



**Report to Economic and Environmental
Wellbeing Scrutiny & Policy Development
Committee
27th February 2013**

Subject: Petitions – Highfield and Pitsmoor Adventure Playground and Verdon Recreation Centre.

Author of Report: Emily Standbrook-Shaw, Policy Officer (Scrutiny)
emily.standbrook-shaw@sheffield.gov.uk
0114 27 35065

Summary:

As part of the budget setting process for 2013/14, changes are proposed to the way that Highfield and Pitsmoor Adventure Playgrounds, and Verdon recreation centre operate.

Petitions have been received opposing these changes, and have been referred to Scrutiny from Cabinet on the 13th February 2013.

At the meeting, the Committee will have the opportunity to hear from the petitioners, and receive a Powerpoint presentation from the Council's Director of Culture and Environment detailing the proposal and the reasons for it.

Full Council is due to discuss and make a decision on the 2013/14 revenue budget on the 1st March. Any recommendations or comments the Committee make will be passed to the relevant Cabinet Member for consideration in advance of the full Council meeting.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Cabinet request for scrutiny	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
------------------------------	-------------------------------------

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Consider the proposal to change the operation of Highfield and Pitsmoor Adventure Playground and Verdon Recreation Centre; and the petitions opposing the proposals.

Category of Report: OPEN

1. The proposal.

1.1 The Revenue Budget 2013/14 report to Cabinet on the 13th February 2013 set out the following:

Activity Sheffield

Physical activity is important for your health. Being inactive increases your chances of being overweight or obese. You also increase your risk of coronary heart disease, some forms of cancer and other serious conditions.

We will continue to invest in programmes that encourage and support our least active communities to be more physically active.

The scale of the cuts means that we have to find savings from our physical activity programmes so next year we have to save over £400,000 on these programmes, with further cuts likely in future years.

We've prioritised lower cost and flexible services and will seek to shift some of our programmes away from the need for Council subsidy.

We will find £100,000 of the savings needed by reducing costs within Activity Sheffield – this will include reductions to management and administrative staff.

We've analysed all services provided by Activity Sheffield in terms of potential savings and the numbers of people affected. Given the hard choices facing us, we've therefore identified those services which could offer us relatively:

- high levels of saving (i.e. they require high Council subsidy)
- low impact on participation if they were closed (i.e. have low visit levels or serve only a small area of the city)

Currently, Activity Sheffield services range from £5 subsidy per visit down to £1.80 per visit. So for example, closing a service requiring £5 subsidy per visit would save £5 for every visit affected by the closure, as opposed to other services where the saving made for each visit affected would be much lower.

Our assessment has led us to focus first on those services which are delivered from our 3 fixed venues:

- 2 adventure playgrounds at Highfields and Pitsmoor
- Verdon Recreation Centre in Burngreave

All 3 are costly to operate with an average of almost £4.50 subsidy per visit.

They also serve relatively small areas of the city and attract almost all of their visits from the immediate surrounding neighbourhoods.

By comparison an Activity Sheffield frontline worker can operate across the city – using a range of indoor and outdoor venues. As a result, they offer a lower cost and more flexible alternative to our fixed venues. For example, a single worker can help 10,000 people get active at a cost of

only £1.80 per person, compared to our fixed venues which average less than 20,000 visits at around £4.50 of subsidy per person.

We therefore propose to withdraw the year round staffed programmes at the 3 venues and instead make them available to local groups on a for hire basis.

This means that community access can be maintained and local groups will have the opportunity to run their own activities at the venues on a regular or occasional basis.

The outdoor play facilities will remain accessible and free of charge to local people. Any lettings charges for use of the buildings will be consistent with our lettings policy. At the same time, the new approach will save us £200,000

2. The petitions

2.1 2 Petitions have been received opposing the proposed changes:

2.2 *Keep Staff at Pitsmoor Adventure Playground and Verdon Recreation Centre (2410 signatures)*

'We the undersigned petition the Council to keep staff at Pitsmoor Adventure Playground and Verdon Recreation Centre and also allow time for local residents and users of the facilities to discuss the future of them with the Council before any changes are made and to seriously consider alternatives to current proposals, working with local people and organisations, so that the future of these important facilities can be secured'.

2.3 *Save Highfield Adventure Playground (2446 signatures)*

'We the undersigned, believe that Highfield Adventure Playground is a unique and valuable resource in Sharrow, not only for the children and parents that use it but also for the wider community and for Mount Pleasant Park. We feel that the proposal to remove the staff and some play equipment, from April, will have many negative social consequences for local children and our local community. We want the Council to show more support to keeping the playground open.'

3. Recommendation

3.1 The Committee is asked to consider the proposal to change the operation of Highfield and Pitsmoor Adventure Playground and Verdon Recreation Centre; and the petitions opposing the proposals.

This page is intentionally left blank