

Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission

Wednesday 16 July 2025

7.00 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1
2QH

Supplemental Agenda

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Briefing - Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission

Playgrounds report

July 2025

1 Purpose of the report

This report provides an update on work related to playgrounds across the borough over the last 18 months – in relation to: high level audit of all sites; reviewing maintenance approach and best practice; progress on delivery of capital projects for new playgrounds; cross departmental working (housing and leisure).

2 Background

The council understands the role and importance of play for children. For many in Southwark, a playground may be their only access to play/green/open space. Playgrounds are important for the crucial early year's development where children learn a wide range of physical, social and emotional skills and abilities. Good-quality playgrounds give parents and guardians the confidence to allow children to play independently in a safe, purposely designed environment.

The management of the council's play areas is currently predominately divided between Parks & Natural Environment (Leisure) and Housing teams. 60 play areas are located in, and managed by Parks, and over 204 on housing estates, managed by Housing colleagues. Whilst there are significantly more playgrounds on estates, these are generally much smaller scale than those in parks, as becomes clear when the amount of equipment is considered- there are approximately an estimated 1,350 pieces of play equipment in housing and 1,000 in parks.

It should be noted that play areas in the borough managed by other organisations and school playgrounds are not included in the scope of this report.

Over the last 18 months there has been a lot of work to understand;

- Where our playgrounds are and which council teams manage them
- How different teams manage the playgrounds they are responsible for
- How all the different teams providing and managing playgrounds can work more collaboratively together (a Play Group has been established that meets quarterly across teams)
- Which of the parks playgrounds are most in need of investment as a result of a light touch audit
- The full picture of current play investment across the council to establish a fair and strategy-led approach to future investment decisions
- How officers can better manage play assets to minimise risk of equipment failure
- How we can make best use of the council's asset management system to enable accurate data collection and lifecycle management for play assets

3 Strategic context

Play is recognised within the Council's Delivery Plan target no. 55 - 'For the council to provide great playgrounds for children of all ages' and 'Ensure that wherever you live in Southwark you have local high-quality playgrounds, including equipment for children with disabilities'.

Play is additionally recognised in a number of other strategic plans including Streets for People which focuses on small play spaces in localised areas, the Climate Resilience Action plan in relation to creating play spaces for the future taking into account hotter temperatures.

The London Plan advises that each London authority has a Play strategy. Southwark does not currently have one, although play will feature in the new Leisure Strategy (2026).

4 Recent investment in playgrounds

Significant investment has been made in new / improved playgrounds over recent years. A summary is as follows:

Table 1

| Park Playgrounds | | |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Site | Date of completion | Ward |
| St Mary's Churchyard Playground and Plaza | 2017 | St Georges |
| Camberwell Green Playground | 2017 | Camberwell Green |
| Nelson Square Playground and MUGA | 2017 | Borough and Bankside |
| Southwark Park Playground | 2018 | Rotherhithe |
| Peckham Rye Park Playground and new playroom building | 2018 | Peckham Rye |
| Mint Street Adventure Playground and building | 2018 | Borough and Bankside |
| Leyton Square Playground | 2018 | Old Kent Road |
| Burgess Park West Playground and park expansion | 2019 | Faraday |
| Dickens Square Park Playground and park expansion | 2019 | Chaucer |
| Leathermarket gardens Playground | 2020 | LB & West Bermondsey |
| Pelier Park toddlers play area | 2023 | Newington |
| Peckham Rye under 5s Playground | 2024 | Peckham Rye |
| Victory Park improvements inc. playground | 2024 | North Walworth |
| Fredericks Playground | 2024 | Newington |
| Ellen Brown Playground | 2024 | South Bermondsey |

Housing Playgrounds – since 2022

| Site | Date of completion | Ward |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Commercial Way | 2023 | Peckham |
| Aylesbury FDS A | 2023 | Faraday |

| | | |
|--|------|----------------------------|
| Tissington Estate | 2023 | Rotherhithe |
| Bells Garden Estate | 2023 | Peckham |
| Moody Road | 2023 | Camberwell Green |
| Adrian & Dennis (39-44 Rutley Close) | 2023 | Newington |
| 345 Southwark Park Road | 2023 | North Bermondsey |
| Daniels Road | 2022 | Nunhead and Queens Road |
| Leather Market – Joseph Lancaster | 2022 | Chaucer |
| Grosv. Terrace playground resurfacing for community park | 2023 | Camberwell green |
| Long Meadow Playground extension | 2022 | Dulwich Village |
| Netra Play | 2023 | Newington |
| Salisbury Row Park playground | 2022 | North Walworth |
| Dawes House Play Area | 2023 | North Walworth |
| Moody Road Toddler's Playground | 2022 | Peckham |
| Alfred Slater Playground | 2023 | Bridge and West Bermondsey |

Play improvements in progress and planned to be delivered in the next 12 months, at parks' sites are as follows:

Table 2

| Site | Nature of the improvement and source of funding | Anticipated date of completion | Ward |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Peckham Rye Adventure Playground | To improve playground and replace equipment at the end of life. Funded by Adventure Playground Programme capital allocation. | Dec 2025 | Peckham Rye |
| Dog Kennel Hill Adventure Playground | A steer has been provided (May 2025) for officers to-bid into the capital programme in autumn 2025, for the additional funding required to redevelop the Trust's building. | Capital bid – autumn 2025 | Champion Hill |
| Bethwin Adventure Playground | Transformation of the adventure playground to become a new modern, adventurous play area. Funded by Adventure Playground Programme Capital allocation. | Spring/Summer 2026 | Camberwell Green |
| Nursery Row Park | Upgrading of park entrance and to two play areas in the park. Previous capital allocation. | Summer 2025 | North Walworth |
| Little Dorrit Park play area | Upgrade to play area and replacement play equipment at the end of life. Funded from CIL, S106 and asset disposal. | Summer 2026 | Borough and Bankside |

| | | | |
|--------------|---|-------------|-----------------|
| Dulwich Park | Refurbishment and replacement of equipment and renewed surfacing as health and safety improvements. Funded from the 2024 capital allocation for Health and Safety improvements. | Summer 2026 | Dulwich Village |
| Goose Green | Replacement of end of life equipment. Funded from the 2024 capital allocation for Health and Safety improvements. | Winter 2025 | Goose Green |

Play improvements in progress and anticipated to be delivered in the medium term in Parks, completed during 2026 – 2027, are as follows:

Table 3

| Site | Nature of the improvement and source of funding | Anticipated date of completion | Ward |
|--------------------------------|--|--|----------------|
| GHM play area | Transformation of the current playground to a more accessible, modern playground and replacing play equipment at the end of life. Funding through the 2016 Elephant and Castle regeneration. | TBC – now in design | St Georges |
| Leyton Square | Replacement of prefabricated buildings. CIL funding from 2021, 2023 and further 2025 to be confirmed. Predominately a building scheme, but includes a small play area. | Autumn 2026 | Old Kent Road |
| Newington Gardens play area | Full redevelopment project replacing all equipment which is in poor condition/at the end of life. Funded through 2024 capital allocation for redevelopment and CIL 2025 to be confirmed. | Autumn 2026 | Chaucer |
| Surrey Square Park play area | Full redevelopment project creating destination inclusive play area. Funded through the 2024 capital allocation for redevelopment. | TBC – now in design | North Walworth |
| Faraday Gardens Park play area | Full redesign and redevelopment project. Funded through the 2024 capital allocation for redevelopment. | TBC - early project planning now started | Faraday |
| Lucas gardens Play space | Improvements to toddler play area. Funded by Cleaner, greener, safer 2021 and 2024. (Small amount of CGS funding available, | TBC – now in design | St Giles |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | so needs additional funding to be identified – potentially from a parks capital budget – TBD.) | | |
|--|--|--|--|

Play improvement pipeline – priorities for investing the capital allocation which have not as yet started include:

Table 4

| Site | Nature of the improvement and source of funding | Current Status | Ward |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|----------------|
| Bird in Bush Park play area | Full redesign and redevelopment project. Funded from 2024 capital allocation for redevelopment. | Awaiting new Project Manager to start in Aug | Peckham |
| Burgess Park play area 2 (under 5s) | Inclusive play project to improve accessibility and inclusivity. Funded through the 2024 capital allocation for inclusive play. | As above | Faraday |
| Honor Oak Recreation Ground play area | Inclusive play project to improve accessibility and inclusivity. Funded through the 2024 capital allocation for inclusive play. | As above | Peckham Rye |
| Salisbury Row Park play area | Inclusive play project to improve accessibility and inclusivity. Funded through the 2024 capital allocation for inclusive play. | As above | North Walworth |

Housing play improvements - there are a number of improvement projects which are planned and underway within housing playgrounds with further projects identified but as yet unfunded. The following table sets out those projects which are underway.

Table 5

| Playground/Estate | Nature of the improvement and funding source | Anticipated Date of completion | Ward |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Rye Hill Estate | Redevelopment of play area with eco-friendly equipment for wider age group. Funded through GLA grant and S106. | 31 July 2025 | Peckham Rye |
| Bells Garden | Redevelopment of demolished playground. Funded through S106 and HRA | 11 August 2025 | Old Kent Road |
| Fendell | Provision of playground with equipment, hard surface MUGA. Funded through grant and S106 | Autumn 2025 | South Bermondsey |

| | | | |
|--------|---|-------------|------------------|
| Maltby | Provision of playground facilities for under 8 year olds. Funded through grant and S106 | Autumn 2025 | South Bermondsey |
|--------|---|-------------|------------------|

5 Current play investment programme

Early in 2024 officers carried out a light-touch audit of play areas in parks and estates to update our understanding of the play assets managed by the council and to establish a starting point for a future investment programme. Play areas were mapped to understand distribution across the borough and identified the following;

- 70% of park play areas have not had investment in the last 12 years.
- 98% of parks play areas are located in areas of deprivation – 93% of parks play areas and 99% of estates play areas.
- 62% of the council's playgrounds are located in areas with high levels of childhood obesity – 58% of park play areas and 64% of estates play areas.
- 53% of park play areas are not considered accessible.

Officers then identified a programme made up of three tranches of priority playgrounds needing improvement detailed below and estimated the cost of these projects being approximately £3m. That sum was allocated at Cabinet in October 2024. The three tranches are as follows:

1. The creation of a wholly accessible and inclusive 'flagship' playground and the major refurbishment of three others (£2m).
2. The enhancement of a range of playgrounds by replacing some equipment with more inclusive, accessible equipment to open up enjoyment of these spaces to all children and young people (£500k).
3. A focus on proactive refurbishment of play equipment that is coming to the end of its life with a focus on key health and safety risks (£500k). One priority site in this tranche of work is Goose Green playground.

Details of these investment projects are in table 4, play improvements pipeline.

It is anticipated that for the council to continue to meet its health and safety duties and the commitments set out in the CDP that a further phase of investment will be sought in approximately 18 months time.

6 Current management of play

The management and development of play across the borough is carried out by several different council departments and also within several different teams within departments.

Table 6

| Team | Role |
|--|---|
| Parks and Natural Environment Team (Leisure) | Responsible for the day-to-day operations of play spaces across parks and open spaces. |
| Asset Management Team (Environment) | Responsible for monthly inspections and maintenance of parks playgrounds |
| Policy and Programme Team (Leisure) | Responsible for the delivery of refurbished and new play spaces in parks |
| Housing | Responsible for the day-to-day operations of play spaces across estates |
| Housing Repairs | Responsible for the monthly inspection and maintenance of estates playgrounds |
| Southwark Construction | Responsible for the delivery of refurbished and new play spaces in parks |
| Youth and Play Services | Responsible for the day-to-day operations of 3 adventure playgrounds and the relationship with the 2 externally run adventure playgrounds (Bethwin and Dog Kennel Hill) |
| External contractors and Small Works Team | Responsible for the monthly inspections and maintenance of adventure playgrounds |
| Planning Policy | Monitoring developer compliance to council policies relating to play as part of planning and construction processes |
| Cleaner Greener Safer | Responsible for the delivery of resident led small capital improvements to play areas across the borough working in partnership with Estates and Parks teams |
| Sustainable Growth | Responsible for the allocation of CiL and S106 funding which can be used for playground improvements |

Representatives from the teams above have been meeting on a quarterly basis as part of a 'Play Working Group' aimed at sharing best practice, aligning standards in design, management and maintenance and improving the play offer across the borough.

Adventure Play

As well as open access play, Southwark also has 3 council-managed adventure play sites. These are managed by the Youth and Play Service. They are: Ellen Brown AP, Mint Street AP and Peckham Rye AP. The council also grant- aids, through the Positive Futures for Young People Fund (PFYPP), Bethwin Road AP and Dog Kennel Hill AP, which are independent to the council, managed by the voluntary sector.

The council-run adventure playgrounds offer is for children and young people aged 8 to 15 years old (up to 25 with SEND). Adventure playgrounds are staffed by trained professionals who are there to support children and young people create their play spaces, take risks, socialise and interact with others their ages. They provide spaces indoors and outdoors for free, imaginative, creative, active and exploratory play under the supervision of qualified and experienced play staff who maintain safe environments, resources and activities planned around a curriculum.

Recent investment of over £600,000 in Ellen Brown has created an exciting and

very popular replacement adventure playground.

Officers are also in discussion with Dog kennel Hill Trust, to ensure that Council funding allocated to this adventure play site is spent on replacement of play equipment, (as existing equipment is reaching the end of its serviceable lifespan), whilst additional funding for a new building is secured.

Open access play areas

In contrast to Adventure Play, play areas in parks and on housing estates are open access and unstaffed. These are managed and maintained directly by the council, with the Parks team (in Leisure Directorate) and Housing team each managing their own sites. The different departments take different management approaches to these play areas, as laid out in the table below.

Table 7 – High level comparison of parks and housing play management approach

| Department | Parks and NE | Housing |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Number of sites | 60 | 204 |
| Number of pieces of equipment | Approximately 1,000 (estimation) | Approximately 1,350 (estimation) |
| Budget | £450k – includes salaries of Small Works Team, order management and repairs in wider parks area (gates, benches etc) | £100k – for repairs and commissioning of external annual audit. Does <u>not</u> include salaries or order management. |
| Monthly inspections | Small Works Team (4) | Communal Repairs Technical Officers (13) |
| Annual inspections | Externally commissioned by Asset Management Services. Inspection costs & order management are covered under the £450k budget | Externally commissioned via play contractor |
| Repairs | Small Works Team (80%) and external contractors (20%) | Play contractor – External contractor (90%) and Small Works Team (10%) |
| Capital investment | Significant - Mixture of mainly council capital but also CiL and S106 | Minimal – Mixture of CiL and S106 |
| Asset database | Confirm | Northgate platform |

7 Health and safety and repairs resources

The British and European safety standard BS EN1176 and the Health and Safety Executive strongly recommend that all play areas have at least one inspection every year from an independent suitably qualified body such as RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents).

Play areas in parks (Leisure Directorate) are maintained and repaired by the council's Small Works Team (Asset Management Services, Environment Directorate). They conduct monthly inspections and carry out repairs where required unless a play equipment provider is needed. The Small Works Team then work with the Parks Team to organise replacement equipment.

All parks playgrounds are independently inspected on an annual basis by RoSPA registered companies and the audit reports then submitted to the Small Works team who address the recommendations within the reports and liaise with the parks team where necessary to carry out the works.

Adventure Play areas Health and Safety is managed separately by the Youth & Play Service (Leisure Directorate) under a different budget. Site checks are completed daily by Adventure Playground staff, who are trained in First Aid, Register of Play Inspectors International, Safeguarding Children and Young People and Food Hygiene. There is an additional annual inspection by an independent external body. Every site has both a premises and activities risk assessments in place, and checks are undertaken by colleagues in the council (and reviewed by Unions) periodically.

Southwark Council's Communal Repairs team is responsible for the maintenance of housing's play areas. Communal Repairs Technical Officers in Housing's Responsive Repairs & Maintenance team carry out monthly estate inspections, including play areas, to capture repairs and carry out fuller inspections every quarter. Estate play areas are also inspected on an annual basis by RoSPA approved inspectors, Play Safe, contracted via the works contractor Bridgewater. The aforementioned Small Works Team (Asset Management Services, Environment Directorate) carry out occasional small metalworks repairs, but most works are contracted to Bridgewater.

Both Housing and Parks Team have limited resources for the maintenance of the significant number of playgrounds across the borough. Pressure on this limited budget increases annually, as new playgrounds are introduced.

Considering the above, there are several improvement efforts underway which aim to;

- a) Improve management and reporting of risks in play areas to ensure safe play;
- b) Improve data and insight on the condition of play assets in the borough to enable better asset management and investment decisions;
- c) Clarify roles, responsibilities and opportunities around the play agenda to support effective cross-functional working and pace of delivery.

8 Current work/projects to improve the management of play in parks

Workstream 1: Re-set of monthly playground management operations

Goal: Improve transparency, accountability & risk management

Activities:

- Introduction of more structured monthly meetings between Parks and the Small Works Team, including development of fit-for-purpose KPI report, risk log, action log, and forward plan agenda (Done)
- Identifying and embedding smarter ways of working, including consistent use of asset management software Confirm for logging condition surveys & works (Done)
- Modernising the way play assets are inspected, including configuring asset management software Confirm to support itemised condition surveys (In progress - interdependency with Workstream 2 below)

Workstream 2: Improving play asset management

Goal: Create play asset inventory and associated lifecycle management plan

Activities:

- Clarify the no. of pieces of equipment v's no of playgrounds (Done)
- Create an inventory database of all play equipment (In progress – on track for delivery Summer 2025)
- Carry out a condition survey of all the play equipment on an asset-by-asset basis (In progress – on track for delivery Summer 2025)
- Develop a long-term lifecycle plan for play equipment (planned work)
- Identify estimated costs associated with the delivery of the lifecycle plan in order to inform an investment plan (planned work)

Workstream 3: Re-write of Service Level Agreement between Parks & Asset Management Teams

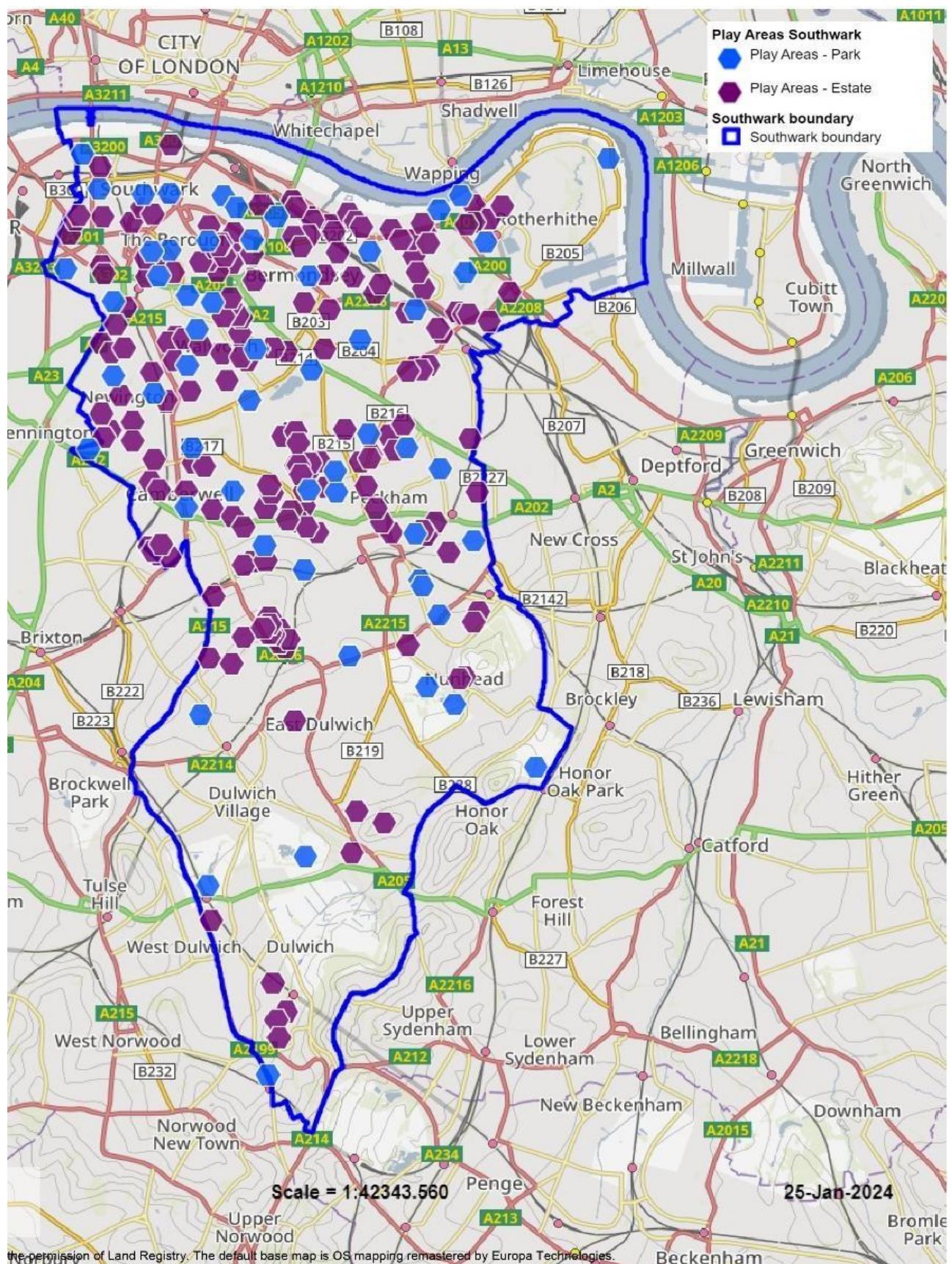
Goal: Clarify roles, responsibilities, service standards and required resourcing

Activities:

- Review and define scope of services (Done)
- Review and define roles, responsibilities and reporting requirements (Done)
- Review and define service standards and KPIs in line with Workstream 1 (Done)
- Review and agree resourcing, budget and cost management procedures (In progress)

These efforts sit alongside the Play Investment Capital Programme and the establishment of the Quarterly Play Working Group referenced earlier in this report.

Appendix 1 - Mapping of Play Areas in Parks and Estates



Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025-26

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NOTE: Original held by Scrutiny Team; all amendments/queries to Julie Timbrell Tel: 020 7525 0514

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