



Play Area (Annual) Inspection Policy

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Southern Housing (SH) is committed to ensuring the ongoing safety and suitability of its play areas through a structured programme of annual inspections. These inspections are essential for identifying wear and tear and potential hazards, and ensuring compliance with relevant safety standards. Play areas must be maintained to the highest standards to prevent accidents and injuries, particularly to children.

1.1.2 The key objectives of this Policy are to:

- Ensure annual inspections of all play areas are carried out in accordance with relevant legislation and best practice, including BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177
- Identify and address risks associated with play equipment, surfacing, and surrounding environments in a timely manner
- Establish clear responsibilities for scheduling, conducting, and following up on inspection findings known as defects
- Maintain accurate records of inspections, defects, remedial actions, and ongoing maintenance
- Supplement our [Health & Safety Policy](#) and Safety and Estate Management framework.

1.2 Scope

1.2.1 This Policy applies to all outdoor play areas owned, managed, or maintained directly by SH, excluding those that are the responsibility of external managing agents. It includes fixed play equipment, safety surfacing, fencing, gates, signage, and the immediate surrounding environment within designated play zones.

1.2.2 Play area types covered by this Policy include:

- Traditional play areas (e.g. swings, slides, climbing frames, zip wires)
- Multi use games areas (MUGAs)
- Outdoor gyms
- Skate parks.

1.2.3 The scope is specifically focused on annual inspections conducted by qualified personnel to assess the safety, condition, and compliance of play areas with relevant standards and legislation. These inspections are separate from routine

visual or operational checks, which are the responsibility of the Estate Services directorate.

1.2.4 The Asset Compliance directorate holds oversight of defects identified during annual inspections, ensuring they are appropriately recorded and monitored. However, responsibility for rectifying these defects lies with the Estate Services and Direct Services directorates.

1.2.5 The Policy covers all SH staff, contractors, and third parties who may interact with or be exposed to these systems during their work.

1.3 Definitions

For clarity and consistency throughout this Policy:

- **'We'** and **'our'** refer to Southern Housing, as the organisation
- **'Annual inspection'** refers to a formal, comprehensive assessment of play areas carried out once per year by qualified personnel to evaluate safety, condition, and compliance with relevant standards
- **'Qualified personnel'** refers to individuals or organisations with appropriate training, experience, and accreditation to carry out annual play area inspections in accordance with relevant standards such as BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177. This typically includes certified play area inspectors or specialist contractors.
- **'Operational check'** refers to a structured inspection of play equipment and surfaces that is less detailed than an annual inspection but more thorough than a visual check. It is designed to identify functional issues, emerging risks, and signs of wear that may require attention before the next annual inspection.
- **'Visual check'** refers to a quick, informal observation of a play area to identify any immediately obvious hazards or issues, such as broken equipment, litter, or vandalism. It is the least detailed form of inspection and is typically carried out during routine estate visits.
- **'Defect'** refers to any issue identified during an inspection that poses a safety risk, affects functionality, or requires repair or replacement
- **'Play area'** refers to a designated outdoor space intended for recreational use, typically featuring equipment or facilities designed for physical activity and play. Includes traditional play areas, MUGAs, outdoor gyms, and skate parks as well as their surfacing, and surrounding environments.
- **'Multi use games area (MUGA)'** refers to a fenced, hard-surfaced area designed for various sports and games, such as football, basketball, and/or tennis
- **'Contractor'** refers to an external party or organisation engaged by SH to carry out annual inspections or remedial works on play areas

- **'Managing agent'** means a third-party organisation contracted to manage certain buildings or facilities, which may include responsibility for play areas. Play area equipment managed by managing agents isn't covered under this Policy.

2.0 Policy

2.1 What are the principles of this Policy?

SH is committed to ensuring all play areas are effectively managed and maintained. To support this commitment, the following principles apply:

- **Safety first:** To prioritise the safety and wellbeing of residents, particularly children and young people, by ensuring play areas are inspected and maintained to a high standard
- **Compliance:** To meet legal and regulatory obligations, including relevant British Standards and health and safety legislation
- **Clarity of responsibility:** To clearly define the roles and responsibilities of directorates and contractors involved in the inspection, oversight, and maintenance of play areas
- **Consistency:** To ensure a standardised approach to annual inspections across all applicable sites, regardless of location or play area type
- **Transparency and accountability:** To maintain accurate records of inspections and defects and ensure appropriate follow up actions are taken by responsible teams
- **Continuous improvement:** To use inspection findings to inform future maintenance planning, investment decisions, and improvements to play area safety
- **Accurate record-keeping:** To maintain an up-to-date register of all play areas subject to annual inspection, including inspection dates and outcomes
- **Competent inspection:** To ensure all play areas are inspected annually by qualified personnel in accordance with legal and manufacturer requirements
- **Prompt action on defects:** To immediately restrict access to any high-risk defective or non-compliant play equipment and ensure issues are rectified without delay.

2.2 Who has roles and responsibilities under this Policy?

- **Executive Director of Operations:** Provides executive oversight, approves this Policy, and chairs the Health and Safety Group to ensure strategic alignment

- **Executive Director of Assets and Sustainability:** Holds overall accountability for the implementation of this Policy across the organisation
- **Asset Compliance Directorate:** Manage play area annual inspections and are responsible for the defects identified at them
- **Director of Asset Compliance:** Responsible for ensuring the Policy objectives are delivered and embedded within operational practices
- **Head of Asset Compliance:** Oversees the operational delivery of the Policy, including contractor performance and system management.
- **Compliance Manager (Play Areas):** Leads on the operational delivery of play area annual inspection compliance, including monitoring, reporting, and continuous improvement
- **Health & Safety Team:** Provides expert guidance on legislative requirements, supports policy development, procurement of competent contractors, and ensures timely policy reviews.
- **Approved contractors:** Must be competent, trained, and approved to work on play areas. They're responsible for adhering to all relevant safety procedures and reporting any issues.
- **Procurement Directorate:** Assist the Asset Compliance directorate in only appointing competent and trained contractors and ensuring SH's contracts with them support our work.
- **Development Directorate:** Install compliant play areas on new-build blocks and provide installation paperwork to the Asset Compliance directorate
- **Lead officers:** If the colleagues or contractor(s) they manage will work on play areas they must check they are competent, trained, and that their risk assessments and method statements (RA/MS) are appropriate for its use in line with our Contractor Health & Safety Management Procedure. This should include an assessment of how the work could affect workers with protected characteristics.
- **SH colleagues:** Must follow all relevant procedures, complete required training, and report any defects, hazards, or concerns related to play areas.
- **Estate Services and Direct Services staff:** Must follow all relevant procedures and respond to defects identified during inspections.

2.3 How is play area equipment recorded?

- 2.3.1 The Asset Compliance Directorate maintain a centralised record of all play areas for which we hold direct responsibility, to ensure effective oversight, compliance, and audit readiness.

2.3.2 The Asset Compliance Directorate record and manage this information in two locations:

- Apex (asset management system): Our primary system/register for play area annual inspections
- Asset Compliance folders: Holds a secondary register alongside supporting information.

2.3.3 Both records are updated as and when required, ensuring they reflect the most current information following inspections, maintenance, or system changes.

2.3.4 Our registers include the following key details:

- Location
- Type(s) of play area
- Access details
- Past inspection dates and inspection due dates
- Remedial actions identified during inspections.

2.3.5 Our registers are managed by our Asset Compliance directorate to ensure accuracy and standards.

2.4 **How do we monitor performance?**

To ensure ongoing compliance and continuous improvement, we monitor the following key metrics related to play area safety:

- % of play areas with a valid annual inspection
- Number without a valid annual inspection
- Number of outstanding corrective actions from inspections
- Number of outstanding corrective actions from inspections in-date
- Number of outstanding corrective actions from inspections overdue.

2.5 **What standards and guidance do we carry out inspections to?**

2.5.1 We ensure all play areas under our responsibility have an annual inspection, in accordance with relevant legislation, standards, and manufacturer guidance recommendations.

2.5.2 Inspections are carried out by competent persons in accordance with:

- BS EN 1176: The British (and European) Standard for playground equipment and surfacing, covering design, installation, inspection, and maintenance requirements
- BS EN 1177: The standard for impact absorbing playground surfacing, ensuring appropriate protection against falls
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) guidance: Where applicable, inspections may follow RoSPA recommended practices for play area safety

- [Occupiers' Liability Act 1984](#): Places a duty on those responsible for public spaces to ensure they are reasonably safe for users, with greater care required for children
- [The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#)
- [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#)
- Manufacturer guidance.

2.5.3 Any defects or non-compliances identified during inspection are logged, and affected systems are taken out of service until rectified if they have a 'High' or Very High' risk defect.

2.5.4 Inspection records are retained for a minimum of 21 years to support audit and compliance requirements. Inspection records are retained so long to ensure legal protection as children may bring claims up to three years after reaching adulthood at 18 years old.

3.0 What have we done to make sure this Policy is fair?

3.1 We've carried out an Equality Impact Assessment to consider the positive and negative impacts this Policy may have on people with protected characteristics under the [Equality Act 2010](#).

We recognise some residents may need adjustments due to a language barrier, disability, cultural need, or vulnerability. In these circumstances, in line with our [Reasonable Adjustments & Vulnerable Needs Policy](#), we'll work with residents to ensure we consider their specific needs, on a case by case basis, provided it doesn't compromise health and safety to individuals or homes. This includes working in partnership with other agencies to ensure we manage and mitigate any known risks of safety and wellbeing.

We aspire to embed diversity and inclusion within the culture of our business activities.

4.0 Review

4.1 We will review this Policy to address legislative, regulatory, best practice, or operational issues.

<p>Policy controls</p>

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