Appendices**

None

## **9 Background Papers**

- 9.1 Government guidance can be found at  
:<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms>

## **10 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 10.1 To enable the re-opening of play facilities and outdoor gyms which provides a greater opportunity for outdoor physical activity to our residents.
- 10.2 To ensure swift operational decisions can be taken to ensure a safe re-opening of facilities.

### **Statutory Officer approval**

**Approved by:** Tina Adams

**Date:** 1/7/2020

**On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer**

**Approved by:** Francesca Whyley

**Date:** 1/7/2020

**On behalf of the Monitoring Officer**