

Foreword

For many years play has been under valued in society, but now it is very much back on the agenda with a national organisation created dedicated to play and local play teams within county boroughs. These factors along with good partnership working and solid consultation can create better play opportunities, providing safe and secure environments letting all children take risks that will give them greater confidence in preparation for every day life. This will also be the key to developing children's social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional skills that they will then use more effectively on a day-to-day basis.

This strategy will now provide a solid backbone for the future of play within the Borough for years to come, benefiting thousands of local children and young people on the way.

I would like to personally thank and congratulate The Children's Grand Council and the Youth Forum of Blaenau Gwent for their work on the boroughs Play Strategy. Their efforts have made sure that the general views of all children and young people throughout the Borough have been carefully considered by all partners who sit on the strategy group and as a result are directly reflected within the strategy. This involvement has resulted in a play strategy, which is needs-led, fit for purpose, and reflects the concerns of children, young people and their families.

Cllr. Gill Clark

Blaenau-Gwent Play Strategy and Action Plan

Introduction

This strategy had been developed in recognition of the importance of play in the lives of children and young people in Blaenau-Gwent. It aims to raise the profile of play, and provide a platform from which future play opportunities can be developed. Blaenau-Gwent Play Strategy will be a tool for ensuring that children's play is included and considered in the work of all agencies operating in the county borough. The strategy is intended to be a working document that sets out guiding principles and issues to be addressed through future work.

The objectives in this strategy have been developed as a result of the participation of a variety of professionals in the voluntary and statutory sector that are involved in play provision. Parents/carers, children and young people and wider community have participated through consultation, discussion groups, questionnaires and their active participation in an action-research project initiated in summer 2005. This was a pilot open access project operated on an outreach basis, where staff provided enhanced play opportunities in 4 local play areas. This project was known as "Play in the Park."

On a national level, this strategy has been developed to reflect the Welsh Assembly Government's Play Policy Implementation Plan and implement this plan on a local level. Since producing the Play Policy in 2002, the Welsh Assembly Government established a Play Policy Implementation Group to develop further recommendations on the direction of play in Wales. Play in Wales - The Assembly Government's Play Policy Implementation Plan was launched on February 15, 2006.

Blaenau-Gwent's Play Strategy has been developed in line with, and is committed to supporting, the principles and values outlined in the Play Policy. This reflects the importance of play in childhood and the importance of children in our society. It makes clear a commitment to ensure children and their needs are central to policy making and that provision is made to meet those needs.

By valuing play, we value children and young people

WHAT IS PLAY?

Play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental; and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live.

Welsh Assembly Government, 2006

Play is a fundamental right and is enshrined in the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which the UK is a signatory. This means that every child in the UK has a right to 'engage in play and recreational activities'.

Play is an essential part of children's lives. When playing, children and young people choose what they want to do themselves, how they want to do it and why they want to do it. It is an integral part of healthy emotional and physical development, for society as well as children themselves. Play is the means by which children explore their environment, their world, their roles and relationships.

Play provides opportunities for problem solving, language development, creativity, communication, negotiation and listening skills. It provides an opportunity to learn about risk which is an essential element of confidence building.

Play can also be therapeutic and gives children the chance to deal with difficult or painful circumstances. Play provides children and young people with the opportunity to let off steam and have fun! These are important experiences that are needed to develop emotional literacy essential for promoting positive mental health in our future generations.

The right to play is the child's first claim on the community. Play is nature's training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing deep and enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens.

David Lloyd George, 1928

WHAT IS PLAY PROVISION?

Play provision is any space or facility, staffed or unstaffed, which provides children with play opportunities. It should also provide them with the freedom of opportunity to play by themselves or with other children of all abilities. When using play provision, children should be free to decide for themselves what they want to do, why they are doing it and how they go about it.

A quality play provision should offer children a rich stimulating environment free from inappropriate risks, and full of challenge, providing them with the opportunity to explore themselves and their world.

The environments that provide play provision for children is varied and include parks; fixed play equipment; play clubs, holiday Playschemes; crèches, playgroups, out of school childcare schemes. This provision is provided by both the statutory and voluntary sector and all should be adaptable to suite the needs of all children.

Styles of Service Provision

Currently play opportunities are provided in a number of different ways, in response to local pressures, needs and ages of the children concerned:

- **Open Access - Staffed play provision**

Local staffed play provision operated on the foundations of playwork principles by suitably qualified staff, employed to facilitate quality play opportunities.

The term “open Access” does not apply to the process of play or how it is facilitated by playwork, but to the level of care provided to children within a staffed setting. It does not describe provision that is un-staffed, for example fixed equipment playgrounds, skateboard ramps, multi-use games area, playing fields, etc. Therefore, open access provision is any provision in which the process of play is facilitated by staff, In settings where children, including those under 8, are free to come and go as they please, free to decide for themselves what they want to do, why they are doing it and how they go about it. There is no contract of formal care between the playworkers and parents/cares for any duration whiled the child is there.

In recognition that this provision provides informal childcare to local parents/carers, it is imperative that parents/carers ensure children and young people have a safe place to go, if they choose to leave the setting. Most will place no limit on numbers and will not require formal arrangements for bringing and collecting children. (As far as is practicable – in some instances alternative arrangements are made for children with impairments such as one to one workers and/or higher staff ratios)

The provision of emergency contact details is required for the protection of children. Staff will keep registration details for this purpose. Staff will not compel children to stay; the provision operates on a “drop-in” basis. This provision may operate with or without a building and is usually free to local children.

“Open access facilities offer a valuable resource because they add to the variety of services available and their more informal nature may offer children as they grow older, more scope to develop confidence and social skills” Children Act 1989 para 6.51

CSIW States: “The main purpose (of open access play provision) is to enable children to learn and develop through play opportunities in a safe environment in the absence of their parents”

- **Restricted Access**

This provision accepts children on a first come, first served basis in the same way that an open access scheme would, but conditions are imposed on how the children are allowed to leave. Usually this will mean that the children will be collected from the site and should not be allowed to leave unaccompanied. These conditions are usually in place for children under 8 to comply with the Care Standards regulations.

- **Play care**

Play care combines the childcare needs of parents with the importance of offering high quality play opportunities to the child. The child has no choice about attending and the provider usually contracts to collect the child from school, supply them with refreshments and look after them until they are collected by a particular adult. This service can be offered out of school or by play projects on a sessional basis.

- **Stay and Play**

This is provision where parents and carers will bring and stay with their child and activities are geared to the interaction between them, either in family groups or as a whole. This type of provision is ideal for consulting with parents as well as offering them the opportunity to support their child's play experiences. Examples of this type of provision are Parent and Toddler groups, Sure Start family support groups and Play Days.

- **Crèche Provision**

This is provision usually for children under 8 to be cared for on a sessional basis to allow their parents to engage in activities i.e. meetings, training, family support activities and leisure activities.

- **Fixed Play Areas**

These offer children the opportunity to play in parks and open spaces on equipment designed to physically challenge them and provide risks in a controlled environment. The play habits of older children (11+) are often perceived to be a nuisance with the communities where they live. Experience suggests that young people of this age are seeking adventurous and risk-taking forms of play

- **Therapeutic Playwork**

Play is used as a therapeutic tool in both work with children, families, in specialist situations (Speech and language development, etc) and in hospitals.

Childcare workers and play workers use play on a one to one basis with families with children exhibiting emotional and behavioural difficulties. Play therapy is a popular and successful tool used by specialists to address developmental, emotional, social or trauma-related problems.

- **Adventure Playgrounds**

Adventure playgrounds are staffed play facilities where children and young people have the chance to shape their own space for their own play purposes. They may have some fixed equipment on site. They provide both a 'sense of adventure' and a 'sense of ownership' to children and young people, who can participate fully in developing that space by designing, building, adapting structures and spaces alongside skilled play workers. Adventure playgrounds are particularly suited to meeting the play needs of the early teenage years.

April 05

Qualified staff are employed to facilitate challenging and stimulating play opportunities on site. Most will place no limit on numbers and will not require formal arrangements for bringing and collecting children. Generally, adventure playgrounds are open access year round provision. They should be open when children need them, usually much longer opening hours than other types of provision. offering the widest range of play opportunities. Children in these settings can often be observed using a range of tools and materials to facilitate their own play scenarios in a way rarely observed in other settings.

- **Play Centres**

Generally open access year round provision, sharing a similar dedication to children's play perspective to the adventure playground. The main differentiating factor being that they are located in a building whereas the adventure playground is an open air provision.

- **Play Schemes**

Temporary play provision provided at regular intervals throughout the year, often during school holiday periods. Can be based in the confines of a building or open air. Sometimes open access and usually operated for a few hours a day. Often play schemes offer a range of opportunities and activities to children and it is fair to say that children can not experience the range of choice and autonomy that they can access on either an Adventure Playground or a dedicated Play Centre.

- **Mobile Play Provision**

Often year round provision that addresses the need for play in rural communities or for communities that find it hard to access play opportunities. These services can be provided from a play bus that as well as providing activities and play opportunities in the open air, also have a range of activities on offer on the bus itself. Sometimes even play equipment is integral to the structure of the bus. Other forms of mobile play are provided through the use of a van and some playworkers delivering props for play and facilitating activities and opportunities with those props.

- **Outreach Playwork/ Peripatetic Playwork/ Street Playwork**

This is the provision of playwork where and when children play in their natural play environments. This may be the local play area, open ground, street, woodland, car parks, graveyards as stated previously where children play. Playwork in this type of

provision relies heavily on the wits and capabilities of the worker. There are often no props but naturally occurring ones. Mostly the playworker will have a small amount of play resources, perhaps some balls, some rope but not much more than that. The playworkers role in this sort of provision is facilitating and supporting children's play and advocating for them at a strategic level, representing their views and opinions, preserving and enhancing their play space.

- **Early years and child care settings**

Playwork is often practiced in these settings, which would include before and after school clubs, child minders, and schools. It must be stated at the outset however, that the primary concern for these settings resides with the adult agenda, whatever that be; childcare, education or the parents or settings requirements for and of the children they cater for. That said, good playwork can, and is practiced in these settings even if the range and access and choice is restricted by the adult agenda.

Play in Blaenau-Gwent

Blaenau-Gwent is a highly deprived county of Wales, incorporating the 3 valleys of Ebbw Fach, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar. It has 12 electoral wards in total and 10 of these have been designated Communities First areas, due to the amount of deprivation in existence in the borough. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WMID) 2005 is the official measure of deprivation for small area in Wales. Within this index, Super Output Areas (SOA's) measures the deprivation of the population in specific areas of Wales. Of the 47 SOA's in Blaenau-Gwent, all but 3 fall into the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. The remaining 3 SOA's fall into the next 20% most deprived in Wales.

The 2001 Census identified 17, 635 children 0 – 18 living in Blaenau-Gwent. Blaenau- Gwent has an above average of its population aged 5-14 compared with the rest of the UK (11,002 children and young people in this age range). At the 2001 census around 1 in 3 households in the borough had children of school aged under 19 and in full time education. 1 in 10 had children under the age of 5. Almost 1 in 10 of all households were lone parents with dependant children, which is the 2nd highest proportion of lone parents in Wales. 28% of children under 16 were living in families on Income Support. Grandparents provide an important source of support for childcare locally, with over half of parents in one local survey stating that they relied on grandparents to provide childcare while they worked or took part in education and training. Blaenau-Gwent is currently ranked 3rd highest in Wales for teenage pregnancy under 16 years and for under 18's, the borough is ranked the 2nd highest in Wales.

A comprehensive health, social care and well being needs assessment was carried out in 2003, as the first steps in the development of the Health, Social Care and Well Being Strategy for Blaenau-Gwent. The findings, contained in "Living in Blaenau-Gwent" (Nov 2003) have 32 pages relating to Children and Young People. The key findings were extracted and categorised according to the Strategic Aims and Key Priorities of the Framework Partnership. The Framework Partnership identified 5 Strategic Aims and subsequent Key Themed Priorities for actions that include:

1. Reducing families living in poverty

- Improve self efficacy/emotional well-being
- Improve accessibility
- Improve economic activity, reduce low income

2. To promote essential skills and learning

- To increase provision of and participation of early years opportunities
- Tackling disaffection in 11-25 age group
- Attainment of essential skills by parents /guardians

3. To support families/parenting

- To improve access and availability of multi-agency guidance and support services
- Improve coordination/integration of existing parent support and further develop
- Provide support mechanism for carers

4. To promote healthy lifestyles

- To promote good nutrition and a healthy diet
- Create safe and healthy environments for children
- Promote physical, mental and social well-being

5. To support children and young people in need

- Improve coordination of service for children and young people at a strategic level
- Target specific groups for consultation and development
- Prepare local organisations to work with specific groups through training and publicise them throughout the borough

These Strategic Aims and Key Priorities provide the foundation for the Cymorth Plan in order to target specific communities of need that exist within the Borough. The evidence suggests that significant numbers of families, children and young people in Blaenau-Gwent are facing adverse economic conditions. Indicators around prosperity, health and well-being indicate the need for effective, accessible and comprehensive services. Comprehensive consideration towards the strategic provision of play opportunities will aid the Framework Partnership in meeting its Strategic Aims and Key Priorities. This Play Strategy will provide a means for taking these issues forward locally in relation to the provision of play opportunities.

The range of play opportunities available in Blaenau-Gwent is provided through sports centre-based playschemes, out of school childcare, day nurseries, childminders, family centres, community centres, Fixed equipped play areas, playgroups, parks and open spaces, outreach playworkers, forest schools, etc. However, provision for children's play and playwork in the borough has suffered from a historical lack of consideration and development. Therefore, play opportunities appear few and far between, and there has been a traditional lack of resources, both human and financial, directed at this provision.

An audit of the services and facilities provided by the voluntary sector network demonstrates that there are many out-of school hours' clubs and activities available for children and young people in the borough. These, however, are primarily in the form of activity specific/single focussed provision such as Scout Groups, dance groups, football clubs and such like. There has been no organisation identified within this network as providing provision solely for the purpose of providing staffed play opportunities for children and young people. In comparison with other authorities, the amount of play provision provided by local community groups is low and virtually non-existent. However, the Play Development Officer is becoming increasingly aware of the need and interest of local community groups in providing play opportunities for their local children and young people.

Blaenau-Gwent County Borough Council Residents Satisfaction Survey 2005 identified that 30% residents wanted improvement in facilities for young children, almost 50% residents wanted to see more activities for teenagers, 15% residents wanted improvement in community activities, and 15% wanted improvement in open spaces.

Parent Link is a forum available to represent all parents/carers of children and young people (0-25) in the borough. Research carried out in Jan 2005 identified through a questionnaire that "the lack of safe areas to Play" in Blaenau-Gwent was a key issue. Over 80% of parents/carers responding to Parent Link's questionnaire identified this as their top priority for concern. Other concerns included

- Lack of (quality) clubs for children and teenagers in the evenings
- Youth provision targeted at 10-14 year olds rather than 11-25 years

- More activities for young people and more information of the opportunities available

To identify further what parents/carers understood as “safe areas to play” partners involved in supporting the Parent link Forum designed a workshop to investigate further. Results revealed some of the issues presenting themselves as barriers to participating in play opportunities, and there is evidence to support the need of developing staffed play provision in the borough that would overcome some of the barriers preventing children and young people from accessing local play opportunities.

A 3 week pilot project “Play in the Park” was delivered in summer 2005 in partnership with the Youth service. The project which involved outreach staff visiting and delivering open access play sessions across 4 local parks in the borough. Play sessions were targeted at 8 –15 years old, but was also available for those under 8 with parental involvement. There was strong participation in the project by parents/guardians and grandparents. This parental participation facilitated the involvement of children as young as 3. The pilot was well-received and 130 children and young people were registered with the project and participated in staffed open access play sessions. The project highlighted and demonstrated a need to develop more locally appropriate staffed play provision, operating on an open access policy, without the need to access transport to access the provision.

The outreach provision was extended to include more areas in summer 2007, and the project operated across 16 play areas, both formal (Such as local play areas) and informal (such as waste ground/underdeveloped green space) and also in school playgrounds (3 in total). In total, 412 individual children and young people registered and attended the play sessions, 11.4% were under 5 years old, 67.4% were 5-10 age range and 21.2% were 11-15 years old.

This demonstrates further the need for further and increased investment in this area and model of service provision for children and young people.

CONCLUSION

There is recognition amongst providers and the Play Strategy Group that children and young peoples play has been traditionally under-resourced financially in the county borough of Blaenau-Gwent. Some of the recommendations and objectives in this Strategy will be realised by a change in practice and sharing of resources. However, it must be noted that appropriate levels of funding are critical to the delivery of this Strategy.

This Play Strategy will help the Framework Partnership realise its 5 Strategic Aims and subsequent Key Priorities for actions by:

Reducing families living in poverty

- Play is critical for developing children's emotional literacy. The Mental Health Foundation estimates that at any time 20% children experience psychological problems, that include stress and anxiety. Opportunities for graduated risk-taking in unsupervised play build children's self-confidence and resilience. These are key protective factors for mental health promotion.
- Outreach playworkers based in local communities can facilitate and enhance local opportunities in close proximity to where children live. Therefore, they are not dependant on adult members of their family to provide transport for them to access play opportunities.
- Open access play session provided on an outreach basis are free from any charge to the children and young people.

To promote essential skills and learning

- There are few opportunities for early years provision provided in holiday time, and outside closed-access playcare. It is a time when many playgroups are closed. It is evident that parents with younger children also need/want somewhere to take their children to play. Over 11% of registered children came to "Play in the Park" with a parent/guardian.
- 21% young people aged 11-15 attended the outreach play sessions giving them somewhere to go and hang out with their friends, with enhanced play opportunities. This provision limits "anti-social" behaviour and encourages them to be challenged and engaged in opportunities that interest them.

- Effective play relationships are fostered between parents/carers so they attain essential skills that both contribute to their children's development and also supports them by giving them good parenting skills.

To support families/parenting

- The Children's Information Service is the ideal point for parents/carers to gain information of children's play services and information to support their children's development through play. Also, to provide "toolkits" for local community groups who are interested in developing local play facilities. To improve access and availability of multi-agency guidance and support services
- Open access play provision not only provides children with play opportunities to promote their development, but informal childcare and respite for short periods. This can relieve the strain of keeping children entertained, whilst they are domestic tasks to perform. Many parents, and grandparents, looking after energetic children whilst parents are working, appreciate somewhere safe for the children to go and meet up with their friends to play.

To promote healthy lifestyles

- Play provision promotes physical, mental and social well-being. Outreach community –based playworkers contribute to the creation of safe and healthy environments for children as they offer minimum supervision when providing play opportunities. This can relieve the tensions between different groups of children and adults, including perceptions of older children.
- Playing outdoors has been recommended as the best way for children to gain their 60 minutes of physical activity a day. It has been found that young people who spent time playing outdoors and in natural spaces can develop good attitudes to staying fit and healthy through enjoyable experiences established in early childhood. These can provide stress coping mechanisms in later life.

To support children and young people in need

- This strategy will improve coordination of service for children and young people at a strategic level and ensure that specific groups are targeted and consulted to ensure that play provision is inclusive for all children
- Although the strategy reflects play in the same context as the Welsh Assembly's Play Policy Implementation Plan, it also realises that there will sometimes need to be a process of engagement before some groups feel comfortable to access open access play provision which is inclusive, freely chosen, personally directed and self motivated.
- It is important that the strategy is flexible and puts actions in place for there to be a successful process for specific groups to gain confidence through playing within their own environment and then slowly being integrated into inclusive open access play provision.
- The strategy will help put measures in place so that services that work closely with children and young people will have the opportunity to develop through training, and therefore will have more of a capacity to integrate children with specific needs into their setting.
- These settings will be easily identifiable to children, young people and their families through displaying a quality mark, which they will receive through taking part in the training given.

It is anticipated that it will also support the delivery of the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services, which contains key action points in relation to children's play:

- 2.38 – Safe play areas which are accessible for children
- 2.43 – provide services and an environment that supports active play and physical activity
- 2.44 – include services and facilities to encourage social interaction of children and young people with their peer, which includes play facilities, appropriate to the needs of the community.

PLAY STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE ONE: Encouraging More Play Provision

Aim: To ensure that consideration is given to providing and developing appropriate local play provision that best meets the play needs of children and young people of Blaenau-Gwent.

The state of Play:

In Blaenau – Gwent, a Play Strategy Group was established to support the development of a local Play Strategy. This group developed the post of a Play Development Officer and this Officer was appointed in April 2005. This Officer was employed with the key responsibility of aiding the development and implementation of a comprehensive Play Strategy for the County Borough, on behalf of the Children and Young People’s Framework Partnership.

A multi-disciplinary Play Strategy Group of the Children and Young People’s Framework Partnership has been established to develop, monitor and ensure the implementation of strategy for the County Borough of Blaenau-Gwent. Terms of Reference have been developed to the Children and Young People’s Framework Partnership and will be a sub-group of the Health and Well-Being Group once it has been re-established within this Framework Partnership. The Play Strategy Group’s vision is that “By valuing play, we value children and young people.” The Terms Of Reference includes the adoption of the Welsh Assembly Government’s Play Policy. The Play Strategy for Blaenau-Gwent will ensure that consideration is given to providing and developing appropriate local play provision that best meets the play needs of children and young people of Blaenau-Gwent. This strategy will echo the Welsh Assembly Government’s Play Policy Implementation Plan: Play in Wales.

The Leisure Division has developed its own strategy for 2004 onwards, in relation to equipped play areas and playschemes. This strategy will “dovetail” into a wider Play Strategy.

The Cymorth Executive Panel has recognised the benefits of play to improve children’s emotional and physical health and well-being. Funding for play increased from 8.5% in 2005/2006 to 10% in 2006/2007, of the total allocation of the Cymorth funding.

In April 2006, a new post of Play Development Worker was created, supported by commissioning through the Cymorth Executive panel, in order to support the Play Development Officer in the role of implementing a comprehensive play strategy across the county borough. This role will support the infrastructure needed within the borough to encourage the development of more play provision. Play Development staff provide a resource to the Local Authority, as a whole, in developing appropriate local play provision that best meets the play needs of children and young people of Blaenau-Gwent.

The need for local play provision to be inclusive of all children is essential. In 2006, Barnardo’s will be establishing a project to assist disabled children and young people participation in play and leisure opportunities.

The Assembly Government, through its guidance for Cymorth spending, expects Local Authorities to develop at least one Integrated Children’s Centre in the local authority area. These centres are required to include open access play facilities within their networks of services. It is intended that the benefits of adventure play can be spread by this mechanism in some of Wales’ most disadvantaged areas. Children Act planning guidance will include a duty to co-operate in addressing the play needs of local children and young people, including the need for staffed adventure play that provides children with a rich play environments. Staffed adventure play sites have been recognised by the Assembly Government as provision that best meet the play needs of older children. The development of adventure play sites within the County Borough will aid the successful implementation of The Extending Entitlement programme for the 11-25 group which states as an entitlement “an opportunity for recreational and social opportunities in a safe and accessible environment.”

The number of out of school childcare places available has increased through funding directed at this purpose, since 1999. These places provide safe play environments before and after school, and during school holidays, while helping parents with childcare. The Childcare Strategy, "Childcare is for Children" is clear that children need access to high quality environments. The Assembly Government is not interested in supporting care that merely warehouses children. Quality out of school care should provide children with opportunities for freely chosen play, and therefore make a significant contribution to this plan. In 2006/07, 9.6% of the Framework Partnership's funding is directed at developing childcare within Blaenau-Gwent. It is therefore important to ensure that this money is spent on developing quality care environments, which provide a range of quality play opportunities.

The quality of play provision is important and the Playwork profession has developed a quality self-assessment process for playworkers that has been endorsed both by the Assembly Government and the Care Standards of Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW). It would be important that planning for staffed play provision incorporates this quality self-assessment process, "The First Claim". Where some staffed play provision has met standards set out in the regulations issued by CSIW in relation to childcare provision and open access play provision, this is not necessarily a guarantee for the quality of play opportunities on offer to children and young people. Therefore, it would be important to encourage current and future play provision to undertake the quality assessment as set out in this document. The quality assessment would complement any Quality Assurance system that current play provision may already have in place. It would ensure that a range of quality play opportunities is offered to children and young people.

Recommendations:

- That a mapping exercise is completed in relation to the current play, leisure and recreational facilities and activities for children and young people. This will identify any gaps in current provision in relation to addressing to the play needs of children and young people of Blaenau-Gwent.

- A variety of audits/consultations have already been carried out by a variety of agencies/divisions within the County Borough and these should form the underlying benchmark towards the current “State of Play Provision in Blaenau-Gwent”.
- Gaps identified within this audit are given priority to future development for the provision of play services and facilities and a Play Development Plan is developed which reflects the needs of the whole community.
- That the Leisure Division Play Strategy is enfolded within this Play Development Plan for future play provision.
- That planning for future play provision is inclusive from the initial stages of development. This would include consideration to the needs of the most local disabled children and young people where a new play facility is planned.
- That a staffed adventure play site is developed as a core element of the Integrated Children’s Centre (ICC), as found in the Cymorth guidance in relation to ICC development. An application for funding this development should include the employment of an Adventure Play Development Worker to take responsibility for developing/managing this provision. In the process of developing this provision it is essential that the site identified is accessible and appropriate to the local children and young people. This development will provide a model of play provision that will provide a mechanism for further developing this form of play provision across the County Borough Council.
- An audit of the range of play opportunities is carried out within the childcare settings throughout the borough. The purpose of this would be to determine the range of play opportunities being provided by these settings currently. Support is needs to be developed, through the EYDCP, to ensure that these settings are providing quality play opportunities, in line with “The First Claim”, for children whose parents/carers need childcare facilities. This will help childcare settings develop and maintain quality play provision
- That all current and future childcare and play provision adopts the playwork quality self-assessment process “The First Claim.”

Action Plan:

ACTION	Date	Monitoring	Who
A map of current play, leisure and recreational facilities and activities for children and young people is carried out to illustrate the range of play opportunities available in the borough	August 2007	Production of map	Play Strategy Group B-G Research Officer CIS/YIS Estyn Mapping and Auditing Group
An audit of issues relating to current play facilities /services is carried out. E/g accessibility, kitemark introduced as part of new Cymorth initiative for play (children with disabilities)	Ongoing - Complete April 2008	Production of Report	Play Development Officer Barnardo's
To ensure that a Play Development plan is developed for future development of services/facilities that address the play needs of children and young people. In conjunction with Tri-County Overarching Play Network. The plan would incorporate the Leisure Division's current Play Strategy.	To be agreed at Tri-County Level	6 weekly meetings	Play Development Officer Leisure's Policy Officer Play Strategy Group Volsector Play Network Tri-County Overarching Play Network
To monitor the implementation of the WAG Play Policy Implementation Plan	On-going	Play Strategy Group meetings Quarterly reports to the Children and Young People's Framework Partnership	Play Development Officer Play Strategy Group Framework Partnership Co-ordinator

ACTION	Date	Monitoring	Who
The development of a staffed adventure play site as a core element of the Integrated Children Centre, Blaina	On-going	Play Strategy Group Meetings	Play Strategy Group
Pilot local outreach project	August - Sept 2006	Report on pilot	Play Development Officer
Consultation			
Funding bid	September 2007	Dedicated funding secured	Play Development Officer
		Adventure Play Development Worker appointed	Play Strategy Group
		Site identified	
Implementation of quality self-assessment process "The First Claim"	Sept 2006	Audit of play opportunities offered by childcare settings	Childcare Development Officer EYDCP
	October 2007	Develop BG "First Claim" Toolkit	Play Development Officer
	Feb 2008	Training events/ workshops for "The First Claim"	
	Ongoing from February 2008	No of settings adopting the quality assessment process	Play Strategy Group

OBJECTIVE TWO: Play in Schools

Aim: To ensure that consideration is given to providing and developing rich play environments that best meet the play needs of children and young people of Blaenau-Gwent within their school environments, both for in school and out-of school purposes.

The state of Play:

Schools are well placed within the community to provide a range of opportunities for children's play. School playgrounds and playing fields can sometimes represent the only local available open space in urban areas.

This is particularly true within Blaenau-Gwent where the topography of the valley environment and the historical development of housing within narrow streets do not allow for open space for play, in some areas. The influence of the modern traffic can dominate these areas as streets are often heavily congested with cars, parked or otherwise. Therefore, school grounds, if well designed, landscaped, and managed, offer children and young people a valuable range of stimuli, ideas, resources and space for play.

There is a range of initiatives developed by the Welsh Assembly Government that support and encourage play within the school environment.

- The Foundation Phase for 3-7 years recognises that children learn best through play and being actively involved in activities.
- Wales: A Better Country makes a commitment to improve school buildings so that they are fit for purpose and properly maintained by 2010. There is a budget to support improvements to both school buildings and the school site, which may be used to improve landscaping so as to make rich and exciting play environments. In order to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained from such landscaping, pupils should **always** be consulted, through mechanisms such as Schools Councils, about how the environment of schools/setting can be changed. This development will provide spaces that serve the play policy and enable children to interact with the environment and each other. The

spaces will provide for the experience of a range of play types, both for use by the children attending during the school day and for children and wider community use out of school hours.

- Community Focussed Schools – recognises that schools can play a key role in creating/improving opportunities for play and informal recreation. They are encouraged to make playing fields/grounds available outside school hours as a play resource particularly where limited open space in local areas. There is funding over 3 years available through LEAs to develop this community focus until 2008. Playschemes would be eligible for funding providing they meet the scheme criteria.

Also, it is important that both teaching staff and non-teaching staff have knowledge of play types, play behaviour, play needs and appropriate intervention styles in order that school playtimes offer play that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. This is to compensate for the reduction in children's ability to play freely out of doors outside school hours. It means that the importance of school playtimes has increased, in terms of offering scope for unstructured and child-directed play opportunities.

In Blaenau-Gwent, an application to the BLF funding for Playground Enhancements: "Playscapes and Playzones" was successful. This funding is to improve school playgrounds to enable them to support unstructured and structured play opportunities in/out of school hours. One of the schools involved in the application for this funding is was allowing local children access to the school playground after-school hours. This is in recognition that access to local facilities for play is far from ideal. However, there are issues of ant-social behaviour and vandalism that is now preventing children from using the facilities. The school will be encouraged to make its grounds available to local children after-school hours. As part of the condition of the grant, mid-day supervisors have to attend the "In the Zone" training developed through the P.E. and Sports in School initiative. Further Playwork training to ensure that there is a play-led approach facilitated within the school lunch hours would complement this scheme.

There is an issue of concerning the responsibility of maintenance within school grounds, particularly where equipment is concerned. The Play Development Officer will become a qualified Routine Playground Inspector. Skills/knowledge and the practicalities of sensible risk-management within school playgrounds, particularly where equipment (Such as sand-pits) is concerned can be filtered down to school staff in order that opportunities for graduated risk-taking is facilitated within school playgrounds. This can be filtered down through support for developing risk management systems. This would counteract the avoidance of such opportunities that prove beneficial to children's development, which can result in sterile play environments in school playgrounds.

In order to support and encourage access to school grounds out-of-school hours, the Play Development Officer piloted 3 Playschemes in primary schools during the summer holidays 2006. This will follow the model of outreach work developed during summer 2005 and will be know as "Play in the Playground."

Following a presentation to the Healthy/Eco Schools Network that highlighted the links with play within schools and these particular agendas, an initial meeting of a variety of officers with an interest in the outdoor school play environment was held. This was a first step towards developing an Outdoor Play Task Group to encourage/ support the development of rich play environments within school premises.

The Play Development Officer has received numerous requests from schoolteachers in relation to providing advice/guidance and information in relation to the development/enhancement of their school grounds. Also, the Play Development Officer attended training to identify the suitability of this training for local purposes. "The Foundation Phase: a 'play-led' approach" was run by PlayPeople. It was a one-day course that supports early years teachers and teaching assistants, providing them with ideas to create the best outdoor environment that centres on the value and integrity of children's learning through play. It explores the delivery of early years learning in schools from a play perspective. The course defines a 'play-led' approach to learning and summarizes the current state of research into the link between learning and play. It significantly enhances training and support, which focuses on environmental improvements. This training would be particularly suitable for local

purposes and would be best facilitated with a whole school approach, to include both teaching and non-teaching staff.

Recommendations:

- That the development of an Outdoor Play Task Group is continued as a priority. This group should include members who have a responsibility/stakeholder interest for developing the school grounds that may come from a variety of differing agendas. This would ensure clarity of approach and understanding of other agendas impacting on schools. It would also give a more strategic emphasis towards the improvements/enhancements made to school grounds in order to make them both fit for purpose and accessible for play opportunities in and out of school hours. Working in this way has the potential to make a bigger impact/influence on schools that may be resistant to opening up their school grounds to the wider community. Through this task group, a variety of issues can be explored and potentially overcome.
- That the Play Development Officer continues to give support to schools and school improvement service for advice/guidance in relation to improving children and young people's play opportunities within these settings. It should be recognised that however, the Play Development Officer has limited capacity. A Play Development Worker has been appointed and will be able to assist with supporting schools around the play agenda. Funding opportunities will be continually explored to further develop this work (including Big Lottery Fund and Community Focussed Schools).
- The potential of monies available through Community Focussed Schools need to be clarified for the provision of a pilot playscheme project "Play in the Playground."
- This provision would work towards meeting the CSIW standards - (minimum criteria) and current legislation/regulations in order that the health, safety and care needs of children are met within these settings. This would facilitate a balance approach to risk management.
- A report on the pilot project "Play in the Playground" should contribute towards developing this initiative further and beyond summer 2006.

- Short courses about play are made available to school staff so that play can be implemented more effectively in the playground

Action Plan:

ACTION	Date	Monitoring	Who
Develop Outdoor Play Task Group	June 2007	Establishment of regular meetings	Play Development Officer Schools Improvement EYDCP
To promote, monitor and report on the promotion of play provision within community focussed schools, appropriate to community need in order to inform future development	March 2007 On going	Play opportunities offered after school Community access to school grounds	Play Strategy Group Play Development Officer Community Focused Schools Officer
Pilot "Play In the Playground" in 2 local Schools over the summer 2006	Sept 2006	Report on pilot	Play Development Officer
Ensure a range of appropriate training courses on play for teaching and non-teaching staff e.g. Webster Stratton schools based programme and disability awareness programme	March 2008	Range of courses Freely-chosen play opportunities offered	EYDCP Play Strategy Group Training Officer Educational physiologist

OBJECTIVE THREE: Play in the Community

Aim:

- **To ensure that children and young people's play needs are considered on a local level and planning for any new developments/regeneration considers its impact on children's play**
- **That play provision is locally appropriate and best meet the play needs of children and young people**
- **To ensure that children, young people and their parents/carers participate in the process of planning for play locally**

The state of Play:

Currently, The Six Acre Standard, developed by the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) is used to advise local authorities when planning for play areas. These standards do not reflect the current and diverse needs of the wider community. As a result, the Authority takes a targeted approach to provide static play areas in line with Leisure Services Play Action Plan.

The local authority provides traditional fixed play equipment areas. Within Leisure's Play Strategy, a ratio for the provision of fixed play areas has been identified as 1 play area per 250 children, aged 0-14 in ward in the county borough. It also identified that play areas would only be removed once they had reached the end of their functional life and on safety grounds. The costs for the removal of play areas are found within existing revenue budgets. There is no capital money available for the replacement/renovation of these traditional fixed play structures. External funding

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has been secured, in order to develop new play areas. These play areas are Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAS), as dictated by that funding source.

In 2004/05, there were a total of 61 of fixed play areas in the borough. 12 of these are MUGAS and there are also 10-wheeled play areas (for skateboarding/bikes). These have increased the diversity of play opportunities locally, and sometimes provide more suitable areas for older children's play and leisure opportunities. Whilst accepting that such areas are sometimes prone to damage and litter, Leisure services has implemented a robust inspection regime (in line with ROSPA guidelines) that highlights and manages the risk associated with these play areas effectively, therefore making them safe areas to play.

There continues to be a sustained demand for designated fixed play areas by parents, children and wider membership of local communities. To ensure that this demand is fully met, all partners from across the Play network, especially the Play Development Officer, will need to have full consultative involvement, in order to maximise plays potential.

Where new play areas/spaces and provision (such as playschemes) is being planned, it is essential that children and young people are involved in the decision making process at a level appropriate to their age and understanding. Providing mechanisms for their input into the decision-making process will ensure that play provision is planned that is locally appropriate and will meet the play needs of those children and young people. It will also ensure that that the development and location of local play provision will be strategically planned, rather than predicated on the need for the solution to the conflicting interests of adults and children. It is not unusual for play provision to be determined on the basis that it will not intrude upon or interfere with adult's use of space/time.

The Play Development Officer was involved in a consultation day in partnership with Barnardo's, which contributed to the establishment of a Service Level Agreement with Social Services for this project. The Play Development Officer is working closely with Barnardo's currently to ensure that holiday play provision is inclusive of disabled children and young people. Part of this work is contributing to the review of Leisure Division summer playscheme provision, in order to better include disabled children

and young people within this provision. The purpose of this work is to ensure equity of access to the play opportunities on offer. Also, it is anticipated that inclusive support will be given to the most local disabled children and young people, in order to provide reasonable access to the Playwork outreach project, known as “Play in the Park”.

A community vehicle is being purchased by the Authority and will be used for providing play sessions on an outreach basis in communities where play provision is limited and further play opportunities can be developed. The provision will provide early years play opportunities during school hours, targeting parents with under 5s. After-school play session will be provided for 5 –14 years in a variety of locations across the borough.

Recommendations:

- To include in the mapping exercise the production of a map that identifies land designated for children’s play, including land where fixed play equipment has been removed in line with the Health and Safety issues. This map should also identify “Green Spaces” that can be used to provide outdoor informal play opportunities locally.
- That a map produced to identify land for children’s play should identify which local authority department holds responsibility for the land, and also land that may be available for future developments.
- The map produced is used as a tool to identify any accessibility issues to identify and account for how children travel to the provision. The provision of “safe routes to play” will contribute to the use that children make of the provision. This “whole park” approach should contribute to the identification of play areas designated for removal/renovation.
- A robust maintenance regime of playgrounds, play areas and public spaces is maintained and that adequate funding is available from the local authority to provide capital costs for equipment, and also the regular inspection and maintenance of such areas.
- When traditional fixed equipped areas are removed, it is important to maintain the designation of use for children’s play space. Maintaining the grounds remaining can do this, including the perimeter fencing if any and waste/litter

removal so the area maintains its recognition and usage within local communities for the purpose of children's play.

- Where any suitable land is available for sale, that this land is available for consideration by the Play Strategy Group, in order that pockets and areas of open space, wasteland and woodland, where children and young people already play, can be protected.
- To ensure that appropriate local play facilities are provided where new housing developments are being planned, and this consideration is incorporated into strategy relating to housing/regeneration developments.
- To recommend and ensure that a broad range of play opportunities (i.e. staffed provision, adventure playgrounds) is considered within Section 106 Agreements.
- Mechanisms to ensure the participation of local children and young people are included in all new developments and plans relating to children's play provision.
- All play providers providing outdoor play space include in their plans maintenance programmes which address the problems of litter, in particular dog mess and broken glass..
- Better use of school facilities should be made for out-of-hours community play
- The community vehicle will enhance local community play opportunities through providing outreach play sessions for children and their families.
- The Play Strategy Group identifies mechanisms to engage with Planning, Housing and Transport and other relevant divisions within the local authority.
- Make available inclusive training courses for all groups that are actively involved with children and young people in the Blaenau Gwent area.

ACTION	Date	Monitoring	Who
<p>To produce map identifying children's play areas</p> <p>Green spaces available for informal outdoor play opportunities</p>	Jan 2007	Production of Map	<p>Grounds Maintenance and Countryside Manager</p> <p>Planning/Education/Leisure</p>
Funding secured and ensured for capital cost, regular inspection and maintenance routines	March 2007	<p>Continue to implement a regular robust inspection and maintenance regime</p> <p>Continue to develop a high quality maintenance service of all play areas</p>	Leisure division
To identify local groups currently active in the pursuit of developing local play provision	February 2007	Report produced from Voluntary Sector Network to Play Strategy Group	<p>Play Development Officer</p> <p>Grounds Maintenance and Countryside Manager</p> <p>Voluntary Sector Network</p>
To identify mechanisms for engagement with Planning, Housing, Transport etc.	February 2007	Report to meetings	Play Strategy Group
To identify mechanisms for ensuring the active participation of children and young people in new developments and plans in relation to play provision	March 2007	<p>Reports to meetings</p> <p>Participation of children and young people in developing play provision</p>	<p>Play Strategy Group</p> <p>Participation Officer</p> <p>Children's Grand Council</p>
To explore the new development of new/guidance/standards for play in new developments	<p>February 2007</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	Development of local standards	<p>Grounds Maintenance and Countryside Manager</p> <p>Play Strategy Group</p>
<p>Provide training courses for groups so they have a better capacity to provide a more inclusive setting</p> <p>April 05</p>	April 2008	Disability awareness courses and where needed specific courses to address specific needs	<p>Training Officer</p> <p>Play Development Officer</p> <p>Play Strategy Group</p>

OBJECTIVE FOUR: A Playwork Profession

Aim:

- **To promote and support the development of playwork training opportunities for play workers and volunteers.**
- **To encourage the development of reflective practice and implementation of Quality Assessment that will complement other Quality Assurance schemes.**
- **To encourage the implementation of Quality Assurance in staffed provision.**

The state of Play:

Staffed provision is a crucial component of play provision. There is currently a low level of playwork positions and provision available in Blaenau-Gwent to attract and retain good quality playworkers. The nature of the provision historically has been concentrated during the summer period, and within the childcare sector through after-school and holiday childcare provision. It is envisaged that the emerging "Child's Play" funding programme BIG will result in the creation of more year round staffed play provision, over the next 3 years.

Playwork training is available locally through a variety of training agencies in the borough for a number of years. Courses have been available through Ebbw Vale College and Clybiau Plant Cymru and the EYDCP has provided funding to students accessing playwork training. There are difficulties in providing opportunities for Level 3 standard training due to the lack of trainers available locally, and across Wales, as a whole. Where playworkers are trained and achieve Level 3 standard in Playwork qualifications, there are very few jobs available to these playwork students. There are limited opportunities available in after-school clubs and holiday childcare schemes. Where jobs are available, it is not unusual for the qualified playworkers to have limited and sometimes, inappropriate placement practice experience.

New playwork materials are under development by Play Wales and are due for completion Dec 2006. The new materials will ask for extensive placement practice as part of the qualification route as they recognise the need for reflective practice. There is a need to develop appropriate placement experiences to support the delivery of

these new materials. These materials are being developed to address some of the issues prevalent in developing a qualified children's workforce.

Historically, temporary recreation assistants have staffed the Sports centre based schemes and no training has been provided. These schemes typically attract students who are looking for holiday work, to fit in with their academic studies. The provision of training for these staff was identified within the Leisure's Division Play strategy.

Also, Playworkers who provide support for disabled children and young people were provided with a training programme delivered by Social Services. However, play activities formed a minor part of this training. However, this problem has been addressed in summer 2006 with the introduction of Playwork Induction Level. The sector skills council, Skillsactive and the Care Standards Inspectorate of Wales, endorse this course. This training provides an initial route into further playwork training.

In summer 2006, a pre-summer playscheme joint training programme was coordinated by the Play Development Officer for temporary summer playworkers and included all staff employed to deliver the summer playschemes and outreach activities run by the authority. The training programme also included workers employed by Barnardos Community Links, employed to give support to disabled children and young people accessing the summer play provision.

Capacity building for staffing play provision was increased through sports development workers and youth workers attending the training and working in the summer play projects. These staff are currently employed by the authority and work in a range of settings and disciplines during term time. This helps to facilitate staff involved in frontline face-to-face work with children and young people a common core of skills and knowledge, as promoted through the Children's Workforce Development Strategy.

For example, staff employed to deliver Sports Development Out of School Hours Learning activities were retained beyond their initial contracts through the summer period and were assigned to become Team Leaders for each of the 4 sports centre playschemes. Youth work staff employed term-time in the Oasis project or as

sessional workers were employed to work as outreach playworkers in multi-disciplinary teams in the Play in the Park project. They all took part in the pre-summer playwork training that was an accredited course, enhancing the professional development and qualifications of these staff.

The development of a Play Forum to support local playworkers and volunteers would help support best practice and promote sharing of ideas/information gain. The Youth Service can also promote this support through the Youth Support Workers Network that has been recently established.

The Care Standards Inspectorate of Wales (CSIW) regulates the standard of play provision, including issues relating to staffing and organisation of the provision. These standards set a minimum standard of qualification for playworkers operating play provision over 2 hours, where the children in attendance are under 8 years old. In order to operate legally, settings have to register the provision with the CSIW.

Locally, some settings only operate for less than 2 hours where under 8s are concerned, or exclude those children under 8 when open for longer, as in the sports centre playschemes. However, best practice is realised when settings operate to these standards, regardless of the age of children in attendance.

Recommendations:

- Promote playwork as a profession across a variety of outlets. E.g. Voluntary Sector Forum, local comprehensive schools, Jobs Centre Plus and Careers Wales
- A comprehensive training audit of all those involved in providing play opportunities for children and young people is carried out.
- A local register of qualified playworkers is developed, maintained and regularly reviewed. This would help inform the provision of further training and professional development modules needed locally.
- Playwork needs to be incorporated within Youth Curriculum activities. Oasis youth support workers are well placed to promote and facilitate playwork taster sessions and Induction Level Playwork training to young people disaffected with mainstream educational opportunities. The Youth Service and

CPCKC are well placed to encourage, promote and deliver playwork taster sessions to young people

- The delivery of new play training materials developed by Play Wales needs to be supported locally.
- Continue work to support the professional development of those staff involved in face-to-face work with children and young people across a range of settings and disciplines to develop a common core of skills and knowledge, including the knowledge and understanding of children's play and quality playwork. Locally, this would promote the understanding of the unique role of a playworker in facilitating children and young people's play within the community.
- The development of a common core of skills and knowledge amongst frontline staff working across specific disciplines would build capacity locally for providing staff delivering play sessions. It has the potential to develop full time professional multi-discipline posts locally, and therefore aid the retention of staff. It would also increase the potential of job creation in the field of work with children and young people. These roles will be invaluable in supporting the success of Integrated Children's Centres developed locally.
- Support for playworkers and volunteers need to be developed. This can be done initially through the Childcare forum, BIG Kids, the Youth Support Workers Forum and the Voluntary Sector Forum. There is a strong need to develop and establish a local Play Forum.
- All settings offering play opportunities should be encouraged to register with the CSIW. The Play Development Officer is well placed to offer support/information and guidance to aid with this process. Where settings operate an open access policy, they should be encouraged to register with the CSIW. Open access play provision caters for children 5-15 (16 if disabled) and the exclusion of certain children in relation to their age is negated. Therefore, a commitment to register provision would increase participation of children and young people in this form of provision.
- There is a need for play provision to be inclusive of all children, including those with disabilities. Where provision is offered for children and young people over the age of 8 working to the minimum standards, as set out by the CSIW, ensures that appropriate child protection and care mechanisms are in place in order for the provision to consider and meet the needs of all children.

- A quality assurance mechanism needs to be developed locally to ensure that play providers are providing both quality care and quality play for all children in attendance. The EYDCP has developed a local Quality Assurance Scheme, which provides a stepping-stone to umbrella organisations (e.g. CPCKC, MYM, WPPA) own Quality Assurance Schemes. This can be developed further to include the playwork quality self- assessment Tool, “The First Claim” to also ensure that there is a quality of play opportunities offered within such a quality assurance scheme.
- All play providers would need to be encouraged to adopt such a scheme, both for closed-access and open-access provision, and funding for play provision should be directed at that provision that can demonstrate a commitment to adopting such a Quality Assurance Scheme.

Action Plan:

ACTION	Date	Monitoring	Who
Complete a training audit of all employed playworkers within the local authority area Review audit	Jan 2007 Ongoing	Training audit completed Baseline established Gaps identified	EYDCP Childcare Development Officer Tri County Overarching Play Network
Promotion of playwork as a training opportunity/profession Through a variety of outlets. E.g. Voluntary Sector Forum, local comprehensive schools	Jan 2007 Ongoing	Nos of courses offering playwork "tasters" and Induction Level Playwork Training Nos of participants of playwork "taster sessions" and Induction Level Playwork training	CPCKC Youth Service CIS/YIS/Adult Education/Genesis
To work to develop appropriate placement experience for trainee playworkers through the development of a range of play provision such as open access play, and in a range of settings such as outreach playwork (e.g. Play in the Park, mobile community playbus sessions)	Summer 2007	Register/ Database of trainee playworkers, qualified playworkers, volunteers and appropriate placement experiences Increase in volunteering opportunities: No of placement opportunities No of volunteers No of playwork students	Play Development Officer Training Development Officer (to be appointed) Flying Start co-ordinator (to be appointed) CPCKC
To continue with Induction Playwork training for summer staff delivering play provision	Summer 2007	Increase in qualified and appropriately experienced playworkers	Play Strategy Group Leisure Division/Youth service

Appoint a training officer to provide appropriate play training opportunities	Jan 2007 Summer 2007 Ongoing	Officer in post Range of progressive playwork courses provided No of playwork courses No of students attending	EYDCP Flying Start co-ordinator Training Officer Play Development Officer
Develop a common core of skills and knowledge in relation to children's play to all staff involved in face-to-face work	Summer 2007	Increased capacity for delivering staffed play provision No of professional development playwork training opportunities	Training Officer Play Development Officer
Develop professional development training opportunities	Summer 2007	Increased opportunities for children's play	Play Development Officer Training Officer
Develop Voluntary Sector Play Network	May 2007 Ongoing	Play Forum established Regular meetings	Play Development Officer GAVO
Audit of registration of closed-access/open access provision	Jan 2007	Nos of registered after-school/holiday provision – both closed/open access	EYDCP CIS Officer
Further development of local Quality Assurance scheme to include Quality in Play opportunities	October 2007	Nos of setting achieving quality assurance Nos of settings using First Claim	EYDCP Play Development Officer

<p>Service specification developed for access to influence funding for play provision- open/closed access</p> <p>Reference only given for external funding if quality assessment in Play achieved</p>	<p>April 2007</p>	<p>Nos of registered settings Nos of setting achieving quality assurance</p>	<p>EYDCP</p> <p>Play Strategy Group</p>
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OBJECTIVE FIVE: Managing Risk and Parental Concerns

Aims:

- **To raise the profile of play**
- **To promote the importance of play for children's development.**
- **To gain a balanced judgement of risk in play provision. This is in order to recognise the importance of the need for children and young people to take risk in their play. Sensibly managed risk-taking is essential for the contribution it makes to children and young people's development.**

The state of Play:

Children and young people living in Wales have become sheltered from the environment that might support their developmental play needs. Many are driven to school and leisure time activities, are watched when at play and never experience the freedom of playing without constraining supervision. As a result, they have fewer opportunities to explore the world they live in, to choose their own friends, to learn independence and to gain knowledge of the characteristics of their community.

Parents and carers have genuine concern for the safety for their children within an environment affected by modern traffic conditions. Sometimes, there is a perception within local communities that permission for children to 'play out' will be interpreted as poor parenting. Within Blaenau-Gwent there is a high perception of crime and disorder. This does not necessarily tally with a relatively low crime rate within the County Borough.

The Play Development Officer established strong links with the Parent Link Forum in April 2005. Research carried out by the Parent Link Co-ordinator in January 2005 found that over 80% of parents who participated in this research were concerned with the "lack of safe areas to play".

An "Information Day" was developed by the Play Development Officer to explore this issue further, in partnership with the Parent Link Forum.

This information session was developed for 2 purposes:

1. To raise the profile of play and the importance of play for children's development amongst local parents and community members – to give parents/carers information regarding play.

2. To explore the concerns and perceptions of local parents/carers in relation to the “lack of safe areas to play” – to gain information from parents on the concerns that they were experiencing locally.

A leaflet titled “Families and Play” was published by the Play Development Officer to support this information session detailing tips for parents to help facilitate children and young people’s play. To date 2 information sessions have been held. Further work to deliver this session borough-wide is incorporated through the strategic targeting of the Children’s Entitlement Team programmed for 2006. This information session available for local parents has been advertised in the Spring Edition of the Children’s Information Service Newsletter.

The “Families and Play” leaflet has been distributed through agencies involved in the Parent Link Forum, the information sessions and a variety of events hosted by the Children’s Entitlement Team, such as the Early Years Funday.

An event was held on National Playday in Parc Bryn Bach. The event was organised by the Play Development Officer and was a partnership event involving Local Authority Divisions/ many different agencies within the County Borough that currently deliver services for children and young people. The aim of this event is to raise the profile of play locally, including through the local media. The event attracted approximately 1000 visitors and was a huge success. The success of the day was recognised across all agencies involved in the planning/delivery of the day and gained media coverage in the local press. The profile of play was raised by this day.

Also, the promotion of this event and forthcoming summer play provision provided by the Local Authority will be included in the Community Communications Network (CCN) scheduled for early summer. This had been facilitated through strong links with the Children’s Information Service (CIS).

The establishment of a multi-agency Play Strategy Group and a various presentations made by the Play Development Officer to a variety of agencies, including the Framework Partnership, have begun to raise the profile of play and play provision.

Play providers can find it difficult to meet children's needs in the light of increased insurance premiums. Part of the reason for the higher premiums is the cover against legal action taken by parents against play providers if children suffer injury. Good practice in risk management, recognising that support for play and children's development requires a balanced judgement of risk. Through the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales, the Assembly Government regulates staffed play provision serving children aged under 8 and can ensure that such a balanced approach is taken in these settings.

The minimum standards set out by the CSIW consider the health, safety and care needs of children attending the provision. Currently they only apply to settings that include children under 8. Where play provision is not registered with the CSIW, it would be important that play providers are encouraged to meet the minimum standards set out in the regulations issued by the CSIW, as far as practicably possible. This would ensure the health, safety and care needs of children over 8 are met, particularly where disabled children and young people are included in this provision.

Recommendations:

- That a multi-agency National Playday Event is held annually and attention is drawn to it within the local media, press releases issued by the Local Authority in a variety of formats, e.g. Valleys Voice, Council website and Children's Information Service (CIS) and the Youth Information Service (YIS).
- That the promotion of play is developed further through the CIS, the YIS and the CCN.
- The Play Development Officer gives settings/play providers support in developing policies and procedures that would meet the CSIW minimum standards for Open Access Play Provision, as far as is practicably possible.
- That all play providers employing staff are encouraged to work towards meeting the CSIW minimum standards for Open Access Play Provision, regardless of the minimum age of children in attendance.

Action Plan:

ACTION	Date	Monitoring	Who
To actively promote this strategy to other divisions/organisations to better enable them to consider impact of their decisions/delivery plans on children's play.	March 2007 Ongoing	Events/workshop/ meetings/presentations Inclusion of play provision in Community Plan Monitoring reports to the Commissioning Executive Panel	Play Development Officer Play Strategy Group Play Development Officer
To actively promote play development/ opportunities through the media	Ongoing	Features in media	Play development Officer CIS/YIS Blaenau-Gwent CBC Communications Office CCN
To support any national campaigns promoting play according to local needs	August - annually	National Playday Event	Play Strategy Group Play Development Officer Leisure Division Youth Service Children's Entitlement Partnership Youth Entitlement Partnership Communities First
Support for play providers developing policies and procedures to meet the CSIW minimum standards for Open Access Play Provision, as far as are practicably possible.	July 2006 On-going	Handbooks/ information developed No. of play providers developing policies/ procedures No. of play providers registered with CSIW	Play Development Officer Play Strategy Group
Information for play provision	March 2007	Handbooks/ Information Numbers of enquiries to CIS	

OBJECTIVE SIX: Play Across the Council

Aim: To ensure co-ordination and integration within existing relevant strategies and organisations in order to affect change and influence other areas of policy development.

The state of Play:

A Play Strategy Group has been established to develop and implement a Play Strategy for Blaenau-Gwent. However, more work needs to be done to engage other departments within the local authority structure, where their work impacts on children's play provision. This group reports to the Framework Partnership in order to affect change and influence other areas of policy development, which may have an impact on children's play provision. The Play Strategy is a crosscutting document and needs to be incorporated within other existing strategies and organisation.

The Play Development Officer has made a range of presentations to other organisations through a variety of partnership meetings but more work is needed here. Stronger links need to be made with the Community Safety Partnership and the Health and Well Being partnership. The Play Strategy needs to feed into the Community Plan.

The development of a better infrastructure would support the implementation of the Play Strategy and to ensure co-ordination and integration into other corporate plans and strategies, or relevant departmental policies and activities. The use of an appropriate Performance Indicator to be developed to be used to monitor the effectiveness of the local Play Strategy and its implementation. This indicator has been developed by the Audit Commission and identifies the extent to which the play policy can act as a practical working tool to influence and guide any decisions made across all relevant departments, which affect or relate to children's play opportunities.

Recommendations:

- The Play Strategy Group strongly recommends that the Framework Partnership make it a priority to engage with the Play Strategy Group to ensure that the play agenda features strongly in other emerging strategies and plans across the sectors.
- That the Play Strategy Group continually reviews/monitors membership to the group, to ensure appropriate membership, and include other divisions which may have the responsibility of implementing strategies that impact on Children's and Young People's Play, e.g. Road Safety Strategy.
- The Play Strategy Group reports on progress regularly to the children and Young People's Framework Partnership on a quarterly basis.
- The Play Strategy is included within the borough's Community Plan.
- The Authority adopts a Local Performance Indicator

ACTION PLAN:

ACTION	Date	Monitoring	Who
Establish and maintain communication and reporting mechanisms through the Framework	April 2006 and on-going	Regular reports to Framework Partnership, with key recommendations. Written minutes/responses from Partnership to Working Group	Chair of Play Strategy Group Children's Partnership Co-ordinator Framework Partnership Co-ordinator
Identify potential members of Play Strategy Group and actively engage with them to promote involvement.	Jan 2007 and on-going	Good communication between other groups. Maintain an up-to-date knowledge of emerging plans and organisations	Play Development Officer
Employment of a Play Development Assistant post to implement and monitor the strategy and to support and develop play opportunities	June 2006	Recruitment and appointment in partnership with Working Group	Play Development Officer
Adoption of any future Local Performance Indicator	Dec 2006 ongoing	Reports to the Framework Partnership	Play Strategy Group Play Development Officer Framework Partnership Co-ordinator

Methodology

A multi-agency Play Strategy Group has been in existence since 2004. This group developed the post of Play Development Officer, whose key tasks are:

- To identify and highlight gaps in provision via the Children and Young People's Framework Partnership structure.
- To develop a comprehensive play strategy for Blaenau-Gwent County Borough
- To work in partnership to develop and expand accessible staffed open access play opportunities.

The Play Development Officer came into post in April 2005.

Initially, The Play Strategy Group's membership was reviewed to ensure a multi-agency approach to the development of a play strategy. Individuals and organisations that have contributed to the development of this strategy and action plan are listed below. Once the group had been established, terms of reference were developed to the Children and Young People's Framework Partnership.

At this point, the group began to explore the recommendations made by the Play Policy Implementation Group to the Welsh Assembly, for the purpose of informing the development of a national play strategy. All 24 of the recommendations made by this national multi-agency group were incorporated into the Welsh Assembly Government's national play strategy, which was launched in February 2006. The national strategy is known as "Play in Wales: Play Policy Implementation Plan.

The group decided that a Blaenau-Gwent play strategy should echo this national strategy, and look towards the implementation of this on a local level, using the themes used in this document, i.e. Encouraging More Play Provision, Play in School, Play in the Community, A Playwork Profession, Managing Risk and Parental Concerns and finally, Play across the Council.

The objectives in this strategy have been developed as a result of the participation of a variety of professionals in the voluntary and statutory sector through discussions and interviews. Parents/carers, children and young people and wider community have participated through consultation, discussion groups, questionnaires and their

active participation in an action-research project, "Play in the Park", initiated in summer 2005. This was a pilot open access project operated on an outreach basis, where staff provided enhanced play opportunities in 4 local play areas.

Other discussions have been held with agencies, such as Community Safety, Local Health Board, Healthy Schools, Community First, who recognise the impact that their services have on play provision, and likewise, the potential benefits that play could bring to their provision.

Desk research was undertaken in relation to play and playwork and a variety of national/local strategies/initiatives.

Parents/carers of disabled children and young people, including non-disabled siblings and disabled children and young people were consulted through their participation in an event organised by Barnardos in February 2006.

Consultation with primary school children was undertaken in May 2007 through the schools Grand Council at Georgetown Primary School in Tredegar.

Further consultation with stakeholder groups will take place once the Children and Young People's framework Partnership have approved the draft strategy for consultation. A series of workshops and seminars will be held so that participants can explore the key objectives and their implications.

Contributors:

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Appendix One: Playwork Principles

These Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people. They are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well being of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
3. 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.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well being of children.

Appendix Two: PI for Play Strategy

Development and implementation of a corporate play policy: assessing you progress

A	The policy is widely scoped, including any local authority services that might directly or indirectly affect children's play opportunities.	<p style="text-align: center;">Advanced</p> <p>The policy clearly identifies the range of authority services with relevance to play and their respective responsibilities. Supporting guidance is provided to the relevant staff in these departments to ensure that the policy is implemented in practice.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Established</p> <p>The policy clearly identifies the range of authority services with relevance to play and their responsibilities.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Emerging</p> <p>The policy broadly identifies services that have relevance to play.</p>
B	The play policy clearly identifies the importance of play	<p style="text-align: center;">Advanced</p> <p>The policy includes a clear assessment of the specific needs and priorities for the local area, identifying, for example, particular locations where action is required. It displays a clear understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child's right to play, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child • Why a variety of play opportunities is important. • Defines play, play opportunities, children and acceptable risks. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Established</p> <p>The policy includes a broad assessment of needs and priorities for the local area, but does not identify specific areas of action. It displays a broad understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Child's right to play • Why play is important. It defines play, play opportunities, and acceptable risks. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Emerging</p> <p>The policy shows an understanding of why play is important, and defines what 'play' and 'play opportunities' mean. The policy is not couched in general terms and does not identify the specific requirements and priorities of the local area.</p>

<p>C</p> <p>The play policy is integrated with other relevant community, corporate and departmental plans.</p>	<p>Advanced</p> <p>The policy is consistent with the authority's corporate objectives, and identifies the role of play in contributing to the achievement of objectives. The policy should be linked to the corporate strategy on children and young people. Where there is no separate strategy for younger people, links to other corporate strategies should be explicit. It considers or makes reference, where relevant, to other existing activities and corporate or departmental plans which may affect the delivery of the play policy.</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<p>Established</p> <p>The policy is consistent with the authority's corporate objectives, and identifies the role of play in contributing to the achievement of these objectives. The policy does not consider or make reference to specific departmental plans or activities that may affect the delivery of the play policy.</p>	<p>Emerging</p> <p>The policy is a stand-alone document that makes little or no reference to corporate or relevant departmental policies and activities.</p>
<p>D</p> <p>The policy was developed drawing on consultation with a range of relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>Advanced</p> <p>Consultation included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector agencies, including tiers in local government. • The voluntary sector • Adults, children, young people and the private sector from the local communities. <p>Consultation was: 'Inclusive', drawing on views from a cross section of people, representative of the local community as a whole, with particular focus on children of different ages, parents and young people, and</p>	<p>Established</p> <p>Consultation included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector agencies, including tiers in local government. • The voluntary sector <p>Consultation was: 'Inclusive', drawing on views from a cross section of people, representative of the local community as a whole, with particular focus on children of different ages, parents and young people, and including</p>	<p>Emerging</p> <p>Consultation included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector agencies, including tiers in local government. <p>No steps were taken to ensure that consultation included a cross-section of the population representative of the wider community.</p>

		including appropriate representation from black and minority ethnic groups, traveller families and children and families with disabled children.	appropriate representation from black and minority ethnic groups, traveller families and children and families with disabled children.	
E	The policy has been endorsed by the chief executive and/or members of the relevant committee	Advanced Yes and engaged for the future	Established Endorsed	Emerging No
F	The play policy is based on a clear baseline assessment of local needs and identifies current provision and opportunities for play	Advanced In developing the policy, the authority has carried out and included an assessment of the current range of provision throughout the authority area. The policy identifies specific local needs and how these are addressed by the current provision, and/or where there is a shortfall.	Established The policy includes a broad assessment of the needs and priorities of the local area, but does not identify specific areas for action. The authority has not carried out and included an assessment of the current range of provision throughout the area, and how this relates to identified needs.	Emerging The policy is couched in general terms and does not identify the specific requirements and priorities of the local area. The authority has not carried out and included an assessment of the level and suitability of the current provision.

G	<p>The play policy provides a clear framework for the implementation and delivery.</p>	<p>Advanced</p> <p>The play policy identifies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key principles and a clear framework for the planned development of play opportunities • Short, medium and long-term priorities and target delivery dates. • Resource implications and allocation • Mechanisms to monitor and review arrangements 	<p>Established</p> <p>The play policy identifies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key principles and a clear framework for the planned development of play opportunities. • Short, medium and long-term priorities and target delivery dates. • Mechanisms to monitor and review arrangements. <p>It does not clearly identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource implications and allocation. • A plan for stakeholder involvement. 	<p>Emerging</p> <p>The play policy identifies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General principles and a outline framework for the planned development of play opportunities <p>It does not clearly identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short, medium and long-term priorities and target delivery dates. • Resource implications and allocation. • A plan for stakeholder involvement. • No mechanisms have been identified to monitor and review arrangements.
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H	A play policy working group with key partners has been established for delivery.	<p>Advanced</p> <p>Yes, with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear terms of reference • Allocated resources and the authority to drive the policy forward. 	<p>Established</p> <p>Yes, with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear terms of reference. • A commitment to secure resources and responsibility to drive the policy forward 	<p>Emerging</p> <p>Yes, with clear terms of reference. However, no resources have yet been committed nor any action plan identified.</p>
I	A framework is in place for monitoring progress and regular reporting on plans.	<p>Advanced</p> <p>A framework is in place that ensures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery against targets and objectives is monitored and on minimum of a quarterly basis. • Progress is reported back to management and stakeholders. • The policy/strategy is reviewed annually, with a comprehensive review at least every five years. 	<p>Established</p> <p>A framework is in place that ensures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery against targets and objectives is monitored on at least a quarterly basis. • Progress is reported back to management and stakeholders. • There are no plans in place for the review of the policy. 	<p>Emerging</p> <p>There is no framework in place.</p>