

Report to: Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee

Date: 7 July 2022

Subject: **Safer Parks**

Director: Liz Hunter

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Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:	
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To brief the committee on the Safer Parks research project, with the intention of a further paper at the September meeting to discuss the findings.

2. Information

- 2.1 In October 2021, the Combined Authority won £383k of Home Office 'Safer Streets' funding to support the safety of women and girls in parks. The bid was a collaboration between the policy team and the policing and crime team and included proposals for the following:
- £100k to make physical changes to 10 local parks (2 per district)
 - £130k for 'reclaim the space' community activities in these parks for women and girls (such as yoga, running, boxercise)
 - £98k for research with the University of Leeds on women and girls' perception of safety in parks
 - £19k for design guidance
- 2.2 Governance of the bid and project is through the Policing and Crime Executive, chaired by DMPC Alison Lowe. However, due to the joint working/cross-cutting themes involved in the research and design guidance elements, it is thought appropriate to update this committee on those parts of the project.

- 2.3 The research was led by Dr Anna Barker and Dr George Holmes, and was based on the following questions:
- What makes a park feel safe or unsafe to visit, and what might make parks feel safer for women and girls?
 - What are the areas of consensus and divergence in viewpoints?
- The research used 'Q methodology' to identify clusters of shared opinions on 49 statements, for example 'I feel safer using parks with my friends and family' and 'Having lighting in parks would make them feel safer for me to use after dark'.
- 2.4 University researchers spoke to 50 teenage girls, 67 women and 26 professionals (inc. parks managers/staff, landscape designers and police) through focus groups and one to one interviews across the five districts of West Yorkshire in early 2022. This was carried out with the support of Leeds Women's Aid and our district partners.
- 2.5 The researchers also carried out a 'photo elicitation' activity which aimed to understand girls and young women's views on standard and gender-sensitive play space designs. 24 images were shown in ten focus groups including existing play spaces in the UK, Europe and the US, as well as 'Better design suggestions for parks' by the campaign group Make Space for Girls. The images were circulated amongst participants in the focus groups who were given the opportunity to say what they liked and disliked about them with a focus on feelings of safety.
- 2.6 Early findings indicate that there are 3 areas of consensus in the girls' views, and that physical environment played an important part in how safe they felt in parks, especially with regard to sight lines and physical barriers.
- 2.7 The bid included a commitment to developing regional guidance for safer, women and girl-friendly parks, with £19k set aside for this purpose. A regional seminar has been scheduled in October to bring together police and combined authority partners to share the research findings and discuss their implications for policy and practice. This will contribute to the parks guidance.
- 2.8 In May, a subsequent bid was made by the University of Leeds and supported by the Combined Authority and West Yorkshire Police, to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), for £40k to progress the partnership, learn from the research findings, and plan new research in this field. If successful, this would bring in more partners including Keep Britain Tidy, who administer the Green Flag award scheme for well-managed parks and green spaces. This could extend guidance to a national audience. In addition, the bid includes a proposal for a two-day international symposium, bringing together academic and non-academic stakeholders working on the prevention and reduction of violence against women and girls in public spaces to share lessons learned.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

- 3.1 The desired outcome of the programme is parks and green spaces that attract more women and girls because they feel safe. Although this does not have a direct impact on the climate emergency, it increases the popularity of parks, improving their financial viability. Physical activity in parks and green spaces is an alternative to other, higher carbon recreational activities.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 4.1 Improving access to and use of green space addresses some of the serious health inequalities that have been identified by the Covid pandemic.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1 As well as benefitting women and girls, parks that feel safer help others who have a heightened fear and risk of crime, such as those with other protected characteristics.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Costs have already been met for the work to date and the regional guidance. Should the ESRC bid not be successful, other funds may be sought to carry out the follow-up work described in 2.8.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 None.

8. Staffing Implications

- 8.1 None.

9. External Consultees

- 9.1 Workstreams of the design support programme have included collaboration with West Yorkshire Police, University of Leeds, all 5 districts' parks and landscape design officers, Make Space for Girls and Leeds Women's Aid.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 That the Panel notes and comments on the content of the report.

11. Background Documents

- 11.1 None.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 None.