Planning for Play

Guidance on the development and implementation of a local play strategy
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## Contents

### Foreword
**Foreword**
by Stephen Dunmore, chief executive of the Big Lottery Fund  
4

**Foreword**
By Adrian Voce, director of the Children's Play Council  
6

### Introduction

**Introduction**

- Purpose of this guide 9
- Age range 9
- Structure of the guide 9

### Part 1: The need for a play strategy

1. Why children's play matters 10
2. Defining play 10
3. Play and health 11
4. Play and the environment 12
5. Barriers to play 12
6. Inequality and exclusion 14
7. Anti-social behaviour 14
8. When and where children play 15
9. Good play provision 16
10. The objectives of play provision 17
11. Inclusive play 17
12. Safety and challenge 18
13. Playworkers 18
14. The policy context for children's play 18
15. Every Child Matters 18
16. Joint area review 22
17. Cleaner, safer, greener 23
18. Childcare and extended schools 23
19. Youth matters 24
20. Children's fund 24
21. Transport strategies 24
22. Housing and regeneration 24
23. Providing for play in rural areas 25
24. Performance management 25
## Contents

### Part 2 Developing and implementing the play strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25. Introduction</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Vision and principles</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Play partnerships</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. The local authority’s role</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Leadership</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Lead officers and champions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Play associations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Community involvement</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Involving children and young people</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Involving parents</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Involving residents’ and community associations</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Providing challenges, managing risk</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Design for adventure</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Monitoring and performance management</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Evaluation</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Sustaining provision</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Using consultants</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage I Preparation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Agreeing the partnership membership</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Agreeing general principles</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Agreeing partnership terms of reference</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Agreeing scope and process</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Agreeing the timetable</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stage II Review
47. Review of existing consultation 46
48. Identifying, mapping and auditing current provision 46
49. Scope of the audit: play and the wider built environment 46
50. Audits and local standards 47
51. Mapping and assessing current provision 48
52. Access audit 51
53. The mechanics of the audit process – The two stage approach 51
54. Audit recording systems 52
55. Analysing patterns of play opportunities 52

Stage III Agreement
56. Agreeing play strategy policy statements 54
57. Play strategy policy statements 54
58. Writing the strategy 54
59. Consultation on the draft strategy 58
60. Communicating the strategy and action plan 58

Stage IV Delivery
61. Agreeing, commissioning and managing projects 60
62. Risk management 60
63. Budgeting for implementation 60
64. Development agreements 60
65. Human resources 61
66. Monitoring, review and evaluation 61

References
Where to find further help and information 64
The Play England project 64
We can all remember playing as a child. Climbing trees, playing in the street, adventures in the woods; these are familiar memories of play. But for many children today these traditional ways to explore and have fun are often unavailable or unsafe. Appropriate play provision allows children to let off steam, build social relationships and challenge their own boundaries in a constructive way. Play is a very important part of a child's life. Many experts in childhood development regard play as the 'work' of children. Play helps a child to experiment with their world and enables them to learn new skills.

We are committed to offering children the enjoyment and fulfilment that positive play opportunities can provide. The Children’s Play initiative will create, improve and develop inclusive play provision across England that responds to the needs of the community and reflects the interests and wishes of the children and young people who will use it.

In response to the findings of ‘Getting Serious About Play’, the national play review for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, raising the value and status of play is at the heart of this initiative. Our vision is that every child should be able to access play provision that offers the opportunity to develop important social and life skills.

Another key part of the Big Lottery Fund’s mission is to strengthen the sector. To achieve this, we have commissioned the Children’s Play Council to establish a regional infrastructure support programme. We are pleased to be working with them and believe that this joint venture provides an excellent opportunity to promote, support and sustain the play sector. They have developed this guidance to aid local authorities in developing effective play strategies that identify the real needs and wishes of the community. We are pleased to endorse this guidance and are confident that this will help to ensure that the strategies developed are inclusive and representative of the community.

We hope that this initiative will leave a lasting legacy for communities across England and that the investment in children’s play will promote both the well-being of our children and young people and help put children’s play at the heart of national and local agendas.

Foreword
By Stephen Dunmore, chief executive of the Big Lottery Fund
The Children’s Play Initiative has been welcomed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education and Skills and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

At a national level play is increasingly recognised as being important not only in its own right but also in helping to achieve wider objectives. It makes a crucial contribution, for example, to the five outcomes in the Change for Children programme and is an important factor in the development of healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities. We are therefore very pleased to welcome the Big Lottery Fund’s Children’s Play programme.

David Lammy
Minister for Culture DCMS

Beverley Hughes
Minister of State DfES

Baroness Andrews OBE
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State ODPM
Foreword
By Adrian Voce, director of the Children’s Play Council

Children at play embody the essence of childhood and much that is healthy and vibrant in a society. Regular enjoyment of time, space and opportunity to play is fundamental to children’s happiness and essential to their healthy development. Children out playing – in public spaces and in dedicated play areas – also signify a healthy community and a public realm that is meeting the needs of its people.

Modern living has thrown up a range of barriers to children playing. More traffic, less open space, real and perceived dangers from crime, changes in family life and new patterns of work have all conspired to deny more and more children the opportunities that previous generations took for granted. The consequences are profound. Increasing childhood obesity, ‘anti-social behaviour’ and mental health problems have each been at least partly attributed to young lifestyles that are more sedentary and restricted than at any time in our recent history.

But until very recently providing places and opportunities for children to play has not been seen as a public responsibility, let alone a priority. A partial survey of local authorities in England in 2001\(^1\) found that less than 40 per cent had any kind of plan for play and that, on average, councils were spending less than 8p per child per week on outdoor play.

In 2004, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published the report of a review of children’s play in England, chaired by Frank Dobson MP. This report, Getting Serious About Play, made recommendations on the use of National Lottery funding for ‘improving children’s play opportunities’\(^2\) through a new, dedicated children’s play programme.
One of its recommendations was that local authorities needed to take the lead in planning for play across their area. They would be best placed, the review concluded, to maximise the impact of any new investment, add to it over time and ensure it is sustained.

The report also concluded that local authorities and other agencies needed to give play a much greater profile and priority in future than they had in the past. The review was not overly prescriptive, recognising that a ‘horses for courses’ approach should be adopted, allowing each area to identify the best way to spend an allocated sum from the new programme – within certain criteria – but on the basis of improved planning and consultation.

This guidance sets out recommended good practice in the preparation, development and implementation of a local play strategy. It is intended to enable a process by which local authorities and their partners can identify where and how to invest in a portfolio of play projects that best meets the needs of children in their communities. Importantly, though, it also provides the arguments and the guidance for enabling broader and longer-term investment in providing for children’s play and for improving the environments in which children grow up.

The aim of this guidance is that a consideration of children’s need to play becomes part of the strategic policy framework for all decisions that affect the planning and design of both children’s services and public space into the future.
Introduction

The need to improve the provision that is made for children to play is acknowledged in a range of national policy areas: from planning, open spaces and transport to health, education and childcare. Local authorities in England have a statutory duty, under the Children Act (2004), to co-operate in their provision for the enjoyment of play and recreation as part of the five key outcomes for all children.

Purpose of this guide

This guidance is primarily for those who are leading the development of a local authority play strategy. It will also be of interest and assistance to partners and others involved in this process. It assumes that readers are familiar with local government.

The purpose is to support local authorities and their partners in preparing strategies for improving children’s play opportunities within the framework of national policy. The aim should be to make best use of allocated Lottery funding from the Children’s Play programme but also to take advantage of other funding opportunities to improve and increase play provision and environments for play across the local authority area, according to identified need.

The guidance aims to help local agencies prepare and implement play strategies that:

- make effective use of funding
- are embedded within key strategic plans and initiatives
- sustain play provision over the long-term
- improve public space as an environment for play
- improve children’s access to safe places to play and socialise
- provide more and better local and inclusive play opportunities where they are most needed.

The guidance is not intended to be prescriptive. It provides a toolkit of techniques illustrated by practical examples, with some suggested processes and references. Further, supplementary materials and a range of practical examples and case studies will be available from the Children’s Play Council (see page 64).

Age range

In line with the age definition adopted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the remit of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda, this guidance applies to planning services and environments for children and young people under the age of 18. Unless a particular age group is specified, all references to either ‘children’, ‘young people’ or to ‘children and young people’ should be taken to include this full age range.

Structure of the guide

The guide is in two parts.

Part 1 – The need for play strategies

- Deals with the need for local crosscutting strategies that engage with wider policy agendas in children’s services and other areas. It covers: the definitions, background and importance of play, and what constitutes good play opportunities. It also examines the wider policy context within which the play strategy will need to be developed.

Part 2 – Preparing and implementing the play strategy

- Explains how to develop, implement and sustain an effective local play strategy, setting out a step-by-step approach to the task.
Part one
The need for play strategies

1. Why children’s play matters

1.1 Play is of fundamental importance for children and young people’s health and well-being, their relationships, their development and their learning. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) gives all children the right ‘to rest and leisure; to engage in age-appropriate play and recreational activities.’ There is increasingly strong evidence, however, that children’s opportunities to play are limited by factors outside their control: the dominance of the car in residential roads, lack of tolerance for children and young people, lack of access to and conflicts over use of local spaces in both rural and urban areas, fears for safety, increased focus on academic learning and structured activities outside school hours, the effects of disability, poverty and other social conditions, commercial pressures and more.

1.2 While the decline in play opportunities affects children generally, the impact is disproportionately greater on disabled children and children living with other forms of social or economic disadvantage, for whom access to free and enjoyable play spaces is especially important.  

Can you remember digging in the mud for worms? Or making perfume from rose petals? Or just hanging out with friends, talking about things, listening to music? Or walking with your eyes closed to see what it felt like? Climbing trees? Playing pranks on grown-ups? Doing things you knew you shouldn’t? Making things, reading, dreaming, hanging out, running, jumping, making yourself dizzy, pretending to be someone else?  


2. Defining play

2.1 Although we all recognise play when we see it, it is notoriously difficult to define. Best Play 6 offers the following, which is widely accepted within the playwork sector:

Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child... Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter.  


2.2 Getting Serious About Play uses the straightforward description of play as ‘What children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons.’  

2.3 While the play strategy may adopt a simple definition, it is important to recognise the diversity, complexity and richness of children’s play. Recognising this level of variety and complexity is helpful when planning for play as it helps us think beyond play equipment and kick-around pitches.
As well as really good, well-organised activities... we need to provide children with opportunities for adventures. A load of constructive material must be put at their disposal. Children must be able to play games and let their imaginations roam around the possibility of using such material. Hilton Dawson, MP, Hansard, 2003.

2.4 These definitions suggest two things: that play arises from children's innate need to express themselves, to explore, learn about and make sense of their world; and that its benefits for children derive from them choosing it and doing it for themselves. Given this, much of children's play is likely to be spontaneous and unpredictable, although there is a place for more structured activities too where children choose them.

2.5 The adult role in play provision is to enable rather than to direct. This is reflected in the playwork qualifications framework.

The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play. Playwork Principles, 2005.

3. Play and health

3.1 Play is crucial to health and development throughout childhood, contributing to social, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional and psychological development. The physical activity involved in energetic play provides children and young people with a significant amount of their regular exercise. School-aged children and young people get as much exercise in free play as they do from more structured activities.

3.2 Good play opportunities promote good social, mental and emotional health, giving children and young people the chance to try out and experience a range of emotions in a 'safe' way. It allows them to learn and develop emotionally by promoting resilience and fostering self-esteem.

Physical health and fitness

3.3 The chief medical officer advises that 'children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of at least moderate-intensity physical activity each day'. There is growing research evidence that increased opportunity for free play is the most effective way to ensure this for children, and that a range of increasing health problems are associated with the decline in play opportunities. The Government White Paper Choosing Health (2004), noted that 'many children appear to have less time being physically active ... because of the increase in car use and heightened concern about the potential risks of unsupervised play outdoors.'

... the shift from unstructured to structured events for children is one of the causes of their decrease in walking ... letting children go out to play is one of the best things that parents can do for their children's health: outdoor play uses more calories than clubs and tuition.

Mental health

3.4 In parallel with concerns about the physical health of our children and the rise in childhood obesity and related disorders, there is also evidence to show a sharp increase in mental illness. The Mental Health Foundation estimates that at any time 20 per cent of children and young people experience psychological problems. Their report, Bright Futures, states that the opportunities for risk taking in unsupervised play helps children build self-confidence and resilience – key protective factors for mental health. Given the decrease in opportunities for playing out unsupervised, the report also recognises the importance of supervised opportunities for play and the role of these services in supporting children’s mental health.

4. Play and the environment

4.1 Research conducted by Demos and the Green Alliance has found that there is a big gap between children from rural and urban backgrounds in their level of access to natural environments and that this is detrimental to children living in cities. Among the report’s key recommendations was that children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be provided with more and better opportunities to good quality open space.

4.2 Evidence shows that contact with the outdoors, and especially with the natural environment, is important for children, particularly in the middle years of childhood. The benefits of building a relationship with nature include a sense of identity, of being in the natural world, and experiencing the restorative effects of special places, which are often secret.

5. Barriers to play

5.1 Children and young people themselves express considerable concern about the restrictions on their independent activity, their enjoyment of public space and the lack of provision for regular and enjoyable exercise. They commonly identify many barriers to play, recreation and their enjoyment of public space. These include: fears for their safety, from traffic and bullying; dirty, boring or run-down play areas and parks; lack of choice; and lack of access.
5.2 Parents and the wider community strongly believe that children today have fewer opportunities to play than they did as children, and are spending too much time watching television or using computers. A 2001 MORI poll cited activities for teenagers as people’s top priority for local improvement, ahead of crime reduction, road repairs and better transport. More and better facilities for younger children were next.20

5.3 Studies show that children’s independent mobility continues to be curtailed both in terms of territorial range (the distance from home) and licence (particular activities, places or modes of mobility, such as not crossing roads or going to places alone).21

5.4 While children do not passively accept these restrictions and have been shown to be skilful negotiators for greater licence,22 a Home Office citizenship survey in 200323 nevertheless reported that two out of three 8 to 10-year-olds never went to the park or shops on their own and 33 per cent never played out with their friends without an adult being present. Among 11–15-year-olds, one in 10 never met their friends outside the home without an adult being present and nearly a quarter, (24 per cent) never went to the park or local shops on their own.

5.5 Several studies have shown that, where traffic is slower, parents allow their children to play outdoors in much greater numbers than in similar streets where it is faster. The same study concluded that fear of abduction was more of an effect of children not being allowed to play outdoors than its cause.24
6. Inequality and exclusion

Inclusive play provision is open and accessible to all and takes positive action in removing disabling barriers so that disabled children and non-disabled children can participate. Alison John, Kidsactive and the Better Play Awards.

6.1 For disabled children, negative attitudes and inaccessible environments compound the general problems experienced by most children, creating enormous social and physical barriers to their enjoyment of the right to play independently. There is evidence that disabled children do not enjoy equality of access to play and leisure activities. A recent survey of 1,000 parents of disabled children demonstrated how their children were excluded from ordinary leisure opportunities. Parks and playgrounds were the least user-friendly, with few facilities for disabled people. Other studies have shown that disabled children and young people can often feel threatened in open spaces and that the design of play equipment often limits their access.

6.2 Research suggests that certain minority ethnic groups are disproportionately excluded from play provision. For example, some Asian children – and girls in particular – are discouraged from attending mainstream play services owing to a range of cultural and ethnic pressures. Enjoyment of the public realm is significantly compromised for many black and minority ethnic children who still report experiencing overt and implicit racism. The evaluation of the Better Play Lottery programme recommends that the involvement of community-led organisations in the development of play strategies is vital if play opportunities are to be culturally appropriate and socially inclusive.

7. “Anti-social behaviour”

7.1 Groups of children or young people ‘hanging out’ in the public domain are often characterised as posing a threat or a nuisance, even when they are simply enjoying being together, leading adults in some communities to be hostile to any measures to provide public space for them. Many children and young people complain that they do not have access to public space, either because of restrictions imposed by parents and carers fearful for their safety, or by perceptions of other adults that there is a rise in crime that can be attributed to young people on the street.
If we want young people to flourish and if we want to divert them from anti-social behaviour, thinking about what the community can provide really counts. Some adults perceive teenagers on the streets as a problem and teenagers want safe spaces to hang out. Surely we must somehow be able to square that circle. 

Margaret Hodge, Minister for Children and Families, 2005.

7.2 Research commissioned by CABE Space shows that ‘place making’ – improving the design, maintenance and supervision of parks and other public spaces – is a more effective solution to “anti-social behaviour” than simply increasing security measures. 

8. When and where children play

8.1 Children and young people spend only one quarter of their time in school curriculum activity. The rest of the time they like to play outdoors for many hours. Given the chance, they also play before, after and on the way to school.

8.2 Research shows that all children benefit from the space and opportunity to play during the school day, with particular gains for children classed as having special educational needs. The school curriculum is not within the scope of this guide, but the play strategy should address the use of school grounds and engage the education authority and school communities. A number of organisations have jointly produced recommendations on play in educational settings covering in-school and out-of-school times.

8.3 Children’s preferred out-of-school play spaces are nearly always sited where they can see and be seen by a trusted adult. In most instances this adult will be a parent, carer or that of a friend. It may also be a playworker or someone without direct responsibility, such as a park keeper or neighbourhood warden. Older young people also prefer to meet in well-connected public places where there is a feeling of social safety, although they generally do not want to feel closely ‘watched over’ by adults.

8.4 Research has shown that children prefer play space to be visible and readily accessible, to be at the heart of the communities and the environments with which they are familiar and where they feel socially secure. However, they also like the option of accessing or creating special and secret places: dens and hideaways. Successful play projects will take account of children’s need to see and be seen without compromising the need for a rich and varied environment. Play spaces that do not comply with these criteria are generally used by fewer children and are more vulnerable to vandalism.
Part one
The need for play strategies

8.5 Children will tend to play where they are likely to meet friends and other members of the community. This is why they often congregate in front of shops, on street corners and in other well-used public spaces. Children depend upon the suitability of these environments to be able to play. Even if they do not play on the roads and pavements themselves, they certainly depend on these being safe routes to spaces where they can play. Strategies that attempt to simply corral children into ‘safe places’ are not likely to succeed and the play strategy should seek to minimise the threat of traffic and other perceived dangers to children playing outdoors.

8.6 Destination or ‘showcase’ parks are sometimes seen as the solution to the need for more play provision, and the popularity of large town parks with quality equipment is clear. However, research shows that the majority of users of such facilities are on a family visit, and that they do not meet the everyday play needs of more than small numbers of local children.

9. Good play provision

9.1 Neither the identification of children’s need for play, the definitions of play itself, nor the description of its objectives, actually tell us what constitutes good play provision. What they do tell us is that play is about much more than swings and roundabouts in the park. Fixed equipment playgrounds have their place. But a good play strategy will take a much broader view of where and how often children need access to the space and opportunity to run, climb, skip, hide, play with ropes, jump, practise cartwheels, throw and kick balls, make friends, fall out, build fires, grow things, tell stories, climb trees, take risks, get wet, explore nature, build dens, get dirty, dress up, pretend, keep animals, dig holes, swing on tyres, shout, fight, invent games, make things, paint pictures, talk with their friends or just sit. Many of these activities lend themselves more suitably to supervised play provision.

9.2 A good play strategy will address all these issues by developing more and better play spaces and opportunities, and also a more child-friendly public realm and greater recognition of the importance of play across the range of policy areas that have an influence on children’s lives.
10. The objectives of play provision

10.1 Best Play is a widely recognised benchmark document describing the outcome objectives for play provision. It sets out seven key objectives, reproduced here.

**Good play provision**

- extends the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it
- recognises the child's need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need
- manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm
- maximises the range of play opportunities
- fosters independence and healthy self-esteem
- fosters the child's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction
- fosters the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.


11. Inclusive play

11.1 An essential feature of the play strategy should be that it promotes inclusion and access for disadvantaged and disabled children and young people. Inclusive principles and good practice should be an integral part of the document but also highlighted as distinct areas for action to ensure, as a minimum, compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.
12. Safety and challenge

12.1 Consultation exercises regularly find that parents place a high priority on safe places for their children to play. This is often interpreted as referring to the safety of equipment. However, when asked, parents often complain that play equipment is not exciting enough and that children have grown out of it by the time they are seven or eight. Parents want somewhere where they feel that their children are socially safe (to ‘see and be seen’) but know that they want and need excitement and challenges from their play.37 See page 36 for further discussion about challenge, risk and safety in play.

13. Playworkers

13.1 Supervised provision, ranging from adventure playgrounds and play centres to out–reach play rangers, can offer an enhanced element of challenging play compared with non–supervised play areas. While there is some overlap with childcare settings, supervised play provision differs in that children are free to come and go, there is usually no charge, and activities are not directed, although there is generally a diverse range on offer.

13.2 Appropriately trained and qualified staff is the key to successful supervised play provision. Quality Training, Quality Play38 sets out the aims and priorities for the development of a professional play workforce and provides information on routes to training and qualifications.

14. The policy context for children’s play

14.1 Recent years have seen a growing interest in children and young people’s play and informal recreation and the need to improve this is now included in many government policies. Indeed, a cross–departmental government group was set up in 2005 to develop a ‘more strategic, cross departmental approach to play policy’.39 This chapter sets out the main national government agendas and their implications.

15. Every Child Matters

15.1 The play strategy can make a major contribution to the Government’s Every Child Matters agenda. The benefits of children’s play are closely linked to the five outcomes for children and young people that form the core of Every Child Matters, namely: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well–being. The following table sets out how good play provision helps to meet the five outcomes.
Part one
The need for play strategies

Meeting the five outcomes

Play, recreation and leisure outcomes sit equally alongside the others... in the provision of children and young people’s services. Rt. Hon Tessa Jowell MP, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport.

Play is a fundamental part of a healthy and happy childhood and its enjoyment is recognised by government as equally important to other outcomes for children. Because it is so fundamental it also contributes to each of the five outcomes for children specified in Every Child Matters.

Being healthy

Play is crucial to health and development throughout childhood, contributing to social, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional and psychological development. The physical activity involved in energetic play provides children and young people with a significant amount of their regular exercise. Research shows that school-aged children and young people get more exercise in free play than from most structured activities, excepting only P.E.

Good play opportunities give children and young people the chance to try out and experience a range of emotions in a ‘safe’ way. It allows them to learn and develop emotionally by promoting resilience and fostering self-esteem.

Staying safe

One of the main reasons children give for not playing outdoors more is that they and their parents are afraid for their safety. Fear of strangers, traffic and bullying by other children combine to keep children in their own homes. Good play provision protects children through reducing unacceptable levels of danger, while allowing them the opportunity to challenge themselves and use their initiative. At the same time, play enables children to take risks, to think through decisions and gain increased self-confidence and greater resilience.

Enjoying and achieving

The essence of play is enjoyment. When playing, children define their own goals and interests, decide what is success or failure and pursue those goals in their own way. Children’s enjoyment through play is linked to the control and choice they are able to exercise. Giving children the chance for free, uninhibited play allows them a psychologically safe space in which to try out new roles and experiences and enhances their enjoyment of life.

There are many developmental and experiential advantages associated with children’s play – providing children also with the opportunities for achievement and enabling them to reach their full potential. These include the development of problem-solving and language and literacy skills as children and young people develop their social skills and express their emotions. Play is also seen as important in the development of children’s imaginations and creative interests and abilities. Play allows children and young people to explore boundaries, be fully absorbed in what they are doing and feel satisfied with what they have achieved.
Making a positive contribution

Children’s involvement in the development of their own play is fundamental. Children learn, from the way others and the environment react to their play, the effects of their actions and value others place on them. When there are no adults present, children will create and make their own choices. In good supervised play provision, adults involve the children and young people in decisions about resources and facilities that might be available to them.

Local authorities and community groups are increasingly involving children and young people in local play audits and discussions about their play and free-time needs. This results in more appropriate provision, helps children and young people develop their skills and knowledge and ensures they are valued as active community members. Respecting and incorporating children and young people’s views into plans and provision helps develop motivation and, potentially, participation in society.43

Economic well-being

Good play provision enables parents to work or train and allows them to feel their children are happy, safe and enjoying themselves. Offering parents the opportunity to have time away from their children can also be an important benefit of play provision. Play provision often acts as a focal point for parents and carers to meet, giving them an opportunity to socialise with other adults.

The creative and social skills that children develop through play help them to develop the lateral thinking and emotional intelligence that are becoming increasingly important in a globalised, non-hierarchical economy.

Good play provision promotes community well-being and security. It brings economic benefits through jobs and training, and parents can feel confident their children are occupied and enjoying themselves. Good play provision, which offers those seeking it genuine challenge and excitement, can help prevent bored children and young people behaving in ways that are socially unacceptable. Development of outside play and recreation spaces has been shown to have a measurable impact on local interaction, new friendships, community cohesion and community safety.44
Part one
The need for play strategies

16. Joint area review

16.1 Guidance from the Department for Education and Skills identifies that the play strategy should link to the Children and Young People’s Plan, helping to meet the requirements of Joint Area Review of the Ofsted Children’s Services Inspection framework, which includes the following key judgements in relation to children’s enjoyment of play and recreation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Judgements</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents and carers receive support in helping their children to enjoy and achieve.</td>
<td>Targeted guidance and support is provided to parents and carers, in line with their expressed wishes, in helping children and young people to enjoy play, achieve educationally and make productive and enjoyable use of leisure time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All children and young people can access a range of recreational activities, including play and voluntary learning provision.</td>
<td>There are safe and accessible places where children and young people can play and socialise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A range of affordable, accessible, challenging and rewarding recreational and voluntary learning opportunities is provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action is taken to ensure that the cost or availability of transport are not undue barriers to participation in recreational and voluntary learning activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recreational and voluntary learning opportunities reflect the needs and interests of individuals as well as groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. ‘Cleaner, Safer, Greener’

17.1 The Government’s cleaner, safer, greener agenda on improving the quality of public space has from the outset emphasised the stake that children and young people have as users of public space. The Government’s 2002 report ‘Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener’ stated that ‘high quality green spaces go a long way to encouraging people to pursue healthier lifestyles through exercise such as walking, cycling and active children’s play. Particular demographic groups tend to suffer disproportionately from poor quality public spaces. Children, young people and older people can be inhibited from walking to school or to the shops, from meeting friends or taking exercise.’

17.2 National planning guidance explicitly recognises the need for dedicated outdoor space for play and recreation. PPG17 requires local authorities to assess the needs and opportunities for different types of open space and recreational facilities, including play space for children. It also requires local authorities to use the information from their needs assessment to set local standards recognising that national standards cannot cater for local circumstances. Standards must be set not just for the quantity of space but for the quality and accessibility of different types of space. Many authorities have already carried out such assessments and the play strategy can use this information as a baseline. Where authorities have not yet completed their PPG17 assessments, to avoid duplication, the play strategy process should be dovetailed so that the objectives of both strategies are achieved.

18. Childcare and extended schools

18.1 The Government’s commitment to expanding childcare recognises children’s needs alongside those of parents. Choice For Parents, The Best Start For Children sets out the Government’s 10-year strategy to create a sustainable framework for high quality integrated early years and childcare activities for all children and families. The strategy, which includes the development of school-based childcare and activities at both primary and secondary levels, will be implemented through the Every Child Matters framework.

18.2 Extended schools where free play provision is a key part of the service can have an important role in the play strategy, but it is important that its primary aim of providing play provision and opportunities for children is not diverted by the childcare or educational agendas.

“A modern childcare system should deliver high quality services for children that enable them to learn, develop social and emotional skills, and explore through play.”

19. Youth Matters

19.1 Government policy on young people recognises the importance of providing good offers for their free time, including unstructured as well as structured provision. Proposals set out in Youth Matters include a new duty on local authorities, working through Children’s Trusts, to secure positive activities for young people, with plans for a new set of national standards and support for local authorities in developing a local offer to young people. These national standards aim to encompass the full range of ‘exciting and enriching activities in which young people might wish to engage in their free time’, including ‘less structured activity that nonetheless contributes to a rich and varied life outside school or work, such as somewhere safe to hang out with friends’. The strategic, needs-based approach proposed by government fits well with the framework outlined in this guidance.

20. Children’s Fund

20.1 Play partnerships should seek to create links between the play strategy development and the Children’s Fund programme and with youth services generally. The Children’s Fund aims to give a greater emphasis to preventative services, particularly for those children and young people most at risk of social exclusion. The Children’s Fund has led to new partnerships that have consulted with young people about their needs and mapped provision for children and young people against needs and disadvantage, and in some areas has had a strong focus on play. The developing play strategy should make full use of this work to ensure that the play needs of groups of children and young people most at risk of exclusion are addressed.

21. Transport strategies

21.1 Government planning guidance promotes traffic calming, home zones and measures to improve walking and cycling, all of which can improve children and young people’s access to play opportunities. These measures also directly create opportunities to play, since for children the act of getting from one place to another is often part of their play, whether or not it is a purposeful trip. But transport policies can also work against children’s freedom of movement and limit their play opportunities if traffic speeds and volumes are too high in neighbourhoods. The Department for Transport is currently drafting new guidance on the design of residential streets, which is likely to take a more balanced approach to accommodating all users of the street.

22. Housing and regeneration

22.1 Government housing and regeneration initiatives have supported improvements to the built environment alongside economic measures, with a growing focus on improving public spaces. Research in 2006 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that a focus on play and public space was a key factor in making new and regenerated communities attractive to families. CABE drew similar conclusions from its research into the views of residents of new housing. These findings are especially relevant to the growth areas in South East of England set up under the Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan, and to Housing Renewal areas.
A play area here is needed for all the children. We do need more communal green spaces to sit and relax in, especially as there are a lot of flats here and we don’t have our own gardens like the houses.

Resident quoted in What it’s like to live there, CABE, 2005.

23. Providing for play in rural areas

23.1 Local authorities in rural areas will face different issues to metropolitan and unitary authorities. They may face challenges in helping children and young people to be involved and have their voices heard, and may need to come up with different approaches to improving provision. There is a popular misconception that play opportunities are somehow better in rural areas. In fact, the relative lack of population, dispersed settlement patterns and poor transport in rural areas can leave some children and young people very isolated. Linear villages, heavy through and/or commuter traffic, lack of pavements and edge-of-village playing fields can all be barriers to children playing. Parental restrictions on children’s freedom of movement can have a more limiting effect on rural children, while public play provision tends to be very limited and intensive farming practices can leave little access for informal play.

24. Performance management

24.1 The Government increasingly expects local authorities to demonstrate how they are improving the services they provide to local communities. The main processes for performance management and monitoring are the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) undertaken by the Audit Commission and the Children’s Services Inspections, including Joint Area Review, undertaken by Ofsted (see para.16). If play services are to be taken seriously by their local authority, they need to become part of these inspection processes.

24.2 The Department for Culture Media and Sport has commissioned the Children’s Play Council to investigate potential indicators for possible future use within the CPA and other performance management frameworks. These will be piloted though 2006.

24.3 There currently exists a Best Value Performance Indicator on the status of the local play strategy (BVPI1 15) and this is available from www.playengland.org.uk
Part two
Developing and implementing the play strategy

**Getting started**
- identify lead organisation or local authority department
- identify and resource lead officer
- identify play champions at senior officer and member level
- identify key partners in play partnership.

**Preparation**
- familiarise play partnership members with key issues and policy context
- agree the vision, underpinning values, aims, objectives and scope of the strategy.

**Review**
- audit and map existing provision of spaces and facilities for play
- survey children, parents and community members
- audit existing infrastructure support
- analyse and prioritise
- identify gaps in provision.

**Agree**
- agree policy statements
- write the strategy and action plan
- consult on the draft strategy
- agree the strategy and action plan.

**Deliver and monitor**
- commission / develop projects
- monitor and review
- evaluate.
25. Introduction

25.1 Part 2 of the guidance provides a broad outline of a recommended method for producing and implementing a play strategy. It is consistent with the Mayor of London’s ‘Guide to Preparing Play Strategies’ but provides wider guidance that can be applied to county and district/borough councils as well as metropolitan and unitary authorities.

25.2 This guidance aims to make improving children and young people’s play opportunities and experiences a positive process that produces enduring, high quality results. It is not about telling the reader precisely what to do in every situation. But it should help you to become more knowledgeable and confident in undertaking the task. Our central piece of advice is to maintain a clear and ambitious but realistic vision and to constantly focus on the end result – the difference the work will make for children and young people.

26. Vision and principles

26.1 A successful play strategy should set out the play partnership’s vision for play: in other words, its aspirations for the play opportunities that should be available to children and young people. This will be based on a shared and explicitly stated understanding of the nature and importance of play in children and young people’s lives.

27. Play partnerships

27.1 A hallmark of any effective strategy is a sense of commitment and ownership on the part of all stakeholders.

27.2 The make-up of play partnerships will vary, but is likely to include those in the local authority, the voluntary and community sector and the private sector with a responsibility for:

- play, leisure and recreation
- children and young people
- planning
- community development and regeneration
- housing
- parks and open spaces
- extended schools.
Part two
Developing and implementing the play strategy

28. The local authority’s role

28.1 Play partnerships will vary in different areas. But whatever the local circumstances, the local authority will have some key roles, as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic planning for delivery</th>
<th>● working with partners to set out a vision for play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● reviewing and auditing existing patterns of play opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● setting local standards for the quantity, quality and accessibility of play provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● planning for development and sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● workforce planning for recruitment and staff development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ensuring that new residential developments cater for play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ensuring that facilities and services are targeted at greatest need, that they are inclusive and do not discriminate against any groups of children and young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● auditing existing spaces and facilities for play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● pooling financial resources and accessing different funding streams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultation and partnership</th>
<th>● supporting the partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● involving children and young people, including disabled children and young people, and the wider community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● engaging and communicating with key partners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting delivery</th>
<th>● project managing capital developments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● providing advice, guidance and support for agencies involved in developing play facilities or services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● following sound commissioning arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● co-ordinating recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● overseeing maintenance arrangements.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial accountability</th>
<th>● ensuring funding is made available to commissioned agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● monitoring expenditure and ensuring good value for money.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
● ensuring systems are in place for providing and monitoring data
● monitoring to sub-contracted or commissioned projects
● monitoring adherence to local standards
● co-ordinating data collection and evaluating performance against strategic indicators and benchmarks.

Championing children’s play

● promoting understanding about the importance and role of play in children’s development
● promoting children’s access to play.

Note: For two-tier areas, workforce planning of children’s services is the responsibility of the county council. Districts that are planning to develop supervised play provision will need to liaise with colleagues at county level dealing with these issues.
Part two
Developing and implementing the play strategy

29. Leadership
29.1 One key role for local authorities will be to provide leadership in developing the strategy. Local authorities must ensure that new funding results in the delivery of additional services.

30. Lead officers and champions
30.1 In unitary local authorities, a director of children and young people’s services will take the lead in seeing through the changes to children’s services described in Part 1 of this guidance. This person should in turn identify an officer to lead in overseeing the development and implementation of a play strategy, and should ensure that this officer is sufficiently senior that key departments will support the process.

30.2 In two-tier areas, the chief executive at district level should take responsibility for nominating a lead officer, while the process should also be supported at county level by a single clearly identified lead officer. In some counties, top-tier and second-tier authorities may agree to work jointly on a countywide play strategy.

30.3 All lead officers should be familiar with play provision and relevant policy and practice, or if not should receive training and support to provide this expertise. In many areas, preparing and implementing a play strategy will be a demanding task, needing substantial resources in officer time. Authorities will need to plan accordingly, and to be realistic about timescales.

30.4 As well as a lead officer it is strongly recommended that the authority designate a senior local authority figure as a ‘Play Champion’, to act as an advocate for the strategy in the council’s policy discussions and provide political leadership. This should be in a position to ensure that all key personnel departments support the process: ideally, a cabinet member, other senior elected member or a departmental director.

31. Play associations
31.1 In many local authority areas, play associations and networks have taken a key role in leading developments in policy, strategy and delivery. Existing play associations are likely to be a source of expertise and contacts. In areas without such networks, there are sound arguments for supporting their creation.

32. Community involvement
32.1 Public participation and consultation initiatives have increased at all levels over the last decade. However the quality and depth of such activities vary widely. Where processes engage well with the community they help initiatives respond better to local circumstances, tap into local energy and resources and build community ownership and understanding. Where they are ineffective they frustrate people, stifle their enthusiasm, waste time, energy and resources and reinforce feelings of powerlessness and social exclusion.

32.2 It is crucial to be clear about the purpose of community involvement before you draw up any plans. Start by asking:

- why are you asking for people’s views
- what are you seeking views about
who should you ask
● how should you ask them
● when should you ask them
● how far can community involvement help with the issues?

Good involvement processes include the following:
● asking meaningful questions where the answer is not already known
● accepting that communities are diverse, with sometimes competing interests
● creating opportunities for different groups to share and exchange ideas and concerns and encourage joint solutions
● giving weight to those whose voices may otherwise not be heard
● approaches that are enjoyable and non-bureaucratic
● allowing time to explore complex or contentious issues
● raising awareness and expanding horizons rather than limiting discussion to what is familiar
● making it clear what is – and is not – up for consideration and avoiding unrealistic expectations
● giving clear feedback to participants.

32.3 Effective involvement needs thought and planning. Partnerships are likely to need time to explore these questions and issues in some depth if the work is to be a meaningful exercise.

33. Involving children and young people

33.1 Children and young people have a strong claim to be the main focus for community engagement work linked to play strategy development and delivery. Plans and initiatives will impact on their lives more than any other group, and the success or failure of any changes will depend critically on whether children and young people value and use them or not.

33.2 Involving children and young people explicitly acknowledges this claim by giving them a voice that all other stakeholders in the process have to pay regard to. It will help the play strategy, and ultimately the changes delivered on the ground, to be more successful, better matched to local circumstances and more valued and sustainable over the long-term.

33.3 The points made above about good community engagement apply equally to the involvement of children and young people. Successful involvement will mean making contact with a diverse cross-section of the local young population. This may in turn mean looking beyond the youth participation initiatives (youth fora or councils) that may already be in place in local authority areas, as these mechanisms may under-represent certain groups. Disabled and minority ethnic children and young people, who not only often face discrimination and denial of access to play and leisure opportunities but whose voices are rarely listened to, should be a particular focus.
Part two
Developing and implementing the play strategy

33.4 Efforts should be made to involve ‘hard to reach’ children and young people who may not be at school or attending out-of-school or youth clubs. These may also be young people and children who are most frequently ‘on the street’ and for whom initiatives may be most needed and beneficial. There are likely to be agencies coming into contact with these children who will be able to help make contact and support the process.

33.5 Involving children and young people raises other challenges, above and beyond those that arise from community involvement generally. Children often become immersed in their play, revealing, through their activities and choices, preferences that surveys or discussions after the fact may fail to capture. Surveys that focus on children’s preferences for different types of play equipment are a good example of how the complexity of children's play behaviour – visible in games like tag and hide-and-seek – can get lost in simplistic approaches to consultation. Children are also sensitive to the expectations and opinions of adults, and to the power and influence that adults have over them, which can lead them to give the responses that they think adults want to hear.

33.6 Children, while typically well informed and articulate about local play opportunities, will need help in addressing strategic issues such as identifying authority-wide priorities. Finally, an obvious yet oft-forgotten point: children grow up. 11 year-olds being asked their views on a play strategy may be 18 by the time its plans have all come into effect, while a group of seven-year-olds asked about the design of a major new play space may be 10 or 11 before it is completed. One implication of this is the need for clarity about timescales if expectations are to be met rather than frustrated.
What and when

33.7 Partnerships should establish their approach to children’s involvement at an early stage. The following questions, adapted from the Mayor of London’s ‘Guide to Preparing Play Strategies’ (2005), will help with this:

- why are we involving children and young people?
- what do we want to achieve for ourselves and the children involved?
- when and at what stages is it appropriate?
- is this to be a one-off exercise or a regular activity of the implementation?
- at what level are we planning to consult children?
- how are we planning to achieve this
- do we have the expertise and resources to undertake these activities?
- if not, what extra resources do we need or have to pool?

33.8 Children and young people should be involved in helping to shape the strategy, in local delivery and in evaluation and review. At the strategy development phase the focus is likely to be on gaining children and young people’s views on some of the key issues the partnership is likely to be considering, such as local priorities for investment. There is great scope for involvement during the design and delivery of local initiatives, at the level of ideas and in construction. Children and young people should be the main participants in assessing the outcomes and impact of changes, as success will largely be a matter of whether or not the initiatives have been taken up by them.

Methods

33.9 The methods used to involve children and young people will depend upon the answers to the questions above, and also on local circumstances. At some points, where a limited range of easily-defined and well-understood alternatives are under consideration, a simple consultation exercise may be enough. At other points, where issues are being explored or design ideas being developed, more wide-ranging participation processes will give better results. The partnership will benefit from working with people and agencies who have expertise in children’s participation.

33.10 Some local authorities have drawn up standards, protocols and guidelines as part of the Local Government Association/National Youth Agency Hear By Right initiative. Playwork services and agencies are also a valuable source of practical ideas and techniques.

33.11 The National Children’s Bureau has produced guidelines on the participation of children and young people that includes a ‘top 10’ list of resources. This and more information about participation is available from www.playengland.org.uk (see page 64).
Part two
Developing and implementing the play strategy

33.12 The table below gives ideas and suggested methods for involving children and young people at different stages in the process. All methods have advantages and disadvantages, so in most contexts a mix of approaches will generate the most useful findings and outcomes.

Play partnerships will vary in different areas. But whatever the local circumstances, the local authority will have some key roles, as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire surveys</td>
<td>Can enable large numbers of children to become involved and can be used with very young children if suitably designed. Schools are normally happy to support the process, as are youth and out-of-school clubs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Can be used to explore issues in depth, though their composition needs careful thought, as involving representative samples of participants is difficult or impossible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth councils/forums</td>
<td>Obvious contact points for discussion and a good way to get feedback, though they may not be representative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences and workshops</td>
<td>Engaging, participative events can provide a broad range of information. The presence of adults and children and young people together at well-organised events can help build respect for the perspectives of different generations, and exposes adults to the powerful experience of hearing at first-hand children and young people's views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's festivals/family events</td>
<td>Can provide opportunities to meet children and parents and to gain feedback and information through surveys and/or activity-based exercises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>Can be used to map patterns of usage of play spaces, and likes and dislikes. Single-use cameras can be a cost-effective method, though the growth in mobile photo-phones gives an alternative approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site-specific activities</td>
<td>Take groups of children and young people through an extensive set of activities aimed at improving specific spaces. One example is Playing for Real™ a process promoted by Devon Play.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All methods can be adapted as necessary to make it easier for disabled children and young people to take part. This may simply require just a little forethought, for example, using symbols as well as words. In other cases it will require facilitators who have the time and skills to observe and ask in the right way.

34. Involving parents

34.1 Depending on children’s age and other factors, parents are, to a lesser or greater extent, the gatekeepers of their children’s play opportunities. Their views on play provision, in particular on what would make them more likely to allow their children to visit play spaces, are valuable.

34.2 This is especially true for younger children, who can only visit play spaces when accompanied. Nurseries and parent and toddler groups provide good opportunities for consultation both for the distribution of questionnaires and for convening focus groups.

34.3 Parents of older children can be contacted through schools, registered play schemes and out-of-school clubs. Views can be sought on similar key issues as for children as well as gaining feedback on more strategic issues such as prioritisation, quality assessments of play spaces, and the location of play space in relation to housing and other elements.

35. Involving residents’ and community associations

35.1 The siting of play and youth facilities is often a contentious issue at the local level, with the needs and wishes of children and young people for play space and facilities sometimes at odds with those of nearby residents. Yet equally residents and community associations are often vociferous supporters of provision for local children and young people. For these reasons residents and community associations need to be involved in the process, though not at the expense of giving due weight to the concerns of children and young people themselves. Ensuring that consultation is undertaken, both directly with young people and through residents associations, can go a long way to minimise conflict when play and youth facilities are being planned.

35.2 Residents’ and community associations can be involved at the outset by helping to explore general principles about the location of play space in relation to housing, for example, in giving their views on reasonable ‘buffer zones’ for different kinds of provision and in the principles of designing play space so that it is safe.

35.3 Residents’ and community associations are also often a good source of information on local issues such as problems with the number, location and accessibility of local play spaces and ideas for improvement.
Part two
Developing and implementing the play strategy

36. Providing challenges, managing risk

36.1 The issue of risk and safety in play provision has preoccupied providers for many years. It is a crucial one to get right if the play strategy is to be effective.

36.2 Statistically, children’s playgrounds are among the safest places to be; but no environment is risk-free. Furthermore, because the developmental need to experience challenges is so pronounced in children, any play provision that does not cater for this need will tend to fail them and they will seek their thrills elsewhere. A degree of risk in play provision is therefore not only desirable but an aspect of one of its primary purposes.

36.3 Play and safety experts agree that there is currently a tendency for providers to minimise accidents and injuries of any kind, at the expense of play environments that offer real challenge and enjoyment. While it is difficult to generalise, there are undoubtedly many play spaces that are sterile and unstimulating as a result. This is a poor use of resources, as such facilities will tend to be underused or abused.

36.4 Accidents cannot be eliminated. Indeed it can be argued that falls and scrapes in childhood are not accidents at all, but part of growing up: an important aspect of learning about boundaries and how to manage risk. The courts accept this principle. Sound policies and risk management procedures provide the right framework for shaping provision, strike the right balance between children’s wishes and providers’ concerns and provide a robust defence against claims. The idea that there has been a dramatic increase in claims for playground accidents may be more myth than reality.

36.5 This issue is even more acute for many disabled children. They are often discriminated against on misguided ‘health and safety’ grounds, but may have an even greater need than other children to experience risk and challenge, since they are so often denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers. The experience of adventure playgrounds, like those provided by Kids, suggests that disabled children can – and need to – enjoy play opportunities that are robust, challenging and adventurous.
Managing Risk in Play Provision

There is growing concern about how safety is being addressed in children’s play provision. Fear of litigation is leading many play providers to focus on minimising the risk of injury at the expense of other more fundamental objectives. The effect is to stop children from enjoying a healthy range of play opportunities, limiting their enjoyment and causing potentially damaging consequences for their development. This approach ignores clear evidence that playing in play provision is a comparatively low risk activity for children. Of the two million or so childhood accident cases treated by hospitals each year, fewer than two per cent involve playground equipment. Participation in sports like soccer, widely acknowledged as ‘good’ for a child’s development, involve a greater risk of injury than visiting a playground. Fatalities on playgrounds are very rare – about one per three or four years on average. This compares with, for instance, more than 100 child pedestrian fatalities a year and more than 500 child fatalities from accidents overall.

Summary position statement

Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.

From Managing Risk in Play Provision, Play Safety Forum, 2002
A full copy of the statement is available from www.playengland.org.uk

36.6 Play partnerships may find it valuable to explore issues of risk and safety at some length at an early stage, in order to ensure a sound, consistent and well-understood approach. The Play Safety Forum, a national body with government funding, was set up to consider this issue, and its position statement Managing Risk in Play Provision provides a helpful focus for discussion (see below).
Part two
Developing and implementing the play strategy

37. Design for adventure
37.1 Partly due to an over-concern with safety, or fear of litigation, there is a tendency for new or refurbished play spaces to be unimaginative and formulaic. There is often an over-emphasis on fixed equipment at the expense of landscaping and other features. Imaginative changes of levels and hard and soft landscaping can be well suited to meeting the needs of various age groups and relatively easy and cheap to maintain. Such environments can stimulate creative play in a way that standardised equipment will not. Many of the most traditional and well-loved forms of play such as ball games, hide and seek, run-outs, building dens and informal bike tracks, are indeed dependent on imaginative natural landscaping rather than manufactured equipment, although the latter of course can have an important role in an overall design.

38. Monitoring and performance management
38.1 Strategic planning for play opportunities must include mechanisms for regular monitoring and data collection. This should include mapping of existing spaces and facilities in relation to where children live, the use of these by children and young people, how children and their parents feel about the opportunities available to them and the quality of what is on offer. This is discussed in more detail in the Review section of this guidance.

39. Evaluation
39.1 Evaluation is a key element of the play strategy development process. It should not be seen as something that is done at the end, but rather as an ongoing process of feedback and adjustment (formative evaluation), which can then also inform the final evaluation. The play partnership should be considering how to approach evaluation throughout the process.

40. Sustaining provision
40.1 Successful provision is sustainable over the long-term. This means ensuring that initiatives are not neglected or allowed to fall into decline. Projects should have in place at the outset the funding, management and maintenance regimes they need to be viable for the foreseeable future.
40.2 Research by the Children’s Play Council has identified a number of factors that have an impact on the sustainability of play provision. This research showed that play facilities and provision were more likely to become sustainable if they:
- are able to demonstrate they are meeting the needs of local children, families and communities
- have strong management including good financial management
- understand the complexities of funding and income generation
- have a skilled, well-trained, motivated workforce
- involve children and young people, their families and other local community members
- work in partnership with local organisations
- network and communicate widely with other local groups and potential stakeholders
- make use of local infrastructure support
- secure commitment from the local authority including officers and councillors
- have effective arrangements for evaluation and monitoring of their services.

40.3 While this will not guarantee secure long-term funding, it is generally believed that these conditions help make the future more secure as they demonstrate robustness in provision. Play partnerships can use these factors as a health check list on the status and sustainability of the strategy they develop and the projects and improvements that emanate from it.

41. Using consultants

41.1 Where the authority does not have an established play service and may therefore lack the relevant expertise, external agencies or consultants may be able to help. There are, however, limits on the extent to which play strategy development can be outsourced. The local authority will need to retain corporate ownership and to ensure that effective links are made across departments, agencies and sectors, and this will demand a level of engagement that cannot be delegated. Moreover local authorities will need to ensure that the learning from the process is not lost if they are to succeed in achieving significant, sustainable change.

**Essential elements of a successful play strategy**

- **Cross-cutting** – developed with commitment from relevant local authorities departments and the community, voluntary and faith sectors.
- **Strong leadership** – a named and properly resourced and supported lead officer.
- **High level support** – named champions’ at senior officer and member level.
- **Sound basis** – based on comprehensive review and audit.
- **Participative** – participation of children and young people, parents and community members.
- **Inclusive** – addresses the needs and wishes of all local groups of children and young people.
- **Commitment** – includes commitments and a timetabled action plan.
- **Resourced** – explicit commitment to resourcing and sustainability.
- **Learning** – has regular monitoring, review and reflective practice built in.
Stage I
Preparation

42. Agreeing the “play partnership”

42.1 The first matter that needs to be considered and agreed is the composition and membership of the play partnership, and the first task is to identify interested agencies, organisations and individuals. This will vary from one local authority to another.

42.2 For example, London boroughs and metropolitan/unitary authorities throughout England benefit from having play, leisure, planning, education, youth and highways functions within the same authority; so although there is a clear role for other agencies and organisations within the strategy process, the task of co-ordinating and encouraging input from key services will, in theory, be easier to achieve.

42.3 On the other hand, district and county councils do not have sole responsibility for the above functions, which means that they must be more inclusive in terms of the public agencies they encourage to become involved in the strategy process. In some second tier councils there may be no historic role for the council in terms of play. The main role in such authorities will be to act as a leader and strategic facilitator of the strategy process. Local Strategic Partnerships, particularly those that have a clear focus on children and young people, could be a useful starting point in two-tier areas. Parish and town councils will have a key role in the process, as they are frequently important providers of play opportunities.
Checklist of stakeholders

Key departments and agencies

- play service
- voluntary sector play association
- children’s services
- leisure department
- parks / green space department
- ‘streetscene’ department
- planning department
- community and youth service.

Other possible departments and agencies

- housing department
- property services and economic development department
- education department
- youth organisations
- highways department
- countryside department
- town/parish councils
- police and criminal justice agencies
- recreational trusts
- housing associations/registered social landlords
- other voluntary and community sector groups
- environmental organisations
- regional architectural centres
- childcare providers
- regeneration agencies
- schools
- hospitals
- colleges
- faith organisations
- private sector providers
- relevant county/regional bodies.
42.4 Building a strong and lasting play partnership is central to the success of the strategy. Setting up a partnership may take time, particularly if there are no existing local structures. Where these do exist they are key resources and should be centrally involved throughout the process. From the outset the intention should be to be as inclusive as possible and to find ways that stakeholders can be engaged and contribute to the partnership to the degree that they find comfortable. Partnerships will need policy and practical support to be effective over the long-term, and local authorities will need to ensure this happens.

42.5 The play partnership will need to be well connected with other initiatives. Authorities with responsibility for children’s service planning may already have appropriate structures, which can be adapted and expanded as necessary. Normally such a partnership would operate as a distinct working group within the hierarchy of partnership arrangements that feed into the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnerships (CYPSP) or Children’s Trusts. In second tier authorities, new ways of working in partnership with key stakeholders may be needed, with the local authority possibly having an enabling role.

42.6 As with any working group, the partnership will need to be of manageable size if it is to work effectively. This might mean an active membership of around 12 to 20. Where the potential membership is greater than this either some form of representative mechanisms for different stakeholder groups, or alternatively sub-groups addressing specific issues or topic areas, should be considered. Government guidance has identified the key features of successful partnerships. This is reproduced opposite.
Checklist: Key features of successful partnerships

- a clear ambitious vision
- a common purpose
- shared values, adapted to fit local context
- integration within the local authority
- strong leadership and effective management
- a range of appropriate skills, knowledge and expertise
- clear roles and responsibilities of members
- transparent systems for decision-making
- effective use of funding
- a system for monitoring and evaluating progress
- an enterprising approach
- an external focus.

43. Agreeing general principles

43.1 Once the key stakeholders have been brought together and a play partnership has been established, the first task is to decide and adopt a clear and coherent statement of principles on which the strategy is to be based, and which the process will adhere to. There are several broad principles that should apply to any play strategy:

- It should include a clear definition and understanding of play.
- It should have a clear scope in terms of age range covered.
- It should be based upon principles of equality and inclusion.
- It should effectively involve children and young people throughout the process.
- It should be undertaken across council departments and in partnership with all stakeholders, including relevant local authorities at all tiers down to town/parish council level, the voluntary sector and the private sector.
- It should cover both fixed play facilities (playgrounds, outdoor youth facilities, wheeled sports facilities) and staffed services (supervised play facilities, out-of-school clubs, junior youth clubs, playschemes etc.).
- It should address children’s play in parks, open spaces, streets and the wider built environment, and also their ability to get around their neighbourhoods.
- It should include an audit and analysis of local facilities and services.
- It should recommend a local standard (or standards) for play provision that could also be adopted elsewhere (such as in planning guidance or open space strategies).
- It should recognise the value of play both in its own right and in relation to wider agendas such as health, social inclusion and community safety.
- It should provide explicit links with strategic documents such as Open Space Strategies, Cultural Strategies, Community Plans and the Children’s and Young People’s Plan.
- It should interpret the ‘local situation’ in the context of relevant regional and national legislation, policy and strategy.
- It should reflect the local diversity and character of the local area.

43.2 The diversity of views and backgrounds within the play partnership means that arriving at common understandings, shared values and joint objectives may not be easy. But consensus is crucial to effective working. One way to address this is to create the opportunity for key agencies to discuss these issues at an early stage in a workshop, which could be led by the lead officer or an external facilitator.

43.3 The workshops stimulate the formation of a series of corporate, cross-sectoral first order strategic objectives. These form the framework, and create the impetus, for creating initiatives that start and end with a vision of where children should be able to play, and play well. The aspiration is to align diverse government strategies and local initiatives with this overarching aim.
During this stage of the process, it may be valuable to get initial input from the community – including children and young people and parents/carers – in order to establish their views on the broad aims and objectives of the strategy. This should be supplemented by more detailed community involvement later in the process.

Once the general principles and broad aims are agreed, a play policy statement should be agreed that states them clearly. The Audit Commission model statement of principles from its Best Value Performance Indicator given in Appendix A is a useful starting point.

44. Agreeing partnership terms of reference

44.1 The terms of reference of the play partnership will cover its roles and responsibilities – what it is expected to achieve, what it will do, and how. A process also needs to be agreed in advance for the strategy to be officially adopted as council policy.

45. Agreeing scope and process

45.1 Decisions need to be made about what the strategy and the consultation process will cover, and what it will not cover. Scoping the task should be informed by the policy statement of principles. The partnership will also need to make decisions about how it wants to conduct the process of developing the strategy. Effective community involvement, including the involvement of children and young people, also needs to be planned into the process from the outset.

46. Agreeing the timetable

46.1 At this stage, it will also be important to consider and agree the proposed timetable for developing the strategy, making explicit the time period the strategy is expected to cover. When it comes to implementing the strategy a further set of time lines will be needed.
Stage II
Review

47. Review of existing consultation

47.1 ‘Consultation fatigue’ is an increasingly prevalent phenomenon among local groups as well-meaning councils seeking community opinion risk duplicating previous survey themes and questions, and therefore alienating the very people they are trying to involve. Before undertaking fresh consultation, all existing and relevant local consultation findings should be identified and examined (e.g. best value information, customer surveys, child and youth consultation exercises, completed community consultation exercises etc.). This should involve gathering such data from all key stakeholders as well as that completed by the council.

48. Identifying, mapping and auditing current provision

48.1 There are some key questions to begin the process of reviewing current play provision in the local authority area:

- which services within the local authority deliver play opportunities?
- which other organisations deliver provision?
- what relationships exist between different providers?
- who is involved in the planning and development of play provision in the borough?
- what written plans and policies exist?
- what do these documents cover and how are they implemented?
- how does play provision fit into other local authority priorities and initiatives?

- are there processes for mediating between children’s play needs and the needs of others?

48.2 Apart from assessing the use of space, the play partnership will also want to consider questions about resources. This would ideally embrace all sources of funding over the previous two or three years, and might include looking at:

- spending on play provision
- spending per child or resident
- allocation of spending between different types of provision
- how planning obligations are used to provide/improve play provision.

49. Scope of the audit: play and the wider built environment

49.1 It is important at the outset to establish the scope of the audit. What precisely is to be audited? This is not as straightforward as it might at first seem. To a child, the whole world is a potential playground: where an adult sees a low wall, a railing, kerb or street bench a child might see a mini adventure playground or a challenging skateboard obstacle.
49.2 Children and young people will play and hang out in almost all publicly accessible space, including the street, town centres and squares, parks, playing fields and amenity areas as well as the more recognisable play and youth facilities such as equipped playgrounds, youth shelters, BMX and skateboard parks, multi-use games areas etc. Play should not be restricted to designated ‘reservations’ of play provision. The principle should instead be to make as much as possible of the environment that children inhabit suited to as for play. The adoption of this principle should provide an added incentive to those involved in promoting play to influence the planning and urban design process.

49.3 Ideally a play space audit should cover all public open space, including not just dedicated play provision, parks and other green space, but also civic and public hard spaces, which may have an important informal play function. In reality it is unlikely that local authorities will undertake such an extensive audit for the play strategy process alone. However, there is an opportunity to follow this principle when authorities are preparing their Open Space Strategy or studies of open space and other recreation facilities, as required by PPG17.

49.4 The basic purpose of the audit is to gather information about local play facilities and services; how many there are; where they are; an assessment of their quality (including staff support, training and qualifications); and how accessible they are to users. This will then allow for an analysis to determine where gaps need to be filled (and what kind of facility/service is needed there); where quality needs to be improved; where steps to improve access are required; and even where there may be more facilities than needed.

50. Audits and local standards

50.1 The information gathered in the audit is also helpful in the development of local standards for play space. Government policy on planning for open space, sport and recreation advocates strongly the production of standards for such provision based on an assessment of local need and provision. Local standards for play provision should therefore be an essential product of the play strategy process. Setting robust local standards based on assessments of need and audits of existing facilities will form the basis for redressing quantitative and qualitative deficiencies. Standards should be included in local authority development plans as well as the play strategies. Government guidance stresses these standards should be founded on three core components:

- a quantitative element (how much new provision may be needed)
- a qualitative component (against which to measure the need for enhancement of existing facilities)
- an accessibility element (including distance thresholds).
50.2 Drawing up play provision standards is a challenging task, and one that will need careful consideration. There is agreement that standards should capture how engaging and enjoyable spaces and services are for children and young people, and hence how popular and successful they are. There is an ongoing debate about how to measure and assess quantity, accessibility and quality. The Children’s Play Council is carrying out work on play indicators that will take the debate forward. Hence this guidance does not advocate any particular quality system. Instead, partnerships are encouraged to decide for themselves on approaches that will work for them. Healthy and lively debate about these issues is likely to help build shared values and perspectives within partnerships. There is more information, and further discussion, about standards in play provision and play space at www.playengland.org.uk

51. Mapping and assessing current provision

Classification of provision

51.1 Mapping of current provision should be informed by the agreed definition of play provision and the values underpinning the strategy. For example – the spaces and facilities to be audited and mapped should be free of charge, where children are free to come and go (other than where safety is an issue for children with particular needs), and where they are free to choose what they do. 51.2 Prior to audits being undertaken, it will be helpful to agree upon a provisional typography for categorising play space. This initial categorisation can facilitate the collection and ordering of information obtained through the audit. The typology show below (adapted from the Mayor of London’s Guide) is one possible categorisation shown below. The Children’s Play Council is piloting area-wide performance indicators for play using the typology shown on page 49.

► Unequipped space – while there is no equipment or specific design for play, the area is suitable and used for play. It may only be practicable to audit such spaces if undertaken as part of a wider open space audit.

► Toddler/doorstep – small space near housing specifically designed for play – may or may not have some small items of equipment for toddlers and seating for adults (similar to NPFA LAP).

► Small equipped – primarily aimed at under eights with, say, three to five items of equipment, seating. Near to housing.

► Large equipped – aimed at 5–11s with a larger range of equipment, say, four to eight items and space/design for ball games, wheeled sports etc. Seating and near to housing.

► Neighbourhood – providing for all children including teenagers. Facilities as for large equipped but with additional equipment challenging to older children; youth shelter type provision; and floodlit MUGA and/or wheeled sports facilities. These sites will serve a considerably wider area than the above four.
Suggested typology for play audit
being piloted for possible inclusion within Comprehensive Performance Assessment

**Type A: Door-step spaces and facilities**
- small equipped play areas (furnished primarily for young children)
- neighbourhood amenity green spaces (unequipped)
- home zone or equivalent.

**Type B: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities**
- large equipped play areas (furnished primarily for children aged 5–11)
- satellite parks*
- junior bike, skate and skateboard facilities, kick-about areas.

**Type C: Local spaces and facilities for play**

**Supervised**
- adventure playgrounds
- open access play centres
- open access playschemes
- play ranger and outreach play projects.

**No formal supervision**
- school playgrounds (open out of school hours)
- neighbourhood equipped play areas (eight+ items)
- teenage wheeled sports area
- ball courts, multi-use games areas
- hangout/youth shelters
- community parks*
- local parks*
- playing fields and recreation grounds freely available for children to use.
- beaches, woodlands and natural areas.

*Definitions can be found in the Open/Green Space Strategy.

More information about the proposed PI's for play can be found at www.playengland.org.uk
Youth facilities – these are spaces aimed primarily at older children and teenagers (12+). They will range from youth shelters/meeting areas within local public open space to floodlit MUGAs, skateboard and BMX parks.

Green spaces – parks, playing fields and other green spaces open to the public and available for play.

Destination playgrounds – these are play spaces within key sites that are aimed at attracting family and similar groups for a longer visit. They will tend to be larger than neighbourhood sites, have car parking facilities, a greater variety of fixed equipment, and access to facilities such as cafes and public toilets.

Other play spaces – and outdoor play facilities and places where children can play not covered by the above, including home zones.

Auditing play services

51.3 For the audit to be comprehensive there will be a similar need to audit play services. Categories include:

- Staffed adventure playgrounds – staffed spaces that aim to provide a wide range of play opportunities aimed at children over five, with playworker supervision. Such facilities are open access and often have large outdoor play structures alongside an indoor space.

- Playschemes – programmes of activities and play opportunities mainly for primary aged children, run during some or all of the school holidays and supervised by playworkers. Schemes take place at a wide variety of venues including schools, village halls, community centres, parks and open spaces, and may either be run on open access grounds or as a form of childcare.

- Out-of-school provision – like playschemes but generally provided as year-schemes to cover school holidays and out-of-school play opportunities. Venues can be sole purpose or within schools, community centres etc. Nearly all are childcare oriented rather than casual open access.

- Mobile and outreach play services – including play buses, mobile playschemes (e.g. resource van loaded with play, arts, crafts and sports equipment), mobile cafes, play rangers etc. Some enable activities to be undertaken in the vehicle itself while others take resources to venues such as village halls, community centres or parks and use their facilities. Play/youth worker supervised.

- Other play spaces – and outdoor play facilities not covered by the above, including play opportunities in specialist settings such as hospitals and refuges.

51.4 The audit may also identify local play sector infrastructure and support services such as play associations/networks, training centres, children’s resource centres, toy libraries and scrap stores.
52. Access audit

52.1 An access audit should also be undertaken for dedicated play provision in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act. As well as including a detailed analysis of the play space itself, the audit should include access to the site in relation to, for example, car parks, bus routes and paths. It may be helpful to bring in people who are registered/qualified in undertaking such audits.

53. The mechanics of the audit process – The two-stage approach

53.1 The audit process should be completed in two stages.

Stage 1 – Desk-based research

The first step is to finalise the essential information that will be required relating to every site based upon consideration of the factors outlined above. From this appropriate questionnaires or pro-formas can be produced that can be completed in relation to every site.

The next step is to build up a database of play spaces to reflect the information being gathered. Sites on the database should initially be built up from existing databases made available by partners. It is important that the database provides information so that the location of all sites can be precisely identified. This will ideally mean a grid reference or at the very least a full address and postcode for every site. Sufficient detail also needs to be gathered to classify each area using the provisional play space categorisation system that has been adopted.

Unless there is complete confidence in the accuracy, quality and extent of the current information available it will be necessary to undertake additional research, including site visits.

The task of updating and completing the audit database will depend upon the pattern of provision. It may involve gathering information from a large number of other stakeholders including housing associations, local councils and voluntary organisations such as local recreational trusts. Hence it may be a significant task, and the time implications of this should not be underestimated. For example, some rural local authorities will have over 100 town and parish councils who collectively can be the primary providers of play space.

Stage 2 – Site visits

It is strongly recommended that, in addition to the above, all sites be visited as an integral part of the audit process. The main purposes of site visits are to:

- fill gaps in site-specific information not secured through Stage 1
- review information received from different sources through stage 1 so that it is consistent across the council area
- classify sites in accordance with the agreed provisional audit typology
- undertake qualitative assessments
- undertake an audit of access for disabled children.

Councils may wish to ensure that the site visits to dedicated play spaces required for the audit coincide with the annual or quarterly visits undertaken for health and safety purposes.
54. Audit recording systems

54.1 In recording the results of the audit, it is important to think through how records are to be kept and used. Whatever system is used, care should be invested in ensuring information can be easily updated. This will mean adopting an appropriate IT database/spreadsheet approach that can be easily linked with a Geographical Information Systems (GIS) database. There are several purpose built systems that authorities can use that would be suitable for both audit purposes and for recording results from regular health and safety inspections.

55. Analysing patterns of play opportunities

55.1 Once both the audit and the consultation stages are complete, all the relevant information should be at hand to undertake a detailed analysis of existing play opportunities relative to the identified needs of the community. On the one hand, the audit will have achieved the detailed mapping and recording of play spaces of all kinds; assessed their quantity, size and distribution; and examined their quality and suitability for use by different groups. On the other hand, local consultation should have provided information about the needs and aspirations of different sections of the community.

55.2 These two sides of the process need to be brought together. The depth and content of this analysis will need to be agreed locally, although the following issues are likely to feature:

- needs of age groups
- needs of social/community groups
- needs by geographical area
- overall distribution and characteristics of provision
- quality of provision
- quantity of provision
- accessibility of provision
- deficiencies and opportunities.

55.3 This analytical stage should therefore provide a clear steer in terms of relevant issues and opportunities that will help to inform emerging policy, proposals, action plans, and local standards for play space.

55.4 Analysis can be undertaken and reported through words, pictures, tables, charts and maps. However, it is strongly recommended that GIS be used throughout the play strategy process. GIS is the generic term for computer-based mapping and data assessment tools. It might best be thought of as a database containing all sorts of information relating to individual play sites (what they contain, location, quality, intended users etc.). The difference between GIS and conventional databases is that its content is then linked to an electronic map. As outdoor play fundamentally involves space, GIS can therefore be an ideal tool for the preparation, monitoring and review of the play strategy.

More information about GIS, with examples, can be found at www.playengland.org.uk
GIS can also be a powerful means for linking the key findings of consultation with the audit of provision. This will benefit both analysis and presentation of findings. For example:

- Local information can be used to identify real travel distances and likely barriers to accessibility, such as busy roads.

- Provision can be depicted relative to age structure and the identified needs of specific geographically based communities and social groups. GIS can help to identify areas of deficiency, measure catchment areas and relate the distribution of play spaces to socio-economic and demographic characteristics. It can (for example) help to examine provision in areas where there are proportionately high numbers of children, and correspondingly greater need.

- GIS can help to identify optimal locations for new or improved facilities or for measures to improve access such as traffic calming or new walking routes.

- GIS can help to establish appropriate local standards.

Mapping the data collected in the audit on GIS also makes it much easier to monitor changes in play provision and add these to the database, making long-term planning and monitoring easier. Some authorities use a GIS database as a more sophisticated tool to assist in both the planning and maintenance of play space, with maintenance tasks and requirements included in the GIS database as part of day-to-day management.
56. Agreeing play strategy policy statements

56.1 Early in the strategy process the play partnership will have developed an overall vision for play in its area, and established the main objectives of the strategy. A broad play policy should also have been adopted containing general principles that all partners have signed up to.

56.2 The strategy process has now completed the following key tasks:
- set up and maintained a play partnership
- completed a review of relevant policy and strategy (national, regional and local)
- carried out an audit of play provision
- engaged directly with the local community including children and young people
- analysed the audit and consultation findings.

57. Play strategy policy statements

57.1 From the above, a number of key play strategy policy statements should be drawn up that will underpin the strategy and action plan. These statements should link to key children and young people’s plan documents such as the Community Plan, Childrens and Young People's Plan and the corporate priorities of the council as well as providing links with national and regional strategies. In this manner, the contribution of play provision to these wider crosscutting agendas will be made explicit.

57.2 The policy statements need to be formulated widely enough so that all action points arising from the strategy can be clearly linked to furthering one or more specific policy statements (and hence to Community Plan and corporate priorities). The key policy statements should reflect the needs of the community as identified through the strategy process but not be too numerous (probably no more than 10-12 in total). They might cover key principles and content such as:
- improving opportunities for play and informal recreation
- promoting enjoyment for children and young people
- involving children and young people
- promoting equality and social inclusion
- engaging in partnerships with the voluntary sector and town/parish councils
- stimulating social and economic regeneration
- providing playwork training
- promoting health and physical activity
- improving the planning system
- increasing community safety
- enhancing public space
- promoting community use of school facilities.

58. Writing the strategy

58.1 Though their content and level of detail will vary, play strategies for all local authorities will cover the same broad topics and are likely to have a similar structure. The table below puts forward a structure that fits with this guidance.
The strategy document – suggested table of contents

Executive summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>● purpose and scope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● outline of content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● definition of play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The case for play</td>
<td>● value and significance of play for children and young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● contribution play makes to wider agendas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>● play in local, regional, and national contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● profile of the council area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● relevant local and national policy and strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of community engagement</td>
<td>● approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● findings and conclusions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local provision examined</td>
<td>● audit findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● audit methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● analysis of provision relative to needs and population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● management arrangements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play policy statements</td>
<td>● key policy statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● links with wider strategic documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local standards</td>
<td>● explanation of standards proposed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action plan</td>
<td>● criteria for identifying priorities for development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● play projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● play developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● links to other strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● timelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● monitoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation plan</td>
<td>● outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● review.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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58.2 The heart of the strategy is an action plan. Each action point in the plan should be directly related to the policy statements, which in turn will be linked to one or more of the council’s corporate priorities, the Children and Young People’s Plan and the Community Plan objectives, to show how proposed improvements link with wider agendas.

58.3 As well as setting out proposed actions, the action plan should include timescales, costs (including funding requirements and potential sources of external funding) and whose responsibility for delivery of each action. It should be clear and succinct and be accessible to a wide readership.

58.4 The action plan is the part of the strategy that most people are interested in. It will say what has been decided, priorities for action, how much money is intended to be spent and on what, who will deliver the improvements and when. It will reveal the influence of community engagement. It is what the local newspaper will want to report on and it tells children and young people what is going to happen. It is also effectively a pledge to children and young people that things are going to change for the better. It is a key milestone in the process of play strategy development. If you have reached this stage without proper preparation then it is likely to run into difficulties.

58.5 The action plan is a live working document, and actions proposed need to be sufficiently specific and concrete for their achievement to be regularly monitored over the life time of the plan. Obviously the content of action plans will vary in different authorities. The table opposite suggests the kinds of actions that might feature:
Possible components of an action plan

**Improving play space**
Investing in new or refurbished play spaces in areas with deficiencies.

**Increasing supervised provision**
Where there is an under-provision of open play space and limited opportunities for creating it, priority might be given to developing supervised provision, such as adventure playgrounds, play schemes or mobile projects. Where existing spaces are under-used, introducing mobile projects or ‘Play Ranger’ initiatives can improve usage and increase the range of play opportunities on offer.

**Inclusion initiatives**
While the long-term aim should be for all play provision to be inclusive, most areas would benefit from a focus on measures that improve access and opportunities for disabled children.

**Re-siting or replacing play space**
When playgrounds are refurbished, re-siting them so that they are nearer to housing, or changing the access points so that travel distances are decreased, may widen catchment and improve usage. Where the location of a play facility means that it is poorly used and this is unlikely to change, permitting development on this site but replacing with the same, or better, in a more appropriate location, could be considered.

**Traffic calming, safe routes and home zone schemes**
These measures may reduce barriers to local provision and/or increase the distances children are allowed to travel unaccompanied. In this way, children’s access can be increased without any actual increase in provision. Much of children’s play occurs in transit and regular journeys can provide opportunities for play if the routes are designed or modified with children’s play needs in mind. This measure can have the added benefit of reducing car use.

**Protecting play space**
Measures to protect play space by legal means, through particular deeds, can safeguard the positive benefits of the strategy for future generations of children, young people and communities.

**Involvement strategies**
Maintaining and developing the level of involvement of the community, including children and young people, in designing and looking after play spaces can be a vital factor in improving and sustaining play provision.

**Mediation strategies**
These can be used to reduce fears, to ensure that children who are just ‘being children’ rather than ‘a nuisance’ are enabled to play within their own neighbourhood, and to resolve genuine conflicts.

**Maintenance**
Good maintenance regimes can improve play provision. For instance, judicious thinning and pruning of hedges or replacing fencing with see-through fencing may assist children to feel more secure in playgrounds and also to reduce vandalism and thereby improve usage. Reviewing maintenance and replacement procedures can improve efficiency and release resources for other measures.
Stage III
Agreement

59. Consultation on the draft strategy

59.1 Copies of the draft strategy should be sent to key partners and additional copies made available to other interested parties/individuals. In addition, it is recommended that a participative workshop including relevant council officers and partners is held to receive feedback and help correct, refine and amend the draft. It may also be valuable to gain feedback directly from children and young people, perhaps through an activity-based children’s/young person’s conference.

59.2 Following this process a new draft should be prepared. This revised draft should be presented to the play partnership, following which any outstanding amendments will be made prior to formal adoption procedures by the council and its partners.

60. Communicating the strategy and action plan

60.1 During the previous period of activity leading up to this point, and in the processes that this work has involved, a great deal of communication of the strategy and its contents will have taken place. It will be important to ensure that the strategy receives as wide as possible media coverage. This phase is about telling people and particularly children and young people the good news. It is particularly important that children and young people get to know that their contributions to the process have been valued and that their views have been heard.

The range of media for disseminating information about future plans will include, for example:

- existing play facilities
- newsletters and leaflets
- posters
- the Children’s Information Service
- schools and youth facilities
- libraries
- local authority website
- local media (TV, radio and newspapers).
Stage IV
Delivery

61. Agreeing, commissioning and managing projects

61.1 This process is likely to have run concurrently with the action planning process, or it could happen after the strategy has been agreed. But whenever it takes place, at some stage the local authority and play partnership will need to make decisions about who and how the action plan will be put into effect, particularly for projects and improvements that are intended to be delivered quickly.

62. Risk management

62.1 Undertaking a risk analysis of the action plan and individual project plans is a useful process to help identify potential, unforeseen obstacles or delays to delivering and implementing proposed projects. The risk analysis should include considerations about quality of delivery, as well as quantity and timescales.

63. Budgeting for implementation

63.1 The action plan should be sufficiently concrete for its proposals to be costed precisely for short-term proposals and realistically estimated for medium and longer-term plans. These costs need to be reviewed annually in line with council’s budget programming so that funds can be secured for the coming years proposals. It is important that all partners who are contributing financial and other resources towards implementing the action plan adopt a similar approach.

63.2 It is likely that the action plan will also need to secure additional external funds. Maximising funding from associated initiatives, and in line with other crosscutting strategic themes, both locally and nationally, is anticipated as the norm if the strategy is to be successful and sustainable, particularly in the longer-term. Plans may require funding applications to be made from a wide variety of sources. It is important that the human resource implications of preparing and managing such applications be taken into account.

64. Development agreements

64.1 Planning conditions, local area agreements and Section 106 ‘planning gain’ agreements are an important additional source of funding that should be maximised wherever possible.

64.2 It is important, however, that the strategy process itself is used to demonstrate the importance of play (both in itself and as a contribution to wider social agendas) to all partners. Mainstream budgets for play services and facilities should be maintained or increased during the strategy timeframe, to ensure stability and manage growth.
65. Human resources

65.1 Depending on the size and particular character of a local authority, a good play strategy is likely to include the development of a range of supervised and unsupervised provision, from child-friendly design of the public realm to properly staffed adventure playgrounds, after-school clubs and other play projects. Resources will need to be identified for the recruitment, training and development of a skilled workforce: playworkers, play development and outreach workers, structure builders, site managers and people with the skills to engage and enable authentic participation by children and young people.

65.2 SkillsActive, the Sector Skills Council for the playwork sector, has information about the training and qualifications framework for playwork from induction, through NVQs and vocationally related qualifications, to higher education opportunities. There is a network of regional Centres for Playwork Education and Training with additional information on locally available education and training opportunities. For authorities aiming to develop a range of supervised provision, a workforce development plan, making reference to the training and qualification needs of the workforce should be an integral part of the play strategy.

66. Monitoring, review and evaluation

66.1 The strategy document and action plan will need to be kept under regular review in order to be effective. Regular review of the action plan will be especially important in ensuring that targets are being met, or checking whether they need to be modified in the light of changing circumstances. The action plan should be subject to annual review. The play strategy should be kept up to date and the need for review will depend on whether there are significant changes in funding, legislation, Section 106 opportunities, other strategies or planning. The local authority should also be responsive and flexible to community feedback as the strategy implementation progresses.

66.2 To effectively review the plan, performance will need to be monitored by agreed performance indicators. The Children’s Play Council has developed a set of performance indicators for area wide play provision which, during 2006, are being piloted for possible inclusion within Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Details are available from www.playengland.org.uk

66.3 Evaluation of the strategy – its effectiveness and impact against its intended outcomes – will be a crucial part of the review process that should be built into the plan from the outset. A discussion of evaluation and some suggested processes are included at www.playengland.org.uk
Appendix 1
Model statement of principles for a play strategy

(From the Audit Commission’s Best Value Performance Indicators Library.)

The Authority recognises the significance and value of play and the poverty of play opportunities in the general environment. It is committed to ensuring that all children have access to rich, stimulating environments, both in and out of doors, free from unacceptable risks, thereby offering them the opportunity to explore through their freely chosen play, both themselves and the world. The policy is based on the understanding that every child needs opportunities to play both on their own and, crucially, with others.

The Authority is committed to ensuring that environments, services and provision for play are attractive, welcoming and accessible to every child irrespective of age, gender, background or origin, or of individual capacities and abilities.

The Authority will work towards increasing play opportunities for and eliminating barriers to the take-up of play provision by disabled children and children with specific cultural needs. This will take the form of developing increased inclusive provision or, if necessary, separate provision, recognising that separate provision may sometimes be a valuable staging post for particularly vulnerable children. Use of specialist services should only be at the choice of the child or their advocate and all mainstream services must be welcoming and accessible to all children.

The Authority recognises that:

- children play in a variety of public spaces as well as in dedicated provision
- play environments should provide safe, stimulating play opportunities that place children at the centre of the play process
- children need to encounter and learn to manage an acceptable level of risk in their play
- children’s views should be sought and listened to
- children should have access to the widest possible range of play experiences and play environments, both indoors and outside.

Judgements about quality in provision will be based on the degree to which children are provided with opportunities to experience directly:

- the natural elements – earth, air, fire and water
- fabricated and natural materials and tools – consumables, ‘loose parts’
- challenge – in the physical environment, in the social context and in private
- free movement – running, jumping, climbing, rolling, balancing
- emotions – both painful and pleasurable, the chance to validate a range of feelings
- a variety of stimulation to the senses – hearing, taste, smell, touch, sight
• play with identity – drama, dressing up, role plays, masks, face painting

• varied social interactions – freely chosen across the age, ability, gender, ethnic and cultural barriers, co-operating, resolving conflict, chatting, negotiating, sharing

• change – building/demolishing, transforming environments, the effect of the seasons and weather, growth and decay, predicting and planning, interesting physical environments – plantings, varied levels, enclosed/open spaces, mounds, steps, walls, shelters, surfaces, platforms, seating, privacy, vistas, flexibility.

Audit Commission (BVPI 115).
Appendix 2
Where to find further information, advice and support

In March 2006, the Children’s Play Council, part of the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) launched the Play England project. Together with the Children’s Play Information Service, also part of NCB, Play England will provide a comprehensive range of information, facilitation and enabling services for all those involved in the development and implementation of local play strategies.

This will include ongoing support through events, seminars and workshops run through nine regional centres in England.

It will also include a range of materials supplementary to this guidance, a growing database of case studies and good practice examples, and, through the Children’s Play Information Service, a thorough reference point for further reading, contacts, briefings and listings.

Play England

Making space for play

Play England
Website www.playengland.org.uk
Advice line 020 7843 6300
Or contact playengland@ncb.org.uk

Children’s Play Information Service
Website www.ncb.org.uk/library/cpis
Telephone 020 7843 6303
Or contact cpis@ncb.org.uk

8 Wakley Street
London EC1V 7QE
References


3 As required under Ofsted Joint Area Reviews.


13 Ibid.


References


35 R Wheway, A number of observational and consultation studies of children’s play (unpublished).


37 Rob Wheway, op cit.


39 Rt. Hon Tessa Jowell MP, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, January 2005.


46 Emily Silverman, Ruth Lupton and Alex Fenton (2006) A good place for children? Attracting and retaining families in inner urban mixed income communities, Chartered Institute of Housing.


48 National Playing Fields Association ‘Local Area for Play’.

49 National Playing Fields Association ‘Local Equipped Area for Play’.

50 National Playing Fields Association ‘Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play’.

51 Multi Use Games Area.

52 www.playwork.org.uk.

53 www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/open_space.jsp.

1 The National Playing Fields Association is the country’s leading advocate for the legal protection of public space for play and recreational use by the community and can provide expert advice on this issue www.npfa.co.uk