

Report on	Update on Forest Schools within Council area for 2020/21
Date of Meeting	Thursday 11 February 2021
Reporting Officer	N Hill Head of Parks
Contact Officer	A Reid, Parks & Countryside Development Officer

Is this report restricted for confidential business? If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	
	No	x

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To update Members on the current position of Forest Schools for 2020 - 2021 within the Council area and to seek approval for the reallocation and distribution of project resources for the current programme.
2.0	Background
2.1	Northern Ireland Forest School Awards (NIFSA) is an environmental awareness initiative, facilitated by personnel from NIFSA, which encourages pupils in Mid Ulster schools to visit and take on an ownership of a Council Park. It has been operating successfully at Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Park since April 2017 as part of the education programme at Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House. The programme is supported through annual revenue budgets.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	This year 2020-21 was to see the continuation of the roll-out of this scheme. Unfortunately due to the on-going Covid pandemic the schools have not been able to take part in the outdoor learning activities as planned. With this uncertainty continuing it has been decided not to hold any Forest School sessions this year.
3.2	Officers have been able to attract funding to deliver a Take Learning Outside Programme, funded by Northern Healthy Lifestyle Partnership (NHLP), funding received £4,000. It was intended to use this funding to further the Forest School programme on Council sites, however due to increasing uncertainty this is not possible. Instead it is proposed that this funding will be used to purchase materials which will be given to the nine schools, who expressed an interest in the 2020-21 Forest School Programme. This will enable them to deliver the Forest School programme on their own sites/virtually, with support and guidance from Council staff. This action has been approved by the funding body.

3.3	It is hoped that this will allow the continuation of the Forest School programme and will maintain this connection of environmental awareness and citizenship skills within sites, while extending the learning of ecological and conservation skills to even more pupils and teachers in the Mid Ulster District Council area.
3.4	Current budget allocation for 2020/21 (£3,000) proposal is to purchase materials needed to deliver the roll out of the programme for the 2021-22 financial year such as tarpaulins, wet weather equipment/Gazebos, hand washing facilities and sanitisers.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial: Distribution of £4,000 (100% funded by NHLP) to purchase materials that will be distributed amongst nine registered local schools that expressed an interest in the 2020/21 Forest Schools Programme.</p> <p>Reallocation of £3,000 contribution to purchase equipment and materials that will support future delivery of FSNI activities in council area.</p> <p>Human: Staff time and commitment. Parks staff support the programme and have undertaken the required training to deliver the workshops and activities associated to the FSNI Scheme.</p> <p>Risk Management: In line with Council policies and procedures</p>
4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: In line with Council policy and procedures</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: In line with Council policy and procedures</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	That members note the postponement of the Forest School Programme for 2020/21 year due to the Covid pandemic.
5.2	Approval for funding received from NHLP will be distributed across nine registered schools, who expressed an interest in the 2020-21 Forest School Programme to enable them to deliver the Forest School programme on their own sites/virtually, with support and guidance from Council staff.

5.3	Approval for the reallocation of current 2020-21 budget of £3,000 to be expended on acquiring course related equipment and materials in preparation for 2021-22 rollout and extension of the Forest Schools Programme.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	N/A