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## NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

17 March 2020

### Cabinet

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**Title:** Removal of 'No Ball Games' signage

**Purpose:** To advise Cabinet of the background to the use of No Ball Games signage and to seek approval for officers to remove existing signage and to cease the practice of erecting any further No Ball Games signs.

**Recommendation:** That the Cabinet:

- (a) notes the historical reasons for the use of No Ball Games signs
  - (b) approves the retrospective removal of existing signs and
  - (c) approves the cessation of this practice in future
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### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Throughout North Ayrshire there are a small number of 'No Ball Games' signs that were erected following complaints about low level antisocial behaviour and where ball games were a factor.
- 1.2 Applications for 'No Ball Games' signs are relatively rare and the signs themselves are not legally enforceable. There is therefore some doubt regarding how effective they are in deterring antisocial behaviour.
- 1.3 In September 2019, footballer Kris Boyd cited 'No Ball Games' signs as one of the reasons that this generation of children no longer play football within their communities. There is also some concern regarding the negative impact these signs can have on children exercising their right to play.
- 1.4 It is proposed that Cabinet approves the removal of all current 'No Ball Games' signs and that no further signs are approved. Officers will follow the procedure noted in Appendix 1 in implementing the removal of signs in order to ensure each location and the impact of removing the sign is considered and managed appropriately.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Housing Services have responsibility for responding to reports of antisocial behaviour within our estates. 'No Ball Games' signage has been used in an attempt to discourage certain types of low-level antisocial behaviour. A procedure and approach that considers requests from residents for 'No Ball Games' signs within residential areas is also in place. Each application is looked at individually but there are some general considerations, including:
- the evidence of damage or degree of damage occurring to public or private property.
  - the amount of open space available for children's play in the area.
  - if there are alternative more suitable locations in the vicinity.
  - the amount of public objection there may be against the sign from other residents.
  - if a sign will simply transfer the problem elsewhere.
  - that some open space should be available for children's play.
  - the probability that the sign would not be observed given that it is unenforceable and resident expectations should not be unnecessarily raised.
- 2.2 On receipt of an application for a 'No Ball Games' sign Officers will attempt to identify the children and speak to their parents. They offer mediation and discuss what alternatives are available locally. It can often be a clash of lifestyles and in these cases a sign wouldn't be approved. For a sign to be agreed, there would need to be enough evidence that there is sufficient damage/upset being caused to merit it.
- 2.3 Occasionally playing with a ball can be one of a number of issues associated with more general antisocial behaviour/youth disorder and in these cases the Police and/or our Antisocial Behaviour Investigations Team could be asked for assistance. The 'No Ball Games' sign would be considered as part of a range of solutions to deal with the issue.
- 2.4 Applications for 'No Ball Games' signs are relatively rare and there are approximately 44 signs at locations throughout North Ayrshire at the current time.
- 2.5 The Council Plan "Aspiring Communities" priority "Children and Young People experience the best start in life" is supported by the Priority Outcome that says "We will work with our young people to build their resilience, supporting their mental and physical well-being". Removing 'No Ball Games' signs would send an important message to our communities that the Council are committed to supporting the right of North Ayrshire's young people to be able to play within their own estates.
- 2.6 In 2013 the Scottish Government published their "Play Strategy for Scotland". The strategy encourages policy makers, planners and practitioners to:
- ensure play is embedded at the heart of decision making throughout our society
  - as a society we need to encourage children and young people to spend time outside
  - children playing outdoors is something we want to see happening much more in all outdoor places including green space, parks and streets

- 2.7 The practice of erecting unenforceable 'No Ball Games' signs could be considered contrary to the Council Plan and the National Play Strategy.
- 2.8 Some of the signs have been in place for many years and the original reason for the signage will no longer be prevalent.

### **3. Proposals**

- 3.1 It is proposed that all 'No Ball Games' signs that were erected by the Council are identified and removed. It is further proposed that no further signs are erected in future.
- 3.2 Prior to the removal of an individual sign, officers will identify the reasons why the sign was erected and, where necessary, will meet with the resident who applied for the sign to explain the reasons for its removal. This would be carried out sensitively, acknowledging that the resident would have had a genuine reason for their original request. Staff will follow the procedure noted in Appendix 1 in implementing the removal of signs in order to ensure each location and the impact of removing the sign is considered and managed appropriately.
- 3.3 Officers will also consult with Community Groups and Tenant and Resident Associations where the location of the sign falls within their area.
- 3.4 Housing staff will consider whether the original reasons for each 'No Ball Games' application are still of concern. Where necessary, they will work with colleagues in other service areas such as the Antisocial Behaviour Investigations Team, Connected Communities, Education, Police Scotland to come to a resolution that gives comfort to the community or individual resident affected. These arrangements will also be put in place should any requests for No Ball Games signs to be erected in future in order to assist in remedying the cause of anti-social behaviour.

### **4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty**

#### **Financial**

- 4.1 The costs of removing signs will be met from existing resources.

#### **Human Resources**

- 4.2 None

#### **Legal**

- 4.3 None

#### **Equality/Socio-economic**

- 4.4 Young people will be afforded the opportunity to play in their local areas. Where matters are reported to officers stating concerns with ball games and anti-social behaviour, officers from a range of services such as Housing, the Antisocial Behaviour Investigations Team, Connected Communities, Education and where appropriate, Police Scotland, will

work together to come to a resolution that gives comfort to the community or individual resident affected.

### **Environmental and Sustainability**

- 4.5 'No Ball Games' signs are not attractive and impact negatively on the aesthetic of our estates.

### **Key Priorities**

- 4.6 Removing 'No Ball Games' signage will support the Council Plan "Aspiring Communities" priority "Children and Young People experience the best start in life" and also the Priority Outcome that confirms "We will work with our young people to build their resilience, supporting their mental and physical well-being".

### **Community Wealth Building**

- 4.7 Removing 'No Ball Games' signage will ensure Council land is available for play and will encourage children to play and spend leisure time outside in their local community.

## **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 The proposal has been considered by the Policy Advisory Panel.

RUSSELL McCUTCHEON  
Executive Director (Place)

For further information please contact **Robert McGilvery**, Senior Manager, Housing Operations on 01294 310175.

### **Background Papers**

### NAC PROCEDURES FOR REVIEWING EXISTING 'NO BALL GAMES' SIGNS

Stage	Procedure	Staff Responsible	Timescale
<b>1</b>	Housing Offices provided with details of all known 'No Ball Games' sign sites.	Estate Management Working Group	Following Cabinet approval
<b>2</b>	Estate Management Database, Street Files, House Files, Records etc to be checked to identify who requested sign and the reason for the request.	Housing Officer	Within 3 months of Cabinet approval
<b>3</b>	Using local knowledge identify other sites where 'No Ball Games' (NBG) signs have been erected.	Housing Officer / Estate Caretaker	ongoing
<b>4</b>	(If applicable) consult with Tenants/Community Groups re any NBG signs in their area	Housing Officer	Within 3 months of Cabinet approval
<b>5</b>	Consult with resident who submitted request for 'NBG' sign. Explain new approach and determine if reasons for sign are still prevalent.	Housing Officer	Within 3 months of Cabinet approval
<b>6</b>	Consult with residents in neighbouring properties. Explain new approach and determine if reasons for sign are still prevalent.	Housing Officer	Within 3 months of Cabinet approval
<b>7</b>	Housing Officer and Area Housing Manager meet to discuss information gathered and views of residents.	Housing Officer / Area Housing Manager	Within 3 months of Cabinet approval
<b>8</b>	Decision to remove signage is made.	Housing Officer / Area Housing Manager	Within 3 months of Cabinet approval
<b>9</b>	Issue a works order to Streetscene to remove signage.	Housing Officer / Estate Caretaker	Same day as decision taken to remove sign

### **Guidance Notes**

- Check to see if any elected members were involved in the original application for NBG sign and update as appropriate
- Consider all other resources available, e.g. Antisocial Behaviour Investigations Team, Economic Development & Regeneration, Education, Police Scotland to come to a resolution that gives comfort to the community or individual resident affected by removal of NBG sign.

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