

taking play seriously

A Play Policy for Gloucestershire

February 2005



Gloucestershire
Neighbourhood
Projects Network



Playwork
Partnerships

organisations involved in the production of this policy

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Gloucestershire County Council's **Early Years & Childcare Service** works with partners to help deliver the Government's Sure Start agenda locally, with responsibility for planning and supporting quality early education and childcare within the county for children aged 0 to 14, including up to 16 for children with additional needs. **Sure Start** is the Government's programme to deliver the best start in life for every child by bringing together early education, childcare, health and family support. For more information on Sure Start visit www.surestart.gov.uk.

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Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network promotes and supports activities that make a significant and sustainable improvement to nine disadvantaged communities in Gloucestershire. Supporting children and young people by developing playful communities is a key area of work.

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Playwork Partnerships is a network organisation aiming to enrich the quality of children and young peoples' lives through their experience of quality playwork, by promoting the importance of play and playwork and increasing the learning opportunities for playworkers. The development of the policy has been **co-ordinated** by Playwork Partnerships.

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The work has been **overseen** by the **Gloucestershire Play Policy Steering Group**, made up of representatives from District and County Councils, strategic partnerships, agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations. A list of members of the Play Policy Steering Group is on page 27 of the full policy document.

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Children and young people need positive play and leisure activities in public open spaces, close to their home neighbourhoods. They need spaces that are safe and welcoming. Places to meet and socialise, make friends, have fun, let off energy and express themselves.

Children and young people express their community lives through play. Good community play opportunities are as important as and complement good schools and happy homes.

Local Action for Young People’s Play; Gloucester Partnership

what this document is about

We take play seriously! Play and free time activity should be fun for children and young people; research also tells us that it is fundamental to their health and wellbeing, their relationships, their development and their learning. We hope that this document will convince you to take play seriously as well.

playing from 0 – 25 years and beyond

We know that we all play throughout our lives, yet provision for play is focussed on children and young people. We also recognise that while young people may not consider what they do in their free time to be 'play', they do need the time, space and freedom that younger age groups have through play. This policy addresses the play and free time needs of children and young people from 0-25 years.

Children and young people, parents and families, communities and professionals, officers and elected representatives have all told us that ensuring children and young people can play is important. Yet children and young people's play and freely chosen pastimes do not have the profile and attention that they deserve, partly because local and national structures of government are fragmented when it comes to play and free time activities.

Local authorities have more influence on children and young people's play and free-time activities than any other organisation. The daily decisions and actions of many local authority departments, in particular planning, transport, highways, education, leisure, parks, housing, community safety, regeneration and environmental protection, have a major impact on where and how local children and young people are able to play.

Children's Play Council 'Planning for Play'

People are interested, but nobody has sole responsibility. Many different agencies and services in all sectors have an impact on children and young people's ability to play. These include leisure providers, voluntary and community groups, strategic partnerships, uniformed groups, faith communities, planners, education departments, regeneration teams, transport services and many more as well as play and youth services.

a vision for a playful Gloucestershire

This policy for play across Gloucestershire has been drawn up to help make the case for better and more coordinated planning for the county's children and young people's play and free time needs. It is a vision of how Gloucestershire could become a place where children and young people can play and relax; it outlines key principles for how those in positions of power, influence and authority can make changes that will support children and young people's play and free time opportunities.

This document has been drawn up after consultation with parents, residents and representatives from organisations and using comments from children and young people themselves. The final policy is the result of all these voices.

[this policy document](#)

This policy is a statement of vision for the whole of Gloucestershire. **For that vision to become reality, those who have responsibility for planning and delivering services need to work with each other and relevant agencies, organisations and community members to develop a strategic plan for play and free time opportunities that is appropriate for them.**

There are two sections to this policy document.

1. **The broad vision** (pages 5-8) outlines what we mean by play and makes seven key statements of commitment to ensuring that children and young people have access to appropriate opportunities for their play and free time. It also lists key authorities and agencies that have signed up to these statements.
2. **The evidence** (pages 9-39) includes some of the hundreds of comments from children and young people about their free time and play needs that have been collected through local and national consultations. This section also presents the findings from the five consultation events in the form of challenges faced by those responsible for service planning and delivery in meeting their commitment to the seven key statements.

[what we would like you to do](#)

If you agree with the vision and the seven key statements in this policy, please promote them in your work. If you are interested in being more involved in helping to turn the vision into reality in your area, please contact the Play Policy Steering Group on 01452 425415.

what we mean by play

Play is important for children and young people's health and wellbeing, their relationships, their development and their learning. It can involve thoughts and feelings, fantasy and creativity, friendships and communities, as well as physical activity. It is the main way children and young people explore, experiment, understand, and so develop a sense of identity. Children and people of all ages play, although young people may not consider what they do in their free time to be play. Some children and young people may need support to get the most out of play.

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 grownups? Doing things you knew you shouldn't? Making things, reading, dreaming, hanging out, running, jumping, making yourself dizzy, pretending to be someone else?

We all played as children, and we can see the young of other animal species play as well. Since play is so universal, it follows that it is likely to have something to do with evolution. In other words, nature has given children a drive to play for a reason that has something to do with survival. This makes it fundamentally important. The trouble is, when we grow up we become serious, rational and logical, and we start to think that children and young people's play is not important because it looks frivolous, irrational, "just playing". We give much more priority to our own adult concerns, things like cars, buildings, commerce, protecting private land and so on. We also think that children and young people should spend their time doing more 'worthwhile' activities such as formal, structured learning, organised activities or sports.

Play is what I do when everyone else has stopped telling me what to do
*Children's Play Council
'Making the case for play'*

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more priority to our own adult concerns, things like cars, buildings, commerce, protecting private land and so on. We also think that children and young people should spend their time doing more 'worthwhile' activities such as formal, structured learning, organised activities or sports.

Play is so effective because it allows children and young people to learn through experimentation and experience, not through being told by someone else.

Play is often described as behaviour that is directed by children and young people themselves, that is freely chosen and carried out for its own sake. These characteristics are useful in that they separate play out from other adult-directed activities.

Playing is a very serious activity that is part of our survival mechanism in the human world
*Sue Jennings,
International Play Journal*

barriers to play

Every child needs to play and has a right to play, but opportunities to play are often limited by external factors – lack of tolerance for children and young people, access to local spaces, conflicts over use of spaces, fears for safety, time pressures, the effects of disability and special needs, poverty and other social conditions. Access to opportunities will be improved by recognition of the child's right to play and by action to support that right.

a play policy for gloucestershire: seven key statements

We believe it is our responsibility as adults to ensure that children and young people are able to enjoy their free time and to play freely. This means we are committed to:

1 recognising children and young people's rights and helping change attitudes

We support the child's right to play and leisure as stated in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We recognise the value of play and free time in children and young people's lives. We want all children and young people to feel part of a playful community and free to play. We recognise this will involve a change of attitudes towards children and young people.

There is now good evidence from several sources that access to a wide range of play experiences in the whole environment... is at least as important for human development as our current focus on formally learning a relatively narrow range of technologies
Mick Conway, Play Education

2 helping all children and young people to have access to a balanced range of play and free time opportunities, in designated spaces and facilities, indoors and in the general environment

We recognise that children and young people will play anywhere and everywhere. However, they will have a better experience if they have access to a range of environments that meet their needs. We will work towards removing barriers to playing, both in designated spaces and in the general environment. Many of these barriers will be avoided if children and young people can play close to home. We will ensure that the different needs across age ranges are met when enabling dedicated provision for play.

3 listening to children and young people, meeting their individual needs in an inclusive way

We recognise that there are numerous ways of identifying the varying play and free time needs of all children and young people; these include research on play and personal experiences as well as direct consultation with children and young people. We recognise the importance of involving local children and young people in the design and operation of spaces where they can spend their free time and play.

4 helping make sure play and free time is fun and enjoyable for children and young people, improving their health and well being

We want all children and young people to experience the wonder of playing outdoors and in natural environments. We know that playing is an excellent way to grow and stay healthy in mind, body and spirit.

5 recognising the need for opportunities to be challenging and free from unnecessary hazards

In research conducted by Dr John McKendrick at Glasgow Caledonian University, it was shown that while parents want more safety on playgrounds, children want more challenging play opportunities

We recognise that children and young people will take risks in their play and free time. Children and young people should be able to experience and learn about risk and safety in their own way. We want opportunities for playing to be challenging and free from unnecessary hazards, so that fear is understood and minimised.

6 sharing resources, making provision more sustainable and appropriate to local needs

We recognise the mutual benefits of linking into other national and local policy initiatives that can support and be supported by provision for children and young people to play. We will review all our current practice and resources to establish how they can best be used to support children and young people's play and free time opportunities. We will pay particular attention to local needs and the inclusion of disabled children and young people. We will maximise opportunities to pool resources for best effect in order to support the sustainability and appropriateness of support for play and free time opportunities at local levels. We recognise the contribution that skilled and knowledgeable adults can make to play and free time opportunities for children and young people.

7 working in partnership to consult on and develop a Play Strategy and Action Plan

We recognise that Local Authorities (at parish, town, district and county levels and across all departments) have a leading role in ensuring that children and young people can play and enjoy their free time. Local authorities work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, other agencies, strategic partnerships, families and communities to establish a co-ordinated approach. This work will include identifying a named person who can champion children and young people's play and free time needs. Together we will consult on and draw up a Play Strategy and Action Plan that will clearly state our priorities and actions and which will be reviewed annually.

I recently made a nostalgic visit to the house where I lived 25 years ago... the area was full of cars... There is not the same tolerance for young people these days. As well as really good, well-organised activities... we need to provide children with opportunities for adventures. Children must be able to play games and let their imaginations roam.
Hilton Dawson, MP

endorsements by key stakeholders

Below are the names of those who have already endorsed this play policy for Gloucestershire and who are committed to working in partnership with others in their area to develop a play strategy and action plan as a key part of the journey towards making the vision a reality.

There will be further opportunities to endorse this policy, including a planned event as a part of National Play Day in August 2005.

Far too many children have nowhere safe to play. They either don't get out to play or they play in places where they aren't safe. So they are deprived of the pleasure and stimulation of being able to play with their friends or they are in danger. That is bad both for them and for the peace of mind of their parents.

Getting Serious About Play, A review of children's play, DCMS, 2004

children and young people's voices

The Government wants children and young people to have more opportunities to get involved in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them or which they use¹.

The value of children and young people's participation is now well recognised at national and local government level. Listening to children and young people and meeting their individual needs in an inclusive way is a key principle within the Play Policy for Gloucestershire.

Today's young people are the experts on what it is like being young today
Local Action for Young People's Play, Gloucester Partnership

Adults don't seem to recognise that children are intelligent beings that do have ideas. I think more interaction between children and adults makes a better community and young people when they play want a challenge.³

children and young people's voices within the play policy for Gloucestershire

The voices of children and young people have been incorporated into the key principle statements of the Play Policy for Gloucestershire in the following ways:

- direct consultations carried out by Steering Group members
- results of consultations already carried out both locally and nationally (these are listed in the Additional Information section)
- general information from national research and consultations with children and young people

key messages from children and young people about their play and free time

Things to do, places to go

Consistently, in consultation with children and young people, things to do and places to go in their free time are identified as a top priority. In a major national consultation carried out with children and young people⁴ the priority issues identified were activities, leisure, parks and the environment.

You can't shout at young people for mucking around and being silly if there is nothing for them to do.⁵

Children would rather be outside, active and with others

Although we are increasingly concerned about our children and young people's sedentary and isolated lifestyles, with the image of the lone child or young person spending most of their free time in front of a TV or computer screen, children and young people consistently say they would rather be outside. Research⁷ has shown

that children and young people actually spend four times as much time outside and unsupervised if the local environment is suitable.

In just a single generation, the 'home habitat' of a typical 8-year-old – the area that a child can travel around on their own – has shrunk to one-ninth of its former size
Tim Gill, Consultant

Overall the major concern was having nothing to do in the village.⁸

Young people also valued being outside, particularly valuing places to chill and meet others, or for wheeled activities (skateboarding, BMX, mountain biking and roller blading)⁹.

However, young people also said that they wanted places to go for specific activities, particularly music and dance,¹⁰ and sports.

Getting there

Access to places where they can play, be with friends or take part in activities was consistently highlighted by children and young people themselves as a major problem. Access issues include:

- Distance: playgrounds, space to play, parks and open spaces need to be as close to younger children's homes as possible.
- Safety: children, young people, parents and carers need to feel that they are safe from dangers of traffic and attack.
- Transport: for older children and young people, adequate and affordable public transport is essential in order to access activities and venues. It may be interesting to note that, following similar consultations with children and young people in London, the Greater London Authority has introduced free public transport for children under 11 years of age, with plans to extend this to under 16's and eventually under 18's.

Cheap or free transport is the key to overcoming marginalized communities – a free bus pass for every child!¹¹

The majority of respondents (nearly 89%) relied on parents on a daily or weekly basis for transport compared to the 22% who used public transport.¹²

- Disabled children and young people said that they faced additional access issues, for example needing someone to take them to the places they wanted to go, and being able to gain physical and social access to open spaces, buildings and activities¹³.

Safety

Children and young people frequently talked about fear of other people, including:

- Attitudes of 'grumpy grown-ups' towards children and young people

- Fear of older children, attacks, street robbery or bullying
- Fear of drug users

*The victims of youth crime are predominantly young people themselves.*¹⁴

Quality spaces

Outdoor play space does not need to be dedicated play space full of expensive play equipment. Children and young people themselves are quite modest in what they would like, and in particular want to be able to adapt their own spaces.

*A group of children asked for a rope to make a swing out of. What they actually got was a sparkling new swing when it wasn't what they wanted. Maybe if they had been listened to they would have got what they asked for and things would have been better.*¹⁵

From research observing what kinds of outdoor spaces are most used by children, four key characteristics have been identified:¹⁶

- it is accessible
- it is free of danger (but not necessarily risk)
- it can be adapted
- there are opportunities to interact with other children and young people.

In addition, children have identified the importance of natural features (grass, trees, bushes, hills, etc., together with materials they can move about and use in their play) and places to hide or build dens.

For young people, the needs are similar:

*The evidence suggests that young people have three basic needs – a place of their own, seating and shelter... Young people are constantly trying to find places that they will not get moved on from. They do not want to disturb or be disturbed. Teenagers everywhere were fed up with being blamed for all the problems in every community.*¹⁷

Young people have particular, and diverse, needs. Neither children's nor adult services are always appropriate for them
The Youth Manifesto

In addition, physical hazards due to other people's inconsiderate use of open spaces (including litter, dog mess, broken bottles and discarded needles) were frequently mentioned.

*The opinion that playgrounds and parks are dog toilets and needle dumps is widespread. That children, dogs and drug users were gravitating to the same neighbourhood space should be a cause for serious concern. The only way to assure the local residents of community safety is through proper maintenance and supervision of play spaces.*¹⁸

Children and young people also asked that play areas be well lit.

Contested spaces and diverse needs

When asked about specific use of space and services, children and young people articulated a wide range of desires. In many cases, they were asked to tick a list of activities, and it would not be wise to draw overall conclusions from these as it is also clear that girls have different priorities from boys, that age is a key factor, and that individual likes and dislikes cannot always be met. Young people complained of their space being spoilt both by “the little kids” and by older young people.

Something for the girls and not just a skate park for the boys.¹⁹

Adults

Although children and young people spoke of playing out independently, and the need to be away from adults at times, they also recognised that adults could help them to feel safe and could help to maintain play spaces. Playworkers, play rangers and youth workers were cited as being important people in the lives of children and young people; both in terms of supporting provision and also in terms of helping to make their voices heard.

Young people do not need adults to think for them but do need community support in helping them give effect to their needs, desires and aspirations.²⁰

In addition, children and young people were keen for local residents and authority figures to be more understanding and not always assume they were ‘up to no good’.

the wider world

Taking play seriously does not necessarily impose a whole new burden on public policy and provision. We know that playful communities are healthy communities, that communities that play together stay together.²¹ We know that play is an essential element of childhood, crucial to the health and wellbeing of children and young people. We know that play is the way in which children discover what cannot be taught, how they develop creativity and a sense of self.

I cannot think of anything else that offers so much to children – all those benefits and fun too! Play is not only important to the quality of life of children; it is of great importance for the country's future, to the creative industries and for the economy.²³

If play bestows all these benefits, it follows that if opportunities for children and young people to play are restricted, there will be a cost both for the children and young people and for the whole community.

Children are not merely losing opportunities for spontaneous play but are being deprived of the richest forms of play, that is play that transcends, that is very intense, characterised by risk, obsession, complete absorption, ecstasy, and heightened mental states.²⁴

Ensuring that children and young people have access to a range of opportunities for playing and free time is a key responsibility for local authorities. It also helps authorities meet existing agendas, statutory duties and targets.

strategic issues and connections

Strategic partnerships are required to plan for and implement a range of initiatives that impact on children and young people's lives. Adopting this play policy will help local authorities and strategic partnerships meet their cross cutting agendas, and this policy will be supported by many initiatives both at a national and local level.

Play provision is not yet a statutory duty; the arguments continue as to whether it should be made statutory to receive more financial support, or whether it should remain an optional service, reflecting the freedom and flexibility needed for play.

Currently, the need for play and recreation has been recognised by Government as contributing to the five major outcomes within the 'Every Child Matters' Green Paper, now listed under the general functions of the Children Act 2004.

These five outcomes are:

- **being healthy**
- **staying safe**
- **enjoying and achieving**
- **making a positive contribution**

- **economic wellbeing**

Services for children and young people will be assessed against these criteria in proposed 'Joint Area Reviews'. Providers will need to ensure that children and young people are involved at the planning stages and that their voices are heard and their needs met. Authorities will need to show how they are providing for children and young people's play and free time activity. This is a significant opportunity for play to be valued across all areas of work with children and young people.

The core philosophy behind Every Child Matters is that children will thrive and grow in a joined up, seamless service for children and young people. Part of the work involves 'Building a Children's Workforce' to ensure that children and young people receive a similar standard of support whatever environment they are in. Margaret Hodge, the Minister for Children, Young People and Families, announced the six headings of the Common Core of Skills, Knowledge and Competence for people working with children and young people in May 2004.

These are:

- child and young person development
- safeguarding children and promoting the welfare of children
- effective communication and engagement
- supporting transitions
- multi agency working
- sharing information

Clearly in the twenty first century, it is necessary for any service to work in partnership with other providers and agencies. Joint working when it operates with clarity and respect helps ensure that all needs are met to mutual benefit and advantage. There is also a strong business philosophy behind many government and financial led initiatives.

Gloucestershire has many examples of the success of this approach, one of which is the Gloucestershire Resource Centre. The Resource Centre seeks to encourage creative expression and environmental awareness through arts and play activities and by promoting the re-use of business waste as the materials for those activities. In addition to its core services the Resource Centre owns and runs the City Works building, a unique social enterprise within the county. In June this year, GRC hosted 'Kifani', a multicultural fair together with training aimed at improving cultural awareness across Gloucestershire.

Gloucestershire is a largely rural county with a predominantly white population. In contrast Gloucester City boasts the largest number of people from minority ethnic groups per population within the South West. The population of Gloucester is approximately 110,000 of which 8% are from Black Minority Ethnic groups and the latest statistic relating to racist incidents is 300 in a year.
GRC Why Kifani?

This kind of social enterprise and 'joined up thinking' will be required to ensure that play takes its fair share from the Big Lottery Fund programme that is being

proposed by Government. In 2001, the Labour Government offered £200m specifically for play projects. After the report on how to spend this money 'Getting Serious About Play' was published by Frank Dobson MP early in 2004, the government decided to incorporate the £200m into the Big Lottery Fund programme. The key findings from this report are shown in the Additional Information Section. This money is being considered by government to be part of the overall picture of provision offered to children and young people. Local authorities and agencies working to a clear Play Strategy are likely to be well positioned to access this and other funding.

Other initiatives to which play, free time and play provision can make vital contributions are too many to list here but include Local Strategic Partnerships, Community Strategies, Local Development Plans, Gloucestershire Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, the work of youth offending teams and projects to help combat crime, the Childcare Strategy, Sure Start projects, Children's Trusts, Children's Centres, Extended Schools, Children's Fund projects, SkillsActive *Quality Training, Quality Play* (National Strategy for Playwork Education and Training), the proposed Youth Green Paper which will focus on support providing places to go, things to do and ways to get help with the difficult choices teenagers have to make, The 'Hear by Right' standards framework for participation, Gloucester City Council Outdoor Playground and Youth Facility Strategy, Gloucestershire Physical Activity Strategy. Each of these initiatives will have local actions to which play and play provision can contribute.

community strategies

The Local Government Act (2000) gives local authorities a statutory duty to develop, with their partners, a long-term Community Strategy to promote and improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their local communities.

The community strategy aims to deliver improvements for the whole community. It is a strategy that must make sense to the whole community. It will focus on what people want and need and involve people in achieving results²⁵

The County Community Strategy identifies six key themes, all brought together under the overarching theme of sustainable development. These, together with key themes from District Community Strategies and Plans, are listed in Additional Information.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.²⁶

It is clear from the consultations that have informed the development of this Play Policy that ensuring opportunities for children and young people to play is a key contributor to the realisation of these themes. In developing the Community

Strategy, the Gloucestershire Strategic Partnership asked schoolchildren across the County “What do you want your county to be like in 10 years time?”

When developing the Play Policy for Gloucestershire, we have taken a more immediate approach and have tried to identify key issues that face children and young people now. There is a clear correlation between children and young people’s play experiences and the future sustainability of the county and the quality of life for its residents.

In addition to the developmental and educational benefits that playing brings, research has also shown close links between playing, social capital and community cohesion, as well as links between playing in the natural environment and a sense of connection with and therefore responsibility for the environment²⁷.

*Children are losing their connection with the natural environment, and their well-being and environmental quality are inextricably linked. The worse a local environment looks, the less able children are to play freely, and develop the habits and commitments that will enable them to address environmental problems in the future.*²⁸

development plans

Development plans set out the local authority’s policies and proposals for the development and use of land in its area. Our consultation showed that children and young people’s needs must be taken into account when drawing up plans for the use of land. There are clear messages for planners and developers in terms of designating space for children and young people to play, either as dedicated playing space or as general, wild areas.

For every acre of land in England given over to public playgrounds, over 80 acres are given over to golf
Tim Gill, Consultant

*Children have a strong sense of the environment as a social space and this influences the way they use public space for outdoor play and personal development*²⁹

Environmental policy – and policy makers – would benefit from listening more to children and young people’s views about their local environments.³⁰

children and young people’s strategic partnership

*Children have the right to thrive, to succeed in school, to grow up healthy, and to have every opportunity to grow into successful adults. The well-being of children and young people, and therefore of us all, is dependent on the capacity of our communities to care for them as they grow.*³¹

The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board is a multi agency group. Its key task is to develop and coordinate inter-agency planning for children and young people across Gloucestershire, including developing and monitoring the Preventative Strategy. Ensuring that children and young people have access to appropriate opportunities to play would be an effective tool within the accountability framework for the Preventative Strategy.

It is important within such a strategy – which is aimed directly at vulnerable children and young people – that the importance of play is not forgotten. Play is a powerful way for children and young people to work through traumatic events or transitions in their lives; indeed access to a range of quality opportunities for playing could be seen as being the ultimate preventative strategy.

When children play together, parents invariably talk together and new community alliances are forged. Inclusive play spaces can be the seedbeds from which sustainable and inclusive communities grow.
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

the policy statements in detail

The policy statements and key challenges were drawn up over the summer of 2004 by individuals and agencies contributing to a county wide consultation process. The key themes that arose from the consultation groups have been linked to the key challenges also identified by those groups and are shown below. The full work of the groups has too much detail to be shown here and is available for reference if needed in the development of local play strategies (see page 25).

Given that these themes cover the county, it is recognised that some challenges may need action at individual, provision, agency and authority levels. It is also recognised that different areas have different needs and priorities. This list is therefore intended to be read as good practice examples and aspirations across the county. Local play strategies and action plans are needed to focus on local priorities and take this work forward, in order to make a real difference in the lives of children and young people.

We believe it is our responsibility as adults to ensure that children and young people are able to enjoy their free time and to play freely. Each area within the county will be able to address the key themes in different ways. The items listed in the 'key challenges' column include actions that local areas would consider, undertake or work towards depending on local needs and resources.

Key themes

Key challenges

Recognising children and young people's rights and helping change attitudes

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We support the child's right to play as stated in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
• We recognise the value of play and free time in children and young people's lives.
• We want all children and young people to feel part of a playful community and free to play. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All key agencies agree to support Article 31, leading to a recognition by politicians, funding agencies, parents and the general public of children and young people's right to choose what to do in their free time
• Undertake a leaflet and poster campaign to raise public awareness about the importance and benefits of play and the need for positive play opportunities in children and young people's lives<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage children and young people, parents, carers and guardians in supporting and accessing play opportunities• Increase awareness of the play policy and the importance of play within a wide range of environments including schools• Support play organisations to promote the benefits of the play opportunities they can offer children and young people, to potential parents and carers of users and other people in their communities
• Create time for children and young people to play freely, rather than only structured or led activities• Celebrate National Play Day, where we all 'chill for children'• Create more freedom for smaller children and those with |
|--|--|

special needs

- We recognise this will involve a change of attitudes towards children and young people.
- Help parents remember what it's like to be a child, the fun and benefits of play
- Adults in the wider community are encouraged to be more tolerant of children and young people playing
 - Take down the 'no ball games' signs, make community greens places to play
 - Tenancy agreements recognise the need for children and young people to play
- Help communities allow children and young people out to play
 - Support play awareness with community safety wardens, rangers and outreach workers

Helping all children and young people to have access to a balanced range of play and free time opportunities, in designated spaces and facilities, indoors and in the general environment

- We recognise that children and young people will play anywhere and everywhere. However, they will have a better experience if they have access to a range of environments that meet their needs.
- Carry out a comprehensive local audit of formal and informal play provision
- Produce survey maps of various types of play provision across the area
- Audit the numbers of children of different ages, ability and cultures who use the play provision
- Low key, locally accessible play spaces are made available in each community, suitable for all ages and abilities
- Provide opportunities for indoor and outdoor play, not only structured, 'educational' activities
- Small spaces are imaginatively and attractively designed for play, for example, with trees, benches shading and litter/dog bins
- Parks/spaces include 'wild' areas for different types of play
- Urban spaces include play routes and play trails, chances for play through town
- Continue to develop traffic management schemes that meet the needs of children and young people and other residents in their neighbourhoods
- Homezones (play streets) are encouraged, children and young people should have priority over traffic in design
- Safe cycle or pedestrian routes are promoted
- We will work towards removing many of the barriers to playing, both in designated spaces and in the general environment. Many of these barriers will be avoided if children and young people can play close to home.
- Opportunities for playing and play leisure time provision should be locally accessible, family based, area based, multi-agency resourced throughout childhood and youth
- Provision should be locally relevant, not necessarily uniform or standard
- Responsibilities for maintenance and management of the spaces where children and young people can play need to be clarified; play areas should be adequately maintained
- Provide mobile play equipment that can be moved between play and leisure areas
- Based on the findings of the Play Audit, consider new

options for play provision, including integrated children's centres and full use year round of school buildings and playing fields

- Funding is available for schools to be more of a community resource
 - Develop a joint planning strategy (including a design checklist that puts play quality ahead of other measures) to co-ordinate the provision and development of new play areas in parks, playgrounds and new housing developments
 - Planners secure play and children and young people's areas of different sizes based on local needs
 - Creative thinking is needed in providing play and open areas; Nimby (not in my backyard) attitudes are challenged; local provision works best
- We will ensure that the different needs across age ranges are met when enabling dedicated provision for play.
 - Play opportunities must be child centred, work towards common definitions of play, comfortable and caring, offer opportunities for risk and challenge
 - Based on the findings of the Play Audit, consider options for new play areas that offer opportunities for adventure, an environmental focus and other outdoor play
 - Identify suitable areas for facilitated play sessions to be available to groups and organisations
 - More space for older children and young people to play and use their free time
 - Youth shelters – hanging out places, well lit, safety in a natural gathering/meeting point
 - Things provided for holiday play, equity of provision, free at point of delivery
 - Independent travel should be encouraged with transport services meeting the needs of young people
 - Work/life balance policies should be supported, parents/carers able to take longer summer hols

Listening to children and young people, meeting their individual needs in an inclusive way

- We recognise that there are numerous ways of identifying the varying play and free time needs of all children and young people; these include research on play and personal experience as well as direct consultation with children and young people.
 - Ensure that children and young people are involved at an appropriate level in the decision making processes for all decisions that affect them
 - Encourage better communication, ensure greater access to information e.g. a play directory for Gloucestershire
 - Working within the 'Hear by Right' standards framework
 - Allocate finances, resources and equipment to ensure access for all, and to promote representation and positive self-esteem
 - Encourage interaction of whole communities through community activities and events, building intergenerational respect
- We recognise the importance of involving local children and young
 - Ensure that all provision works to agreed standards for participation, so that children and young people's voices are included as standard in all key decisions affecting them

people in the design and operation of spaces where they can spend their free time and play.

- Share good practice on inclusion across all existing and new play provision
- Develop a variety of communication tools, including involving children and young people in putting consultation together
- Set up or use existing mechanisms for consulting in an appropriate way with children and young people prior to determining the play needs of those children and young people
- In new developments, skilled workers should work with families to agree how to use open spaces
- Feedback to children and young people should be open and honest
- Processes for negotiating contested space should be clear and accountable

Helping make sure play and free time is fun and enjoyable for children and young people, improving their health and well being

- We want all children and young people to experience the wonder of playing outdoors and in natural environments.
 - Ensure the provision of a variety of environments, with or without adults
 - Develop more 'wild spaces' for play – rough/untended environmental play sites
 - Children and young people play in community spaces, gardens, allotments, city farms, etc., spaces that they can modify (dig up ground, build dens etc)
 - Provide 'loose parts', i.e. things that children and young people can use, move around and change
 - Children and young people are encouraged to use real tools – e.g. forest schools
- We know that playing is an excellent way to grow and stay healthy in mind, body and spirit.
 - Help create an active recreation environment
 - Use existing expertise to promote sporting and outdoor recreational play initiatives
 - Use existing expertise to promote 'environmental play' initiatives
 - Promote the benefits of play in natural spaces to the managers of those spaces and to local communities
 - Improve the quality of all play spaces to agreed standards
 - Provide 'Lifelong play' and fun for children and all ages
 - e.g. Opportunities to play with older people (nursing home)

Recognising the need for opportunities to be challenging and safe from unnecessary hazards

- We recognise that children and young people will take risks in their play and free time. Children and young people should be able to experience and learn about risk and safety in their own way.
 - Place more emphasis on play value and less on safety surfacing in the design of play areas
 - Adults and parents, as well as young people recognise the importance of risk and challenge in play opportunities
 - Exploring adventure is seen as important
 - Minor accidents are considered normal, as are torn clothes and getting dirty

- We want opportunities for playing to be challenging and free from unnecessary hazards, so that fear is understood and minimised.
- Provide training in risk assessment for those in control of play environments
- Promote water safety through more swimming lessons
- Volunteer and staff placement and induction processes need sharing and developing e.g. criminal records checks
- Lists of contact people, play, youth and other specialists and resource opportunities need to be made available to local people and groups
- Encourage neighbourliness – all adults looking out for all children and young people, more trust developed in communities
- Encourage drivers' awareness of children at play
- Play spaces should be adequately resourced for the basics (bins, toilets, drinking fountain)
- Provide dog bins to help responsible dog owners

Sharing resources, making provision more sustainable and appropriate to local needs

- We recognise the mutual benefits of linking into other national and local policy initiatives that can support and be supported by provision for children and young people to play.
- Hold seminars to promote the Play Policy to Council Officers and elected members, and other decision makers in key organisations, i.e. Planning, Education, Social Services, Heath Trusts and Authorities, strategic partnerships, the voluntary and community sector, the Police and other agencies and regeneration initiatives
- Make sure play and free time activities are given due regard in the planning and delivery of strategies and initiatives that impact on the lives of children and young people (key examples are given on page 15)
- Agencies and communities working with children and young people work pro-actively together
- We will review all our current practice and resources to establish how they can best be used to support children and young people's play and free time opportunities.
- Develop common codes of practice across all play and/or youth services to ensure good practice in all provision and by all play and youthwork staff, paid or unpaid
- Ensure all provision, training and education is rooted in the principles and values of playwork as identified in the National Standards, Best Play
- Continue to develop a coherent framework for the training and qualification of all playworkers with various routes to qualification
- Promote common understanding of the language and processes used in Playwork
- Use existing quality assurance standards such as Quality in Play and First Claim to measure the quality of play provision
- We will pay particular attention to local needs and the inclusion of disabled children and young people.
- Increase play and free time opportunities for marginalized groups of children and young people
- Provide a range of free or very low cost play services to those most in need
- A programme of need should be prepared each year

- highlighting those areas needing practical support
 - The needs of disabled/special needs children will be built in and provided for
 - The Disability Discrimination Act will be implemented in planning for play provision
- We will maximise opportunities to pool resources for best effect in order to support the sustainability and appropriateness of support for play and free time opportunities at local levels.
 - Play and free time provision has a clear funding stream and is adequately resourced
 - Agencies work together to support play and free time needs across the age ranges and abilities
 - Develop a network (web) of people working to support play
 - Support the network with an identified officer e.g. Play Development Officer working across the county
 - Large local companies encouraged to actively sponsor play provision
 - Focus planning gain to maximise best provision
- We recognise the contribution that skilled and knowledgeable adults can make to play and free time opportunities for children and young people.
 - Increase the numbers of trained and qualified people who work through play in the county
 - Improve the status and sustainability of play and youth workers
 - Increase the participation of play and youth workers from a range of social and cultural backgrounds and with varying abilities
 - Develop a common induction to playwork for all people involved in play in the county
 - Provide play training for school based staff, midday supervisors, school sport coordinators
 - Support more adults who support play: play rangers, green rangers, wardens, childminders, playgroups
 - Encourage access for volunteers to work with children and young people

Working in partnership to consult on and develop a Play Strategy and Action Plan

- We recognise that Local Authorities (at parish, town, district and county levels and across all departments) have a leading role in ensuring that children and young people can play and enjoy their free time.
 - Engage all key stakeholders in adopting the play policy
 - Publish a commitment to the Play Policy that organisations and people can sign up to
 - Parish, town, district and county councils to consider play provision separately from leisure centre provision and follow it through with action
 - Planning and policies to be aware of the need for play and free time in all areas
 - The impact of all planning and policies on children and young people's play and free time needs are considered in every department and agency
- Local authorities will work in partnership with the voluntary and community
 - Create a system whereby play expertise already available in the county can be shared by local communities and groups

- sector, other agencies, strategic partnerships, families and communities to establish a co-ordinated approach.
- This work will include identifying a named person who can champion children and young people's play and free time needs.
 - Together we will consult on and draw up a Play Strategy and Action Plan that will clearly state our priorities and actions and which will be reviewed annually.
- Develop appropriate partnerships to raise awareness and improve attitudes towards play and play opportunities
 - Establish a Play Partnership with the remit of continuing to implement Play Strategies and deliver on quality targets
 - Identify and access appropriate funding to support the work of the Play Partnership
 - Ensure that the Play Partnership is represented on forums impacting on children and young people where decisions about play and youth provision may be made
 - Identify a Play Champion, a named person for each authority who can support play and act as a play advocate or ombudsman
 - Ensure better integration within/across departments/districts
 - Link to Local Strategic Partnerships and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership to provide a co-ordinated approach to provision of youth and play services
 - At county/district/parish levels
 - Recognise that play is more than swings and roundabouts
 - Agree to feedback decisions to children, young people and the community promptly
 - To make what is shown here happen, we need a statement of action, a strategy for making things happen. A successful strategy will:
 - be built on an understanding of children and young people's play and free time needs and the key principles in this policy
 - be informed by best practice, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally
 - highlight the key priorities for development
 - allocate responsibility and resources for making change
 - set a clear timetable for action
 - co-ordinate the actions so that the whole policy can be effective
 - be reviewed annually with the involvement of children and young people
 - Launch the new Play Strategy and Action Plan process to children, young people and communities

making things happen – implementation stages

This policy outlines a vision for how things could be in terms of effective support for children and young people's play and free time opportunities. To help move the vision closer to reality, each area needs to develop a Play Strategy and Action Plan, stating how they will work towards the key challenges.

We know that any progress is good progress, and that coordinated, planned action is best.

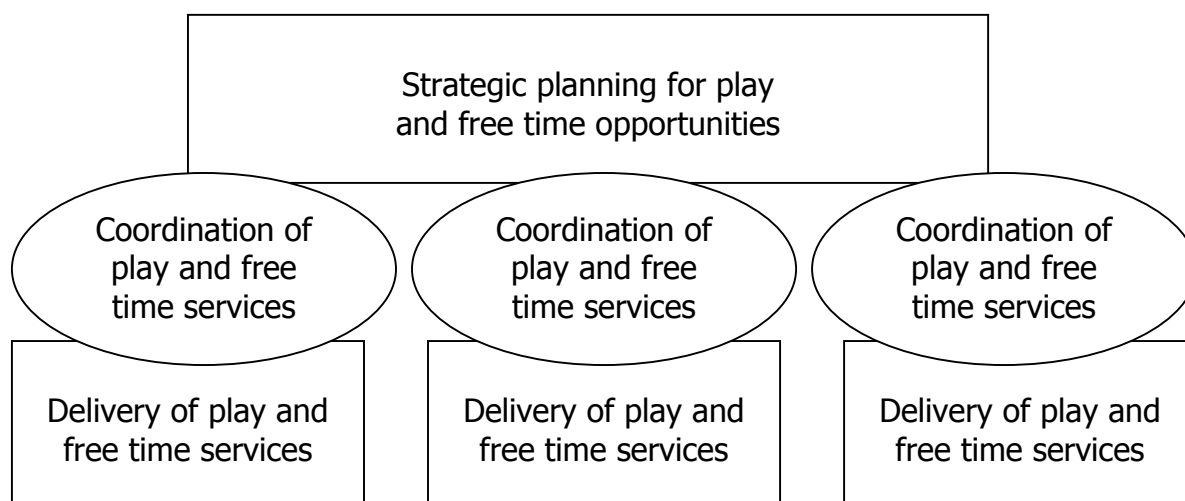
Each authority will wish to prepare its own strategy to take this work forward. The Play Champion for each area should help identify and coordinate the people who will lead on this work. Meetings should be held regularly to ensure that the strategy is prepared and turned into action **by December 2005**.

A successful play strategy will:

- be built on an understanding of children and young people's play and free time needs and the key principles in this policy
- be informed by best practice, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally
- highlight the key priorities for development
- allocate responsibility and resources for making change
- set a clear timetable for action
- coordinate the actions so that the whole policy can be effective
- be reviewed annually, with the involvement of children and young people

Ideally, this policy will be implemented across the County in three related but distinct ways; *strategically* across the whole county with *co-ordination* between County and District Councils for *delivery* by area. The responsibility and resources for each level of activity should be clarified across the county.

The diagram below illustrates how these three elements of implementation are interrelated:



further information and support

For those who take on the task of developing this play strategy, there is a CD available from **Playwork Partnerships** with additional information, including:

- a draft action plan template showing the key statements and challenges with additional columns to aid the SMART planning process
- detailed responses from the consultation events
- useful local and national documents

Further guidance may be found from the Mayor of London's *Draft guide to preparing play strategies*, 2004.

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The Gloucestershire Play Policy Steering Group:

- Vicky Fowkes, Gloucestershire EYDCP and Chair of the Steering Group
- Pat Bailey, Gloucester City Council
- Alan Beard, Tewkesbury Borough Council
- Linda Birkhead, Royal Forest of Dean College
- Tracy Brown, Cheltenham Borough Council
- Jane Bullows, Stroud District Council
- Kathryn Chamberlain, Cheltenham Borough Council
- Shirley Crandon, Gloucestershire Early Years and Childcare Service
- Francis Gobey, Gloucester City Council
- Maria Griffin, Consultant
- Liz Giles, Gloucestershire Early Years and Childcare Service
- Shirley Jones, Gloucestershire Fire Service
- Rob Hainsworth, Tewkesbury Borough Council
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- Pip Levett, Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network
- Rosemary Lynn, Cotswold District Council
- Douglas Macgregor, Youth Sports Trust, Loughborough University
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- John Skilling, Gloucestershire Police Authority
- Lynne Speak, Gloucestershire County Council
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- Cath Stenson, Forest of Dean District Council
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The report was written by Perry Else and Wendy Russell, of Ludemos Associates.
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additional information

about Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire is a county that covers 1,025 square miles including the largest Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the country. Essentially a rural county, it has been known since Roman times for farming, forestry and horticulture with an industrial history featuring the wool trade.

With a total population of 565,000,³² the proportion of children aged 5-15 in the county (13.99%) is slightly below the figure for England and Wales as a whole (14.21%). Cheltenham has the lowest proportion at just under 13%, and Gloucester the highest at over 15%, with the concentration in the city centre.³³

The table below gives a snapshot of demographic data across districts, with comparisons with England and Wales³⁴. Significant differences are shown in bold.

% of the population that is ...	Cheltenham	Cotswold	Forest of Dean	Gloucester	Stroud	Tewkesbury	England and Wales
Under 16	18.4	18.6	19.6	22	20.1	19.3	<i>20.2</i>
16-19	5.2	4.1	4.9	4.7	4.5	4.1	<i>4.9</i>
20-29	14.3	9.0	9.7	11.9	9.2	9.8	<i>12.6</i>
Over 60	21.9	25.4	23	19.4	22.8	23.4	<i>20.9</i>
Black and Minority Ethnic	3.3	1.2	0.9	7.5	1.3	1.4	<i>8.7</i>
In good health	71.2	72.1	68	69.2	71.0	71.8	<i>68.6</i>
Unemployed (adults)	2.6	1.7	3.0	3.4	2.4	2.0	<i>3.4</i>
Qualified to degree level or higher	26.5	24	16.4	14.9	22.9	21.1	<i>19.8</i>
Lone parent households/dependent children	5.2	3.8	4.6	6.9	4.8	4.7	<i>6.5</i>

The percentage of people aged between 16 and 24 is lower than the national average across the county as a whole, and in parts of the Forest of Dean and the Cotswold district the proportion is very low (less than 5%). In general, the higher concentrations of this age group are found in the urban and suburban areas.³⁵

The proportion of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups across the county is well below the national average (8.7%). There are just over 16,000 such people in the county, of whom half are in Gloucester, where the percentage (7.5%) is the closest to the national average. In some neighbourhoods, the percentage is over 50%. In contrast the proportion in Forest of Dean has less than 1%, although there are pockets away from the urban areas where the proportion is higher.³⁶

The number of lone parent households with dependent children has doubled since 1991 but is still below the national average (6.6%) across the county as a whole. However, nearly one in five of all households with dependent children are headed by a lone parent. Most are concentrated in districts in Gloucester and Cheltenham (6.9% and 5.2% respectively) with pockets in other urban areas such as Cinderford and Tewkesbury. Some rural and remote areas also have high proportions, for example Blockley, Longborough, Tidenham and Highnam.³⁷

One in three children lives in poverty in the UK today, and poverty threatens the well-being of children and their families in Gloucestershire. Within the county, eight communities are ranked in the top 20% for Child Poverty nationally³⁸, which means a significant number of children and families being affected by very low income. These income deprived families struggle to provide for basic needs with poverty placing a strain on family relationships. Improved access to play activities and recreation for poorer children & families can help to compensate for the poverty they are experiencing.

community strategies and plans in Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire's key themes are:

1. a thriving economy
2. learning and opportunity for all
3. living life to the full
4. a better environment
5. a safe county
6. thriving communities

Key themes from the district community plans:

Cheltenham:

- reduce crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, in our communities
- improve the supply and standard of affordable housing
- reduce inequalities in our communities and develop a sense of community
- protect and improve the environment
- improve sustainable travel and transport options

Cotswold:

- society and community
 - having your say and getting involved

- enjoying life – leisure, culture and recreation
- health and social care
- housing and homelessness
- crime and disorder
- wealth, income and deprivation
- economy
 - economic structure, unemployment and business performance
 - roads and traffic
 - learning and skills development
- environment
 - development, heritage and the built environment
 - landscape and biodiversity
 - pollution and contaminated land
 - river environment, water resources and flooding
 - waste minimisation, recycling and energy conservation

Forest of Dean

- sustainability
- equality and diversity
- culture and heritage
- access and inclusion

Gloucester:

- a strong, vibrant and sustainable city
- an inclusive city
- a healthy, active city
- opportunities to live, learn and play
- a safe, clean and pleasant city
- working together

Stroud:

- improving housing opportunities
- creating wealth
- access to services and rural transport
- health and well-being
- crime and disorder

Tewkesbury

- housing
- transport and access to services
- education, training and employment
- enabling healthy communities
- community safety
- economy (including the rural economy)
- environment and planning
- communities
- leisure, culture and the arts

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The United National Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31

The right of all children to have time, space and opportunity to play is defined in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the UK ratified in 1991.

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural artistic, recreational and leisure activities.

Best Play: The seven play objectives, 2000

This report looks at how children benefit from play opportunities; how play services and spaces can provide these benefits; and how they can show that they are providing them. Produced in partnership with the National Playing Fields Association, PLAYLINK and the Children's Play Council, Best Play is of interest to practitioners as well as local authorities determining Best Value, government departments, funding bodies and all those working in children's play. The seven play objectives state what provision should offer children and young people when they play.

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

The Play Charter

'Children Now' is a magazine written for people working with children. The Children Now Play Charter, November 2004 sets out a vision of how children could spend their free time. It was drawn up after research with play experts, parents and children, and consultation with play organisations.

1 Children need to play

Children have a natural inclination to play. It is essential for the healthy mental, physical, emotional and social development of every child. While the needs of older children and teenagers are different from those of young children they are no less important.

What should happen:

- A general acknowledgement by politicians, funding agencies, parents and the general public of children's right to choose what to do in their free time.
- Widespread education about the implications of children's right to play, and the benefits to children and wider society.
- Children must be able to play freely and free of charge in their neighbourhood.

- A national strategy for play with a specific commitment to implement it.
- Play must be taken seriously across all government departments and agencies and children's need to play considered in all decisions that could have an impact.
- Give local authorities a statutory duty to provide for children's play, to end the vulnerability of play provision to cuts in funding.
- Opportunities and provision for play must be assured, funding should be meaningful, long-term and sustainable
- The new structures for children's services must put provision for play and recreation at the heart of their planning alongside health, education and social care.
- The common core of training received by everybody who works with children must ensure an understanding of the importance of play and of adults' role in providing for it.

2 Children need freedom to play

Play takes place when children and young people decide what to do and who to do it with, when they negotiate their own rules and boundaries and their imaginations are allowed free rein. It is not performed for any external goal or reward. In supervised provision, trained playworkers have an important role in supporting children to create and explore their own play experiences.

What should happen:

- A stated acknowledgement that provision for children and young people's play is different from and additional to that for childcare, sport or other adult-led activities.
- Maintain a clear distinction between play provision and provision for structured activities or sport, and provide freedom, opportunities, time and spaces for challenging unstructured as well as structured activities. The organised settings in which children spend increasing amounts of time, from breakfast to after school or holiday clubs, must allow freedom and opportunity for self-directed play.

3 Children need space to play

While children can and do play indoors, it is essential that children and young people have easy access to outdoor space for spontaneous physical activity. Every child should have places to play close to home. General community spaces, such as streets or the spaces between buildings are as important as dedicated play provision.

What should happen:

- End the postcode lottery of play provision, and especially the inequalities between urban and rural areas, and, in particular, urban pockets of deprivation.
- Housing providers and planners should have a duty to set aside suitable spaces for play, and to promote a culture in which playing children are not viewed as a nuisance but as welcome members of the community.
- A major focus on local streets, neighbourhoods, parks, open spaces and school grounds to make them welcoming, safe, attractive play places for children and young people.
- Challenge the assumption that big sporting or leisure facilities are an adequate substitute for easily accessible neighbourhood spaces. The lack of safe, traffic-free streets and the trend for local authorities to concentrate funding into one or two flag-ship play or sports areas means that children are increasingly frustrated in their attempts to play in their neighbourhoods.
- Spaces to play should be in well-used areas providing informal adult supervision.

4 Children need time to play

Children should have the chance to play every day, when they are not being told what to do, who to do it with or where to go.

What should happen:

- Playtime in schools should be valued and preserved as a vital part of the school day. Children should be given time and space away from the confines of the classroom and allowed the freedom to socialise and exercise their minds and bodies in a safe and healthy environment.

- Play should not be corralled into activities, times or spaces that are designed simply to fit around parents' working times.
- Take great care that the trend for longer school opening hours, where children's days are increasingly taken up with breakfast clubs, home-work clubs and after-school clubs, does not limit children's chances for self-directed play.

5 Children must feel safe and welcome where they play

Communities must make safe, welcoming, accessible provision for all children to play, no matter what their age, physical or mental abilities, personal circumstances or cultural background. Children and young people who are different from the majority have a right to play in the same places as other children, should they want to.

What should happen:

- Spaces in which children play must be accessible, welcoming and engaging to all children, whatever their age, physical or mental abilities, or cultural background. This includes not only playgrounds but also general public spaces such as parks or housing estates.
- Children must feel safe where they play. A beautiful, well-equipped play space in which children do not feel safe, or where parents do not feel their children are safe, will not be used. Spaces that are close to home, in busy places or on well-travelled routes are more likely to be welcoming than ones that are locked in out-of-the-way places that do not feel safe.
- Good design and diligent maintenance are crucial. The days of a lone set of swings and a rusting slide should be long gone. Sadly they still aren't. Well-designed, imaginative play spaces are not only popular: they are also safer and easier to maintain.
- Often accessibility, whether for disabled children or to ensure safety and a sense of security, will depend on the presence of suitably trained adults who children trust. A fear of bullying or intimidation by older children must not be allowed to inhibit play or access to spaces and facilities.
- Play provision staffed by trained playworkers, who support and facilitate rather than control or direct, can be important for children with-out easy access to play friendly environments. Playworkers should be supported and recognised as a growing profession.
- Risk and challenge are intrinsic to play, and a balanced approach must be taken to these.

6 Children are the best authorities on play

Children know what they enjoy and what makes them happy. Play grounds or other spaces and facilities that will be used for play, including school grounds, will be more successful if children and young people are meaningfully involved in their design and in decisions affecting them.

What should happen:

- Any relevant developments must include proper consultation with children, their parents and the local community, and lead times must adequately allow for this. Communities in which children's voices and views are respected are also more likely to appreciate the benefits of play and support children's right to play.
- Children of different ages, interest, ability, ethnicity and family circumstances may have different requirements from play provision and should all have the opportunity to participate in planning and decisions about local provision.

7 Play is everybody's responsibility

The ability for children to play freely outside is a sign of a healthy, vibrant community. While children do not need adults to tell them how in play, parents, communities and government have a duty to ensure that children have the chance to play every day.

What should happen:

- Childcare, education, housing, health and other settings where children spend time must all have appropriate policies to facilitate play. So should local planning authorities.
- Parents need to understand the importance of outdoor play and of ensuring children have plenty of time and opportunity to play freely with their friends. Parents should be

encouraged and, if necessary, taught how to play with their children. When asked, many children say they are unhappy that their parents do not have enough time to play with them, or that when they do, they don't know how to play.

- The economic and workplace environments must allow parents time to spend with their children.
- Educate the public to appreciate the essential nature of play and the value not only of tolerating but actively encouraging children to play safely in public spaces.
- Re-evaluate and if necessary modify public policies that limit play. For example, transport and town planning policies must keep residential streets safe for children. Curfews designed to curb anti-social behaviour by a few also breach the right of the majority of children and young people who are not guilty to socialise and move about freely.

Getting Serious About Play, key recommendations

This report of a major national play review, chaired by Frank Dobson MP in 2004, sets out how best to invest the £200m lottery fund pledged by the Labour Party in 2001, for improving children's play opportunities.

It recommends that:

- Funding should be focused on areas and groups with the poorest access to good quality play opportunities with a major emphasis on the inclusion of disabled children and young people.
- Long-term popularity with children and young people is the main test of success.
- The main emphasis should be on projects with medium or small-sized catchment areas. Access should be free.
- Play opportunities with some form of adult supervision or adult oversight are likely to prove more successful.
- The local authority or a local partnership should be responsible for drawing up proposals for the use of the funds allocated to their area which add to existing provision and reflect the priorities set out above.
- Their proposals must be prepared in partnership with other local agencies, children and young people and local communities.
- Local agencies will be expected to fund the consultation and preparation of plans from their own resources. However, the distributor, government and local agencies should work together to ensure that all areas, especially the most deprived communities, have the necessary support to prepare sound, high-quality proposals and to implement them.
- Where possible, local proposals should try to maximise the impact of lottery funding by complementing and augmenting it with funds from other sources.
- Out of hours use of school grounds and buildings should be promoted, most especially when schools are being built or refurbished.
- Local authorities should take the opportunity provided by the programme to improve the planning and operation of play facilities across their area.
- They should designate a 'play champion' to carry out this task and to help ensure the success of the lottery funded projects.

Consultation with children and young people – guidance

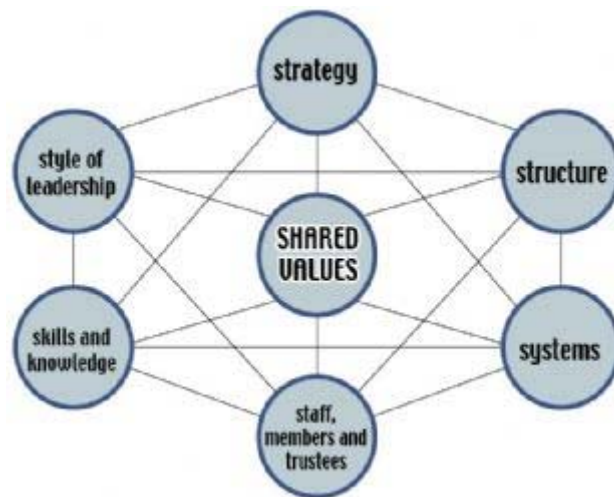
Consultation with children is vital if their true needs are to be considered. The following guidance may be helpful in formulating consultations and is taken from the guidance issued by the Lord Mayor of London 2004.

- Children should NOT be interviewed without the permission of their parent/carer
- It is important that the children realise that there are no 'right' answers. Consultations should be deliberately open (asking closed questions such as 'You do like swings don't you?' limits the answer both to equipment and to a specific item of equipment)
- Asking children 'Where do you go?' or 'Where do you hang out after school or at weekends?' is likely to reveal a wider range of places than 'Where do you play?' to which the obvious answer is 'Playground'. Favourite play places may not be designated play

places. 'What things do you like doing?' will reveal a much wider range of activities than 'Which equipment do you play on?'

- Having identified locations and activities, asking how often will indicate whether they are regular play places or places that are only visited occasionally
- Asking why they go to those places will indicate whether the reason is proximity, friends, specific equipment etc.
- Asking why children do not go to specific places in the area will indicate physical or social barriers to their attending
- Asking if they like what is at the play places in their neighbourhood will indicate the play value of what is on offer.
- Inviting their suggestions for improvements, both for themselves and for children of other ages, will encourage them to use their expertise - they are after all the experts in children's play
- When consulting children it is important to select a wide cross-section by age, gender, culture, ethnicity, disability etc. It is as important to consult those who do not get out and play as those who do
- Consulting in this more open way does make analysis more difficult than simple tick-boxes. However, it will give a much truer picture of where children need their play opportunities to be located if they are to use them and what they think will give good play value

The National Youth Agency has produced "Hear By Right", a standards framework for organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors to assess and improve practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people. It is based on the seven S model shown here.



Gloucestershire YouthCAN has also produced ethical guidelines on consulting young people generally (see Local Documents Consulted).

The Youth Pledge

The National Youth Agency has issued a youth manifesto calling on local and national government to deliver better services to young people. The manifesto has a pledge to which agencies that provide for young people are asked to commit. Agencies should provide:

- a safe, warm, well-equipped meeting place within reasonable distance of home, accessible to young people at times defined by young people, giving an opportunity to participate in personal and social development activities including arts, drama, music, sport, international experience and voluntary action
- a wide diversity of youth clubs, projects and youth activities
- a set of programmes, related to core youth work values and principles, based on a curriculum framework which supports young people's development in citizenship, the arts, drama, music, sport, international experience and personal and social development, including through residential experiences and peer education
- a comprehensive generic, confidential information, advice and counselling service
- mechanisms for ensuring that their voice is heard, perhaps (though not exclusively) through a youth council or youth forum for each locality, with the intention of supporting youth engagement in local democracy in a wide range of ways
- an annual youth service questionnaire involving young people in auditing and evaluating the services (provided by the local authority youth service) available to them locally
- a defined project to promote and secure youth volunteering and voluntary action

- the opportunity to participate in programmes which offer accreditation for learning such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Youth Achievement Award or similar

The Youth Manifesto, National Youth Agency

Involving children and young people in design and care for their space

A good practice guide, 2004, by CABE Space, a government sponsored agency, offered some key points:

- Playworkers can encourage and support all children who use a play space to get involved in the design process
- Links should be made with disabled children and their carers, and the space developed with their views and needs in mind
- Trips to different play and public spaces can help young people to develop ideas
- Giving young people support for decisions, and enabling them to present projects externally, engenders creativity and responsibility
- Using models helps children to understand designs and allows them to comment and suggest changes
- Young people, especially from ethnic minorities, can be unwittingly stereotyped, for example being seen as anti-social. Only contact and ongoing dialogue will realise genuine relationships
- Physical regeneration can provide a starting point for continuing participation
- Playworkers provide a high level of maintenance and help to create a safe and secure atmosphere for children and young people
- Building on existing networks can be effective in involving young people
- The political will to involve them can be critical to creating a dialogue between the council and young people

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