



## INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – PARKS AND PLAY AREAS

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Distribution: Audit Committee  
Chief Executive  
Director of Corporate Services  
Director of Environmental Services  
Head of Estates  
Assets Officer

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All matters contained in this report came to our attention while conducting normal internal audit work. Whilst we are able to provide an overall level of assurance based on our audit work, unlike a special investigation, this work will not necessarily reveal every issue that may exist in the Council's internal control system.

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## Executive Summary

This internal audit was completed in accordance with the approved annual Internal Audit Plan for 2017/18. This report summarises the findings arising from a review of Parks and Play Areas which was allocated 8 days.

Through our audit we found the following examples of good practice:

- A list of all parks and play areas is maintained for health and safety purposes.
- Appropriate policy and procedures are in place in relation to parks and play areas and relate to regulatory standards of health and safety.
- Inspectors have received suitable health and safety training and are suitably qualified to complete inspections.
- Appropriate risk assessments are carried out for each park/play area.
- An appropriate inspection schedule is established and maintained for each playground.

Two areas (Priority 2) where controls could be enhanced were noted during this review.

The following table summarises the total number of recommendations from our audit (all recommendations being accepted by management):

Risk	Number of recommendations & Priority rating		
	1	2	3
Council may have inadequate Health and Safety arrangements in place.	-	1	-
Play equipment and play areas may be unsafe, not well maintained or free, as far as is reasonably practicable, from hazards.	-	1	-
<b>Total recommendations made</b>	-	<b>2</b>	-

Based on our audit testing we are able to provide the following overall level of assurance:

### Satisfactory

Overall there is a satisfactory system of governance, risk management and control. While there may be some residual risk identified this should not significantly impact on the achievement of system objectives.

## Objective

The areas for inclusion in the scope of the audit were determined through discussion with management and will consider the main risks in relation to Parks and Play Areas and to review the key systems and controls in place to address these. The review focused on:

- Health & Safety
- Inspections

## Background

The Council manages approximately 100 children's play areas across the Borough, as well as many other outdoor facilities for young people. Play Areas can be found in parks and open spaces, as well as in local residential areas.

The Health and Safety at Work Order (Northern Ireland) 1978, Sections 3 and 4 place a duty on businesses providing play facilities to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of persons frequenting their premises and using the facilities. This duty extends to ensuring the safe siting, installation and maintenance of play equipment. There's no law to say that any form of inspection should be carried out on children's playgrounds. However, it's recommended in BS EN 1176 that inspections should be carried out throughout the course of a year. If Council fail to carry out these inspections, or fail to keep records of these inspections taking place, then unfortunately they will leave themselves very much open to successful claims in the event of an accident. The Health and Safety Executive (NI) looks for a systems approach to safety and for playgrounds to meet relevant standards or guidance.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require risk assessments to be carried out and significant hazards from any activity reduced and the findings recorded. Faulty equipment or failure to have a safe system of work could lead to fines of either £5000 or £20,000 per offence. Failure to have adequate risk assessments carries a fine of up to £5000. The level of fine depends on which court hears the offence.

A combination of the weather and the way children use the equipment can lead to hazardous conditions. In addition, equipment can be misused and vandalised by adults, particularly at night. Equipment made defective in this way can then present a serious risk of injury to users. Frequent checks are carried out and checklists are completed and retained on file.

There is an annual inspection undertaken for all play areas carried out by a RoSPA approved inspector which covers a wide range of outdoor safety issues. In addition to this formal annual inspection, Council perform weekly and more thorough monthly inspections, with the results of these inspections being retained and passed to the Assets Officer. Frequency will vary according to the site and local usage, although weekly should be seen as a minimum. This will depend on the risk assessment of the site; for example, a site on a housing estate prone to vandalism may require a daily check. Inspectors report any defects through the electronic Tabs View system to the Assets Officer. Council has in place a computerised maintenance management system (CMMS) which details all maintenance of play areas.

## Risks

The risks identified relating to Parks and Play Areas and agreed with management are as follows:

1. Council may have inadequate Health and Safety arrangements in place.
2. Play equipment and play areas may be unsafe, not well maintained or free, as far as is reasonably practicable, from hazards.

## Audit Approach

Our audit fieldwork comprised:

- Documenting the systems via discussions with key staff
- Consideration of the key risks within each audit area
- Examining relevant documentation
- Carrying out a preliminary evaluation of the arrangements and controls in operation generally within the Council
- Testing the key arrangements and controls
- Testing the completeness and accuracy of records.

The table below shows the staff consulted with and we would like to thank them for their assistance and co-operation.

Job title
Head of Estates
Assets Officer
Play Park Inspectors

## Findings and Recommendations

This section of the report sets out our findings in relation to control issues identified and recommendations. A summary of all the key controls that we considered is included in Appendix II to this report.

### 6.1 Risk 1 – Health & Safety Arrangements

Strategic Plan
a) Observation-

Overall, appropriate policy and procedures are in place in relation to parks and play areas and relate to regulatory standards of health and safety. However, it was noted during the audit that Council does not have a Parks and Play Strategic Plan in place.
<b>b) Implication-</b> A medium range planning document that will provide direction for managing and developing parks and play facilities, programs, infrastructure, resources, and investment over the next three year period is not yet in place.
<b>c) Priority Rating-</b> 2
<b>d) Recommendation-</b> A Strategic Plan process should be developed to assess the status of parks and play within the Council area and plan a future that reflects the Corporate Priorities of the Council and needs of our community.
<b>e) Management Response-</b>
<b>Responsible Officer &amp; Implementation Date-</b>

## 6.2 Risk 2 – Maintenance of Play Equipment and Play Areas

Maintenance Records
<b>a) Observation-</b> It was noted that Ballycastle and Limavady inspectors use a manual system for recording inspections whereas Coleraine and Ballymoney inspectors use an iPad with TABS software installed. The TABS system captures inspection records which can be emailed directly to management to facilitate reactive and planned maintenance.
<b>b) Implication-</b> Manual Inspection records may not be fully completed and retained to assist the Council to appropriately defend against any legal action together with failure to report defects to ensure corrective action has taken place.
<b>c) Priority Rating-</b> 2
<b>d) Recommendation-</b> The TABS system should be rolled out to all Inspectors to ensure there is streamlined and robust inspection and maintenance records in place.
<b>e) Management Response-</b>

## **Appendix I: Definition of Assurance Ratings and Hierarchy of Findings**

### **Satisfactory Assurance**

Evaluation opinion: Overall there is a satisfactory system of governance, risk management and control. While there may be some residual risk identified this should not significantly impact on the achievement of system objectives.

### **Limited Assurance**

Evaluation opinion: There are significant weaknesses within the governance, risk management and control framework which, if not addressed, could lead to the system objectives not being achieved.

### **Unacceptable Assurance**

Evaluation opinion: The system of governance, risk management and control has failed or there is a real and substantial risk that the system will fail to meet its objectives.

## **Hierarchy of Findings**

This audit report records only the main findings. As a guide to management and to reflect current thinking on risk management we have categorised our recommendations according to the perceived level of risk. The categories are as follows:

**Priority 1:** Failure to implement the recommendation is likely to result in a major failure of a key organisational objective, significant damage to the reputation of the organisation or the misuse of public funds.

**Priority 2:** Failure to implement the recommendation could result in the failure of an important organisational objective or could have some impact on a key organisational objective.

**Priority 3:** Failure to implement the recommendation could lead to an increased risk exposure.

## Appendix II: Summary of Key Controls Reviewed

Risk	Control issues
<p>Council may have inadequate Health and Safety arrangements in place.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Parks and Play Strategic Plan is in place.</li> <li>• A list of all parks and play areas is maintained for health and safety purposes.</li> <li>• Appropriate policy and procedures are in place in relation to parks and play areas and relate to regulatory standards of health and safety.</li> <li>• Inspectors have received suitable health and safety training and records are retained as proof.</li> <li>• Appropriate risk assessments are carried out for each park/play area.</li> <li>• Parks/Play equipment within the Borough remains safe to use.</li> </ul>
<p>Play equipment and play areas may be unsafe, not well maintained or free, as far as is reasonably practicable, from hazards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An appropriate inspection schedule is established and maintained for each playground.</li> <li>• Engineers are informed in a timely manner of the required playgrounds and playground equipment to be inspected and maintained.</li> <li>• Inspectors are suitably qualified and trained to complete playground inspections providing a measurable degree of competency.</li> <li>• Inspection records are fully completed and retained to assist the Council to appropriately defend against any legal action and comply with investigations carried out by the Health and Safety Executive NI and/or RQIA.</li> <li>• Ensure any corrective action or planned maintenance has been established, is actioned and appropriately monitored.</li> <li>• An annual inspection of all play areas is carried out by a reputable safety organisation such as RoSPA.</li> </ul>