Embedding the Play Strategy

Guidance for local authorities, Children’s Trust Boards and Local Strategic Partnerships on planning and sustaining provision for children and young people’s play and informal recreation
Foreword

Foreword by Baroness Delyth Morgan and Gerry Sutcliffe MP.

The importance of play cannot be under-estimated. It has significant benefits for children and young people’s well-being and development across all five Every Child Matters outcomes: promoting physical and emotional health, and providing opportunities for positive social interaction and learning. Most importantly, it should not be forgotten that running around, using imaginations and having adventures is, quite simply, fun. Opportunities to play are at the heart of a happy and fulfilling childhood.

All of us need to take responsibility for creating child-friendly communities and public spaces that value and enable children’s play. Children playing in their local neighbourhoods and parks is a fundamental characteristic of a healthy society – a safe, welcoming environment for children is also a safe, welcoming place for their families and the whole community.

It is only through a joined-up approach across local services that we will fully address the barriers to play which children, families and play professionals have told us about – ‘no ball games’ culture, road traffic, fear of anti-social behaviour – all of which can limit children’s opportunities for play.

The Government’s Play Strategy sets out our vision that all children, young people and families should have access to free, high-quality play spaces in every local area. Each local authority in England has received a share of £235m of new investment to deliver up to 3,500 new and refurbished play facilities across the country by 2011.

Through our play capital programme, we are creating conditions to ensure that play becomes a greater priority across all local authorities. We also need play to be embedded in Children and Young People’s Plans by Children’s Trust Boards, working with wider Local Strategic Partnerships to coordinate planning and delivery. We want to judge our success by hearing what children think of their local play offer, and so we have introduced a new National Indicator on Play (NI199) which will measure children’s satisfaction with their play areas and parks.
This new guidance will help local authority senior executives, strategic planners and their partners to improve local play offers by embedding everyday opportunities for healthy, active play within top-level strategies for children, communities and spatial planning. It will assist Directors of Children’s Services and their partners in Children’s Trusts to deliver play services locally through multi-agency cooperation.

The development of child-friendly communities is fundamental to the Government’s long-term vision to make this country the best place in the world to grow up. Giving children the space and opportunity to play, explore and be themselves is crucial to this ambition.

Baroness Delyth Morgan
Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Children, Young People and Families

Gerry Sutcliffe MP
Minister for Sport
Message from the Association of Directors of Children’s Services

Children and young people have a physical, mental and emotional need to play. It is how they explore and learn about their world.

At play, children should be free: to make a mess, make a noise, make friends, make up new games, and find new ways of looking at the world. Playing – alone, or with others, indoors or out – is fundamental to a good childhood and one of children’s basic human rights.

It follows that the adult world has a duty to make space for and defend children and young people’s right to play: to channel their extraordinary energy and creativity. Play can be quiet or noisy, contained or uncontained. It is boundlessly inventive, always changing.

Children need to be able to take risks when they play – it is part of growing up – but to be safe from serious harm. And so the duty we owe them extends to making sure that there are boundaries, so that their risk-taking is managed and that they are never placed in real danger or exposed to the consequences of youthful recklessness. These responsibilities are an important part of local authorities’ duty to work across their areas with the full range of partners to improve outcomes for children.

This is why the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) very much welcomed the Government’s Play Strategy. The strategy is helping local authorities, their partners and communities to transform public parks, children’s play areas and school grounds so that all children have the opportunity to enjoy playing outside with their friends in a safe, stimulating and exciting environment.

We now welcome this consultation on strategic guidance, which sets out a clear rationale and a set of recommended processes for the all-important planning that is needed if we are to sustain these efforts to genuinely make space for play in the longer-term. We especially welcome the links that are made with the effective joint planning and commissioning process; essential for good play services and ‘playable’ places becoming an integral part of Children and Young People’s Plans.

The task is a vital one and we look forward to engaging with the Government and our colleagues in planning, housing, highways and parks – as well as the play sector itself – in responding to this challenge.

Kim Bromley-Derry
President
Association of Directors of Children’s Services
Message from the Local Government Association

The Local Government Association (LGA) welcomes this non-statutory guidance to local authorities on embedding the Play Strategy.

Improving and extending children’s play areas and making neighbourhoods more child-friendly – creating places where children can thrive – is not only good for children; it is good for their families and their communities too.

England’s councils take play very seriously. We need to raise the profile of play and of those who work in play. The LGA therefore commends the ambition and the breadth of the Play Strategy and endorses this guidance document. It should enable councils to work with other agencies and with children and families themselves to make play come alive in the best possible way for them and their communities.

Councillor Shireen Ritchie
Chair, LGA Children and Young People’s Board
Executive summary

‘The children are excited about the new activities that will be provided. Some of the children have been able to get involved in minor aspects of the building process. Parents have expressed their support by volunteering their help once the projects are up and running. The local schools, after-school playgroups, the local asylum seekers group and the youth service are keen to use the facilities, and the local police have also shown a keen interest and are willing to support these projects.’

*Playworker – Dog Kennel Hill, Southwark*

**The purpose of this guidance**

This non-statutory guidance is designed to assist local authorities, Children’s Trust Boards and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) to undertake the strategic planning necessary to improve their local play offers and thereby support a range of priority outcomes for children, families and local communities. This will embed and sustain the investment in every local authority that has come through the Government’s £235m Play Strategy programme.

The steps recommended in this document will enable authorities to embed the provision for play as part of the strategic planning and commissioning within authorities.

**This guidance will:**

1. Enable senior decision makers and strategic planners to identify how play and child-friendly public space contributes to achievement against a range of national indicators and local priorities, including the play indicator (NI199).

2. Help Directors of Children’s Services, Directors of Public Health, Chief Planning Officers, Directors of Transport and other senior executives and strategic decision makers to understand their roles and responsibilities in improving these outcomes through implementation of the Play Strategy locally.

3. Guide Directors of Children’s Services and commissioners in developing and adopting local play strategies, underpinned by a thorough needs analysis, which can feed into the Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP).
In doing so, it will:

4. Assist Children's Trusts in meeting their obligations to work closely with their LSP to develop excellent facilities and opportunities for outdoor play and recreation, as described in statutory guidance for Children's Trusts.¹

5. Provide a framework for the strategic planning expected of ‘pathfinder’ and ‘playbuilder’ authorities, as outlined in the 2008–2011 Play Strategy capital programme grants guidance, and for embedding and sustaining this investment.

6. Offer updated guidance to play partnerships within authorities on developing and reviewing their existing local play strategies² and, where relevant, on working between top-tier, second tier and unitary authorities to coordinate planning and delivery of local provision within the area-wide strategic framework.

This guidance has been developed over the calendar year 2009, drawing on learning from the development of play strategies under the Big Lottery Fund Children’s Play programme (2006-11) and the further development of strategic approaches to play provision underpinning delivery of the Children’s Plan play capital programme (2008-11).

Although the Children's Plan/Play Strategy capital investment programme has a focus on provision for 8-13 year olds, the strategic scope of the Play Strategy and this guidance document encompasses all children and young people up to age 19. The term ‘play’ within the Play Strategy describes what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons. Older children and teenagers tend not to use the terms ‘play’ or ‘playing’ but they have a similar need for places to go where they can enjoy their informal recreation.

¹ At time of publication, new statutory Children’s Trust guidance and new Children and Young People’s Plan regulations are under consultation (November 2009 – 29 January 2010). The commitment to play in the consultation draft guidance represents a continuation of policy from current statutory guidance on Children’s Trusts. See: www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm

² This guidance builds on and updates Planning for Play, produced by the Children's Play Council and the Big Lottery Fund as part of the Children’s Play programme in 2006. While emphasising the lead role of top-tier local authorities and, in particular, Children's Trusts and LSPs, it also aims to encourage the sustained role of districts and their play partnerships.
Part 1 of this guidance sets out the policy context for play, highlighting strategic roles and responsibilities

**Why play is important**

Play is central to an enjoyable childhood and playing is a primary need for children, closely linked to their innate need to express themselves, to explore, learn about and make sense of their world. Research tells us that play helps combat childhood obesity, aids children’s mental and emotional responsiveness, improves their social skills, promotes their resilience and supports learning.

An environment which is attractive and safe for children to play is also an attractive, safe place for the whole community. Responding to consultations on the Children’s Plan and the Play Strategy, parents and children said that they want more safe, outdoor places for children to play and for teenagers to meet.

**A National Indicator for play (NI199)** was added to the national indicator set in April 2009. It measures children and young people’s satisfaction with parks and play areas, as measured through the TellUs survey.

Play provision makes a significant contribution towards the four key Local Area Agreement (LAA) themes:

- Children and young people;
- Safer and stronger communities;
- Healthier communities and older people;
- Economic development and the environment.

The table below shows the national indicators to which play can contribute positively. Their relationship to play is explained further in Chapter 1.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>National Indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stronger Communities</td>
<td>NI 1–6 – Community cohesion and satisfaction with local area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safer Communities</td>
<td>NI 17, 22, 23 – Perceptions of anti-social behaviour, parents’ responsibility for children; respect</td>
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<td>NI 48 – The number of children killed or seriously injured</td>
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<td>Stay Safe (Children and Young People)</td>
<td>NI 69 – Children who have experienced bullying</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NI 70 – Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries to children and young people</td>
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iii The current national indicator set at time of publication will run until April 2011. The Government has committed to reducing the number of indicators where they are no longer considered relevant or needed from April 2010.
Executive summary

Government policy

The Play Strategy, backed by £235 million of dedicated investment for local play facilities, has allocated funding to 30 play pathfinder and 122 playbuilder authorities in England. By 2011, there will be up to 3,500 new or refurbished, free play areas and at least 30 fully staffed adventure playgrounds or play parks.

Over the longer term, the Government aims to see provision for play fully embedded in the priorities of local authorities and Children's Trust partnerships, with every child and young person having access to enjoyable, safe and stimulating play opportunities within local communities that respect and value children's play. Statutory guidance to Children's Trusts sets out the need for a strategic approach to play across the local area, with the full involvement of children, local communities and the third sector in decision-making. This requirement to support children's play and young people's recreation is underpinned by Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, which places a duty on local authorities and their ‘relevant partners’ to cooperate in the making of arrangements to improve well-being for local children, as implemented through the Every Child Matters outcomes framework.

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Government funding towards play pathfinder and playbuilder developments through the Play Strategy is intended to enhance and improve local authority provision. Local authorities should not be using this funding to replace or otherwise scale back on local play funding and budgets.
2020 vision for play

- In every residential area, there is a variety of supervised and unsupervised places for play, free of charge.
- Local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play.
- Routes to children's play spaces are safe and accessible for all children and young people.
- Parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well maintained and well used.
- Children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours.
- Children and young people behave in a way that respects other people and property.
- Children and young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces.
- Play spaces are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, children of both genders, disabled children, and children from minority groups in the community.

The Play Strategy (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008)

World Class Places (HMG, 2009) sets out Government’s vision for improving quality of place. It emphasises the importance of green infrastructure and advocates the benefits of outdoor play and everyday interaction with nature, setting out expectations on this for public and open space planning and housing developments.

Planning for the development of local play spaces and a child-friendly public realm is an important part of the overarching responsibility of the Local Strategic Partnership. Enabling children and their families to take an active role in the development of local play provision and the design of neighbourhoods is relevant to local councils’ duty to cooperate with partners and across services, and the duty to involve and empower communities as set out in Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance (HMG, 2008).

Everyday opportunities for active play have a particularly important role in promoting healthy lifestyles. Play is highlighted as a priority in Healthy Lives, Brighter Futures (DH & DCSF, 2009), the Government’s child health strategy, and in Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives (HMG, 2008), the Government’s strategy for tackling childhood obesity.
Play partnerships
The experience of many unitary authorities and district and borough councils has demonstrated that the creation and maintenance of a play partnership, involving all the key agencies and departments, is the best way to manage an effective local play strategy. It is recommended that the Children’s Trust Board considers establishing a play partnership within the Children’s Trust governance structure.

The make-up of play partnerships will vary, but should broadly include those in the local authority, other statutory agencies, and the voluntary and community sector (with links, where appropriate, to the private sector) with a responsibility for:

- **play services, parks and open spaces**;
- **planning** – Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) requires local authorities to assess the needs and opportunities for different types of open space and recreational facilities, including play space for children;
- **public health** – play is one of the most effective ways to keep children active and healthy, tackling obesity and promoting good mental health;
- **procurement and commissioning** – play provision should be coordinated through the joint planning and commissioning process of Children’s Trusts (ref. Part 2);
- **community engagement** – the third sector has historically played a significant role in supporting and delivering play provision, from small ‘friends of the park’ groups to broader-based third sector play partnerships;
- **neighbourhood management and regeneration** – research has found that play and public space is a key factor in making new and regenerated areas attractive to families;
- **police** – local policing teams have an important role in ensuring children and young people playing in their local area feel safe and that their families are confident that they will be safe;
- **youth services** – the planning, services and capital investment of youth programmes such as myplace should be aligned with play service delivery wherever possible;
- **housing** – Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) requires planning authorities to consider, where family housing is to be developed, the needs of children;
- **highways and transport** – traffic and travel safety can be key barriers to play: Department for Transport statutory guidance recommends strategic alignment of Local Transport Plans and Children and Young People’s Plans;

Note: a play partnership is not a mandatory requirement, but is recommended best practice as the most effective strategic mechanism for delivering high quality play provision.
• **schools and extended services** – schools should endeavour to embed the provision of play opportunities within the school day and outside school hours;

• **early years and childcare** – play is central to the Early Years Foundation Stage, the statutory framework for children from birth to 5 years, and children’s centres have a key role in ensuring local parents and carers know about and have access to local play opportunities;

• **workforce development** – playwork should be seen in the context of the wider children and young people’s workforce: staffed provision and volunteer supervision can facilitate better play experiences and help to allay concerns about safety;

• **services for disabled children and young people** – local authorities must comply with the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1995 and 2005) and the *Disability Equality Duty*;

• **services provided for children in exceptional circumstances** – where children and young people are in exceptional circumstances, such as in care or hospital or young carers, they are at risk of losing friendships and opportunities to play with their peers.

This is not a comprehensive list and other partners may have particular relevance to your local area. It is also essential to ensure the views of children and families are considered.

**Leadership for play**

**Lead officers for play** in some authorities may be within a different department, but generally the Director of Children’s Services\(^\text{vi}\) would take the lead in overseeing the development of a top-tier play strategy and identify an appropriately qualified officer with sufficient authority to drive its development and implementation.

**Play champions** can have an important role as advocates for play in policy discussions and to provide political leadership. A councillor should be in a position to ensure that all key departments support the process and, ideally, would be a cabinet member or other senior elected member. Local MPs can have an important role too, and should be invited to engage in the local play strategy.

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\(^\text{vi}\) It is recognised that in some authorities, particularly at the second tier, the lead for play is not with children’s services but, for example, with leisure, culture or life-long learning. Whichever department takes the lead in service delivery, the Children’s Trust Board should aim to coordinate activities and secure cross-cutting commitments within the framework of the joint planning and commissioning framework, with appropriate inclusion of the lead department.
Part 2 of this guidance sets out good practice and a recommended process for developing and implementing a local play strategy within the joint planning and commissioning framework of the Children’s Trust partnership, aligned to the Government’s model nine-step commissioning framework.

Developing and implementing a local play strategy within the joint planning and commissioning framework for children’s services

1. Look at outcomes for children and young people
2. Look at particular groups of children and young people
3. Develop needs assessment with user and staff views
4. Identify resources and set priorities
5. Plan and design the pattern of play services and spaces
6. Decide how to commission services efficiently
7. Commission services and spaces for play, pooling resources where possible
8. Workforce planning and development
9. Monitor and review services and process
How the generic stages in the planning and commissioning cycle can be applied to a local play strategy

1. Look at NI199 as a measure of children’s enjoyment of play and recreation and consider play’s contribution to other outcomes and indicators (see Chapter 1, Table 1).

2. Look at particular groups and neighbourhoods that may need targeted investment for play provision.

3. Develop play needs assessment through engagement with the community, including hard-to-reach and targeted groups identified at Stage 2.

4. Audit play provision, including formal and informal play space, accessibility, quality and the local market. Identify gaps and resources and agree priorities for the play strategy.

5. Plan the pattern of services and spaces for play to be commissioned, targeted at areas of greatest need. Consider standards, location, design, travel to and from play, supervision, maintenance, and wider delivery through services such as schools.

6. Design the local play strategy and related action plans, including cost analysis. Identify effective commissioning mechanisms, where appropriate, using local joint commissioning arrangements such as a Joint Commissioning Unit. Communicate the strategy vision.

7. Commission services and spaces for play. Look for potential for joint commissioning, using pooled resources and collaboration across departments and with neighbouring authorities. Develop a market management plan for suppliers. Include the third sector.

8. Develop and implement a play workforce development plan, including playworkers, volunteers and cross-professional skills development.

9. Monitor progress of the action plan against agreed milestones and review the commissioning process. Evaluate performance using local play indicators and NI199. Evaluate the play strategy against identified outcomes, ensuring children and communities are consulted on their views.
Other guidance and support for embedding the Play Strategy
For an executive summary of the Play Strategy, see Annex A. The full Play Strategy document and related background information and supporting documents, including the research and consultation evidence, can be downloaded at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/play.

Play England, part of the National Children’s Bureau, has been appointed by DCSF to support local authorities and their partners in implementing and embedding the Play Strategy. Play England has nine regional offices, from which it also supports the Big Lottery Fund’s Children’s Play initiative. To contact Play England or for a range of on-line play resources, visit: www.playengland.org.uk.

Embedding the Play Strategy should be used in conjunction with the suite of new practice guidance documents and tools to support the implementation of the Play Strategy. These resources can be found via the DCSF or Play England websites.

Currently available:

- Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces
- Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide
- Safe from Bullying in Play and Leisure Provision
- Better Places to Play through Planning
- Tools for Evaluating Local Play Provision
- Outdoor play: A communications toolkit for local authorities (website)
- Playful Communities (website)
Part 1

The policy context for play: strategic roles and responsibilities

‘...evidence suggests that good quality outdoor play opportunities can drive improvements for children and young people across all five outcomes. The National Play Strategy for England requires not only a strategic approach to planning, creating and maintaining play provision across the local area (with children, local communities and the third sector fully involved in the decision-making process), but also introduced a new national indicator which measures children’s satisfaction with their local play facilities. Delivering these excellent outdoor play opportunities for all children requires working closely with the Local Strategic Partnership on issues such as town and highway planning and the management and maintenance of public spaces, to promote child-friendly neighbourhoods.’

Children’s Trusts: statutory guidance on co-operation arrangements, including the Children’s Trust Board and the Children and Young People’s Plan (consultation draft – Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009)
Introduction

The purpose of this guidance
This non-statutory guidance is designed to assist local authorities, Children’s Trust Boards and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) to undertake the strategic planning necessary to improve their local play offers and thereby support a range of priority outcomes for children, families and local communities. This will embed and sustain the investment in every local authority that has come through the Government’s £235m Play Strategy programme.¹

The steps recommended in this document will enable authorities to embed the provision for play as part of the strategic planning and commissioning within authorities.

This guidance will:
1. Enable senior decision makers and strategic planners to identify how play and child-friendly public space contributes to achievement against a range of national indicators and local priorities, including the play indicator (NI199).
2. Help Directors of Children’s Services, Directors of Public Health, Chief Planning Officers, Directors of Transport and other senior executives and strategic decision makers to understand their roles and responsibilities in improving these outcomes through implementation of the Play Strategy locally.
3. Guide Directors of Children’s Services and commissioners in developing and adopting local play strategies, underpinned by a thorough needs analysis, which can feed into the Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP).

In doing so, it will:
4. Assist Children’s Trusts in meeting their obligations to work closely with their LSP to develop excellent facilities and opportunities for outdoor play and recreation, as described in statutory guidance for Children’s Trusts.²
5. Provide a framework for the strategic planning expected of ‘pathfinder’ and ‘playbuilder’ authorities, as outlined in the 2008–2011 Play Strategy capital programme grants guidance, and for embedding and sustaining this investment.
6. Offer updated guidance to play partnerships within authorities on developing and reviewing their existing local play strategies³ and, where relevant, on working between top-tier, second tier and unitary authorities to coordinate planning and delivery of local provision within the area-wide strategic framework.

³ This guidance builds on and updates Planning for Play, produced by the Children’s Play Council and the Big Lottery Fund as part of the Children’s Play programme in 2006. While emphasising the lead role of top-tier local authorities and, in particular, Children’s Trusts and LSPs, it also aims to encourage the sustained role of districts and their play partnerships.
This guidance has been developed over the calendar year 2009, drawing on learning from the development of play strategies under the Big Lottery Fund Children’s Play programme (2006-11) and the further development of strategic approaches to play provision underpinning delivery of the Children’s Plan³ play capital programme (2008-11).

Part 1 of Embedding the Play Strategy contains guidance for local authority senior executives, strategic planners and their partners on embedding commitments to improve play opportunities within top-level strategies for children, communities, spatial and transport planning.

• Chapter 1 sets out how play fits into the national policy framework and how it contributes to local strategic priorities.

• Chapter 2 sets out strategic roles, responsibilities and recommended practice for developing and implementing strategies for play at different tiers and across different functions of local government, coordinated and led by the Children’s Trust partnership.

Part 2 sets out a recommended nine-stage process for developing and implementing a local play strategy within the joint planning and commissioning framework⁴ of the Children’s Trust partnership.

Note: The development of local play strategies is voluntary and recommended best practice only. Local authorities and their partners will find the suggested approaches to planning and commissioning play provision in this guidance helpful irrespective of whether a local play strategy is developed. However, a local play strategy has been shown to be the most effective way to identify and communicate a vision for play, and to drive the strategic action from the range of partners necessary to deliver the improvements that local people want to see. It also helps to clarify and embed the necessary cross-cutting commitments within other local plans and strategies in a way that retains the focus on play provision and its outcomes for children.

World Class Places⁵ sets out Government’s vision for improving quality of place. It emphasises the importance of green infrastructure and advocates the benefits of outdoor play and everyday interaction with nature, setting out expectations on this for public space planning and housing developments.

Planning for the development of local play spaces and a more generally child-friendly public realm is an important part of the overarching responsibility of the LSP to improve communities’ quality of life and to promote a safer and a more attractive built environment. However, children’s needs are too often ignored in public space design.
Enabling children and their families to take an active role in the development of local play provision and the design of neighbourhoods is also relevant to local councils’ duty to cooperate with partners and across services, and the duty to involve and empower communities as set out in *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance*.

Everyday opportunities for active play have a particularly important role in promoting healthy lifestyles for children and families. Play is highlighted as a priority in *Healthy Lives, Brighter Futures*, the Government’s child health strategy, and in *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives*, the Government’s strategy for tackling childhood obesity.

Play provision also cuts across a range of other local outcomes and responsibilities, from keeping children and communities safe from traffic or anti-social behaviour to provision of housing, youth activities and play opportunities in schools and early years.

**The meaning of ‘play’ and why it is important**

The term ‘play’ within the Play Strategy describes what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons. Playing is a primary need for children, closely linked to their innate need to express themselves, to explore, learn about and make sense of their world. The benefits of play derive from children choosing and doing it for themselves. The adult role in play provision is to enable rather than to direct.

Older children and teenagers tend not to use the terms ‘play’ or ‘playing’ about themselves. But they have a similar need for places to go where they can enjoy their own informal recreational time and things to do that reflect their own social and cultural lives. Whilst the Children’s Plan / Play Strategy capital investment programme has a focus on provision for 8-13 year olds, the strategic scope of the Play Strategy and this guidance document encompasses the informal, freely chosen leisure and recreational activities of all children and young people up to age 19.


The Children’s Plan sets out a vision to make England the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up by 2020. It underlines the principle that children need to enjoy their childhood, as well as grow up prepared for adult life. Children’s play is fundamental to this principle.
As well as being a vital part of a happy childhood, play is important for children’s ongoing and future well-being, making a major contribution to positive outcomes. Research tells us, for instance, that play helps combat childhood obesity by increasing activity levels, aids children’s mental and emotional responsiveness, improves their social skills, and promotes their resilience. There is also evidence that play helps children to develop learning and problem-solving skills, key to their ability to achieve in school and in later life. Further, it is self-evident that an environment which is attractive and safe for children to play is also an attractive, safe place for the whole community.

Responding to consultation on the Children’s Plan, parents and children said that play was an essential component of a good childhood and that they want more safe outdoor places for children to play and for teenagers to meet. The response to *Fair Play*, the consultation on the Play Strategy, overwhelmingly endorsed the Children’s Plan 2020 vision for play and the policy commitments set out to achieve it.

The Play Strategy, backed by £235 million of dedicated investment for local play facilities across the country, has allocated funding to 30 play pathfinder and 122 playbuilder authorities in England. By April 2009, this had already delivered 500 new or refurbished play areas that are free, accessible, local and inclusive. By 2011 this number will have risen to at least 3,500 free play areas and 30 fully staffed adventure playgrounds or play parks. Sites are based on good practice design and safety principles and on consultation and engagement with local communities and their children. Through children’s and communities’ involvement in the design and planning of these spaces, play areas will be valued locally and continue to reflect the distinct needs of each community.

The capital programme of investment in play provision is only the first stage of a 10 year strategy to 2020 to transform children and young people’s access to play and recreation. Over the longer term, the Government aims to see provision for play fully embedded in the priorities of local authorities and Children’s Trust partnerships, with every child and young person having access to enjoyable, safe and stimulating play opportunities within local communities that respect and value children’s play.

This is why statutory guidance to Children’s Trusts sets out the need for a strategic approach to play across the local area, with the full involvement of children, local communities and the third sector in decision-making. This requirement to support children’s play and young people’s recreation is underpinned by Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, which places a duty on local authorities and their ‘relevant partners’ to cooperate in the making of arrangements to improve well-being for local children, as implemented through the *Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes framework*. 

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ix At time of publication, new statutory Children’s Trust guidance and new Children and Young People’s Plan regulations are under consultation (November 2009 – 29 January 2010). The commitment to play in the consultation draft guidance represents a continuation of policy from current statutory guidance on Children’s Trusts. See: www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm.
2020 vision for play

- In every residential area, there is a variety of supervised and unsupervised places for play, free of charge.
- Local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play.
- Routes to children’s play spaces are safe and accessible for all children and young people.
- Parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well maintained and well used.
- Children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours.
- Children and young people behave in a way that respects other people and property.
- Children and young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces.
- Play spaces are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, children of both genders, disabled children, and children from minority groups in the community.

The Play Strategy (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008)

A National Indicator for play

The achievement of these aims locally will be measured by the new National Indicator (NI199) on the level of satisfaction of children and young people with play areas and parks where they live and go to school, as measured through the TellUs survey.

Other guidance and support for embedding the Play Strategy

For an executive summary of the Play Strategy, see Annex A. The full Play Strategy document and related background information and supporting documents, including the research and consultation evidence, can be downloaded at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/play.

Play England, part of the National Children’s Bureau, has been appointed by DCSF to support local authorities and their partners in implementing and embedding the Play Strategy. Play England has nine regional offices, from which it also supports the Big Lottery Fund’s Children’s Play initiative. To contact Play England or for a range of on-line play resources, visit: www.playengland.org.uk.

Embedding the Play Strategy should be used in conjunction with the suite of new practice guidance documents and tools to support the implementation of the Play Strategy. These resources can be found via the DCSF or Play England websites.
Currently available:

- *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces*¹¹
- *Safe from Bullying in Play and Leisure Provision*¹³
- *Better Places to Play through Planning*¹⁴
- *Tools for Evaluating Local Play Provision*¹⁵
- *Outdoor play: A communications toolkit for local authorities* (www.dcsf.gov.uk/play)
- *Playful Communities website* (www.playfulcommunities.org.uk)
Chapter 1: How play provision supports local priorities and national policy

1.1 This chapter summarises how planning and providing for children’s play contributes to priorities identified at national and local level towards achievement of national indicator targets, the Every Child Matters\textsuperscript{16} outcomes, and community engagement and built environment policy aims.

1.2 The Government’s ambition is to make this the best country in the world for children to grow up. Fun and exciting opportunities to play are at the heart of a happy, healthy and enjoyable childhood. Children, young people and their parents all recognise that play is a vital ingredient of a happy childhood, supporting children’s physical, emotional, social and educational development. Better outdoor play opportunities are good for children, good for families and good for communities.

Play and the National Indicator Set

1.3 In April 2009, a new indicator was added to the national indicator set, NI199, which measures children and young people’s satisfaction with parks and play areas. The following table illustrates how play also contributes to a range of other national indicators.x

x The current national indicator set at time of publication will run until April 2011. The Government has committed to reducing the number of indicators where they are no longer considered relevant or needed from April 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>National Indicators</th>
<th>Contribution of play provision and play space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronger Communities</td>
<td>NI 1–6</td>
<td>Play spaces are a high priority for families. The introduction of inclusive play spaces and/or involvement of local people in their development and management can engender community ownership and engagement, enhance quality of life, bring different generations together, and help to reduce anti-social behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community cohesion and satisfaction with local area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safer Communities</td>
<td>NI 17, 22, 23</td>
<td>Good, inclusive play provision and child-friendly public space can promote a sense of belonging, increase mutual understanding and respect, and change perceptions of behaviour and responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of anti-social behaviour, parents’ responsibility for children – respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NI 48</td>
<td>Reducing levels of car usage in the built environment through 20 mph zones, home zones and other design, planning and engineering measures can calm traffic and reduce accidents to children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The number of children killed or seriously injured</td>
<td>Consulting children on their needs when planning and designing routes and other measures can facilitate access to play and increase children’s independence while also reducing accidents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 1: Play and the National Indicator Set (Cont’d…)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>National Indicators</th>
<th>Contribution of play provision and play space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be Healthy</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Children and Young People)</td>
<td>NI 50, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58&lt;br&gt;Children's physical, emotional and behavioural health</td>
<td>Playing out increases physical activity and can promote mental well-being and resilience. Good play provision offers opportunities for all children to have fun and enjoy life, to develop and maintain friendships, and increases their self-confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stay Safe</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Children and Young People)</td>
<td>NI 69&lt;br&gt;Children who have experienced bullying&lt;br&gt;NI 70&lt;br&gt;Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries to children and young people</td>
<td>Well-designed play spaces and supervised free play can reduce bullying and help children's self-confidence. Well designed play areas and staffed play provision can enable children to develop the physical skills and confidence to manage risks, helping to improve their safety from accident. Safer routes to and from play spaces, street play schemes and greater supervision of public space should reduce accidents involving children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enjoy and Achieve</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Children and Young People)</td>
<td>NI 72–78&lt;br&gt;Children and young people achieving minimum standards at each key stage&lt;br&gt;NI 88, 109&lt;br&gt;Number of extended schools and Children’s Centres&lt;br&gt;NI 92–98, 106–108&lt;br&gt;Narrowing the gap</td>
<td>Good play opportunities promote informal learning, creativity and initiative, and can improve children’s ability to concentrate. Play facilities can make schools and other children’s services more enjoyable and welcoming to children. Staffed play provision in Children’s Centres and within the ‘varied menu of activities’ offered through extended services make these more enjoyable and attractive to children. Children’s enjoyment of their childhoods, including play and recreation – things to do and places to go – is a key to the Every Child Matters outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Make a positive contribution</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Children and Young People)</td>
<td>NI 110&lt;br&gt;Young people’s participation in positive activities</td>
<td>Staffed play provision can offer volunteering opportunities for young people. Facilities for play and informal recreation that are well designed through engaging with children and young people can enhance their sense of ownership, involvement and respect for their neighbourhood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Play and the National Indicator Set (Cont’d…)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>National Indicators</th>
<th>Contribution of play provision and play space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Well-being (Children and Young People)</td>
<td>NI 116</td>
<td>Good play provision is at the heart of safe, cohesive and prosperous communities where children can thrive and develop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NI 117</td>
<td>Staffed play provision can offer training and employment opportunities for young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Free, accessible play space helps children from poorer families to compensate for lack of other opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tackling exclusion and promoting equality</td>
<td>NI 140</td>
<td>Play services and play spaces can, and should be, fully inclusive and accessible and all neighbourhoods should have access to playable areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good, inclusive play provision ensures that all children and young people have access to play opportunities, including disabled children, children in poverty, ethnic minorities and vulnerable children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local economy</td>
<td>NI 151</td>
<td>Increased local play provision includes increased investment in the local workforce and generates business for suppliers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NI 155, 160, 170, 175, 179</td>
<td>Good play areas and green, playable public space can increase residents’ satisfaction with their local area and housing conditions, and with local authority services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental sustainability</td>
<td>NI 195, 197</td>
<td>Well used and maintained children's play areas add to general use of, and pride in, community space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NI 198</td>
<td>Natural play areas add to green space and engender environmental awareness in children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Where children and their families feel the area is safe to play outside, they are more likely to walk or cycle to school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: How play provision supports local priorities and national policy – 27

Play and the Every Child Matters outcomes

Being healthy

1.4 **Health policy and initiatives.**

Play is one of the most effective ways to keep children active and healthy, and research provides convincing evidence of the benefits of play for mental health. Senior decision makers in public health and Primary Care Trusts should work closely with their Children’s Trust partners to ensure a coordinated approach to promoting play as an aspect of children’s everyday activity. Provision for play is embedded across the delivery planning for Public Service Agreement (PSA) 12: to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Play is an important part of the children and young people’s health strategy, *Healthy lives, brighter futures*. Tackling obesity is a national priority in the NHS Operating Framework (*Vital Signs*) and the cross-government strategy *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives* and the Department of Health guidance, *Be Active, Be Healthy: a plan for getting the nation moving* each promote the importance of play in children’s lives. *Play4Life* is an integral part of the national *Change4Life* campaign.xi

Staying safe

1.5 **Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards.**

Following changes in Government legislation and the Children Act 2004, every local authority now has a statutory duty to have a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), coordinating integrated, multi-agency responses to children’s safety and welfare locally. This includes the safety of children at play.

1.6 **Transport policy, safe routes to play and active travel.**

Department for Transport *Local Transport Plan guidance,*xii published in July 2009, is statutory guidance on local authority transport planning. It promotes the integration of transport with wider corporate priorities at local level. The guidance recommends that local authorities strategically align Local Transport Plans and Children and Young People’s Plans. The associated *Policies and Good Practice Handbook* provides links to further guidance and resources, and includes a section on child-friendly travel and transport planning and policy. *Manual for Streets* is award-winning Government guidance which represents a move away from a culture of seeing streets simply as a means of providing for traffic, to one of emphasising their community and place function. It promotes designs that help to create communities which will stand the test of time, giving a high priority to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and users of public transport.

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xi The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has also published a range of guidance on physical activity and play. See: www.nice.org.uk

xii Local Transport Plan guidance can be found at: www.dft.gov.uk/ltp.
1.7 **Workforce development, supervision and safeguarding.**
Fear of strangers, anti-social behaviour and bullying are cited as key reasons for children not playing outside. Staffed play provision and volunteer supervision can allay many of these concerns. The DCSF 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy\(^\text{19}\) describes playworkers as an important part of the children's workforce. Playwork should be seen within the wider context of the integrated children's workforce and should be planned for under the local children's workforce strategy. All those working with children, including playworkers and volunteers, should be following safeguarding guidance as set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*.\(^\text{20}\) An aim of local play strategies should also be the development of knowledge and skills within the wider workforce (for example, local planners, parks officials and highways officers) of how to enable children’s play in public space.\(^\text{xiii}\)

1.8 **Local policing and community support officers.**
Youth crime and anti-social behaviour are concerns for many children and parents. Although some feel this is at times exaggerated or misrepresented in the media, a minority of young people do cause trouble and become involved in anti-social or criminal activities. Local policing teams have an important role in ensuring children and young people playing in their local area feel safe and that their families are confident that they will be safe. They also have an important role in providing support to play providers on tackling anti-social behaviour, ensuring play providers have a point of contact and guidance on what to do when confronted by serious criminal behaviour.

1.9 **Health & safety – proportionate risk management.**
Research shows that encountering and managing risk at play increases children's resilience, adaptability and self-confidence. The Government’s *Staying Safe Action Plan*\(^\text{21}\) recognises these benefits and that child safety does not mean we should “wrap children and young people up in cotton wool”. The Play Strategy has taken this forward by publishing guidance on *Managing Risk in Play Provision*. Endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive, this guidance sets out a proportionate approach to risk management that assesses benefits as well as risks. The aim is to enable providers to offer children and young people challenging, exciting play opportunities while ensuring that they are not exposed to unacceptable risk of harm.

\(^\text{xiii}\) See the Play Shaper programme: www.playshaper.org.uk.
Chapter 1: How play provision supports local priorities and national policy – 29

Enjoying and Achieving

1.10 Play in Schools.
Schools should endeavour to embed the provision of play opportunities within the school day and outside school hours. The final report of the *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum* by Sir Jim Rose, whose recommendations have been accepted by the Government, has highlighted the importance of play and proposes extending and building upon the active, play-based learning of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) across the transition to primary education, especially into Key Stage 1. Opportunities for play are an important feature of after school provision as part of the varied menu of activities and the childcare elements of the core offer of services. This is made clear in the extended schools prospectus *Extended schools: Building on experience.* Well-developed sites and facilities, including for play, are an important feature of the Building Schools for the Future programme.

1.11 Play in early learning and childcare.
Play is central to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) which became statutory from September 2008 for all early years providers (including maintained and independent schools) working with children aged from birth to 5 years. The EYFS acknowledges that young children learn best through play in a safe environment, with encouragement and support from parents and practitioners. Children’s centres have a key role in ensuring local parents and carers know about local play opportunities. As children’s centres are already hubs of local services, they are well placed to link with local play providers or to develop additional free play provision themselves. Children’s centres’ services vary according to location and need. However, all centres are expected to offer activities for children, parents and carers, and play should be integrated across Sure Start Children’s Centre services.

1.12 Inclusion.
All sections of the community should have access to play opportunities, including:

- Disabled children – in particular, it should be assumed that disabled children want to play and will access any play area, and this should be encouraged and supported through inclusive and accessible provision. Local authorities are required to comply with the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1995 and 2005) and the *Disability Equality Duty*. The *Aiming High for Disabled Children* programme offers a range of short break opportunities for disabled children, including time with their peers in staffed play provision;

- Children from minority communities – research has shown that children from some minority ethnic communities can find themselves excluded from play provision;
• Looked after and vulnerable children – where children and young people are moved around between homes or have suffered stressful experiences, they are at risk of losing friendships and opportunities to play;

• Families – families come in all shapes and sizes (children and young people, grandparents, lone parents, non-resident mothers and fathers, disabled parents, young carers etc) and facilities should be welcoming and accessible for all.

Making a positive contribution

1.13 **Youth facilities and myplace.**

*Aiming High for Young People* sets out the Government’s vision for improving youth facilities in response to clear ongoing demand from young people, parents and communities. In April 2008, *myplace* was launched to deliver over £270 million of capital investment in youth facilities over three years. Local authorities should, wherever possible, align the planning and resources of youth programmes and play capital investment so they complement and add value to each other. This may also have the benefit of reducing inappropriate use of play provision by teenagers where this has been a problem.

1.14 **Youth participation.**

*Aiming High for Young People* also aims to foster a more positive approach to young people across society and within communities and increase their participation in high quality positive activities. Actively engaging children and young people in the design and development of their own play and recreational spaces, alongside local residents, can engender a greater sense of community and intergenerational tolerance and respect. Respecting and incorporating children’s views results in more appropriate provision, helps them develop their skills and knowledge, and can help develop motivation and participation in society.

Enjoying economic well-being

1.15 **Child poverty and play.**

Part of the Government’s commitment to end child poverty is “the aspiration that families will live in safe, cohesive and prosperous communities where children can thrive, with safe places to play, opportunities to develop, and access to high-quality services.” *The Child Poverty Bill*, which was introduced before Parliament in summer 2009, requires the Government to publish a child poverty strategy within one year of the Bill receiving Royal Assent. This strategy will consider the access that children living in poverty have to safe places to play and the role this can have in alleviating the experience of poverty. In addition, the Bill will introduce a new duty on local authorities and relevant delivery partners to work together to tackle child poverty in their area. The Government expects LSPs and Children’s Trusts, working with partners such as Registered Social Landlords, to ensure their strategies for reducing child poverty and on extending and improving provision and space for children and young people’s play and informal recreation are aligned.
Play, communities and built environment policy

World Class Places

1.15 The Government is committed to improving the places where people live, whether in villages or large cities. *World Class Places* sets out why and how quality of place matters and the practical steps the Government will be taking to build on the achievements of recent years and do more to create prosperous, attractive, distinctive, inclusive and sustainable world class places. *World Class Places* emphasises the importance of green infrastructure and advocates the benefits of outdoor play and everyday interaction with nature, setting out expectations on this for public space planning and housing developments.

Planning and housing policy guidance

1.16 National planning guidance explicitly recognises the need for dedicated outdoor space for play and recreation. *Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17)* requires local authorities to assess the needs and opportunities for different types of open space and recreational facilities, including play space for children. *Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3)* requires planning authorities to consider, where family housing is to be developed, the needs of children. In order to promote the wider aims for children’s environmental well-being within spatial and housing planning policies, the Children’s Trust should engage with planning departments to assist their consideration of the need for play provision during the preparation of Local Development Frameworks (LDF) and, where appropriate, at the planning decision stage. This is important in both unitary and two-tier authorities, where LDFs and open space strategies are developed at the district level. An area-wide local play strategy (see Chapter 2) should be coordinated with the local open space strategy. CABE Space, the Government’s adviser on planning issues for open space, has published guidance on developing open space strategies and much of this guidance can be applied to the development of a local play strategy. Building for Life is a partnership between several national agencies, led by CABE and the Home Builders Federation, which promotes design excellence: the 20 Building for Life criteria embody a vision of functional, attractive and sustainable housing.

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*xiv* As part of the reform of the planning system, CLG has been working to consolidate and streamline planning policy on open space, sport and recreation (PPG17), biodiversity and geodiversity (PPS9) and landscape and soil (part of PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas). The intention is to bring these policy areas together into one document to provide planning policy on green infrastructure.

*xv* For more on sustainable development and the environment, see *Securing the Future: UK Government Sustainable development strategy* (Defra, 2005) and *Every Child’s Future Matters* (Sustainable Development Commission, 2007).

*xvi* See: www.buildingforlife.org.
Strong, safe and prosperous communities

1.17 Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance requires closer joint working between local authorities and their partners to empower communities, improve their quality of life, and provide a safer and a more attractive built environment that meets people’s needs. Involving children and young people in the place-shaping of their neighbourhoods and engaging local people about improvements and developments in play provision is consistent with this duty. Whenever communities are asked about their levels of satisfaction with their neighbourhoods, better play and recreational opportunities for children and young people are a consistently strong priority.

Community engagement

1.18 The Communities and Local Government White Paper Communities in control: real people, real power offers a blueprint for how communities can be given real control over local decisions and services. This shift in power and influence to communities and individual citizens provides opportunities to influence children’s services and play facilities. In April 2009, a new duty on local councils to involve local people in key decisions was introduced, encouraging authorities to embed a culture of engagement, including when regenerating or providing new play space. Connecting Communities, a new programme announced in October 2009, will provide support for local neighbourhoods and estates to strengthen local leadership, give people a voice and increase opportunities for participation. Underpinning the Play Strategy is a vision of community empowerment whereby local children, young people, families and residents are integral to the shaping, quality and long-term future of play provision.

Play and the third sector

1.19 Third sector organisations have historically played a significant role in supporting and delivering play provision, from small ‘friends of the park’ groups to broader-based third sector play partnerships. It is important to ensure that voluntary and community sector organisations continue to provide local play services for children and young people, working in partnership with local authorities and other services. Greater community ownership of local play spaces is an important component of the aim to sustain and build upon the Government’s substantial investment in play. As part of the terms and conditions of their grants, it is expected that all local authority play pathfinders and playbuilders will work with and involve the voluntary and community sector in the delivery of play opportunities. Published in July 2009, the new DCSF Third Sector Strategy and Action Plan sets out principles, pledges and commitments for continued working with the third sector to help deliver the Every Child Matters agenda.

xvii For resources and information on third sector involvement in play see www.playfulcommunities.org.uk.
Chapter 2: Local strategic planning for play, roles and responsibilities

2.1 Play is a universal need and cuts across many local authority responsibilities, from schools and children’s centres to parks, open spaces, housing and highways. Provision has traditionally been the responsibility of town, parish, district and unitary councils, responding directly, or through the voluntary sector, to local need.

2.2 Second tier authorities, town and parish councils, and the voluntary and community sectors continue to have a central role in providing for play. The dual intention of the Play Strategy is that this provision and improvements to public space for children form part of the integrated children’s services offer and the spatial development plans for local areas. This will require collaboration and commitments at the top level of local government and across partners.

2.3 The Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP) should identify commitments to extend and enhance the play offer according to local need, and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) should reflect these commitments within plans for spatial and community development and the infrastructure that supports it.

2.4 Many authorities have found the production of a local play strategy to be the most effective way to achieve the desired outcomes. This approach to embedding play within the strategic planning framework, which is voluntary but considered best practice, is illustrated below, followed by descriptions of a local play strategy and a play partnership. A local play strategy, via the CYPP on the one hand and as background evidence for the Local Development Framework on the other, can be a vehicle for ensuring that the top level Sustainable Community Strategy takes account of children and young people’s need for play provision and of the whole community’s need for a safe, child-friendly public realm. The approach and processes described will also be of use and should be given due consideration by those adopting an alternative approach to their strategic planning for play provision.

2.5 A local play strategy is also a commissioning strategy for play and sits alongside other commissioning strategies for improving children’s well-being undertaken by the Children’s Trust partnership. More and better play provision should be considered for ongoing investment from the integrated budgets and coordinated delivery that will flow from the commissioning process. So too should improvements to the built environment and open spaces to make them safer, more accessible and more ‘playable’ for children.
2.6 The Commissioning Support Programme has been set up to work with Children’s Trust partners to improve their commissioning capacity and capability. It offers advice, information and tools to help support successful joint commissioning, including a tailored offer for play. The programme will run until April 2011. Published in July 2009, *Achieving Better Outcomes: Commissioning in Children’s Services* is recommended guidance and can be downloaded from the Commissioning Support Programme website: www.commissioningsupportprogramme.org.uk.

**Figure 1: Recommended approach to play within the local strategic planning framework**

* Play strategies are optional but recommended practice

**Children’s Trusts**

2.7 Children’s Trust partnerships have the key role in planning and commissioning services and spaces for the delivery of positive outcomes for children and young people. This should include provision for play and informal recreation.

2.8 Statutory Guidance to Children’s Trusts sets out the need for a strategic approach to play across the local area, with the full involvement of children, local communities and the third sector in decision-making. The requirement to support children’s play and young people’s recreation is underpinned by Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, which places a duty on local authorities

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xviii Jointly sponsored by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health.

xix Children’s play often sits logically with the Children’s Services Department, but it is also an important responsibility of other departments such as planning, parks, leisure and cultural services, any of which may have the lead role. Where this is the case, these departments should be properly represented on the Children’s Trust Board.

xx At time of publication, new statutory Children’s Trust guidance and new Children and Young Peoples Plan regulations are under consultation (November 2009 – 29 January 2010). The commitment to play in the consultation draft guidance represents a continuation of policy from current statutory guidance on Children’s Trusts. See: www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm.
and their ‘relevant partners’ to cooperate in the making of arrangements to improve well-being for local children, as implemented through the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes framework.

2.9 The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act extends the number of ‘relevant partners’ on the Children’s Trust and places the Children’s Trust Board on a statutory footing with responsibility for preparing and monitoring the implementation of the CYPP. All areas will be required to have in place a Children’s Trust Board by April 2010 and have new jointly owned CYPPs in place by April 2011.

Local Strategic Partnerships

2.10 The Children’s Trust partnership alone cannot deliver the friendly, safe and accessible spaces that will be essential to the success of the Play Strategy. The draft new statutory guidance for Children’s Trusts also identifies that:

‘… delivering excellent outdoor play opportunities for all children and young people will require working closely with the broader Local Strategic Partnership on issues such as town and highway planning and the management and maintenance of public space, in order to promote communities that are more child-friendly’

‘… there are environmental services, including provision of green spaces and clean air, and strategies which seek to reduce carbon emissions, all of which have the potential to have a radical effect on children’s well-being now and in the future’

‘… It is important that local authority services which do not come under the direct management of the Director of Children’s Services, such as adult social care, housing, transport and leisure are included, as all of these areas are likely to affect children’s well-being. In unitary authorities, these services co-exist within the same organisation, so the Chief Executive has an important role in making the connections within the senior management team. The situation in two-tier areas is different because district councils, which have responsibility for a number of these important functions, are statutory ‘relevant partners’. Here the top-tier authority must engage with the districts through the Children’s Trust co-operation arrangements as it does with other ‘relevant partners’.

2.11 Statutory Guidance on Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities also requires closer coordination and joint working between local authorities and their partners, and the LSP has a key role to play in bringing partners together to identify and articulate the needs and aspirations of local communities. The LSP is in a position to strategically influence and improve communities’ quality of life and to promote improvements to the built environment that meet people’s needs, including promoting safer and more attractive public places for children to play and teenagers to meet.
2.12 Planning policy and the role of planners (including housing and transport) is vital to the creation of child-friendly public and green space. CABE Space, the Government’s adviser on public space has published guidance that identifies a local play strategy as one component of the Open Space Strategy that can inform the Local Development Framework for spatial planning.34

Performance monitoring and the inspection framework

2.13 Play is a priority for the Government as it is clear that children, parents and families want play to be a priority in their local areas. Therefore, provision for play is now part of the performance framework for local authorities. From April 2009, the National Indicator Set has included an indicator (NI199) on children’s views of the parks and play areas in their local area, which will be measured through the TellUs survey of school-aged children. The new indicator will be reported against by the joint inspectorate as part of the annual Comprehensive Area Assessment.xxi

2.14 Local Area Agreement (LAA) delivery planning provides a clear opportunity to consider play provision and scope for further development of playable public space, and local authorities should consider prioritising children’s play as one of their LAA targets.

2.15 Local authority play services and their partners will also need to look at their own monitoring and evaluation, with particular reference to the impact of their playbuilder or pathfinder funding via the Play Strategy. This will help to inform the overall assessment of services by the joint inspectorate and enable effective performance management.

The local play strategy

2.16 Many local authorities have already opted to develop and adopt local play strategies,xxii coordinated and led by a local play partnership reporting to the Children’s Trust Board. This approach is recommended best practice, with the local play strategy becoming a commissioning strategy that sits alongside other commissioning strategies for the Children’s Trust partnership.

2.17 A cohesive vision for play that is shared across the local authority and its partners on the Children’s Trust Board, and adopted by the LSP, will require considerable joint planning. The Children’s Trust Board will need to engage with the LSP on issues such as town and highway planning and the management and maintenance of public space, aiming to embed play within local housing, regeneration and transport plans. This process of engagement should raise awareness and enable the LSP to appropriately consider children’s play provision within the priorities for improvement in the LAA.

xxi Note: although the full range of the national indicator set is considered as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, it is a process which highlights areas of success or which require improvement according to local conditions. As the assessment relates to local circumstances, there is no set list of outcomes which may be flagged as part of the assessment in each area.

xxii Guide to preparing play strategies in the London Boroughs was produced by the Mayor of London in April 2005.
2.18 For two-tier areas, where district councils have a very large part to play in the delivery of play provision and in the planning and management of the neighbourhoods where children live, local authorities and their respective LSPs are expected to work together in leading local partner activity on developing Sustainable Community Strategies and county-wide spatial and thematic plans. The local play strategy should be developed within this two-tier approach.

2.19 This guidance also provides a framework for the review and renewal of local play strategies where they already exist, many of which were produced for the Big Lottery Fund Children’s Play programme.

**Essential elements of a successful local play strategy**

- **Cross-cutting**: top level commitments within the CYPP, Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Development Framework with links to open space, transport and housing.

- **Strong leadership**: a lead officer with appropriate seniority and resources, supported by a play champion within the council or relevant cabinet.

- **High-level support**: support for a cross-cutting, collaborative approach from the Director of Children’s Services and the Chief Planning Officer.

- **Sound basis**: based on a comprehensive play audit and needs assessment.

- **Participative**: active participation of children and young people, parents and community members.

- **Inclusive**: actively includes disabled children, children from minority ethnic communities, and children living with social or economic disadvantage.

- **Commitment**: commitments are defined as SMART objectives with a timetabled action plan.

- **Resourced**: activities are resourced and there is a commitment to sustainability.

- **Learning**: regular monitoring, evaluation and review.

- **Knowledge and understanding**: input from play sector experts, including playworkers and third sector organisations supporting play.

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Web links to published local authority play strategies can be found at the Children’s Play Information Service, based at the National Children’s Bureau: www.ncb.org.uk/cpis110.
The play partnership

2.20 The experience of unitary authorities and district and borough councils has demonstrated that the creation and maintenance of a play partnership, involving all the key agencies and departments, is the best way to develop an effective local play strategy. xxiv The local authority with its partners on the Children’s Trust Board should consider establishing a play partnership within its governance structure (see Figure 2 below).

2.21 The play partnership can develop a shared vision for play across the whole area, with clear commitments from each partner and a coordinated delivery plan, implemented through a joint commissioning strategy for play and a suitable operational group.

2.22 The make-up of play partnerships will vary, but should broadly include those in the local authority, other statutory agencies, and the voluntary and community sector (and with links, where appropriate, to the private sector) with a responsibility for:

- **play services, parks and open spaces**;
- **planning** – *Planning Policy Guidance Note 17* (PPG17) requires local authorities to assess the needs and opportunities for different types of open space and recreational facilities, including play space for children;
- **public health** – play is one of the most effective ways to keep children active and healthy, tackling obesity and promoting good mental health;
- **procurement and commissioning** – play provision should be coordinated through the joint planning and commissioning process of Children’s Trusts (ref. Part 2);
- **community engagement** – the third sector has historically played a significant role in supporting and delivering play provision, from small ‘friends of the park’ groups to broader-based third sector play partnerships;
- **neighbourhood management and regeneration** – research35 has found that play and public space is a key factor in making new and regenerated areas attractive to families;
- **police** – local policing teams have an important role in ensuring children and young people playing in their local area feel safe and that their families are confident that they will be safe;
- **youth services** – the planning, services and capital investment of youth programmes such as *myplace* should be aligned with play service delivery wherever possible;

xxiv Note: a play partnership is not a mandatory requirement, but is recommended best practice as the most effective strategic mechanism for delivering high quality play provision.
• **housing** – Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) requires planning authorities to consider, where family housing is to be developed, the needs of children;

• **highways and transport** – traffic and travel safety can be key barriers to play: Department for Transport statutory guidance recommends strategic alignment of Local Transport Plans and Children and Young People’s Plans;

• **schools and extended services** – schools should endeavour to embed the provision of play opportunities within the school day and outside school hours;

• **early years and childcare** – play is central to the Early Years Foundation Stage, the statutory framework for children from birth to 5 years, and children’s centres have a key role in ensuring local parents and carers know about and have access to local play opportunities;

• **workforce development** – playwork should be seen in the context of the wider children’s workforce: staffed provision and volunteer supervision can facilitate better play experiences and help to allay concerns about safety;

• **services for disabled children and young people** – local authorities must comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (1995 and 2005) and the Disability Equality Duty;

• **services provided for children in exceptional circumstances** – where children and young people are in exceptional circumstances, such as in care or hospital or young carers, they are at risk of losing friendships and opportunities to play with their peers.

2.23 This is not a comprehensive list and other partners may have particular relevance to your local area. Other representation on or via the play partnership to be considered should include parent/carer representation, play professionals, and communications, sports and physical activity departments. It is also essential to ensure the views of children and young people are considered.
Case study: Kent County Council

Kent is a large two-tier authority with 12 district councils which are diverse and geographically isolated. Prior to the national Play Strategy, Kent’s only county involvement in play was through the early years and extended services agendas. There were few formal links between the two tiers of local government, and limited sharing of expertise between districts. The county designated a senior experienced strategic officer to have responsibility for the playbuilder strategy, who has drawn together existing expertise within the districts. Robust selection, monitoring and evaluation systems have been developed to ensure the county can fulfil its responsibilities and deliver top quality provision. A play partnership was formed, with an elected independent chair and wide cross-sector representation. Play is being embedded throughout county policy with joined up working across departments and districts and good practice being replicated, such as a joint conference on risk management hosted by one district with attendance from across the county.
Roles and responsibilities

The local authority

2.24 Play partnerships vary but, whatever the local circumstances, the local authority will have a key role in championing play through the wider Children’s Trust partnership as part of the CYPP, and:

- reviewing and auditing existing play opportunities;
- setting local standards for the quantity, quality and accessibility of provision;
- fully engaging the voluntary and community sector;
- planning for the recruitment and development of the workforce;
- pooling financial resources, accessing different funding streams for delivery;
- evaluating implementation and impact.

Lead officers and play champions

2.25 Play services in some authorities may be led by a different department but generally the Director of Children’s Services would take the lead in overseeing the development of a top-tier play strategy and identify an appropriately senior and qualified officer to drive its development and implementation, liaising with other key departments to ensure support for the process.

2.26 The play lead should be supported by a board or partnership of officers from all the appropriate departments, such as planning, housing, schools and transport, as well as representatives from key partner agencies such as health, police, and local voluntary and community sector organisations. Representatives should have sufficient seniority to make decisions or the partnership may struggle in terms of its mandate and authority.

2.27 As well as a lead officer for play, it is strongly recommended that local authorities designate a councillor as a ‘play champion’ to act as an advocate for their play strategy in policy discussions and to provide political leadership. A councillor should be in a position to ensure that all key departments support the process and, ideally, would be a cabinet member or other senior elected member.
2.28 Local MPs have an important role too, in representing community interests in their constituencies and maintaining links with Parliamentary activity. The play partnership should seek opportunities to invite local MPs to engage with the local play strategy and to help shape its development on behalf of their constituents. They can also, of course, be invaluable informal champions, adding value to the advocacy of elected members.

2.29 As well as inviting partners to become members of the play partnership, it is also recommended that the partnership proactively seeks to have representation on other non-play forums which have relevance to its activity. This can be an effective way to engage busy colleagues and potential champions from other departments.

The play partnership
2.30 Almost all district and borough councils now have a local play strategy and play partnership, in support of funding allocations from the Big Lottery Fund Children's Play programme (2006–2011). Therefore, in two-tier authorities it is recommended that the local authority, with its partners on the Children's Trust board, form a play partnership that includes representatives from each second-tier authority. This should then lead the development of a county-wide approach to coordinating activities and programmes and commissioning projects (from the districts or their partners where appropriate) through a top-tier play strategy.

2.31 However it is constituted, the play partnership should reflect local requirements. It should provide strategic leadership for play services and play space development, overseeing the delivery of play pathfinder or playbuilder projects as well as provision resourced through other funding streams. It should also ensure that provision by the voluntary and community sector, both small grassroots organisations and broader area-wide associations and support organisations, is appropriately recognised and supported.

2.32 To sustain these improvements, the play partnership, embedded within the wider Children's Trust partnership, should ensure that a cohesive vision and strategy for play is disseminated, shared and coordinated across all the key areas of responsibility and activity. The local authority should then ensure that the commitments of the local play strategy are embedded within statutory plans like the CYPP and Sustainable Community Strategy – so that local play needs become an integral component of the LSP vision for its community.
Chapter 2: Local strategic planning for play, roles and responsibilities – 43

Case study: Bristol City Council

Bristol City Council’s play strategy constantly evolves. A cyclical process involving regular monitoring and review means that the strategy develops in accordance with changing circumstances and opportunities. In this way, the play strategy in Bristol is consistently referred to as a working document rather than a static reference point. A Play Strategy Development Group (PSDG) was convened comprising stakeholders from across authority departments as well as play providers and the voluntary and community sector. Each partner organisation nominated a play champion responsible for implementation of a SMART action plan. The play champion roles ensure a consistency of approach as well as clear lines of accountability. The partner organisations report to the PSDG through their play champions and the PSDG in turn reports to the Bristol Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership, which reports to the Local Strategic Partnership.
'Children in deprived communities can often lack safe spaces to socialise and play. This can have knock-on effects on a child’s cognitive development, communication skills and health, and their attainment. The Government has set itself the aspiration that families will live in safe, cohesive and prosperous communities where children can thrive, with safe places to play, opportunities to develop, and access to high-quality public services.'

_Ending child poverty: making it happen (HM Government, 2009)_
Figure 3: Developing and implementing a local play strategy within the joint planning and commissioning framework for children’s services

1. Look at outcomes for children and young people
2. Look at particular groups of children and young people
3. Develop needs assessment with user and staff views
4. Identify resources and set priorities
5. Plan and design the pattern of play services and spaces
6. Decide how to commission services efficiently
7. Commission services and spaces for play, pooling resources where possible
8. Workforce planning and development
9. Monitor and review services and process
How the generic stages in the planning and commissioning cycle can be applied to a local play strategy

1. Look at NI199 as a measure of children’s enjoyment of play and recreation and consider play’s contribution to other outcomes and indicators (see Chapter 1, Table 1).

2. Look at particular groups and neighbourhoods that may need targeted investment for play provision.

3. Develop play needs assessment through engagement with the community, including hard-to-reach and targeted groups identified at Stage 2.

4. Audit play provision, including formal and informal play space, accessibility, quality and the local market. Identify gaps and resources and agree priorities for the play strategy.

5. Plan the pattern of services and spaces for play to be commissioned, targeted at areas of greatest need. Consider standards, location, design, travel to and from play, supervision, maintenance, and wider delivery through services such as schools.

6. Design the local play strategy and related action plans, including cost analysis. Identify effective commissioning mechanisms, where appropriate, using local joint commissioning arrangements such as a Joint Commissioning Unit. Communicate the strategy vision.

7. Commission services and spaces for play. Look for potential for joint commissioning, using pooled resources and collaboration across departments and with neighbouring authorities. Develop a market management plan for suppliers. Include the third sector.

8. Develop and implement a play workforce development plan, including playworkers, volunteers and cross-professional skills development.

9. Monitor progress of the action plan against agreed milestones and review the commissioning process. Evaluate performance using local play indicators and NI199. Evaluate the play strategy against identified outcomes, ensuring children and communities are consulted on their views.
Stage 1: Looking at outcomes for children and young people

Stage 1: Look at NI199 as a measure of children’s enjoyment of play and recreation and consider play’s contribution to other outcomes and indicators.

Part 2 of Embedding the Play Strategy outlines a recommended nine-stage process for developing and implementing a local play strategy within the joint planning and commissioning frameworkxxvi of the Children’s Trust partnership. This process is applicable to those developing a play strategy, reviewing an existing play strategy or otherwise supporting, planning or implementing strategic delivery of play provision.

A cross-cutting approach to play

As illustrated in Part 1, play provision makes a significant contribution towards the Every Child Matters outcomes as well as a range of national indicators and other desired outcomes for communities, cutting across local authority and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) responsibilities and the four key Local Area Agreement (LAA) themes:

- Children and young people;
- Safer and stronger communities;
- Healthier communities and older people;
- Economic development and the environment.

Play should be considered across the full range of indicators and outcomes, and thought given to how it can be included or contribute to achievement of LAA targets and the underpinning strategies and delivery plans.

xxvi There are various descriptions of the commissioning process, often reflecting specific local circumstances. Many Children’s Trust partnerships already use the nine-step framework developed by the Government in 2006. Ultimately, each Children’s Trust Board should agree a common process that all partners can recognise and in which they can participate.

For further information and downloads on joint commissioning in children’s services, see: www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/managersandleaders/planningandcommissioning/joint.

The Commissioning Support Programme, jointly sponsored by DCSF and the Department of Health, has been set up to work with Children’s Trust partners to improve their commissioning capacity and capability. It offers advice, information and tools to help support successful joint commissioning, including a tailored offer for play. See: www.commissioningsupport.org.uk.
It is important to ensure that play provision, strategies and plans cover all key settings and environments where children play and young people spend their leisure time. Although different local authority departments (such as transport, housing, health, extended schools, youth provision or early years) can have separate requirements, guidance and funding streams, it is important that children have appropriate opportunities to play wherever they live, learn and congregate. Through making effective links between different programmes and departments, there are benefits of joining up plans and services which can provide, for example, economies of scale, pooled resources and lines of communication towards the achievement of shared goals and targets. It is also important to consider and engage external organisations supporting play in the local area, including voluntary and community groups and the private sector, to ensure a full picture of play provision in the area and to avoid unnecessary duplication.

**National Indicator for play (NI199)**

The data from the 2008 TellUs 3 survey showed that 44 per cent of children rated parks and play areas as ‘very good’ or ‘fairly good’. However, a larger proportion of children gave lower ratings, with 30 per cent rating them as ‘fairly poor’ or ‘very poor’ and 47 per cent saying better parks and play areas would make their area a better place to live. At the same time, 74 per cent said they had visited a park or play area in the last four weeks, which shows that a sizeable percentage of children and young people visit play spaces but are not happy with them. Further, 18 per cent said they would like to go to parks and play areas but did not.

To make the enjoyment of play a more robust part of the outcomes framework, since April 2009 the National Indicator Set has included NI199, which will measure children’s satisfaction with their local play areas and parks. As part of the joint inspectorate annual Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process, every top-tier local authority will be assessed against the full range of national indicators, including NI199.xxvii

Where local authorities are shown to have relatively low levels of child satisfaction with local parks and play areas, the authority and Government Office should think about whether NI199 should be one of the local targets to be included in the LAA, considered in the context of other local priorities.

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xxvii Note: although the full range of the national indicator set is considered as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, it is a process which highlights areas of success or which require improvement according to local conditions. As the assessment relates to local circumstances, there is no set list of outcomes which may be flagged as part of the assessment in each area.
Play in Local Area Agreements

**Darlington District Council:** *Play as part of the safer and stronger communities block*

As part of their safer and stronger communities block, Darlington has included the indicator: ‘percentage of residents very or fairly satisfied with children’s play areas’. Darlington chose to use this indicator because it reflects their local priority to increase numbers of children and young people who are positively engaged in their free time, enjoying play and recreation and achieving personal and social development. Darlington measures this through a survey of local residents.

**Somerset County Council:** *Play as part of the Children and Young People theme*

As part of its commitment for children to ‘achieve personal and social development’, Somerset intends to extend its range of play opportunities and the numbers of children and young people using them. The county is linking this aim to the five district play strategies within the county. Somerset chose this indicator as it represented both the wishes of the wider community and their target to increase children’s physical activity.

**Local evaluation tools**

Play England has developed and piloted a set of voluntary local play indicators, as part of a toolkit for evaluating and improving the play offer. These indicators support collection of targeted data on the extent of local participation in play provision, the degree of access to playable spaces, and an objective tool for assessing the quality of these spaces. Local play indicators can enable authorities to closely monitor the impact of improvements through the pathfinder and playbuilder programme, and offer detailed, localised information to help with planning, delivery and improved performance management. The indicators can also be used to support evidence of local achievement towards NI199.
Stage 2: Looking at particular groups

The local play strategy should aim to identify locations with the greatest need for more play provision or improvements to public space. Play deprivation can result from a number of factors including traffic and road safety, badly planned or high-density housing resulting in a dearth of green space, low level crime and bullying, or lack of supervision or oversight. These can affect whole communities, particularly those living with other forms of social disadvantage or discrimination. Therefore, although it is important the local play strategy should aim to improve provision and environments for all children across the whole area in question, it should prioritise improving outcomes for children in deprived neighbourhoods and particular groups where the barriers to play are most significant.

Collecting data and demographics
Before undertaking an audit of play spaces there should be an analysis of key demographics of local children and families. Obtaining and understanding key data about the young community – numbers of children, gender, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, types of family structures, types of housing, and employment profiles – will help to identify the specific needs of local children and their families. By considering the needs of the family holistically – children and young people, grandparents, lone parents, non-resident mothers and fathers, and other carers – a broader picture can be obtained which can help to develop provision that supports the diverse needs of the whole community.

Existing data on local demographics should be available from a range of possible local sources, although authority systems can vary: for example, from housing departments, through the health and well-being Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) or from earlier development of playbuilder or pathfinder plans. It is important the data is current, but thinking about and identifying existing sources first will avoid unnecessary replication and enable a gap-filling approach.

Data should be analysed to draw conclusions, inform local priorities, and provide information required to build an informed picture of local play needs. The data can then inform LAA negotiations, strategic documents such as the CYPP, the Local Development Framework, local transport planning and decisions on commissioning and service design.

The assessment of data should look at groups of children and young people with particular needs for targeted provision. These groups may include children from ethnic minority communities, disabled children, children of refugee or asylum-seeking families, looked-after children, children in hospitals, and those at risk of offending or in the justice system. The play and leisure needs of girls and young women, for whom there may be particular concerns about safety or cultural
barriers, should also be considered. It is particularly important to understand where children and young people live and learn, as well as play – so that services and spaces can be made as accessible as possible by providing them close to where children are found and through ensuring safe routes to, from and between these areas.

**Children living in poverty**
Children in deprived communities can often lack safe spaces to socialise and play. This can have knock-on effects on a child’s happiness, health, cognitive development and communication which, in turn, can contribute to anti-social behaviour. Research has suggested that an approach to building services for children that takes their wider domain into account would do more ‘to tackle the broader, more ecological and structural aspects of social exclusion’.

Research in London has shown that free access to play areas and child-friendly public space can provide compensatory benefits for children and their families living with economic hardship. Good play provision promotes community well-being and security through the increased confidence and freedom that comes from children being enjoyably and safely occupied and through the creation of safer, more positive, more desirable neighbourhoods.

**Disabled children**
For disabled children, negative attitudes and inaccessible environments compound the general problems experienced by most children, creating enormous social and physical barriers to the enjoyment of their right to play independently. Local authorities are required to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (1995 and 2005) and the Disability Equality Duty, which came into force in December 2006.

There is convincing evidence that disabled children do not enjoy equality of access to play and leisure activities. A 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 for disabled people. Poor designs of play equipment and play areas, including access routes, can particularly compound the problems for children with mobility impairments, limiting or curtailing their access altogether. Other studies have shown that disabled children and young people can often feel threatened in open spaces, with bullying a particular problem for some groups of disabled children. For example, in a recent Mencap survey, 8 out of 10 young people with a learning disability had been bullied, and 6 out of 10 said they had been physically hurt by bullying. 8 out of 10 were scared to go out because of bullying.

**Children from black and minority ethnic communities**
Research has shown that children from some minority ethnic groups can find themselves excluded from play provision. For example, some children with an Asian heritage – and girls in particular – may sometimes not access mainstream play services because of cultural influences. Enjoyment of the wider public realm is also significantly compromised for many children from black and
minority ethnic communities. Research by Barnardo’s has recommended that the involvement of community-led organisations in the development of play strategies is vital if play opportunities are to be culturally appropriate and inclusive of diverse communities.

**Looked after and vulnerable children**

It is particularly important that looked after and vulnerable children have access to free play opportunities where they live, in nearby open spaces and in staffed provision. Where children are moved around between homes or families, and where they have suffered abuse or neglect or are going through stressful experiences, they are at risk of losing friendships and of not developing the experience to play either alone or with their peers. Also, it is very important that adults with carer or parental responsibility for vulnerable children play with them, or encourage and reinforce their play. This can help to build trust and self-confidence, establish relationships and develop positive adult role models.

**Families**

Play is not only important to children and young people – it is crucial for families as a whole. Families tell us that having places to go and things to do together is really important to their physical and emotional well-being, and going to the park together, in an environment where the whole family feels safe and welcome and can reach easily, is very important to them. Spending time in each others’ company helps families build bonds and relationships with each other. Families come in all shapes and sizes – children and young people, grandparents, lone parents, non-resident mothers and fathers, young carers and other carers – and facilities should be welcoming and accessible for all.

**Case study: Healthy Care**

In the West Midlands, Play England is working with the Department of Health and the NCB Healthy Care Programme to promote play for children in foster care. The aim of the project is to encourage looked after children and carers to engage in play as a means of developing an active lifestyle and to support foster carers in developing their understanding of the value of play in nurturing relationships and promoting healthy lifestyles.
Stage 3: Needs assessment

Stage 3: Develop play needs assessment through engagement with the community, including groups identified at Stage 2.

Statutory Guidance to Children’s Trusts requires that the strategic approach to play across the local area should be with the full involvement of children, local communities and the third sector in decision-making.xxviii

After identifying the particular neighbourhoods and groups of children in the community who may need targeted provision or support, the next stage of the joint planning and commissioning process is a comprehensive needs assessment. In order to understand fully the needs of local children, young people and families for play and informal recreation, it is important to involve them and consult with them. It is also important, particularly when developing new play spaces, to involve the views of the local community and those that work with children and communities.

The Fair Play consultation found that both children and adults wanted a greater say in decisions about the design and development of play space. They asked for greater involvement and more opportunity to have a say in what happens in local communities and to have more ownership. If communities are involved in local decision-making about which play sites receive investment, where they are situated and what they look like, local people will be more likely to understand children’s play needs and accept children in public space.

Consultation should commence at the start of the planning process, and involvement of children and communities should be ongoing from the development of plans through to implementation and evaluation, to ensure plans and provision reflect local community aspirations.

Needs assessment and consultation are funding requirements under the Play Strategy pathfinder and playbuilder programme, and should include children and young people, parents, carers and families, local communities and third sector groups.

The Outdoor Play Campaign Toolkitxxix is a DCSF on-line resource. Its purpose is to help local authorities to plan and deliver communications activities to raise awareness of play in local communities and support pathfinder and playbuilder capital build or refurbishment of existing facilities. It provides detailed information on consulting with people in local communities along with other communications advice.

xxviii For further guidance see: Engaging the Voluntary and Community Sectors in Children’s Trusts: www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/voluntaryandcommunity/voluntaryandcommunity.
xxix The Outdoor Play Campaign Toolkit can be found at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/play.
The CABE Spaceshaper toolkit\textsuperscript{xxx} is a good practice model of engagement, designed to bring local people together with professionals to plan how local spaces can be improved. Spaceshaper 9–14, funded by DCSF, has been developed specifically to offer inspiring, creative opportunities for young people to have a meaningful role in improving local spaces.

Design for Play gives advice on community engagement in all aspects of the design process for new and refurbished play areas, from preparation and planning to involvement in construction and maintenance. More information on the involvement of children and young people can also be found in two other publications: \textit{How to involve children and young people in designing and developing play spaces}\textsuperscript{43} and \textit{Our play – our choice.}\textsuperscript{44}

**Engaging children and their communities**

‘The children love having the new equipment as we rarely get the opportunity to ask them what they want, and then be able to provide it. We would also like to take this opportunity to say a big ‘THANK YOU’ from everybody at the Woodgate adventure playground.’

\textit{Playworker, Woodgate Adventure Playground, Leicester}

Local authorities have a duty to empower local communities by taking steps to involve local people (including children). This could be through providing information, consulting them, or any other way considered appropriate. Local authorities will want to review previous consultations from across all Children’s Trust partners (for example, CYPP consultation) to ensure that they are making best use of the available information and not repeating questions that have already been asked.

Approaches such as Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)\textsuperscript{xxxi} are effective ways to engage with a wide range of children, young people, parents, providers, professionals and community groups.

Children and young people should be the main focus for community empowerment work around the play strategy and whichever projects are commissioned from it. 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.

Successful involvement will mean making contact with a diverse cross-section of the local young population. Children’s Trust partnerships need to empower children and young people: increasing their influence over the design and delivery of services, building on the experience of Youth Opportunity Funds and Capital Funds (YOF and YCF) and local youth councils or forums, and offering children and young people opportunities to contribute to their communities.

\textsuperscript{xxx} See: www.cabe.org.uk/spaceshaper.

\textsuperscript{xxxi} For outcomes based accountability, see: www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/8940584.
Involving children and young people in this way can give 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 sustained over the long term.

**Involving particular groups of children**

Groups of children identified as being disadvantaged in terms of play opportunities at Stage 2 should receive particular attention at this stage. This may mean looking beyond existing consultation networks and frameworks and seeking out specific groups of children and young people whose views would not otherwise be represented.

Often children and young people who are most in need of play and recreation provision, and whose day-to-day free time is punctuated with boredom or behaviour unacceptable to others, are also those least likely to take part in formal consultation processes. There are likely to be a number of agencies in regular contact with these children, who should be able to help and support the process. These include both voluntary organisations and local community police.

Disabled children, especially those with communication difficulties, are also often excluded from consultation and participation. The disabled children’s charity KIDSxxxii offers advice and support on involving disabled children and their families in every phase of play strategy development, both on designing and building play spaces and on delivering inclusive or specialist provision, linking up with short breaks funding.

**Involving parents and carers**

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 and public space – particularly on the factors that increase or decrease confidence in their children using it – can be valuable data for the audit. 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. Parents of older children can be contacted through schools, registered play schemes and out-of-school clubs.

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xxxii KIDS, the disabled children’s charity: www.kids.org.uk.
Case study: Engaging communities in Knowsley

Knowsley became a play pathfinder in April 2008, and is placing a strong emphasis on putting communities, including children and young people, at the heart of planning and play spaces. When complete, the pathfinder programme will provide bigger, higher, natural, free, more challenging, more accessible, more social and more ‘grown up’ play spaces, designed with children and communities at the heart of the process.

Knowsley is one of five Metropolitan Authorities in Merseyside and comprises five townships with varying degrees of play deprivation and provision. The pathfinder programme has put the assessment of need and ongoing consultations with local communities at the forefront of their work.

They recruited six part-time consultation playworkers very early on, which allowed them to gain an excellent depth and breadth of engagement with the community. Consultation took place at a wide range of events, including Playday, festivals and flower shows, mobile play and play ranger sessions, primary schools and after-school clubs. The team were able to observe children’s use of space and play habits, as well as showing them examples of play provision that was very different to what they were used to, for example by visiting sites such as Tatton Park in Cheshire. A local play audit (measuring the quantity, quality and accessibility of play spaces) and local needs assessment were carried out alongside the ongoing community consultation to help identify potential sites for the pathfinder programme, and to provide a strategic rationale for targeting capital and revenue finance.

Knowsley found it useful to use a variety of consultation methods, including questionnaires and booklets; free play activities; graffiti walls; visits to unused spaces within their areas; and the visit to Tatton Park. They found that when consulting with local communities it was important to start with a broad explanation of children’s play and to outline the importance of natural play space for children, and use consultation with local children and young people to support the argument.

The authority is now considering options for sustainability in the future, including initiatives for volunteering, private sector partnership, social enterprise, developer contributions, Covenants on new residential property in New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas and support.
Involving playworkers and play associations
The experience and expertise of playworkers who work directly with children at play is a valuable resource. They know how to facilitate children's play and are aware of the barriers and opportunities afforded by different environments or interventions. They are also skilled at listening to children talk about their play and how this is viewed within the wider community. They are also likely to have relationships with other agencies and adults working with children.

Many areas have play associations, usually in the voluntary sector. These local (or, in some cases, regional) agencies offer a range of support services and advocacy for children's play. Such organisations, run by local volunteer trustees but employing professional staff, will often be the most experienced agencies on children's play as well as its longest established champions. Local play associations should be natural partners in developing a local play strategy. Play associations can provide strategic cohesion and support for smaller, local grassroots play providers across an area, and local authorities should consider how they can support them and, through them, neighbourhood-based grassroots provision.

Involving the voluntary and community sector
One of the key aims of the national Play Strategy is to drive community ownership of play by engaging local people in decisions about its provision, and supporting their involvement in capital projects. Another aim is to increase the availability of supervised play opportunities by exploring volunteering initiatives and building the capacity of the voluntary sector to support local play spaces.

Many small voluntary and community groups are involved in the direct delivery of play services for children. This includes play schemes, play ranger projects, after school projects, and adventure playgrounds, where volunteers may be playworkers, members of management committees or simply helping keep the play space in good condition through supervision and repair. These services should be part of the Children's Trust commissioning arrangements and volunteer staff should be integrated as far as practicable in workforce development and other integrated processes, particularly safeguarding.

Involving residents’ and community associations
The siting of play and youth facilities can be 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. Equally, residents and community associations are often strong 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. For example, 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. 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.

**Community Play programme**

Supported by DCSF, Play England’s Community Play programme provides a range of activities and resources to support and encourage community engagement in the development and delivery of local play provision.

Play England has produced the *Playful Communities* website dedicated to supporting the involvement of the third sector in play, as part of the Community Play programme. The website provides easily accessible advice and links to a wide range of resources.

The website includes a *Playful Communities toolkit* for local people, voluntary and community groups. This updated version of the former Neighbourhood Play Toolkit contains information and resources to enable local people and community groups to organise, create and sustain local play provision. This includes advice on the strategic context as well as practical advice on setting up a local group, how to involve the whole community, insurance, health and safety, funding, design and maintenance.

The Community Play programme is also delivering seminars and briefings for voluntary and community organisations, and supports local authorities to involve, facilitate and promote local activity and engagement with the third sector. Play England can offer enhanced advice to local authorities that need particular support in engaging communities in the delivery of local play provision.

For more information, visit: www.playfulcommunities.org.uk.
Stage 4: Identifying resources and priorities

Stage 4: Audit play provision. Identify gaps and resources and agree priorities for the play strategy.

Definitions
Before mapping provision and space for play, a typology will need to be adopted that is underpinned by agreed definitions.

The national Play Strategy defines play as children and young people following their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons, having fun while respecting themselves and others. It aims that in every residential area there are a variety of supervised and unsupervised places for play, free of charge.

The Big Lottery Fund’s Children’s Play programme targeted investment on new provision for play that was 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. This rule of thumb for public play provision, known as the ‘three-frees’ rule, is one that many local authorities have adopted.

The primary focus of the following definition and typology of play space is on outdoor, free play provision (supervised and unsupervised) and on public space. However, it is important to ensure that play provision, strategies and plans consider all key settings for children and their families. Other settings and departments (e.g. youth provision, early years settings, hospitals, indoor play schemes etc) can have separate requirements, guidance and funding streams, but it is essential that children have appropriate opportunities to play wherever they live, learn and gather. It is also important to consider voluntary and community provision as part of the audit process, to ensure a rounded picture of local opportunities for play. Private sector provision should also be considered as part of the broad picture of availability of play opportunities, but should be considered within the context of whether it adequately meets the ‘three-frees’ rule and an options analysis of local availability of other provision, as the aim of the Play Strategy and the purpose of this guidance is to provide readily accessible public play space for all.

The play space audit
The purpose of the play audit is to gather information about local play provision and play space: quantity, location, quality and extent of usage. This should include a survey of access routes and transport links.
Relevant data may already be available or need to be simply reviewed from previous planning processes such as, for example, the development of local play strategies to underpin Big Lottery Fund allocations or from Open Space strategy audits. Scoping the task with the right partners (see Part 1, Chapter 2) and considering the extent to which the audit could be accomplished by drawing on existing sources can facilitate or enhance the process and prevent duplication.

It is important to establish the scope of the audit. Children and young people will play wherever they have the chance. This includes most public space: streets, 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, and so on. Play is not restricted to designated areas for play provision and so the principle should be to make as much of the environment suited to play as possible, with a weighting towards child and family centred environments and services where children are most likely to live, play and gather together (including around schools, children’s centres, residential housing etc). The adoption of this principle provides an added incentive to those involved in play to influence the planning and urban design process.

Therefore, a comprehensive 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 can have an important informal play function.

**Note:** Many local authorities have found it helpful to deploy Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map provision and prioritise improvements. Play England’s guidance *Tools for evaluating local play provision: A technical guide to Play England Local Play Indicators* discusses the use of GIS for mapping play spaces. GIS mapping should be used in conjunction with other considerations of access, such as ‘real’ walking distance as opposed to ‘straight line’ walking distance or where routes are restricted to the public, which may not be readily apparent.

### Where do children play?

The London Borough of Camden looked beyond its dedicated play provision to begin its audit of play space:

‘…during the school summer holidays, Camden Play Service, with a range of partners, undertook an audit of all public space within Camden to see where children play. It involved small teams, in every ward, visiting all public spaces (parks, open spaces, streets, housing estates etc) on the same afternoon to monitor what was being used by children and young people and how it was being used. The “Where do children play?” audit was a useful first step in building a picture of children’s use of public space for play – and has been useful as a tool for assessing other audit findings’.

Different types of play space
It is recommended that the audit consider types of play space by two different sets of criteria.

1. Scale and distance from children’s homes
For the purposes of auditing play space and for collecting data for the local play indicators, the following categories are recommended for the broad types of play space (which should be taken to include space for the informal recreation of older children and young people) according to scale.

‘Door-step’ spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation
*A small space within sight of home where children, especially young children, can play within view of known adults*

For example, this could be a grassed area, open space, residential street in a home zone, or a small designated play area, which is large enough to enable young children to play.

The space could incorporate some interesting and attractive landscape features and/or a small number of items of play equipment. It should create an environment which will stimulate and enable young children’s play, allowing for a variety of play experiences, bearing in mind that older children and young people may also use the space from time to time.

A doorstep space would be sufficiently close to home for the children who use it to feel safe and be able to interact with individuals and groups of other children, and it should cater for the needs of a range of children of different abilities. Seating could also be made available for carers to be able to sit, watch and meet other people.

‘Local’ spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation
*A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults, and for adults with young children to walk to with ease*

For example, this could be a grassed area, small park, local open space, informal space designed for play or recreation, or school playground open out of school hours, which is attractive to children as they begin to move around their neighbourhoods without being accompanied by adults.

These spaces and facilities can provide varied and interesting physical environments including, for example, natural features, sand and water, and landscape features with varying levels and contours, which test children’s capabilities. There might also be features designed for specific activities such as ball games or wheeled sports or meeting places and/or several items of play equipment offering a variety of play experiences. Play facilities can include local staffed play provision such as play centres, play schemes, play ranger projects and adventure playgrounds.
These spaces and facilities should also be capable of catering for the needs of children with a range of abilities. The children who use these spaces and facilities should feel safe and be able to interact with individuals and groups of other children of different ages.

‘Neighbourhood’ spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation

A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences

For example, this might be a park, playing field, recreation ground or natural open space such as woodland, moorland or a beach, accessible and attractive to older children and young people.

The space or facility provides for a variety of age appropriate play and informal recreational experiences. It might provide a varied and interesting physical environment, incorporating some interesting and attractive landscape features with varying levels and contours. There are likely to be more challenging items of equipment and features that meet the needs of older children and young people. Larger facilities specifically designed for informal recreation could be present, such as a ball court, multi-use games area or skateboard area, which can provide the opportunity for a variety of experiences for young people with differing skills levels.

These spaces and facilities should also be capable of catering for the needs of children and young people with a range of impairments. There is likely to be sufficient space to play large group ball games and seating and shelter to enable young people to socialise with their friends. These spaces should be reassuring to children and young people that they are safe, but not over-supervised as young people can be inhibited about play and recreation if they feel they are being ‘watched’ or ‘controlled’ too rigorously.

Distance thresholds for the three types of play space
Within any given catchment area, the following distance thresholds could ideally be applied for different types of play space (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of play space</th>
<th>Distance criteria</th>
<th>Walking distance (m)</th>
<th>Straight line distance (m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doorstep play spaces</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local play spaces</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood play spaces</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Designation

Places where children play may or may not be specifically designed for play or informal recreation (designated or non-designated) and may or may not be supervised by staff trained in playwork or other skills. The play place grid (Table 3) gives examples of the types of facility and space which can offer children and young people the best opportunities for play and informal recreation and it is recommended this should form the basis of provision for children's free play, in their own neighbourhoods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Type play place grid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supervised and semi-supervised</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated places for play and informal recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Non-designated places for play and informal recreation | Parks with rangers and gardeners | Residential streets |
| | Streets with wardens | Neighbourhood open spaces |

Access audit

As well as including a detailed analysis of the play space itself, the audit should cover access to the site and routes to play. For example, this may cover car parks, bus routes and walking and cycle paths.

An access audit should also be undertaken for dedicated play provision in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act (1995 and 2005), including both access for disabled children and disabled parents or carers. It may be helpful to bring in people who are qualified to undertake such audits.
Summary of suggested typology for play space audit

Door-step spaces and facilities
- small designated play areas (furnished primarily for young children)
- neighbourhood amenity green spaces (unequipped)
- home zone, play street or equivalent

Local spaces and facilities
**Supervised or semi-supervised**
- adventure playgrounds
- open access play centres
- open access play schemes
- play ranger and out-reach play projects
- school playgrounds (open out of school hours)

**Informal supervision or unsupervised**
- larger designated play areas (furnished primarily for children aged 8-13 years)
- satellite parks
- junior bike and skateboard facilities, kick-about areas
- ball courts, multi-use games areas
- hangout/youth shelters

Neighbourhood spaces and facilities for play
- neighbourhood play areas (furnished for children of different ages)
- teenage wheeled sports or other sports area
- local and community parks
- playing fields and recreation grounds freely available for children to use
- beaches, woodlands and natural areas

More information on auditing, mapping and benchmark standards can be found in the Play England documents *Tools for Evaluating local play provision* and *Better Places to Play through Planning*.

**Note 1:** 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.
Note 2: 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 high quality equipment is clear. However, the majority of users of such facilities are on an occasional family visit, and they may not meet the everyday play needs of more than small numbers of local children.45

The audit process
Once the typology is agreed and adopted, the audit should follow a two-stage process.

Stage 1: Desk-based research
The first step is to agree upon and finalise the essential information that is required across all sites, based upon consideration of the factors outlined above. This will be underpinning, key information and should be used to develop a flexible model of provision according to local circumstances and needs. From this key information, appropriate questionnaires or pro forma surveys can be produced that can be completed in relation to each site.

The next step is to build up a database of play spaces to reflect the information being gathered. 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 play space typology or preferred categorisation.

Initially, sites on the database would be best built up from existing databases and information made available by partners. 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.

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 (see below). Some rural local authorities will also have many town and parish councils who are the primary play providers. The significance of this task and its time implications should not be under-estimated.

More detail about data to collect and possible sources can be found in Play England’s guidance Tools for evaluating local play provision: A technical guide to Play England’s Local Play Indicators.

Stage 2: Site visits
Visits should be seen as integral to the play space audit. The main purposes of site visits are to:

- fill gaps in site-specific information not already secured through stage 1 of the audit;
- classify sites in accordance with the agreed audit typology;
- undertake qualitative assessments;
Stage 4: Identifying resources and priorities

- undertake an audit of access, including for disabled children and access road safety;
- review information received from different sources through stage 1 of the audit to ensure it is consistent across the council area.

Local authorities may wish to ensure that the site visits to designated play spaces required for the audit coincide with the annual or quarterly visits undertaken for health and safety purposes.

Consideration should also be given to taking expert professional advice, both on site visits and throughout the planning process, to get a rounded overall view of provision. For example, landscape architects and the local police Architectural Liaison Officer can advise on site specific potential and safety respectively, and planning for play would generally benefit from the expert knowledge of playworkers and the local delivery knowledge of parks staff throughout the development process.

**Case Study: Nottingham City Council**

To ensure that the right sites were selected to receive play pathfinder funding, the local authority developed a matrix that scored each play area against a range of criteria, including Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance, local population levels, play value, existing community involvement, risk levels, local member support and date of installation. The matrix was used to produce a shortlist of sites. This shortlist was taken to a variety of consultation events before asking stakeholders to approve final funding decisions. The matrix ensured that the most suitable sites were shortlisted.

**Identifying financial resources**

The play partnership should now consider the question of resources. This would ideally embrace all sources of revenue funding as well as current capital assets, including sites and buildings identified in the play audit.

The assessment of resources should consider non-play and potentially new funding streams. Different local authority departments and delivery programmes can have separate funding streams yet shared goals and targets. Through making effective links between different programmes and departments there are benefits which can provide, for example, economies of scale, enhanced delivery through pooling of resources or more cost effective procurement. Potential sources of external or match-funding should also be explored. For example, consideration should be given to shared delivery from parks, leisure and sports budgets, Aiming High and myplace youth programmes, schools and extended schools, regeneration and growth point initiatives, children’s centres, health provision etc. All those identified in Part 1, Chapter 2 as likely members of a play partnership are also potential funders.
A typical resource analysis might include looking at:

- overall spending on play provision (including third sector capacity);
- allocation of spending between different types of provision;
- how planning obligations and conditions can be used to improve play provision;
- what additional resources are available to bid into (such as lottery funding or the application of other funding streams to emerging play priorities);
- spending per child or resident;
- where local housing associations, hospitals or others may wish to allocate funding to the surrounding built environment;
- where transport or business development departments are allocating resources to the built environment;
- where regional bodies are allocating regeneration resources and undertaking master-planning;
- where local residents’ associations are raising funds to develop local provision.

**Case Study: Halton Borough Council**

To embed inclusion as a key element of the playbuilder programme to ensure that play spaces will be accessible and welcoming to all children and young people, the *Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC)* project lead is a member of the playbuilder project group. The play lead is also a member of the AHDC steering group. AHDC capital and revenue resources have been allocated to support playbuilder sites and fund specific items of equipment. Upgraded facilities, such as hoists, are provided at three sites to improve access. Additional revenue support has been provided to Halton Play Council to deliver after school and weekend activities for young people with additional needs.

**Identifying workforce and provider resources**

Commissioners will want to undertake a similar audit of local markets and the available provider workforce to identify the resources available to meet play outcomes for children and young people. This should not simply look at standard or traditional play provision, but approach play in a holistic way: for example, consider staff in adventure playgrounds, out-of-schools clubs, children’s centres and volunteers, as well as non-traditional play resources such as playable furniture for public spaces.

Markets and workforce information will contribute to the local play strategy and commissioning decisions. It will also inform the tasks undertaken in Stages 7 and 8 of the process.

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xxiv SkillsActive carry out a biennial survey of the playwork workforce. Although not broken down to a local level, it provides useful statistics and information for overall workforce development planning. See: www.skillsactive.com.
Stage 5: Plan and design the pattern of services and spaces for play

Stage 5: Plan the pattern of services and spaces for play to be commissioned, targeted at areas of greatest need as identified at Stages 3 and 4

Matching needs to resources
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. It will have 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. These two sides of the process now 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 different age groups of children and young people;
• needs of social/community groups;
• needs by geographical area;
• overall distribution and characteristics of provision;
• quality of provision;
• quantity of provision;
• accessibility of provision;
• gaps and overlaps in provision;
• deficiencies and opportunities.

The needs/resources analysis can be undertaken and reported through words, pictures, tables, charts and maps.

Deciding where to invest
Clearly, investment should be where the need of a particular community is greatest. However, there are some general principles about the location of play spaces and other improvements to the play offer that should be considered as part of this process.
Research has shown that children prefer play spaces to be widely visible and easy to access: at the heart of the communities and the neighbourhood environments they know best. Children value the freedom and independence that outdoor play can give them. They also like to be where they can see and be seen by (or at least be in reach of) trusted adults, although this naturally decreases with age. Paradoxically, children also like the option of accessing or creating special and secret places, dens and hideaways. Therefore, landscapes with natural growth interspersed with clearings and open space that have good access points and sight lines are ideal locations.

**Standards**

*World Class Places*, the Government’s strategy for improving quality of place, committed to ensuring all new government building and open space developments will meet high minimum standards and to encouraging higher standards in private-led developments. The *Green Flag Award*xxxv is the national standard for parks and green spaces. The management and maintenance of play spaces should aspire to the Green Flag Award standard, which can help raise the profile of play in your local area.

*Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17): planning for open space, sport and recreation* strongly advocates the production of local standards for such provision. Setting robust local standards based on assessments of need and audits of existing facilities will form the basis for redressing quantitative and qualitative deficiencies. Local standards for play provision should therefore be an essential product of the play strategy process. It is also recommended that standards for green space and play provision are included in local authority built environment and open space development plans. PPG17 stresses these standards should be founded on three core components:

1. a quantitative element (how much new provision may be needed);

2. a qualitative component (against which to measure the need for enhancement of existing facilities);

3. an accessibility element (including distance thresholds).

Drawing up play provision standards is a challenging task, and one that will need careful consideration. There is general 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.

More detailed information on developing local standards is available in *Better Places to Play through Planning* (Play England).

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xxxv See: www.greenflagaward.org.uk.
Stage 5: Plan and design the pattern of services and spaces for play

As well as considering the options for dedicated services and spaces, the local play strategy will want to include, where appropriate, changes to universal services such as children’s centres, schools, youth provision and leisure services to ensure that they are designed in the best possible way to meet the play needs of local children, young people and families. It may also include other means of improving play outcomes such as motivating families to access their local services, ensuring communities are aware of what’s on offer, and addressing residents’ attitudes to young people playing in urban spaces.

Outlined below are some of the options and issues for provision that should be considered.

**Re-siting or replacing play areas**
When playgrounds need to be refurbished or improved, re-siting them so that they are nearer to housing, or changing the access points so that travel distances are decreased, may widen catchments and improve usage. Where the location of a play facility means that it is poorly used and this is unlikely to change, relocating it to a better, more appropriate location should be fully considered.

**Ensuring success through good design**
To effectively embed play provision in local communities a collaborative approach is needed. Planners, local community groups and transport professionals all need to be involved to ensure the wider changes to play in our public spaces will benefit the whole community. Depending on the local context, planners, park managers and transport professionals, as well as playworkers, may well need to be involved in decisions about future designs of play provision.
In response to the *Fair Play* consultation, children and parents said that they wanted more stimulating and exciting places to play. Investment should be used to produce innovative and creative public play spaces that follow design principles that engender optimum play value for children and, wherever possible, are designed as an integrated part of the wider landscape. *Design for Play* shows how to design good play spaces, which can be affordably maintained and give children and young people the opportunity and freedom to play creatively, allowing them to experience risk, challenge and excitement. It sets out a new approach, tackles some current myths, and aims to challenge providers to think more laterally and creatively about children and young people in the public domain. *Design for Play* sets out 10 design principles, asserting that successful play spaces:

1. are ‘bespoke’;
2. are well located;
3. make use of natural elements;
4. provide a wide range of play experiences;
5. are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children;
6. meet community needs;
7. allow children of different ages to play together;
8. build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge;
9. are sustainable and appropriately maintained;
10. allow for change and evolution.

In addition to *Design for Play*, Play England has produced a *Playable Space Quality Assessment Tool* to enable a full consideration of the full range of factors that contribute to the success of any site. The tool covers the three broad themes that should be assessed:

a. location and accessibility;

b. play value;

c. care and maintenance.

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Inclusion
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 (1995 and 2005) and the Disability Equality Duty (DED).

The DED came into force in December 2006, and is made up of two components.

The general duty requires every public authority when carrying out their functions to give due regard and the need to:

• promote equality of opportunity for disabled people;
• eliminate unlawful discrimination;
• eliminate disability-related harassment;
• promote positive attitudes towards disabled people;
• encourage participation by disabled people in public life;
• take steps to meet disabled peoples needs, even if this requires more favourable treatment.

The specific duties require listed public authorities to publish disability equality schemes that set out how they will carry out their general duty, monitor, and report on progress and how they have involved disabled people in developing their scheme.

Successful play spaces should be fully accessible and inclusive to both disabled children and their non-disabled peers, to girls as well as boys, and to children from the fullest range of socio-economic groups and from all cultural, faith and ethnic communities. Procurement and design briefs should therefore fully embed the principles of inclusive design of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (originally adopted and advocated by the former Disability Rights Commission). The design of inclusive projects or facilities needs to always consider and be guided by:

• Ease of use;
• Freedom of choice and access to mainstream activities;
• Diversity and difference;
• Legibility and predictability;
• Quality;
• Safety.
The play design principles are fully expanded upon in *Design for Play*, while the inclusive design principles, as they apply to play settings, are the basis for the guidance documents *Inclusion by Design* and *Inclusive Design for Play*.

Play provision for disabled children and young people should also consider wider aspects of support. The Aiming High for Disabled Children programme is designed to offer a range of short break opportunities for disabled children and young people, including time in staffed play provision with their peers. There are also dedicated tools for looking specifically at the needs of disabled children, young people and their families published by KIDS (see: www.kids.org.uk).

**Maintenance**

Planning for ongoing maintenance is central to the design cycle. It is a key issue and should be integral to the action plan.

Successful play spaces are sensitively and carefully maintained and resources should be allocated for a high standard of maintenance. Children will be more likely to respect the play space if the council or owner is seen to be investing in caring for it. Play spaces that fall out of use, even temporarily, because equipment is not working or is poorly maintained, quickly become a source of frustration to users and can become more vulnerable to further damage through, for example, advanced decay or vandalism. The hallmark of a successful and well-used play space is wear and tear, and a degree of this is perfectly acceptable. However, wear and tear must not be allowed to descend into neglect, which can quickly become a downward spiral. A good standard of maintenance is essential to the long-term sustainability of play areas.

Maintenance options and costs should be analysed at the outset to ensure that adequate resources will be available – this includes everything from litter collection to checking for hazards and replacing equipment and features. Resources will often be necessary to allow for adjustments once designs are implemented. It is not possible to foresee all the issues and possibilities on the drawing board, and the experience of construction and use may highlight additional maintenance requirements and risk-benefit issues. Judgements may also change and develop over the life of the play space and there should be opportunities and resources built into maintenance programmes to experiment with and reconfigure the space.

Good design and high quality equipment and features should have the advantage of lower maintenance costs, although they may mean a greater initial outlay. If some parts of equipment wear out more quickly than others, consider ordering key spare parts along with new equipment, which will help avoid delays in repairs. Allowing for asset depreciation is also important. Make sure that, after a suitable period has elapsed (usually 10-12 years), funds are available for renewal of key features.
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 – a complementary role to the supervision and oversight discussed below. People from the local community or friends’ groups can also form part of the inspection team. More details of how this can be achieved will be on the Playful Communities website (see Stage 3).

**Natural environments and features**

Children benefit in particular from being able to play in natural environments. They tend to be more active, and research shows contact with natural environments can support positive mental health. Children’s playgrounds often look remarkably similar across the UK, and the design process can be dominated by assumptions and stereotypes. A playground consisting only of basic equipment, fencing and rubber safety surfacing caters for a narrow range of play experiences. A widely held belief has developed that this is what play areas are supposed to look like. Although playgrounds like these are often used and enjoyed by children across the UK, they too often fail to offer the kind of environment that allows children the fullest play experience and its attendant benefits. In many areas children can have little access to alternative places for outdoor play or to the natural environment.

A good play space will allow access to natural objects and features in a managed, well-maintained setting, which will allow for a different range of play opportunities from those offered by conventional equipment. For example, boulders and logs make especially good informal balance features. As there are no specific industry standards for natural play features it will be necessary to undertake proportionate risk-benefit assessments on any features designed into the play area.

Designing and maintaining more interesting play spaces with natural elements can seem unusual and possibly challenging. However, ease of maintenance should not take priority over play value in play space design and should never be the primary driver. Play spaces which are designed to have as much emphasis on the setting as on the equipment will be slightly more complex to maintain than the traditional model of playground. The inclusion of more hard and soft landscape elements will mean that there will be a need for different maintenance operations to be carried out, whereas previously maintenance might have been focused largely on routine equipment inspections. The maintenance and management of play spaces should, however, be seen in the context of the significant additional play value that these types of play spaces offer. Whilst the maintenance and management implications should always be considered and adequately resourced at the design stage, these should not detract from the provision of maximum play value.

Play England has produced *Nature play: Maintenance guide*, which is specific guidance on the maintenance of natural play spaces. *Design for Play* also provides advice on the design and maintenance of play settings incorporating natural features.
Managing risk in play provision

‘The most noticeable lesson has been the overwhelming demand put on this (and other refurbished sites) since the reopening of the improved playground facility. Informal head counts show consistently high usage with 80+ people present… on sunny days even when the nearby paddling pool isn’t operating. Formerly we estimated perhaps less than half this number. More innovative items such as a nest swing and cargo net have introduced a new social and controlled risk element into the types of play available, adding to the popularity of the site overall.’

Eastbourne District Council

Statistically, children’s playgrounds are among the safest places to be (although no environment is risk-free). The Play Strategy consultation found that parents and children place a high priority on safe places to play but also often complain that play equipment is not exciting or challenging enough. It is essential to ensure that play managers and providers are properly aware of appropriate risk management and not risk averse to the point where play provision is sterile and non-stimulating as a result. Risk management should be proportionate and realistic, taking into account both the benefits as well as the risks for children and young people. A range of guidance and training is available to help play professionals and others manage risk more effectively.

Research shows that encountering and managing risk at play increases children’s resilience, adaptability and self-confidence. Children want and need exciting and adventurous play experiences – to challenge and stretch themselves under their own initiative is one of the main reasons children play. The Government’s Staying Safe Action Plan recognises these benefits and that child safety does not mean we should ‘wrap children and young people up in cotton wool’.

Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide is a non-statutory guidance document, which has been endorsed by both the Health and Safety Executive and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. It shows how play providers can adopt a proportionate risk-benefit approach to assessing challenging play experiences for children and young people, while ensuring they are not exposed to unacceptable risks. This document follows on from a position statement produced in 2002 by the Play Safety Forum.

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 provider’s concerns, and provide a robust defence against liability claims.

Managing risk is a key factor in ensuring inclusion of disabled children, who 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: Summary 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.


**Staffed play provision**

Where there is under-provision of open play space and limited opportunities for creating it, staffed provision should be considered, such as adventure playgrounds, play schemes or mobile projects. Compared to non-staffed play areas, these can offer the social safety of on-site responsible adults, an enhanced element of challenging play and a greater sense of community.

Staffed play provision should aim to deliver the outcomes described in *Best Play*,49 the widely recognised benchmark document:

a. The provision extends the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.

b. The provision recognises the child’s need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need.

c. The provision manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.

d. The provision maximises the range of play opportunities.

e. The provision fosters independence and healthy self-esteem.

f. The provision fosters the child’s respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.

g. The provision fosters the child’s well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.

While there may be some overlap with childcare settings, supervised play provision should generally offer enriched play environments (also described in *Best Play*) where children are free to come and go, there is generally no charge to attend, and they are free to play as they choose. Staffed adventure playgrounds are generally regarded as the ideal form of supervised play provision.
Why adventure playgrounds?

Traditional, staffed adventure playgrounds meet the needs of a wide age range, crossing the primary/secondary school divide, and can provide a gateway to more structured, positive activities like sport and music, adding value to the youth offer.

More importantly to the local play strategy, many play specialists regard them as the ideal form of play provision. Although the term is sometimes co-opted to describe unstaffed, fixed equipment playgrounds that ape their typical structures and materials (for example, rope swings and runways, tyres and wood), traditional adventure playgrounds are staffed by skilled playworkers who enable and facilitate the ownership, development and design of the space – physically, socially and culturally – by the children playing there. It is this crucial relationship between playworkers and children – forming unique communities of play – more than any physical attribute, that most defines these settings.

Adventure playgrounds aim to serve the full range of children’s play behaviours and provide access to important childhood activities and experiences not readily available or allowed elsewhere: digging holes, making fires and cooking outdoors, using tools and materials to build (and demolish) camps and dens, playing with water and mud. Continuous modification and evolution of the play environment – creating and recreating the physical world to reflect imagined ones, and defining spaces as uniquely children’s own – are deeply instinctive play behaviours. Honouring and supporting this is fundamental to the adventure playground ethos.

A briefing paper on developing adventure playgrounds has been produced by Play England for the play pathfinder authorities. See www.playengland.org.uk/resources.

Improving supervision of play spaces and policing

‘The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is pleased to support the Government’s Play Strategy. An environment that is welcoming and accepting of children and young people playing sociably and respectfully outside and meeting their friends is the sign of a healthy community. Importantly, the Play Strategy recognises there is an appropriate balance to be struck between meeting the developmental needs of children and young people through free play without being over-supervised and the need to ensure they are safe and protected from crime and anti-social behaviour.’

*The Play Strategy, Annex B (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008)*
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. An evaluation of the Children’s Fund by Birmingham University found that children’s play projects and after-school clubs may have a significant role in preventing social exclusion by diverting children from anti-social behaviour and the consequent risks of offending.

The Fair Play consultation responses showed strong support from parents and children for the increased supervision of play spaces. There was also strong endorsement of the principle that the supervisory role is to create a secure atmosphere to enable children to play freely, according to age, ability, culture and circumstances. It is important that supervision is not regulatory in a way that inhibits or restricts children from playing.

There are a variety of possible types of supervision, which should be appropriate to the play space context and function. This could range from a qualified playworker or a play ranger, to voluntary or ‘friends of the park’ groups, community police patrols in places where anti-social behaviour is an issue, maintenance staff or park keepers, or simply providing seating for adults in a space designed for all ages.

It is important that those who supervise public space have good contacts with the local police and clear guidance on what to do in case of criminal or anti-social activity. It is not appropriate for untrained people to tackle more serious issues and behaviours. Local policing teams, including community support officers, have an important role in ensuring children and young people playing in their local area feel safe and that their families are confident that they will be safe. Local police can support play by:

- using their expert, local knowledge to advise and support play providers on the planning, design, development and ongoing supervision of play spaces;
- involving local play associations and friends of the park groups in local police panels and attending local play forums;
- providing support to play providers on tackling anti-social behaviour, ensuring play providers have a point of contact and guidance on what to do when confronted by serious criminal behaviour;
- providing a voice of authority to resolve community issues about children and young people playing or hanging out, ensuring children’s views are listened to and treated with respect as well as the views of adult residents;
- visiting play spaces and parks to put a friendly face to policing and to help reassure users that the park is a place which is both safe and fun.
**Case Study: play and policing in Eastbourne**

To identify areas which would benefit from the provision of play facilities, neighbourhood police in Eastbourne have consulted residents through neighbourhood panels and street meetings. Local residents identified one area affected by what they considered anti-social behaviour resulting from young people socialising in the local area. Approximately 35 people attended a street meeting, including those young people perceived to be causing problems and other children who lived in the surrounding neighbourhoods. The overwhelming opinion was that new and improved play provision would help to resolve the anti-social behaviour issues. The children, young people and local residents agreed to be part of a consultation process about developing the play space. The police have planned an Environmental Visual Audit in the area and invited other agencies to discuss the development of the play space.

**Improving supervision and oversight of public space**

Children of all ages want to play where they are likely to meet their friends. Children's everyday play opportunities, beyond the school day, can depend to a great extent upon the suitability of their local built environment – the public spaces that make up their immediate environment outside the home. Children have traditionally played more within the informal public spaces of the streets and estates where they live than in dedicated play areas. Even if they do not play on streets and pavements themselves, they depend on these being safe routes to play space. 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 outside.

Although it is currently often perceived as a negative phenomenon, children's tendency to congregate together in and around the streets where they live is a social instinct for community that is deeply embedded in children's culture: an elemental play behaviour that should be supported and facilitated by the adult community. The perceived lack of community oversight and shared responsibility for today's children 'playing out', compared to previous generations, is a major reason for the decline in children's outdoor play. The oversight of children at play in their neighbourhoods does not need to be solely dependent on families, carers or even neighbours, although each of these has an important role. Play rangers, neighbourhood wardens and community support officers are just some of the public service roles that can facilitate and informally supervise children's play in public space.

Community volunteering is another way to promote a greater degree of community responsibility that can be as effective for supervising street play as for developing local ownership of dedicated play areas or staffed playgrounds.

The Play Shaper programme (www.playshaper.org.uk) is designed to develop understanding and engagement with this oversight role within all public sector jobs that have an influence or impact on the planning, design, management and supervision of public space.
Mediation strategies
As important as situating play space where it is likely to be most used and enjoyed by children, is locating an area that will be accepted for play by the wider community. The DCSF Outdoor Play Campaign Toolkit gives detailed information on consulting with people in local communities.

The following advice is from Design for Play:

‘It is not unusual for communities to be hostile to the idea of new play spaces. In this situation, taking time to explore concerns is essential. Differing local views can derail a project, unless the commissioner and designer are prepared to make a serious attempt to confront and negotiate over them, and ultimately they may have to take a strong line to preserve the integrity of the design concept. A frank and open process of engagement with the community may not avoid disagreements, but should have the effect of showing the process to have been fair. Identifying someone within the group to take a leadership role and act as a project advocate will also be very helpful.’

Mediation strategies and consultation can be used to reduce fears of anti-social behaviour and ‘not-in-my-back-yard’ opposition by enabling a constructive dialogue that allows different generations and members of the community to air their views and by raising awareness of the views of others. Reasons for opposition can sometimes be relatively straightforward, with small adjustments potentially making a big difference by recognising and addressing a specific issue. Mediation processes can help to ensure that children who are just ‘being children’ rather than ‘a nuisance’ are enabled to play within their own neighbourhood, and can also help resolve genuine conflicts.

The community conflict resolution role of the neighbourhood police team may come into play where there is difficulty in overcoming differences about what does and what does not constitute a nuisance or an acceptable place for children and young people to gather. Where a consensus cannot be reached, or if indeed the consensus view is that a location is unsuitable, then the decision should be reviewed.

Traffic calming, the built environment and safe routes to play
Measures to decrease the risk – and perceived risk – from traffic will be vital, not only to allowing children greater access to play areas but also to the broader aim of creating child-friendly public space. Increasing children’s independent mobility – the distances they are allowed to travel unaccompanied – can increase their access to play space without actually expanding provision. Such measures can have added environmental and health benefits by reducing car use and increasing children’s physical activity. Much of children’s play occurs in transit and regular journeys can also provide opportunities for play if the routes are designed or modified with children’s play needs in mind. Priorities for action include taking steps to address road safety and access to green space.

Although issues and initiatives related to traffic calming and safe routes may be expected to appear in local transport plans and strategies, they also often appear in local area design guidance. Guidance and standards, arising from
PPG17 assessments, can include play spaces that have safe access routes to them that encourage independent travel, and are located in places free from noise and pollution from road traffic. Local policy affecting children should extend to embrace the environment as a key factor in their well-being.

Department for Transport (DfT) Local Transport Plan guidance, published in July 2009, is statutory guidance on local authority transport planning. The guidance recommends that local authorities strategically align Local Transport Plans and Children and Young People’s Plans. The associated Policies and Good Practice Handbook provides links to further guidance and resources, and includes a section on child-friendly travel and transport planning and policy (www.dft.gov.uk/ltp).

Local Transport Plans should consider the social as well as the environmental impact of traffic and transport developments, taking full account of the needs of children and young people to play, walk and cycle around their local neighbourhoods. The Children’s Trust should work locally with local planning and highways authorities, with particular consideration given to the DfT-led guidance document Manual for Streets and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) Public Health Guidance 8.

Additional information to assist planners in considering the needs of children and young people can be found in DfT guidance Making residential travel plans work: guidelines for new development. This guidance seeks to bridge the gap between designing and locating developments (such as planning and design guidance) and managing the resulting travel patterns (for example, through Local Transport Plans).

**Case Study: Routes to and from play**

‘The refurbishment has increased access routes to and from the playground and increased the play opportunities available for a wider age range of children. The space now offers a larger area to play and allows children the opportunity to engage in a mix of play types in a less confined environment.’

_Councillor, Hastings Borough Council_

**Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council** planners and traffic management were concerned with traffic in and around the adventure playground. As part of the initial membership sign up to the adventure playground, local children and young people are encouraged to walk or cycle to the playground. A project based at the adventure playground, City Can Cycle, provides free bikes for local children to use. Bike rails are to be installed at the entrance to the adventure playground site. Disabled children can be escorted to and from the site. A robust traffic calming and management system is in place.

In **Bristol** new lines of communication across play, transport planning and park services are leading to a joined up approach between play area, green space and cycle route development. Cycle parking is now planned for most playgrounds across the city and a city-wide accessibility map is being generated that combines school, green space and playground locations with paths, crossing points and bus stops.
Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity, has developed guidance for local authorities on how to ensure children and young people can enjoy independent and active access to play provision through its Active Play and Travel programme. Their guidance document *Routes to Play* offers practical recommendations on improving walking and cycling access to play spaces, along with a series of case studies. It can be downloaded from the Sustrans website: www.sustrans.org.uk/play.

Good practice guidance is also available on developing Home Zones from www.homezones.org.uk.xxxvii More affordable alternatives to the Home Zone approach are now being piloted by a number of local authorities in the UK, including those involved in Sustrans’ *DIY Streets* pilot programme.xxxviii

Local authorities in rural areas may encounter different issues from those of metropolitan and borough authorities. The relative low-density population, dispersed settlement patterns and poor access to public transport in rural areas can leave some children and young people very isolated. Linear villages, heavy through-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. In rural areas, consideration will need to be given to children’s need for independent travel as much as the provision of play spaces and facilities. Links with schools and opportunities for using school playgrounds for play out of school hours may provide a solution in some areas.

**Making links between play space, active travel and health**

‘… 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.’

*Making children’s lives more active. Research report.* (Mackett, R., 2004 – Centre for Transport Studies, University College London)

An option for the play strategy might be to site new play spaces along existing or planned cycling and walking routes. For example, use information from school travel plans and the National Cycle Network to create attractive, traffic-free routes which can become networks of playable space that also promote active travel.

Local authorities are obliged to publish Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategies (SMoTS), which are informed by School Travel Plans. Many activities delivered under these plans, such as cycle training and safe routes to schools, promote safety and healthy physical activity, and can build confidence in children and parents. School travel advisers will also have knowledge and experience which can help when developing safer, active travel for outdoor play. Promoting free independent travel is a particularly important factor in delivering more play opportunities to disadvantaged children.xxxix

xxxvii See also www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/homezones.
xxxviii See www.sustrans.org.uk/diystreets.
xxxix Support for this process can be found from Sustrans’ School Travel information service. See: www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk or email schools@sustrans.org.uk.
Stage 5: Plan and design the pattern of services and spaces for play

Case study: ProActive Islington: A strategy for Islington 2006-2012

The London Borough of Islington’s physical activity strategy sets out the aims of the ProActive Partnership, which works to increase levels of physical activity in all sections of the Islington community, regardless of ability. The strategy clearly recognises the importance of play in increasing children’s physical activity levels, stating that ‘Life-long physical activity starts with children’s play.’ It also fully supports the borough’s local play strategy. Islington Play Association worked closely with the ProActive Partnership to ensure that play was represented appropriately and present in local strategies that determine where funding goes.

Primary Care Trusts and health professionals, through the Children’s Trust partnership, have a vital role in supporting a strong, coherent play element in physical activity strategies and the health improvement section of the Local Delivery Plan, ensuring that it is coordinated with the local play strategy and the wider Children and Young People’s Plan. They should engage in a proactive way with planning departments to ensure that Local Development Frameworks are supported by evidence of investment in health infrastructure, children’s play and child-friendly public space to fulfil their aims. The Government’s Healthy Towns programme is also delivering a range of interventions to strengthen the links between play space, active travel and health.

Case study: Partnership between health and play services in Halton

Halton Borough Council has invested significantly in modern, stimulating play facilities over the last 10 years and recognises the impact that play has on improving children and young people’s health. To build on their investment in play, the borough and St Helens Primary Care Trust have created an innovative partnership in which the PCT has agreed to fund a team to maintain new play facilities. The PCT will fund an additional two-person Playground Maintenance Team, at a cost of £80,000 per year for at least five years and, in return, Halton Borough Council will create five new play facilities. The PCT believes that health services should place an emphasis on health promotion, well-being and illness prevention, as well as treating illness. It is therefore keen to work with partners and the public to better improve lifestyles, including through supporting play.

After school clubs and extended services

By 2010, all schools should be offering access to a core offer of extended services. This includes access to a varied menu of activities (combined with childcare in primary schools) that should include play provision both before and after school, as well as during school holidays where there is demand. Many schools work in partnership with other schools and with wider community organisations in the delivery of extended services. Children’s Trust Boards should commission extended
services that include opportunities for free play and employ suitably qualified playworkers as appropriate. The briefing paper *Play in schools and integrated settings: A position statement* can be found at www.playengland.org.uk/resources.

**Case study: St John the Baptist Church of England School, Hackney**

St John the Baptist school in Hackney set out a long-term programme to tackle poor grades and problem behaviour in the school through developing innovative play spaces designed for and with the children. Adventure playground structures, such as cargo nets and aerial walkways, have been built in the playgrounds, there are flower gardens and children grow organic vegetables which are used in the school kitchens, and classrooms extend into the playground. The school has seen significant changes in attendance, academic grades and children’s behaviour. Ofsted inspections have also documented significant improvements in the overall running of the school. Along with neighbouring schools, they offer an extended school service. Funding for the play features came from additional grants from charitable funders, rather than from core school funding. Playworkers regularly visit the school to improve children’s play experiences and teachers and parents are being trained as NVQ level Playworkers to help supervise the extended school services.

**Protecting play space**

Measures to protect play space by legal means, through particular deeds, can ensure the positive benefits of the strategy for future generations of children, young people and communities.\(^{11}\)

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\(^{11}\) Fields in Trust, formerly The National Playing Fields Association, is the country’s leading advocate for the protection of public space for play and recreational use by the community: www.fieldsintrust.org.
Stage 6: Develop and adopt a joint commissioning strategy for play

Stage 6: Design the local play strategy, identifying effective commissioning mechanisms where appropriate, this could include working through a Joint Commissioning Unit.

Play policy statements
The play partnership, having reviewed the audit and the needs analysis, should now identify gaps in provision and specific barriers to play, thereby determining priorities for investment through the local play strategy. In analysing the audit against need, the partnership will want to identify areas for improvement according to the typology adopted at Stage 4 and a consideration of the different considerations of provision discussed at Stage 5.

The context for the local play strategy should be the Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP), which sets out the priorities for commissioning within the Children’s Trust partnership. The play strategy should link to the CYPP, and through the CYPP feed into the Sustainable Community Strategy and both the LAA and Local Development Framework.

The local play strategy should also be a commissioning strategy, setting out how the aims and priorities will be achieved. The play partnership will need to develop proposals for a commissioning strategy that responds to the needs of children and young people and their communities, and of particular targeted groups. The Play Strategy pathfinder and playbuilder capital programme requires that the work of engaging the community and assessing needs be done before new sites are short-listed.

Some authorities have found it helpful to set out an overall vision for play through policy statements that establish both the principles and the key objectives for a new joint commissioning strategy for play. As well as defining local priorities and aims, the policy statements should aim to set these in the wider policy context of the national Play Strategy, the Children’s Plan and the Every Child Matters outcomes framework.

Joint commissioning arrangements
Some Children’s Trust Boards have put in place a Joint Commissioning Unit which brings together key commissioning functions from across Children’s Trust partners. Commissioners who are designing and implementing the local play strategy will want to work within the relevant identified local commissioning arrangement, such as a Children’s Trust Joint Commissioning Unit.

A Joint Commissioning Unit (or other commissioning function) will help to ensure that there is strategic alignment between neighbouring Children’s Trusts where there is likely to be cross-boundary access to services. And it will help to maintain strategic alignment across different organisations and provision in the local area such as schools, children’s centres, housing, transport, health services, adult services, other leisure services etc. Working alongside other commissioners will
also ensure that their knowledge, skills and experience can be brought to bear on play. This should ensure that the process leads to improved outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable way.

Skills, competencies and experience for commissioning of play services include:

- knowledge and understanding of children’s play and playwork;
- engaging and drawing on the experience of local community leaders and partners, including third sector organisations;
- engaging and drawing on the experience of local leaders from schools, hospitals and other locally-based agencies;
- engaging with children, young people and their families;
- collaborating with providers;
- mapping resources;
- specifying and measuring outcomes;
- managing knowledge and assessing needs;
- prioritising investment;
- shaping and managing the markets;
- promoting improvement and innovation;
- securing procurement skills;
- implementing project and change management;
- managing and leading the children’s services system;
- making sound financial investments;
- assuring quality.

**Identifying costs and funding**

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 councils’ and Primary Care Trusts’ 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.

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 cross-cutting strategic themes, both locally and nationally (see Part 1, Chapter 1), 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.

It is important, however, that the strategy process highlights the importance of play itself, as well as how play provision can contribute to a range of outcomes. Mainstream budgets for play services and facilities should be maintained or increased during the strategy timeframe, to ensure stability and manage growth.

**Note:** Government funding towards pathfinder and playbuilder developments through the Play Strategy is intended to enhance and improve local authority provision. Local authorities should not be using this funding to replace or otherwise scale back on local play funding and budgets.

**Communicating the local play strategy**

During Stages 1–5, a good deal of communication relating to the strategy and its contents will have taken place. At this defining stage it is important to ensure that the strategy receives as wide as possible coverage, through a range of media.

This phase is about telling people, 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. Equally important is that families do not feel lectured or cajoled into different lifestyle choices but made to feel empowered by the increased range of opportunities that reflect their needs and aspirations.

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

- existing play facilities;
- newsletters and leaflets;
- posters;
- Family Information Service;
- children’s centres, schools and youth facilities;
- libraries;
- local authority website;
- local media (TV, radio and newspapers).

DCSF has produced *Outdoor play: A communications toolkit for local authorities* (see: www.dcsf.gov.uk/play). The toolkit is designed to help authorities to engage with local parents and communities on issues relating to outdoor play. A number of materials have been specifically developed to provide strategic communications guidance and practical support when planning, delivering and launching play areas at a local level.
Stage 7: Implementing the local play strategy and procurement

Stage 7: Commission services and spaces for play. Look for potential for joint commissioning, using pooled resources and collaboration across departments. Develop a market management plan for other suppliers.

Procurement of quality play provision

The play partnership should include colleagues with expertise in commissioning, in planning and in procurement to ensure that all aspects of delivering the local play strategy can be resourced effectively. This has been seen to be particularly important with time-bound resources, such as the current capital programme.

The play commissioners will want to consider whether pooled or aligned budget options are appropriate where multiple partners are contributing to the local play strategy. Pooling can be achieved under Section 75 of the NHS Act 2006 and Section 10 of the Children Act 2004. Pooling can help to ensure strategic alignment and reduce the complexity of multiple funding streams – both for the commissioners and for providers. DCSF guidance on joint funding arrangements, including case studies and examples, can be found on the Every Child Matters website.xli

The play strategy will identify the most appropriate local mechanisms for implementation during this stage of the commissioning cycle. There are a range of procurement mechanisms available to drive efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable outcomes and improvements. Where appropriate, this can include de-commissioning.

Framework contracts, such as Pro 5 for play detailed below, are becoming increasingly popular to ensure value for money whilst reducing the cost and time implications of other procurement routes. Some local authorities have a framework agreement with a manufacturer or landscape architect who will design multiple sites in that locality, having agreed their costs and committed to these over a set period of time. These frameworks will need to ensure sufficient flexibility to allow for a different design to be developed for each space. If the existing framework is not sufficiently flexible, local authorities are not restricted to using those companies on the framework and can invite other companies to join a competitive bidding process. However, existing frameworks and procurement arrangements should not necessarily be discarded where there are clear benefits to retaining them.

xli DCSF guidance on pooled budgets can be found at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/managersandleaders/planningandcommissioning/joint-funding/jointfund
Whichever procurement options are taken, the play value to children and young people should be paramount. *Design for Play* describes how this is best achieved by a process that is design-led:

‘[the] commissioner [should be] looking for an individual, design-led approach for each play space, which may involve purchasing play equipment and features from different companies, and where any equipment and features are located within a setting which complements their play value’.

*Design for Play* stresses the potential role of landscape architects in the process, but also recognises that:

‘Local authorities and other providers commissioning play spaces frequently appoint play equipment companies to design and build a number of playgrounds. Some of these companies have their own specialist designers with expertise in both landscape design and play design and can work with commissioners to develop site-specific play spaces using a design-led approach’.

The principle is to secure value for money without sacrificing quality, and to make use of good play equipment without the design being dominated by it. A key to successful play spaces is that individual designs are bespoke, responding to the particular need and character of their community and the aspirations and enjoyment of the children who will use them. Therefore, judgments must sometimes be made between cost efficient procurement and meeting the design principles that deliver long-term play value.

**Pro 5 for Play**

Pro5, in partnership with DCSF, has put in place a framework for outdoor play equipment design and installation which the public sector can use to procure its outdoor play equipment. Local authorities are advised to consider this procurement framework when deciding on the most appropriate procurement approach. For further information, see: www.ogc.gov.uk/contractsdatabase/list_all_contracts_1685.asp.

**Supporting the third sector**

The Play Strategy recognises the important contribution and value of the voluntary and community sector to delivering play. Underpinning the Play Strategy is a vision of community empowerment whereby local communities are actively involved in supporting and sustaining play provision in the long term. The third sector has a crucial role in delivering this vision. It is expected that all local authority pathfinders and playbuilders will work with and involve voluntary and community groups in the delivery of play.

Local authorities should consider how to maintain and build the capacity of local voluntary and community organisations as part of a strategy for shaping and developing the market to deliver play services. These organisations may have
concerns about sustainability and attracting funding, particularly grassroots organisations where the small numbers of paid staff or volunteer time available to engage in commissioning and other processes can be limiting. Capacity building could include direct financial investment through local commissioning arrangements, or support in kind, such as access to workforce development opportunities. It should include helping to build a sustainable local third sector support infrastructure and possibly funding umbrella bodies (such as play associations or play networks) whose role would include representing their members in local play partnership arrangements.

**Case study: Staffordshire County Council**

Meetings and events were held for parties interested in tendering a bid for funding. These included presentations on Design for Play and Managing Risk in Play Provision and key aspects of appraisals of bids. Two conferences and 17 road shows were held in the community and across the districts of the two tier authority. Everyone who applied for funding was directed to Design for Play and Managing Risk in Play Provision, as well as the national Play Strategy. Playbuilder application forms were scored by a multiagency independent panel. All applications within the districts were required to be endorsed by the respective local play partnership.

**Engaging the play equipment market**

The private and commercial play sector has experience in providing for play which should not be overlooked in developing a play strategy and plans. Commercial providers can be expert in their field and consideration should be given to their role in supporting the play partnership, particularly organisations affiliated to or registered with trade associations such as API, Exor or Chas. Having informed and intelligent suppliers can make contracting for outcomes an easier task, especially when suppliers are clear on the approaches required by the local authority and its partners on the Children’s Trust and can therefore provide solutions to achieving the desired outcomes.

The requirements of the Play Strategy pathfinder and playbuilder investment programme and its associated guidance represent something of a sea change in expectations, particularly for fixed equipment playgrounds, and the commercial sector has responded positively to the new demands with many instances of private providers supporting local authority playbuilders to deliver their local programmes in a genuine spirit of partnership and cooperation. Nonetheless, the changes in expectations require careful consideration and management of the equipment market, to ensure best value at the same time as delivering on the aspirations of the local and national play strategy.

Play partnerships should consider whether to cooperate across sub-regions or regions to manage the markets for particular services, develop specialist providers, make best use of scarce skills, or to meet high cost and low incidence
Stage 7: Implementing the local play strategy and procurement

Existing examples of this include standardising contracts and bidding processes across a region, using consortiums, combining purchasing power, and pooling commissioning and contracting skills to secure outcomes focused and ‘strategic partnering’ style contracts.

Examples of good procurement practice

The local authority, working with its partners on the Children’s Trust Board, should work closely with procurement and legal teams and ensure their local arrangements ensure the best outcomes for children. They should:

- Manage and develop the local market by partnership-building with all providers, both private enterprise and the third sector. This allows the market to understand the Children’s Trust’s strategic objectives and evidence base, encourages dialogue between suppliers and the Children’s Trust and makes for a more transparent and flexible marketplace.

- Use seed funding, standardised contracting, and capacity building to support smaller providers to compete, so as to maintain the markets’ diversity, choice, innovation and sustainability.

- Ensure the procurement process takes account of the engagement with children, young people and the wider community in the design and delivery of services.

- Use, as far as is practical (taking account of the nature and value of the contract), competitive tendering between providers. Increasingly this will mean internally provided services will have to compete against external providers to ensure a range of provision and the most efficient and effective delivery of outcomes.

- Competitive tendering decisions should not just be based on cost, but on quality factors decided by the Children’s Trust. Understand the full costs of services (internal and external) and ensure that all tenders include full costs to ensure that services are sustainable in the long term.

- Assess different options for their risk and impact on equality.

- Award contracts that are flexible, proportionate to the complexity of the task, and non-combative in nature.

- Award long-term contracts where this is appropriate (3-5 years – possibly with rolling extensions for a fixed period of time) so as to encourage providers to invest in services and innovate solutions.

- Implement robust monitoring arrangements, with provision for contract termination if services are failing to meet the needs of children and young people.
Stage 8: Play workforce development

Stage 8: Develop and implement a play workforce development plan, including both playwork and cross-professional skills development.

Playwork

‘The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.’

The Playwork Principles

As with other children’s services, appropriately skilled and qualified staff is the key to successful play provision. It is important that those supervising and facilitating children's play have access to appropriate training in playwork. A range of playwork qualifications and endorsed training is available, from entry to postgraduate level.

The Playwork Principles, underpinning the National Occupational Standards, state that ‘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 training and qualifications are developed to support children in a play environment. They include specific knowledge and skills on how to create, with children, an enriched play environment and to ensure the child’s need to be challenged and to encounter risk in their play is balanced with their safety and well-being.

Quality Training, Quality Play 2006–2011 is the UK Strategy for Playwork Education and Training of the Sector Skills Council for the playwork sector, SkillsActive. It sets out their aims and priorities for the development of professional playwork.

SkillsActive provides support for employers and information on routes to training, qualifications, and workforce development. SkillsActive Playwork Unit oversees the National Occupational Standards, endorses playwork training, and works with awarding bodies to ensure qualifications are fit for purpose. A dedicated regional delivery team provides support, advice and guidance on workforce development, including support tools and information on locally available education and training opportunities. For more information, visit www.skillsactive.org.uk/playwork.

The Government has asked the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to lead a programme of work to ensure 4,000 playworkers are funded to achieve Level 3 playwork qualifications by 2011. In addition, CWDC is leading pilots for a leadership and management training programme to support playwork managers in working more effectively in an integrated workforce environment. SkillsActive is a partner on both of these programmes.

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xlii The Playwork Principles were endorsed by SkillsActive in 2004 and are being incorporated into the Playwork National Occupational Standards to replace the previous Assumptions and Values of Playwork.
xliii See: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/playwork.
For authorities aiming to develop a range of supervised provision, a workforce development plan should be an integral part of the local play strategy. Playwork should be seen within the wider context of the integrated children's workforce and should be planned for under the local children's workforce strategy as carefully as for schools and social services.

Local authorities should encourage their play service staff and those they commission services from to hold playwork qualifications (although, to note, Ofsted does not require staff in settings registered under the Early Years Foundation Stage to hold playwork-specific qualifications).

Consideration should also be given to developing other skills in the playwork workforce, such as disability, equality or personal care training. Further, it is not only playworkers who supervise play areas and interact with children and young people in play settings: volunteers, other administrative or strategic staff and all those involved in play provision should be aware of their roles and responsibilities with regard to the enjoyment and safety of children at play, and provided with training as appropriate.

**Cross-professional training in play**

The full realisation of neighbourhoods where all children can play will require some understanding of the principles and practice of play provision within those professions that have responsibility for planning, designing and managing public space. The local authority may want to work closely with its Children’s Trust partners in ensuring relevant professionals have opportunities to undertake training in these principles as part of continuous professional development.

The Government has commissioned a national partnership, led by Play England, to develop and offer to local authorities the Play Shaper cross-professional programme (www.playshaper.org.uk) which focuses on the particular needs of children in the design, planning and management of public space. The aim is that participants will better understand:

- the nature and importance of children's play
- the characteristics of good quality play space
- the tenets of good practice in delivering play

The training promotes a greater appreciation of the responsibility of different professional roles in enabling children’s safe access to, enjoyment of, and mobility around the public realm, as well as the importance of cross-professional collaboration in achieving these ends.
Safeguarding

Safeguarding of children and young people is the responsibility of all those working with children. It is important that all those working around play in regular contact with children, including volunteers, administrators and managers, are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and are appropriately vetted. All those working with children should be following safeguarding guidance as set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*. Suitable recruitment procedures and training will assist in this process.

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xlv  For the third sector, the Safe Network was launched in June 2009 to provide advice and resources on safeguarding and safety issues specifically for the sector. See: www.safenetwork.org.uk.

xlv  The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) has been created to help prevent unsuitable people from working with children and vulnerable adults. See: www.isa.gov.org.uk.

xlvi  Sponsored by DCSF, new Safer Recruitment guidance and training are available free of charge via the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) website. See: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/safeguarding/safer-recruitment/safer-recruitment-resources.
Stage 9: Monitoring and reviewing the local play strategy

Stage 9: Monitor progress of the action plan against agreed milestones and review the commissioning process. Evaluate performance using local play indicators. Evaluate the play strategy against identified outcomes and review results of NI199.

Planning and commissioning are cyclical processes. It is important to monitor progress and periodically evaluate and review outcomes. The information provided by the evaluation process will help to refresh play strategy plans and ensure appropriate provision continues to be provided where it is most needed. As well as for new strategies, Part 2 of this document provides a framework for a strategy renewal process.

Evaluation

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. In addition, authorities are expected to conduct a local evaluation of their play pathfinder or playbuilder projects. This should include conducting local surveys to gather the views of children and young people, taking steps to ensure those who might not normally take part in consultations are included. A national evaluation of the pathfinder and playbuilder programme is being undertaken. The research tools used to conduct this evaluation will be available to authorities in due course.

Strategic planning for play opportunities must include mechanisms for regular monitoring and review of progress towards identified outcomes. Through the introduction of the National Indicator (NI199) of children’s satisfaction with parks and play areas, a benchmark against which future improvements can be measured on an area-wide basis is now available. More detailed local evaluation should aim to capture the impact of play provision on specific communities and other outcomes identified in the local play strategy and plans.

The intended outcomes identified at Stage 1 should provide the basis for such work.

xlvii As part of the initial stages of the national evaluation, Ipsos MORI conducted research in seven play areas across England which had been improved recently. Although these areas had been enhanced via funding from non-pathfinder or playbuilder sources, this research aims to provide some early indications of the likely impacts of investment and to inform the evaluation design and programme delivery. See www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR089.pdf.
Reviewing the strategy and plans
The local play strategy document and relevant action plans need be kept under regular review in order to be effective. Regular reviews will be especially important in ensuring that targets are being met, and checking whether they need to be modified in the light of changing circumstances. The action plan should be subject to annual review. Local play strategies should be kept up to date and the need for review will depend on whether there are significant changes in funding, legislation, other related strategies or planning. The local authority should also be responsive and flexible to community feedback as the strategy implementation progresses.

Developing play indicators locally
To effectively review plans, Children’s Trust partnerships will wish to monitor performance by agreed indicators. The data collection for local play indicators should seek to measure the extent to which children and young people have access to spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation that:

1. are free of charge, allowing children the freedom to come and go, and where children are free to play as they choose (the ‘three frees’);
2. are accessible, welcoming and engaging for all, including those who are disabled or have specific needs and wishes;
3. allow for the needs of different ages of children.

Play England has developed a set of performance indicators, piloted with a number of local authorities, to support local collection of robust information on area-wide play provision. Details and guidance, including a full evaluation report of the pilot programme, are available from Play England.

The resource implications of the data collection for the indicators will differ between local authorities and depend on other information being collected locally, resources available with the local authority performance management team, and skills available locally. Data collection methods include household surveys, surveys of children through schools, audit and GIS mapping and site visits for quality assessment, many of which are covered earlier in this document in more summary detail.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 1</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Method of generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The percentage of all children and young people aged from birth to 16 years (from all social and ethnic groups, including those who are disabled), who play out for at least four hours each week.</td>
<td>Household survey</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 2</th>
<th>Access to a variety of facilities and spaces</th>
<th>Method of generation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The percentage of all children and young people aged from birth to 16 years that have access to at least three different types of space or facility (doorstep, local and neighbourhood), at least one of which is a dedicated place for play and informal recreation, which are all within easy walking or cycling distance as defined in Table 3.</td>
<td>Open space and play strategy audits, GIS mapping</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 3</th>
<th>Quality of facilities and spaces</th>
<th>Method of generation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The proportion of play spaces and facilities with high scores for location, play value and care and maintenance as assessed using the Playable Space Quality Assessment Tool.</td>
<td>Quality Assessment Tool</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Indicator 4</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Method of generation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The percentage of all children and young people (from all social and ethnic groups, including those who are disabled), who think that the range and quality of play facilities and spaces they are able to access in their local neighbourhood is good/very good. (Note: this local indicator links to NI 199, but allows for more locally targeted analysis and therefore assessment of need for, and impact of investment in specific locations.)</td>
<td>Questionnaire survey of children and young people</td>
</tr>
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Annex A: Executive summary of the Play Strategy

Introduction
1. The Government’s ambition is to make this the best country in the world for children to grow up. Children, young people and their parents all recognise that play is a vital ingredient of a happy and healthy childhood, supporting children’s physical, emotional, social and educational development.

2. This national Play Strategy, backed by £235 million of dedicated investment for local play facilities across the country, is informed by extensive consultation with children, young people and their parents.

3. Our Fair Play consultation, launched in April 2008, attracted a huge response. Over 9,400 children and young people shared their views with us, giving widespread support for our 2020 vision for play in every residential area.

4. Our aim, shared with children, young people and parents, is for all children to be able to enjoy a range of safe and exciting places to play close to where they live. Through children’s and communities’ involvement in the design and planning of these spaces, play areas will be valued locally and continue to reflect the distinct needs of each community.

5. This Strategy sets out how we will deliver our vision for 2020, supporting local delivery partners to make a reality of children’s right to play, as stated in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Our vision for play
• in every residential area there are a variety of supervised and unsupervised places for play, free of charge;

• local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play;

• routes to children’s play space are safe and accessible for all children and young people;

• parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well maintained and well used;

• children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours;

• children and young people play in a way that respects other people and property;

• children and young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces; and

• play spaces are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, and children from minority groups in the community.
 Delivering our vision for play
6. *Our vision for 2020*, sets out the short-, medium- and long-term objectives that will deliver our vision for play.

Short term: 2008–2011
7. Through the development and implementation of this national Play Strategy, backed by dedicated investment, our immediate priority is to increase the availability of safe, exciting and inclusive play facilities, putting the needs of local communities at the heart of the design process and improving facilities in the areas where children need them most. We will establish a strong framework for local delivery, including continuing to develop the compelling evidence base on the benefits of play and identifying and disseminating best practice to help our partners deliver high quality local play spaces.

Medium term: 2011–2014
8. Over the medium term, we will build on our initial investment and support Children’s Trust partnerships to provide the local leadership necessary to build communities that value and respond to children, young people and parents’ demands for safe and well maintained places to play. This will rely on staff from across wider local authority and health services understanding and supporting this agenda, integrating it within local children’s services. Progress will be demonstrated year-on-year by higher reported satisfaction of children with local outdoor play facilities. Those who support and supervise children’s play will become increasingly professionalised, ensuring staffed provision is high quality and makes the right links with other children’s services locally.

9. Over the longer term, our objective is that all children and young people will be able to access world-class play and recreation spaces near where they live, within communities that are child-friendly. The local authority working through strong Children’s Trust partnerships will lead the delivery of excellent local play provision, with consideration of children’s needs embedded in the planning of the wider Local Strategic Partnership.

10. The rest of this Play Strategy sets out in detail how we will work with local partners to deliver this vision across the country.

 More places to play
11. Children and parents told us that they want more high quality places to play near where they live. To respond to this demand, our aim is to provide a variety of safe, accessible and exciting places to play in every residential area.

Children, young people and adults asked for:
• more play spaces, accessible to all children throughout the country;
• play spaces that are exciting and stimulating for children, especially 8 to 13-year-olds;
• play spaces where families can share and enjoy leisure time; and
places to play when the weather is bad.

**Our key actions:**
- we are investing £235 million in up to 3,500 play areas across the country;
- we are investing in 30 Pathfinder local authorities to receive additional funding, part of which will be used to develop a large, staffed adventure playground;
- every local authority will receive at least £1 million in funding, to be targeted on the children most in need of improved play opportunities;
- so that children can benefit from this investment as soon as possible, we are accelerating national roll-out so that every local authority will be offered funding by April 2009;
- we have contracted Play England as our national delivery partner and significantly expanded their capacity. Play England will provide all local authorities with access to expertise, planning advice and guidance;
- we have published detailed design guidance to help local partners produce the new and refurbished play areas that children and parents tell us they want to see; and
- we will explore how good play opportunities can be provided when the weather makes outdoor play unappealing to children.

**Supporting play throughout childhood**
12. Children of all ages want to have opportunities to play, regardless of their background, physical ability and where they live. To improve opportunities for all children, the Play Strategy focuses on places where children and young people spend their leisure time (including parks and green spaces), schools and Sure Start Children's Centres. Through the implementation of this Strategy, we will make sure that parents know what opportunities exist locally.

**Children, young people and adults asked for:**
- improved play opportunities for all children in schools, children's centres and through other local services;
- improved provision and access for children least able to take advantage of play opportunities;
- play spaces that are exciting and accessible for children with disabilities; and
- better information about what is available locally.
Our key actions:
- by April 2009, we will publish a toolkit to help local authorities and service providers inform parents and children about local play opportunities;
- to ensure disabled children benefit fully from our investment in play we have introduced funding requirements and are working with the third sector to provide expertise, advice and guidance for local authorities;
- new Sure Start Children’s Centres will deliver best practice in design and provision of spaces for children to play; and
- the Building Schools for the Future capital investment programme will have clear requirements around outdoor play and recreational spaces in schools.

Playing safely
13. Children, young people and parents told us that concerns about safety are preventing children from going outside and accessing play areas, and that play facilities are often dull and are not challenging and stimulating for children. To address this, we will do more to tackle bullying and crime, improve road safety and increase the availability of appropriately supervised play, as well as to support partners to deliver safe and exciting play areas that children and young people want to see.

Children, young people and adults asked for:
- steps to address fears of bullying and crime;
- increased supervision of play spaces, but without turning play into a regimented, structured activity;
- safer routes to play spaces;
- play spaces that are clean and well maintained;
- play spaces that are exciting and help children learn how to take and manage risks in a safe environment; and
- those working in local areas asked for support on the issue of litigation around play-related accidents.

Our key actions:
- we will publish guidance for practitioners on tackling bullying outside schools;
- we are taking steps to tackle youth-related crime through the Youth Crime Action Plan and the Youth Taskforce Action Plan;
- we are supporting links between local authorities, the third sector and community policing to improve appropriate supervision of children playing;
- we will provide resources to support the third sector and volunteering in support of play; and
• we are publishing guidance on proportionate risk management to support the delivery of exciting play spaces.

**Child-friendly communities**

14. We want to see communities that give greater consideration to children’s needs and interests – communities which are more child-friendly. Children and young people want their own views to be reflected in local decisions about how their neighbourhoods are designed and developed. In response to this, we are taking steps to make local areas more child-friendly and more welcoming for children, in particular, by working with local partners and the housing industry.

**Children, young people and adults asked for:**

• children, young people and local communities to be involved throughout the design and construction of play spaces;

• children to be able to play in public space, streets and neighbourhoods; and

• communities to become more tolerant and welcoming of children’s play as long as children respect the views of others.

**Our key actions:**

• we will ensure that children’s needs are fully reflected in a forthcoming review of planning policy;

• new web-based guidance will bring together best practice for planning officers on supporting children’s play and recreation;

• a new national partnership will deliver training to every local authority by March 2011, focused on helping the professionals who design and manage our neighbourhoods to understand the importance of play and child-friendly spaces;

• we are working with the social housing sector and regulators to ensure that play is supported in some of the most deprived areas;

• the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment is working with the Government, local authorities, and the housing development industry to deliver residential developments and new housing growth areas that meet children’s needs and interests; and

• our Aiming High strategy is taking steps to foster a more positive approach to young people across society.

**Embedding play in local priorities**

15. Parents want play to continue to be a priority for the Government and local authorities and we also want to ensure that our investment will have a lasting impact. To achieve this we will create a policy framework and incentives for sustainable and effective delivery in every area and invest in a skilled workforce. This will be driven by a shared understanding across
local partners and local communities on the value of play, what good play opportunities look like and where they are needed, and what the various roles and responsibilities should be locally to deliver on this.

**National and local delivery partners asked for:**

- action to ensure play becomes a priority, with respondents welcoming the National Indicator;
- play to have a higher priority locally and be embedded in children’s services and wider local authority business planning;
- the health sector to play a key role in supporting and promoting play;
- support for the playwork profession and recognition of their commitment; and
- the third sector to receive support, as a crucial delivery partner.

**Our key actions:**

- we are introducing a new National Indicator from April 2009 for local authorities, which will ask children how satisfied they are with their local parks and play areas;
- updated statutory guidance for Children’s Trusts sets out roles and responsibilities in relation to play;
- jointly with Play England, we are publishing for consultation new draft guidance on how Children’s Trusts and Local Strategic Partnerships can respond to children’s play needs as they plan services and changes to neighbourhoods;
- we are working with the Department of Health to support active play as part of the drive by Children’s Trusts to help children lead healthy lives, and through the healthy lifestyle campaign Play4Life;
- we are providing funding to enable 4,000 playworkers to achieve a Level 3 playwork qualification by 2011;
- we are supporting the continuous professional development of leaders and managers in the play workforce by developing a new playwork management qualification; and
- we are investing £1.5 million in third sector-run adventure playgrounds and providing funding to help build third sector infrastructure that will support play locally.

16. This Play Strategy aims to make a reality of our ambition for world-class opportunities for play in every area, by helping professionals in local government, the third sector and business to respond to the play and recreational needs of children and young people.
Annex B: References


