

## Findings

### KEY STATS:

- **Just under a third (31%) of all councils have closed play provision since 2010**
- **However, the amount of play provision closing is small – an average of 2.4% across councils**
- **71% of councils have experienced a fall in their revenue budget for play facilities between 2010/11 and 2013/14. Budgets have fallen by an average 60%, or £195,841**
- **58% of councils have experienced a fall in their capital budgets for play facilities between 2010/11 and 2013/14. Budgets have fallen by an average £334,337.46, or 69%**
- **Almost two thirds of councils that have had play worker staff since 2010 have reduced their staff levels**
- **More than a fifth of councils that have had playworker staff since 2010 no longer have any staff**
- **19% of councils are providing staffed play provision, with the majority located in London**

### Detail:

164 councils responded of varying size, including county, district, borough, town etc

The email request was sent to 245 councils in total, including borough, district, county and town councils (but not parish).

Of these, Surrey CC, Cambridgeshire CC, Cotswold District, Cumbria County, Essex County, Hampshire County, Lancashire CC (7) all said after the FOI reply period that they did not hold this information. It was too late by then to go to the relevant district/parish councils. Other councils that responded immediately with this information led to the FOI being resent to relevant district/parish councils.

As a result of this, the total number of councils observed in the study is: 157.

### **PLAY AREAS – Columns B to E**

NB for this analysis, the total number is **156** because Peterborough City Council was unable to provide figures.

### **Staffed**

A total of 29 councils said they had staffed playgrounds = 19% (18.6)

The highest number was in Birmingham and Lambeth with 14 each.

Six of the top ten councils with staffed playgrounds were London Boroughs

Nine out of the total were London boroughs.

Of the authorities with staffed playgrounds, 3 have closed since 2010. None of the councils that provided this information gave any further details about the closures.

### **Unstaffed**

No council said they didn't have any unstaffed play provision. Islington provided unclear data, so this was discounted. Total for this analysis: **155**

Milton Keynes provided the highest figure, claiming to have 492 play areas.

Wandsworth had the second highest, which was surprising considering its relative size (check population figures). A total of three councils have between 300 and 500 play areas.

Six councils have between 200 and 300 play areas.

31 councils have between 100 and 200 play areas

115 had between 1 and 100 play areas.

A total of **48** councils said they have closed play areas since 2010.

The highest was Sunderland City, which had closed 15 play grounds. In its response, Sunderland explained: "we have removed the old play equipment from 'pocket parks' as new play parks (captured in number in Q1a above) have been established".

It also said: "External funding opportunities for play developments are not readily available as in previous years. In this challenging economic climate, it is important that the City Council are clear where and why resources are focused to make the best use out of public money. Section 106 contributions for play have historically been used to match capital play programmes, such as Play Pathfinder and Big Lottery Fund, and city council contribution's through the strategic Investment budget and the strategic investment programme budget across the city in recent years to add value to developments. Now that these external funded programmes have ended and no further Government investment is available in this area, Section 106 is now becoming in the main the only investment capital available for any play priorities moving forward. The contribution is made by housing developers who develop residential property. With limited access to additional external funding opportunities available for the foreseeable future, the city councils Play and Urban Games Delivery Plan for 2013 - 2015 will prioritise developments and upgrades to ensure the Section 106 contributions are maximised for the greatest impact."

3 councils had closed more than ten play grounds. In Sunderland, this represents about 11.5% of its total unstaffed play areas [15/(116+15)]. In Sheffield, it was about 7.4% and in Kirklees about 2.9%.

7 councils had closed between 5 and 10 play areas.

The majority (22) had closed only 1 play ground.

As a percentage of the total number of councils that responded to this question, 31 per cent (30.96) had closed a playground since 2010.

No council reported any staffed play areas closing without also closing unstaffed play. So the 31 per cent figure is true of all closures.

**We can therefore say, just under a third of all councils have closed some play provision since 2010**

But the amount being closed is not huge. The council with the highest number of total closures (staffed and unstaffed) as a percentage was the London Borough of Havering. It has closed 12.5 per cent of its play facilities since 2010.

The average rate of closure as a percentage among all the councils that reported closing either staffed or unstaffed facilities was  $[166.9/48]$  **2.4%**.

## REVENUE BUDGET

Some people were unable to provide figures for this section because they did not separate their revenue budget or did not have one.

A total of **51** councils provided data for this question.

**36** of these showed an overall fall in revenue over the years from 2010, representing 71 per cent (70.5)

**10** of these showed an overall rise, representing 20 per cent (19.6)

4 said their budget had remained the same each year (7.8%), and 1 could only provide budget details for 2013/14.

Of the council's that showed a fall in revenue, the greatest fall was reported by Newcastle at over a million pounds: £1,190,038. This represents a 91 per cent (90.6) fall in its budget.

The average fall per council was  $7,050,260/36 = £195,840.56$

This figure also tells us that more than £7m has been lost from the play revenue budget overall since 2010.

Of the councils that showed a rise in revenue, the highest was Islington at £189,793.00

The average rise was  $309,391/10 = £30,939.10$ . So many more council have lost significantly more money than those who have gained have gained.

The average fall in budget as a percentage is:  $2,149/36 = 60\%$  (59.7)

The average rise in budget as a percentage is:  $138/10 = 14\%$  (13.8)

In total, 10 councils said they had no revenue budget this year. Six councils had no budget for more than one year.

## **PLAYWORKERS**

55 councils provided data about play workers. The others had no staffed provision and therefore the question was irrelevant to them.

32 had fewer staff now than in 2010 (62% (61.5))

21 reported consistent levels (38%)

And 2 reported a rise (3.6%)

12 councils reported that they no longer have any staff.(21.8%)

We can therefore state:

**More than a fifth of councils that have had playworker staff since 2010 no longer have any staff.**

**Almost two thirds of councils that have had play worker staff since 2010 have reduced their staff levels.**

[NB must make it clear that much of this data represents full-time equivalent posts. Many councils also reported hiring seasonal workers, especially for summer play schemes]

## **CAPITAL**

These budgets are much more variable – some councils have money some years and not others. We can look at the difference between figures for 2010/11 and 2013/14 again, but have to bear in mind that the funding has not dropped steadily over the years. We can explain this with more comment about where the funding comes from – provided by Mick – and where it's likely to come from in the future. [see his notes] Even so, the drop in funding are significant.

**119** councils provided data for this question.

69 of these showed a drop in budget between 2010/11 and 2013/13 = **58%** (57.9)

40 showed a rise =34% (33.6)

10 showed the same budget level = 8.4%

When we look at the amount by which capital budgets have fallen, we don't include Wigan in this as it only provided the amount it has spent so far. Although the amount suggests an overall fall, it's not accurate to include this figure. So the total for this question is **68**.

Bradford reported the largest budget fall of £1,179,433. In its reply, Bradford indicated that the funding it had in 2010/11 of £1,521,583 included Playbuilder funding.

Durham County Council reported the next highest fall of £911,000.

Stockport's capital budget fell from £800,000 to £0. In total, 14 councils said they had no capital budget for 2013/14 (12%).

**The average fall in capital budget is [22,734,947/68] £334,337.46**

21 of the councils showed a percentage fall in capital budget of 90% and above.

**The average percentage fall of the capital budgets was [4,680/68]69% (68.8)**

Of the 40 councils that reported a **rise** in capital budget, the highest was at Waltham Forest, of £1.45m. The council provided no further explanation about where this money is coming from.

The average rise was [4,650,890.00/40] £116,272.25. If we take Waltham Forest out of the equation, because its rise was considerably higher than all the other councils, the average is [3,200,890/39] £82,074.10. This is considerably less than the average fall in capital budget funding.

## **MAINTENANCE BUDGETS**

I'm yet to go through all this, but the data here appears to show little consistency. I don't think we'll have any big top line figures showing a large rise or fall. A lot of the council's reported consistent spending over the years. Some don't have a set budget – they find the money from a pooled budget for repairs as and when they need it.