

# Getting Serious About Play

*A review of children's play*

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Designed by **Lowe Broadway London**

Front cover photo : Philip Wolmuth/London Play

# Foreword

Far too many children have nowhere safe to play. They either don't get out to play or they play in places where they aren't safe. So they are deprived of the pleasure and stimulation of being able to play with their friends or they are in danger. That is bad both for them and for the peace of mind of their parents. So at the last General Election the Government pledged that £200 million of National Lottery money would be earmarked for new and improved children's play facilities.

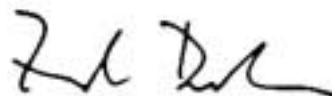
Tessa Jowell, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, was determined to make sure these extra funds went to those neighbourhoods and communities with most need and least high-quality facilities. She asked me to chair a Review to draw up a national strategy to do just that and that is what we have done. The Review covered inner cities, suburban and rural communities. It looked to the needs of children who may feel excluded from local play at present. It paid special attention to the needs of disabled children.

Drawing up a national strategy has not been easy because the play needs of children differ from place to place. Children of different ages want different play facilities. Successful playgrounds and play schemes vary widely. It is really a matter of 'horses for courses'. So we recommend that local authorities be allocated a share of the funds which reflects child deprivation in their area. They should then be obliged to consult local people and voluntary bodies and put forward

good-quality schemes which meet local needs and which have reasonable prospects of being a long-term success.

The £200 million will go a lot further if local schemes can manage to bring in money from other public sources or voluntary funds. Keeping things going after the lottery money runs out may prove very difficult in many deprived parts of the country. Though it is not Government policy, I believe that a commitment to continue lottery funding of play facilities for the next decade would be a great step forward for children's play and also a sensible and popular use of lottery funds.

I would like to thank all the hundreds of people who have been involved in the Review and the civil servants and experts from the voluntary sector who played a major part. Above all, I must pay tribute to Tim Gill from the Children's Play Council who did most of the work.



**Frank Dobson**



## Prologue:

### A tale of two families

Gillian and Beth are both mothers with three children. Their families are similar: each has a 14-year old boy, and 11-year old girl and an 8 year old boy. Both are on low incomes, neither has a car. But while Beth's neighbourhood has very little to offer children and young people, Gillian lives close to a well-equipped park, there is a lively play area next to her local school and all her children can take part in an extensive programme of playschemes during the school holidays.

Gillian and Beth's oldest boys are both into BMX bikes. Gillian's local park has a BMX track, so her eldest son can go there whenever he likes and practice his skills and tricks with his friends. He's had a couple of run-ins with the park warden for riding too dangerously through the park. After a quiet word he's accepted the rules.

There is nowhere suitable near Beth's house, so her son used to go to the shopping area. But he got into arguments with security guards who didn't want him and his friends hanging around.

So now they roam the neighbourhood looking for things to do to relieve their boredom. Beth is worried that they are starting to get into trouble.

Gillian's daughter went to a summer playscheme, where thanks to an enthusiastic play-worker she discovered a hidden talent for jive dancing, so she is now taking this up more seriously. It's not something she would have tried otherwise. It has also made a big difference to her self-esteem. Gillian's daughter and her youngest son are also regular users of the play area in their primary school playground, which is open for public use. Most days Gillian lets them both walk to school on their own as she feels the play area is a safe place where they can run around, stretch themselves, play games with other children or just hang out. Gillian herself values the play area as a place where she can meet and chat with other parents. Sometimes she has asked one of the mums to look after her children if she has a doctor's appointment or a job interview.

Beth's daughter doesn't go out on her own.

Her parents worry that she's not very confident or street-wise. They think there is nowhere safe for her to go. Beth's youngest son is lively and full of energy, but there is nowhere nearby to run around and let off steam. He and his sister used to play on the pavement near their house, but the neighbours complained about the noise and Beth started to feel she was being a bad mother for letting them play out in the street. So now they spend a lot of time indoors playing computer games.

Sometimes when they've been indoors all day they get very restless and start playing up, which Beth finds hard to cope with. The children's father would like to take them all out to get some fresh air at the weekend, but without a car it's difficult to organise, so they tend to stay in and watch TV or videos. For Beth, who grew up in the area, the worst thing is that the local park used to be her favourite place to play when she was a girl, but now the gates are chained up and it lies vandalised and derelict.



## Summary

- <sup>1</sup> This report sets out how best to invest the £200 million from the New Opportunities Fund\*, pledged in June 2001, for improving children's play opportunities. It is the result of an eight month review that involved extensive consultation, commissioned research and drew on evidence from existing sources.
- <sup>2</sup> It looked at the needs of children and young people aged from 0-16. While the review process covered the whole of the UK, the report's conclusions and recommendations are specific to England. It is for the devolved administrations to draw upon the review as they think fit.
- <sup>3</sup> For the purposes of the review, play meant what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons. NOF, and the projects it funds, should apply the same definition.
- <sup>4</sup> The NOF funding programme should improve and create thousands of spaces where children and young people can play freely and in safety.
- <sup>5</sup> Funding should be focused on areas and groups with the poorest access to good quality play opportunities with a major emphasis on the inclusion of disabled children and young people.
- <sup>6</sup> Long term popularity with children and young people is the main test of success. The review identified the following main characteristics of successful projects: they are centred on children, have an attractive location with high quality play opportunities, fit in well with local circumstances and give both children and parents a sense of security. NOF should assess applications against these criteria.
- <sup>7</sup> The main emphasis should be on projects with medium or small sized catchment areas. Access should be free.
- <sup>8</sup> Play opportunities with some form of adult supervision or adult oversight are likely to prove more successful.
- <sup>9</sup> The bulk of the NOF funding – around 80 per cent – should support exemplary projects that follow and promote best practice. Most of the remaining funding should support new approaches, while recognising that some may not succeed.
- <sup>10</sup> NOF should make a provisional allocation of the main funds to unitary and lower tier local authority areas on a basis that reflects the level of child poverty.
- <sup>11</sup> The local authority or a local partnership should be responsible for drawing up proposals for the use of the funds allocated to their area which add to existing provision and reflect the priorities set out in paragraphs 5 and 10 above. Their proposals must be prepared in partnership with other local agencies, children and young people and local communities in the neighbourhoods concerned.
- <sup>12</sup> Local agencies will be expected to fund the consultation and preparation of plans from their own resources. However, NOF, the Government and local agencies should work

\*This report refers throughout to the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). As part of its proposed reorganisation of the National Lottery funding arrangements, the Government is minded to abolish NOF as a separate entity. All our recommendations about the priorities and functions of NOF should apply to its successor.

together to ensure that all areas, especially the most deprived communities, have the necessary support to prepare sound high quality proposals and to implement them.

- <sup>13</sup> Funding from the NOF programme should allow enough time for the preparation of effective proposals and for projects to become established.
- <sup>14</sup> Where possible, local proposals should try to maximise the impact of NOF funding by complementing and augmenting it with funds from other sources.
- <sup>15</sup> Out of hours use of school grounds and buildings should be promoted, most especially when schools are being built or refurbished.
- <sup>16</sup> As NOF funding may, where necessary, cover revenue as well as capital, proposals should indicate how projects are expected to be supported when NOF money runs out.
- <sup>17</sup> Local authorities should take the opportunity provided by the NOF programme to improve the planning and operation of play facilities across their area. They should designate a 'play champion' to carry out this task and to help ensure the success of the NOF funded projects.
- <sup>18</sup> NOF, the Government and local authorities should take the opportunity to make sure that the creation and maintenance of high quality play facilities secure a much higher priority with national and local decision makers.
- <sup>19</sup> The Government and NOF must make sure there is clear responsibility for implementing the programme nationally and locally and should seek to give it a national identity to maximise its impact, to raise standards and promote long-term viability.
- <sup>20</sup> NOF should evaluate the impact on children and young people, parents and local communities of the play projects they fund and also build up a data base of what works and what does not.
- <sup>21</sup> The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education and Skills should enhance their capacity to support the NOF programme and to ensure joint support for it across Government.

# Introduction

This report presents the findings of the first ever Government-sponsored review into children's play. It sets out how best to invest £200m from the National Lottery to improve play opportunities for children and young people.

It was commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education and Skills, with support from the New Opportunities Fund, other Government departments and the administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

<sup>1</sup> The play review was launched in October 2002, and followed an announcement in June 2001 of a £200 million boost for children's play funded from the New Opportunities Fund. The aim is to improve play opportunities for children and young people aged 0-16. The bulk of the funding is likely to be available from late 2005/2006.

<sup>2</sup> The review set out to gather information on existing play provision and what more needs to be done. It had neither the time nor the resources to log or map play facilities across the UK but drew upon existing published information, research which it commissioned and, most of all, extensive consultation in every part of the UK.

<sup>3</sup> The consultation involved the publication of consultation documents made available via the internet or on request. This was followed up by fourteen consultation events in the English regions, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A BBC Newsround online survey generated over 1,800 replies – the most ever. 119 MPs responded to an invitation to give their views and three parents' focus groups were conducted.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the consultation events, members of the review team visited Bradford, Manchester and Copenhagen to obtain information first hand on innovations and good practice and how

these fitted in with wider social and economic objectives. Major aspects of the consultation process are given in Annex A and further details will be published by DCMS in due course in a background report.

## What we mean by play

<sup>5</sup> Different people have different definitions of play. From an early age, play is important to a child's development and learning. It isn't just physical. It can involve cognitive, imaginative, creative, emotional and social aspects. It is the main way most children express their impulse to explore, experiment and understand. Children of all ages play. Some may need support to get the best out of play.

<sup>6</sup> While few teenagers would describe what they do as play, they need the time, space and freedom associated with play for younger age groups. For the purposes of the review, play meant what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas, in their own way and for their own reasons. NOF and the projects it funds should apply the same definition.

## What we mean by play provision

- <sup>7</sup> Play provision can be a space, some facilities or equipment or a set of activities intended to give children the opportunity to play as defined in paragraph 6 above. At its most successful, it offers children and young people as much choice, control and freedom as possible within reasonable boundaries. This is often best achieved with adult support, guidance or supervision. The children and young people may themselves choose play involving certain rules or, in some cases, informal sport.

"STATES RECOGNISE THE RIGHT OF THE CHILD TO REST AND LEISURE, TO ENGAGE IN PLAY AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES APPROPRIATE TO THE AGE OF THE CHILD AND TO PARTICIPATE FREELY IN CULTURAL LIFE AND THE ARTS."

THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO PLAY IS RECOGNISED IN ARTICLE 31 OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, WHICH WAS RATIFIED BY THE UK GOVERNMENT IN 1991

## Examples of play provision

- <sup>8</sup> The most familiar type of play provision is the public play area or playground. This is usually unstaffed. Some other provision is run by adult staff including adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, parent and toddler groups and mobile play projects or playbuses. Some of these staffed services are ‘open access’, allowing children to come and go as they please. Informal leisure facilities include skateparks, BMX tracks, basketball courts, kickabout areas, multi-use games areas and youth shelters. Many forms of childcare, including day nurseries, pre-schools, after-school clubs and breakfast clubs, aim to provide play opportunities for the children in their care. Schools, nurseries and other educational settings for children of all ages, including wildlife centres, also provide space and time for play. Only a small proportion of school premises are open out of hours for wider community use.

## Informal play locations

- <sup>9</sup> Any effort to improve children’s play opportunities must recognise as a fact of life that most play does not take place on sites formally designated as play spaces. When not playing at home, many children resort to local streets or any nearby open spaces and buildings from which they are not excluded. This is most important for children with little or no play space at home. Those responsible for promoting children’s opportunities to play in safety must make sure that children on foot or on bikes have high priority on local streets.
- <sup>10</sup> The visible presence of children and young people making harmless and inoffensive use of public spaces is a sign of a healthy community. It is also vital to recognise that what to a planner or developer may appear to be an unused brownfield site may turn out to be a major informal play area, whose disappearance would deprive local children. Safeguarding the freedom and safety of children and young people must come high on the public agenda in both urban and rural areas.



This public playground in Highbury Fields, London is a popular and long-standing facility

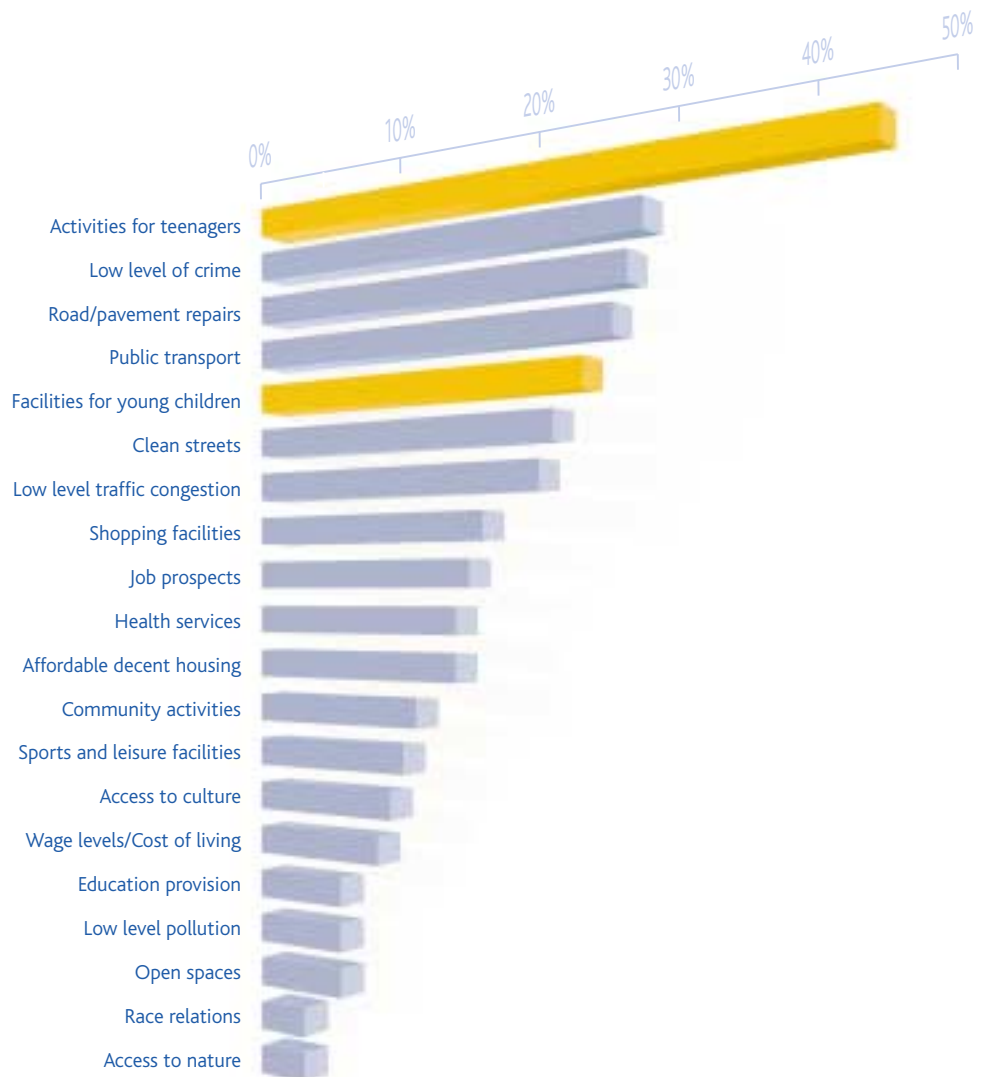
## What are the main concerns about play?

<sup>11</sup> In 2001, a MORI survey for the Audit Commission showed that 'activities for young people' was ranked by adults as the single most requested improvement in local services. 'Facilities for young children' scored ahead of health, education and housing and almost level with crime reduction. These priorities no doubt reflected the long-standing recognition that 'the devil makes work for idle hands'. Other surveys show that parents believe that today's children have fewer opportunities for play than they did themselves. They feel that children today spend too much time watching TV or playing on computers. They would like them to get more physical exercise.

<sup>12</sup> At the same time, surveys show that many parents are very concerned about the safety of their children and are reluctant to let them out of the house. They cite fears of strangers and traffic as their main concerns. Traffic is a big danger with an average of 112 child pedestrians killed and 3,390 seriously injured in each of the last five years. It is extremely rare for children to be harmed by a stranger in any public space - on average 8 have been killed in each of the last five years. Hardly any children are ever seriously harmed by a stranger in a park or playground. But, as the focus groups carried out for the review confirmed, parents' fears are real. So they must be addressed. Children and young people are also concerned about their safety. Surveys show that children's main safety fears are about bullying and traffic. Both children and parents are keen on adult supervision.

### WHAT MOST NEEDS IMPROVING IN YOUR AREA?

MORI/AUDIT COMMISSION SURVEY 2001



- <sup>13</sup> The other side of the safety coin is the growing blame culture and litigation. This leaves providers of play facilities more and more concerned to minimise the chances of even minor accidents for fear of being taken to court. Play facilities which offer no challenges will not contribute much to a child's development. Worse still, they can become so boring that children seek excitement elsewhere often at much greater danger to themselves and other people. This is an obvious possible result when play facilities are closed because of fear of litigation or because insurance premiums have been increased. The play review consultation revealed strong concern about the damaging impact of an overly cautious approach to safety.
- <sup>14</sup> For many years, play provision has been given low priority. Many play projects have been neglected. Playgrounds, like other green spaces, have become run down and degraded. Levels of supervision of parks and public playgrounds were reduced leaving them and their users vulnerable to crime, vandalism and bullying. Play staff were reduced and in many areas all but disappeared. This resulted partly from the need of local authorities to concentrate their attention and resources on statutory services. Another consequence of play's low priority was the frequent lack of basic local information on play or comprehensive local play strategies.
- <sup>15</sup> Even where play facilities and services have continued, they have rarely had sufficient resources to respond to changing local needs and circumstances. The most familiar models of provision – the public playground, the holiday playscheme, the adventure playground – have remained relatively unchanged in spite of changes in culture, public policy and wider society. Investment in public playgrounds has focused almost exclusively on the installation of off-the-shelf fixed play equipment. Yet there is



Natural features are a common component of play spaces in Copenhagen

good evidence that children and young people value and enjoy landscaping, sand, water, trees and bushes and other natural elements as much as, or more than, equipment.

- <sup>16</sup> The last few years have seen a growing recognition of the need for more and better maintained public open space, play facilities and opportunities. The funding for this comes from a multiplicity of Government and National Lottery supported initiatives, some of which are set out in Table 1 on page 14. Play is a prominent theme in Sure Start, the Government's programme to improve the health and well being of families and children aged from 0-3 in the most disadvantaged areas of England. Sure Start local programmes receive revenue funding to deliver a set of core services, one of which is play, learning and childcare. Play features strongly in a number of local programmes funded through the New Deal for Communities and the Children's Fund. Play is also covered by the regulatory standards for daycare for children under 8 in England and Wales.

I WAS MOTIVATED TO BECOME INVOLVED IN TRYING TO IMPROVE PLAY PROVISION LOCALLY AFTER BEING IMPRESSED BY PLAY FACILITIES IN NEW ZEALAND.

MY 3-YEAR OLD LEFT THE UK RELATIVELY PHYSICALLY INEXPERIENCED. THREE MONTHS IN NEW ZEALAND SAW HIM REALLY READY TO EXPLORE CHALLENGES HE WAS PRESENTED WITH. ALSO, HAVING AVAILABLE EQUIPMENT BEYOND HIS PHYSICAL SCOPE TAUGHT HIM WHEN SOMETHING WAS TOO DANGEROUS YET.

HE LEARNT TO MONITOR HIS OWN LIMITS. I REALLY QUESTION WHETHER CHILDREN ARE KEPT TOO 'SAFE' BY THE LIMITATIONS ON PLAY EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE TO THEM IN THIS COUNTRY.

PARENT RESPONDING TO PLAY REVIEW CONSULTATION

### Table 1: Relevant Government and National Lottery initiatives

Arts Lottery Fund  
 Children's Fund  
 Community Fund  
 Heritage Lottery Fund  
 Living Spaces  
 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund  
 New Deal for Communities  
 NOF Green Spaces, Sustainable Communities  
 NOF Out-of-school Childcare and Out-of-School Hours Learning  
 NOF Space for Sport and Arts  
 NOF Transforming your Space  
 Sports Lottery Fund  
 Sure Start

- <sup>17</sup> This recognition is very welcome, but organisations delivering individual projects can find it difficult to negotiate their way through the complex patchwork of funding regimes each with different priorities and service objectives. Large amounts of time and effort can be taken up with getting funds from organisations whose main or only job it is to distribute the funds. Different timescales can also leave projects facing uncertainty about their future funding. The review confirmed the need for a more strategic approach, a stronger focus on play at national and local level and for the whole system to be streamlined to secure maximum benefit from the extra funds and the higher priority now being given to play.

## Access to play provision

- <sup>18</sup> Social changes have left many children and young people with poorer access to many kinds of play opportunities, especially those that need outdoor space. They are less likely to get around on their own and more dependent on their parents or

carers. At the same time, they have many more forms of indoor entertainment to keep them occupied - a lifestyle change that partly explains the dramatic growth in child obesity in recent years. Nevertheless, children and young people want improved play opportunities. They want to be physically active, indoors and outdoors; the chance to meet with their friends; the chance to be somewhere quiet; and choice and variety. They say that they are stopped from playing because of: fears for their safety, especially from bullying; traffic; dirty and/or run-down play areas and parks; lack of choice; and play provision that is too far away.

- <sup>19</sup> Disabled children and young people have significantly worse access to good play opportunities. There are a limited number of specialist playgrounds, but most disabled children and young people, supported by their parents and carers, want to be able to go to the same places as all the other children. Despite the Disability Discrimination Act and a growing body of information, advice and support for the development of more inclusive provision, practice has not changed in many places. Changes that have been made tend to focus on physical modifications to equipment and buildings and the need for specialist staff. This is welcome, but it is often more valuable to start by improving communications with disabled children and young people, their parents and carers and to encourage existing play staff to help disabled users get the most out of the existing set up.
- <sup>20</sup> Girls of school age have less freedom to go out than boys even though surveys show they are almost as keen to do so. Although there are minor differences, girls and boys want to do similar things. However, given half a chance boys will often dominate play provision leaving girls with poorer access and less choice. Adult supervision has a key role in opening up opportunities for girls and young women. The same problems can arise for children in care, and for children and young people from ethnic or religious minorities in play facilities dominated by one particular

group. Here again, adult supervision can ease access. Children of refugees and homeless families may not even know of the existence of some local play opportunities.

- <sup>21</sup> The relative sparsity of population and poor transport in rural areas can leave some children and young people very isolated. Public play provision tends to be very limited while intensive agriculture can leave some areas with little access for informal play.

## Information on the value of play and play provision

- <sup>22</sup> There is good evidence about the benefits of play. But very little work has been done even to log the amount of play provision. Even less work has gone into evaluating its quality or monitoring its impact on children, although work by Groundwork UK and the New Economics Foundation has shown that new play provision helps to increase community cohesion. The review revealed a strong desire amongst the professionals for evaluation methods centred on the children themselves as the best way of measuring quality. Some work is being planned by Barnardos and the Children's Play Council, and CABE Space, but more is needed.
- <sup>23</sup> The evidence cited on page 11 shows that the public recognise that the whole community benefits from the impact of good play provision. Nevertheless, the natural complexity of the forces that affect the behaviour of children and whole communities make it difficult to develop reliable methods of assessing long-term outcomes. Some recent work has shown promising results and further projects are under way. The information they produce could prove crucial to the effort to raise the priority of play both nationally and locally.

## Out of hours use of school grounds

- <sup>24</sup> Practically everybody agrees that there should be much more out of hours use of school grounds, especially where they are the main or only local open space in a neighbourhood. Yet very few school grounds are used out of hours. This is partly because the main priority for a school is achieving high educational standards. It is also because it can cost a lot of money to make school buildings secure from vandalism and arson. However, this can be done. Many school playgrounds are now being redesigned, for example by Learning Through Landscapes' 'Grounds for Improvement' scheme. These efforts must be stepped up, possibly with some of the NOF money. The best time to provide such facilities is when a school is being built or refurbished. Supervision will often be necessary, and extra caretaking costs may be incurred.

## Recent developments

- <sup>25</sup> After many years of decline, there has been a growing focus on improving opportunities for play, both in its own right and as part of the enhanced attention being given to public open spaces and to childcare. This was in part a response to studies of the mental and physical health of children, to growing concern about the safety of children and to the contribution which play can make to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.
- <sup>26</sup> Developing play facilities can also provide a focus for general community activity. Involving children and young people in the policy-making process promotes more mature and responsible behaviour, which can enhance their contribution on other neighbourhood-wide issues. This wider approach has also extended the role of playworkers and play providers to other aspects of children's lives

<sup>27</sup> In recent times, play providers have also set out to identify and codify the key elements of successful play provision, for example in the publications *Best Play*, *The First Claim* and *Quality in Play*. More needs to be done. The review commissioned field research to identify some good examples of different types of play provision and to spell out their strengths and weaknesses. This is set out in Annex B (p38).

## Conclusions and recommendations

<sup>28</sup> The NOF funding should be used to improve and open up thousands of high quality play opportunities that respond to the needs and wishes of children and young people and recognise their evolving competences and interests. It should focus on areas and groups with poorest access to good play opportunities, with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of disabled children and young people. It should fund projects that follow existing good practice, but with some funding earmarked for innovative approaches. Last, but not least, it should help make sure that providing good play opportunities becomes a higher priority with local and national decision makers.

### Focus on disadvantage

<sup>29</sup> The NOF funding is not enough to improve play provision everywhere, so the programme should focus on children and young people with poorest access to good play opportunities. This means that the bulk of the NOF funding should be concentrated in areas where there are the greatest numbers of children and young people in low-income families, whose circumstances often constrain and impoverish experience of play. Every area should be required to devote funds to the needs of disabled children and young people and other disadvantaged groups.

<sup>30</sup> NOF should use an allocation process for distributing most of the funding, rather than a bidding process. This is needed to ensure that

the funding reaches the areas where the need is greatest, not just those who are best placed to make an application.

### Good practice and innovation

<sup>31</sup> Most of the available funding should support projects that follow and build on existing good practice. But some should be used to support innovations providing these seem likely to have a wide application. It must be recognised from the outset that some new approaches may not succeed.

### Informing public policy


<sup>32</sup> The NOF programme should be used to highlight how local planning can better develop and safeguard play opportunities, not just through supporting play provision but also through recognising children and young people's travel patterns and their use of brownfield and greenfield sites. The programme should also be used to gather information on the impact of improved play opportunities on children and young people, families and communities. It should reveal key success factors, highlight problems with the application of standards and regulations, and show the strengths and limitations of planning processes concerned with cultural services and childcare. All of these issues are of interest to agencies beyond those directly involved in implementing the NOF programme.

### Supporting success

<sup>33</sup> The NOF programme should support success. It should maintain a clear focus on quality, not just quantity. There are many successful play projects across the UK. But there are also many examples of poor provision, so the quantity of provision in an area is not in itself a measure of success. Long term popularity with children and young people is the main test of success.


<sup>34</sup> NOF should fund high quality local community-based provision – indoors or outdoors – where children and young people are given freedom, choice and control in keeping with the definition of play in paragraph 6. The good practice case studies described in Annex B illustrate a variety

of good play opportunities, including conventional playgrounds, adventure playgrounds and buildings. They also highlight opportunities made possible by the addition of staff and other resources including mobile projects or special events programmes. Many projects, though not all, involve creating or improving permanent physical spaces. Some require appropriate levels and styles of adult supervision ranging from playworkers, play rangers, wardens or other staff or volunteers – sometimes just occasionally or on a temporary or periodic basis by way of events or mobile projects.



WE NEED TO MAKE OUR PUBLIC SPACES SAFE, INVITING AND INCLUSIVE FOR EVERYONE – AND THE ONLY WAY OF DOING THAT IS WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE TO DESIGN PLACES AND SPACES THAT MEET THEIR NEEDS.

TONY HAWKHEAD, CE OF GROUNDWORK UK



PLAY IS IMPORTANT IN COMMUNITIES. IN ORMLIE IT BROUGHT US ALL TOGETHER – CHILDREN, ADULTS AND COUNCIL PEOPLE TO GET THE PLAY WE WANTED.

CHILDREN FROM ORMLIE IN SCOTLAND, RESPONDING TO THE PLAY REVIEW



# VITAL

The common elements of many successful play opportunities are probably best captured in the acronym VITAL – **V**alue based, **I**n the right place, **T**op quality, **A**ppropriate, **L**ong term. Criteria based on these five elements should be used to assess priorities for NOF funding.

## Characteristics of VITAL play opportunities:

### *Value-based*

- Children and young people's interests and rights respected
- All children and young people, whatever their ability or background welcomed, especially those from disadvantaged groups
- Children and young people's competences and abilities, respected

### *In the right place*

- Close to children and young people's homes and schools, on well-used travel routes, in safe locations
- Located in places that children and young people and the wider community are happy with

### *Top quality*

- Safe, welcoming and providing choice and variety
- Well-designed in relation to the surrounding space and community
- Taking a balanced approach to managing risk
- Well-managed

### *Appropriate*

- Shaped by local needs and circumstances
- Complementing other local opportunities
- Taking account of all sectors of the local community
- Well-planned

### *Long-term*

- Sustainable beyond the lifetime of the NOF programme
- Set up to be valued and respected parts of the social fabric of the neighbourhood

### **Value-based**

- <sup>35</sup> Children and young people should be at the heart of all play programmes. They all have different abilities and competences – social, emotional, physical, creative, linguistic and cognitive. But many have limited opportunities to give full rein to exploring and developing these. The NOF programme should reflect this and ensure that spaces are welcoming to all children and young people, both girls and boys, especially those with disabilities and from other disadvantaged groups.
- <sup>36</sup> The NOF programme should require the inclusion of disabled children and young people, and other disadvantaged groups, in funded projects. Projects should reflect the Barnardos /Children's Play Council definition that inclusive provision is "provision that is open and accessible to all, and takes positive steps in removing disabling barriers, so disabled and non-disabled children can participate" and should follow the guidance on accessible play recently published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. They should adopt a similar approach in relation to all disadvantaged groups and promote community cohesion.

- <sup>37</sup> NOF funded projects should also recognise children and young people's competences and abilities – in keeping with the Core Principles proposed by the Children and Young People's Unit in DfES - through involving them in planning, design, delivery, and evaluation. While some have done this, it is still the exception rather than the norm.

### **In the right place**

- <sup>38</sup> The NOF programme should ensure that projects are easy for children and young people to get to, and that they take place in safe locations. Research shows that location is probably the single most important factor in the success of a play project, especially an outdoor public space such as a play area. In the right location even a poorly designed facility can be well used. But a well-designed facility in the wrong location is likely to fail. Location will ultimately be a matter for local decisions, and may require compromise with different interest groups achieved after thorough local consultation. NOF guidance should emphasize that children and young people should have a big say in the location of their play provision.
- <sup>39</sup> A key feature is the physical relationship between the project and the wider neighbourhood. The best location is reasonably close to home or school, with familiar local routes for walking or cycling. Attention needs to be paid to the routes between home and play facilities for child pedestrians. Local partners including the highway authority should work together to provide routes that enable children to travel independently and safely. They should also try to make informal local play as safe as possible. 'Informal oversight' from nearby houses or other well-used public areas can be a great help but can also lead to problems with neighbours. Hierarchies of provision, with a mix of smaller and larger facilities perhaps reflecting the growth in freedom of movement as children and young people grow up, can help to improve access across an area. Mobile projects may be particularly appropriate in dispersed rural areas.

### **Top quality**

- <sup>40</sup> The NOF programme should aim for every funded project to be successful and popular, not just at the start but in the long term. Well-used, popular spaces generate a virtuous circle of local respect and belonging, fostering an atmosphere in which children and young people feel out of harm's way. There is no simple formula to create this atmosphere. In some cases the right location, good design and informal oversight by users and others will be enough, while other spaces will succeed through introducing varying degrees and styles of adult oversight or supervision.
- <sup>41</sup> Successful play provision attracts children and young people to make repeated visits. It needs to provide choice and variety to reflect different interests and may involve an element of risk to sustain the excitement and interests of its users. This takes effort and expertise and is best achieved by involving users in design and development. Studies show that landscaping features are often more popular than conventional play equipment. The seven play objectives set out in the document *Best Play* provide a ready benchmark for quality.
- <sup>42</sup> One key test of design quality is the approach projects take to risk. Accepting and developing children and young people's ability to assess and manage risk, as well as their appetite for challenge and excitement in their play, helps providers to take a balanced approach to risk management.
- <sup>43</sup> Good management, good quality materials and regular maintenance are crucial to long-term success and sustainability. Children and young people, like adults, are very aware of signs of poor upkeep. Top-quality, well-maintained provision sends a signal that society gives a high priority to children and young people. They are likely to respond by treating it with respect. Conversely, poorly maintained provision tells children and young people that their needs and wishes are low on the list of public priorities. It is much more likely to be vandalised.

**Appropriate**

- <sup>44</sup> Different localities have very different needs and will generate different responses. Projects should reflect variations in child population, existing spaces and services, the availability of public space and cultural, social and economic factors. Special attention must be given to ensuring that particular sections of the child population are not being left out.

**Long term**

- <sup>45</sup> The NOF programme should be used to improve on established play projects with long-term futures. This will require physical durability, commitment of local communities and, above all, long-term sources of funds to meet running costs

and maintenance after the NOF money runs out. Sources of such funds include central and local government, charities and voluntary bodies.



This play area in Devon incorporates reference to local myths




## Programme delivery

The NOF programme should devote the bulk of the funding – around 80 per cent - to the 'VITAL Spaces' strand, drawing on the criteria set out above. Alongside the main VITAL Spaces strand, the NOF programme should devote up to 20 per cent of the funding to create a 'Playful Ideas' strand to develop and support projects that create play opportunities in innovative ways, or in 'nontraditional' settings.

### Key features of VITAL Spaces strand

- <sup>46</sup> There should be an emphasis on medium or small catchment areas for projects. The strongest message from children and young people involved in the play review was that play facilities are most valued when they are close at hand. This is backed up by research showing that if a facility is more than a few hundred metres away, regular use declines dramatically. Appropriate catchment areas depend on the targeted age group, the type of facility, its characteristics and layout and the make-up of the community. Older children are prepared to travel longer distances. Children of all ages and their parents will accept longer journeys to have access to wider variety. So a hierarchy of spaces is the optimum solution. But within each local authority area there should be a balance in favour of projects whose catchment area covers a neighbourhood, estate or village rather than trying to cover a whole town or district.
- <sup>47</sup> Access to projects should be free to users. Charging clearly leaves low-income children and young people and their families at a disadvantage. So any charges should be considered only in exceptional circumstances, e.g. for trips and outings, and only then if there is no other source of funds.
- <sup>48</sup> Wherever possible, play projects should include some form of adult supervision or oversight. This may be provided by paid staff or volunteers or through informal oversight by parents, carers or other local people. At the very least this adds to safety by reducing bullying and vandalism. At best, it adds immeasurably to the richness and depth of play as trained playwork staff bring to bear their skills and experience. All paid and voluntary staff must be subject to current vetting procedures. It must be made clear to parents whether or not projects are providing childcare and assuming parental responsibility. Where this is so, projects should be tied in with other local provision and must comply with relevant statutory requirements.
- <sup>49</sup> Projects must promote the inclusion of disabled children and young people. Applications for funds should specify what is proposed in terms of physical arrangements, staffing and other measures to bring this about. The Disability Discrimination Act will set standards, but these will be just the statutory minimum. A good practice guide, *Developing Accessible Play Space*, has been published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This should be followed by NOF-funded projects. Some of the Playful Ideas money should be devoted to innovations for disabled children and young people.

- <sup>50</sup> Children and young people must be involved in the planning and running of projects to ensure local needs are met. Involving parents, and the local community will also contribute to that and at the same time improve the chances of the local community commitment necessary for the long-term prospects of a project.
- <sup>51</sup> NOF projects should receive capital funding and, where necessary, help with meeting revenue costs. Where possible, projects should try to secure funds from other statutory and voluntary sources to augment the NOF funding and so maximise its benefits. Projects with substantial revenue costs would normally be expected to include partnership funding to secure their long-term viability.



INCLUSION IS A PROCESS AND ALL CHILDREN ARE DIFFERENT. A PLAY ENVIRONMENT CANNOT BE DESIGNED OR ADAPTED TO ALLOW FOR EVERY NEED. RATHER IT IS IMPORTANT TO TRY TO PROVIDE AS MUCH VARIETY AS POSSIBLE IN TERMS OF ACCESS, CHALLENGE AND SENSORY STIMULATION AS WELL AS RESPONDING TO THE INDIVIDUAL NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN WHO COME AND GO.

FROM KIDSACTIVE'S PLAY REVIEW CONSULTATION RESPONSE



### Allocating funding for VITAL Spaces

- <sup>52</sup> The VITAL Spaces strand should be delivered through allocating funding to the level of unitary authorities and in county areas to district and borough councils. The funding allocated to a local area should be proportionate to the numbers of children in poverty in that area, using the best available measure of child poverty. There are arguments for concentrating the vast majority of the funding on a limited number of the most deprived local authority areas. An alternative is to allocate at least a small amount to every area providing that the least deprived areas concentrate their limited investment on disabled children and young people. This is for Ministers to decide.
- <sup>53</sup> Within local authority areas in general the focus should be on the most deprived children and young people. Some pockets of deprivation occur outside the most deprived areas or concentrations of disadvantaged groups. So flexibility about the geographical areas or groups of children and young people targeted is acceptable as long as supporting evidence is provided.
- <sup>54</sup> NOF-funded projects must improve or add to local provision. Local authorities will be expected at least to maintain their patterns of expenditure on play. NOF funding cannot be used as an opportunity to reduce their current or planned expenditure.

### Local planning and delivery of VITAL Spaces

- <sup>55</sup> Applications to NOF from each local authority area should be made through an 'accountable agency' that would have ultimate responsibility for preparing local plans. This would normally be the local council or strategic partnership. However, the local authority may choose to delegate this plan preparation role to another agency or partnership with the capacity to do the work and the ability to take an overview of local provision. Plans should embody a partnership approach.

- <sup>56</sup> NOF should operate a 2-stage process to allow time for preparation and planning of applications.
- <sup>57</sup> An application should be produced in partnership with local agencies from the statutory and voluntary sectors and should involve children and young people and the wider community in the neighbourhoods concerned. Local authorities, partnerships, voluntary organisations and community groups would all be expected to have a role in delivering projects. Programme plans should reflect existing provision and future proposals such as green space plans, early years development, childcare and community plans and strategies. They should if possible include a needs analysis and audit or mapping of existing provision, in keeping with the approach outlined in England in Policy Planning Guidance note PPG17 and the companion report to that document.
- <sup>58</sup> Many local areas have already developed play policies and strategies, conducted consultations and undertaken other work that could form part of a delivery plan. Local agencies will normally be expected to work together using their existing resources to prepare their plans. The Government will need to be satisfied that all areas, especially the most deprived communities, have the necessary capacity and support to propose sound, high quality proposals and implement them. NOF, the Government and local agencies should work together to bring that about.
- <sup>59</sup> Local authorities should take the opportunity provided by the NOF programme to improve the planning and operation of play facilities across their area. They should be encouraged to designate a 'play champion' to carry out this task, help ensure the success of the NOF-funded projects and tie them in with other local authority functions which affect children and young people. Such a post could also oversee contact with local children and young people about local play provision, perhaps through youth forums or children's councils.

## Playful Ideas strand

<sup>60</sup> The Playful Ideas strand, while reflecting the VITAL criteria, should be devoted to developing innovations especially where there is both a future expansion in activity and a need for new models. These might include:

- Play provision as part of new schools
- Play opportunities in new housing developments
- Playful elements in public spaces, museums and other cultural centres
- Play provision with community access in childcare/early years services

NOF and the Government should encourage good practice in the comprehensive planning and delivery of play opportunities across a local authority area.

<sup>61</sup> This would recognise success in:

- Delivery of NOF-funded projects to a high standard in keeping with best practice in planning, participation, design and inclusion
- Raising standards in other play provision and in other settings where children and young people play, such as schools, childcare, youth provision and other children's services
- Improving a range of local policies, plans and strategies, such as those covering development and land use, green spaces, childcare, culture or transport

<sup>62</sup> The Government's school capital programme, with £5.1 billion of investment planned in 2006 alone, provides a major opportunity for the NOF programme to influence the design and use of school outdoor space. Given the small size of the NOF funding in comparison with this investment, it should pilot design and management approaches through the Playful Ideas strand that aim to overcome the key barriers to community use. These can then be applied more widely through mainstream school capital programmes.

<sup>63</sup> The Playful Ideas strand will be particularly valuable in stimulating innovative ways to include disabled children and young people, children in care and other groups excluded from mainstream provision. While this is a most important focus for the NOF programme as a whole, new approaches need to be encouraged if further progress is to be made. Some funds could be allocated to a voluntary body to give the lead in developing new ideas for improving play opportunities for disabled children and young people. They would have responsibility for spreading their good ideas and getting them implemented. The Playful Ideas strand could also support projects that bring together children and young people from communities that have not traditionally shared facilities.



This school playground in Mallusk, Northern Ireland, is open for community use

<sup>64</sup> The Playful Ideas strand should be delivered in a flexible way in order to respond to issues that emerge as the programme unfolds. But approaches could include grant funding with an open application process, support for modelling, sharing good practice, and design competitions. The Playful Ideas strand should look favourably on ideas from the voluntary sector as well as from local authorities and other statutory organisations. It must be recognised from the outset that some of these novel projects may not succeed.

### **Promoting long-term sustainability**

<sup>65</sup> All funded projects will be expected to continue after the NOF programme ceases. Play projects, like other free community-based provision, are unlikely to be able to generate significant income. Hence the long-term future of projects is likely to depend upon embedding them into local community provision. Demonstrating how proposals and plans fit and engage with other local services, plans and strategies will be crucial to this. Local programme plans and project proposals should show how the NOF funding complements and augments other expenditure, and how projects will be supported once the NOF money runs out.

<sup>66</sup> The length of funding for the NOF programme should allow enough time for effective planning and preparation to take place and for projects to become established. Allowing the programme as a whole to be delivered over a longer time period reduces the risk of overheating or overstressing the capacity of the agencies doing the work. Conversely, NOF could allow some plans to be 'fast-tracked' where local planning is well-advanced.

### **Monitoring and spreading best practice**

<sup>67</sup> CABE Space, Sure Start and OFSTED have a pre-existing role in the production of guidance on good practice and standards. These cover benchmarks and quality standards in design and upkeep, and in the skills, training and/or qualifications required of those involved in the programme.

Projects should be made aware of such material and that produced by the Children's Play Council and other national play agencies.

<sup>68</sup> NOF should evaluate the impact of the programme on children and young people, their families and the wider community. The NOF programme is a good opportunity to show how play can make a key contribution to improving the general quality of life in a neighbourhood.

<sup>69</sup> The NOF programme should encourage projects to share their experiences. It should build up an evidence base of what works and does not work. The challenges facing projects mean that the programme will need to balance cost-effective delivery with supporting good practice and improving on it.

<sup>70</sup> It is imperative that there is clear overall responsibility for implementing the play programme funded by NOF. Delivering the programme will be a complex and demanding task, so the Government and NOF will need to make sure that enough support is available. Compared with other sectors, such as childcare, sport or the arts, play has not so far had a high priority. Consequently, it lacks the equivalent communication channels, or guidance and support mechanisms. It varies enormously from place to place and region to region. National and local organisations promoting and supporting play do exist, but their funding and staff are limited. The NOF programme will fuel demand. So special arrangements and efforts will have to be made by the NOF and the Government if the play programme is to succeed and the most deprived children are to get the greatest benefit.

<sup>71</sup> DCMS and DfES will need to enhance their capacity to help ensure the success of the NOF programme and to ensure joint support for it across Government.

- <sup>72</sup> NOF should explore the possibility of creating a national identity for the programme. The programme has the potential to reach very large numbers of children and families through providing well-valued, highly visible and popular improvements that address some of the most pressing concerns in local communities. Moreover good public play provision is an enduring and powerful expression of society's shared concern for children and young people's quality of life. A strong identity, backed up by high quality delivery and management, is likely to help to raise standards, extend the impact of the programme and increase the prospects of long-term sustainability.
- <sup>73</sup> The NOF programme is, as one local authority put it, 'much needed and long overdue'. It provides the opportunity to respond to children and young people's wishes, growing public concern and professional interests and to model and develop good practice that will have much wider application. Perhaps most importantly, it should result in play securing a permanent higher priority nationally and locally.

## Finally

All concerned in play projects should apply a simple but demanding test. They should be able honestly to give the answer yes to the question: "would this be good enough for my children?"

# References

This review makes extensive use of the reports *Making the Case for Play: Building policies and strategies for school-age children* by Issy Cole-Hamilton and Tim Gill, and *Making the Case for Play: Gathering the evidence* by Issy Cole Hamilton, Andrew Harrop and Cathy Street, both published in 2002 by National Children's Bureau.

*The opinion poll survey cited can be found at:*

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# ANNEX A

## Play Review Consultation

The following summarises the key findings from a series of consultations that were carried out as part of the Children's Play Review between October 2002 and March 2003. A full report, detailing all findings, will also be made publicly available.

### THE CONSULTATIONS

#### Consultation events

Consultation events were held in each region in England, and in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. A separate event was also held in Birmingham for black and minority ethnic and disabled children and young people. Attendance at these events was as follows:

#### Wales

In Wales, Children and Young People's Framework Co-ordinators were invited to include questions relating to the play review in local consultations with children and young people already arranged. The outcomes from these consultations are currently being collated and will inform the emerging play strategy directions in Wales.

#### Northern Ireland

The document 'What children say' - which presented the findings of a consultation event in Northern Ireland with 500 children and also the views of parents and young people - was submitted as a formal response to the Play review.

#### Final consultation event in London

74 people from the 3 Play Review groups (Core-Steering Group, Expert Advisory Group and Cross Government Group) and from attendees of each of the consultation events discussed draft recommendations at a final event.

#### Focus groups with parents

Three focus groups were held with parents. One group consisted of mothers of children 3-6 from South London, one of mothers of children 7-11 from Leeds and one of mothers and fathers (not couples) of children aged 12-16.

#### BBC Newsround online survey

A UK-wide survey was available online for 2 weeks following coverage on the BBC Newsround television programme - over 1800 children and young people responded making it their most popular survey ever.

#### Written consultation

A written consultation document was available across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland for a 12 week period - 425 responses were received. The Welsh written consultation ran for a period of 8 weeks - 131 responses were received. All MPs were invited to give their views.

Event	Children and Young People	Adults
Yorkshire and the Humber	20	86
North East	10	39
North West	8	71
West Midlands	0	50
East Midlands	0	57
South East	0	25
South West	16	60
East	0	40
London	8	50
Wales	See above text	96
Northern Ireland	See above text	112
Scotland	16	116 (approx)
Birmingham	25	0



## KEY FINDINGS

### Consultation events

The consultation events provided opportunities to discuss and comment upon the following: the definition of play, funding mechanism, whether provision should have a small or large catchment area and priorities for types of provision.

Afternoon workshops focused on the following topics: lead agency, quality tools, sustainability, training, good practice support and strategy and planning. The above sessions constituted the focus of the day in England: the country events addressed some additional topics – details of their findings on these additional topics will not be included here although they will be included in reference to a background report, which DCMS will publish in due course. Children took part in the morning sessions but were not present for the afternoon workshops.

### Definition

The definition that was tested at the events and used throughout the review, was generally supported. Comments that were made were largely related to the need to ensure that all children were included in the definition and also that adult intervention is sometimes necessary. Other comments included the need to ensure that the definition clearly acknowledges the importance of managed risk.

### Funding mechanism

The funding mechanism which

was proposed – which suggested that funding would be allocated to areas and decisions would then be made locally about how it could most effectively be spent – was generally met with approval. However, individuals had concerns about: the support that would be provided and the levels of NOF expertise available, the need to work with other funds and sustainability. Clear messages came through that people felt that it was essential that pockets of deprivation – especially in rural areas – were not overlooked. There was some concern around the funding being distributed according to levels of deprivation – the need to also include ‘play deprivation’ was brought up. Comments were made about the need to ensure that voluntary sector organisations were included in the process. The need for some funding for capacity building was also cited. It was suggested that each country needed to be able to identify the body or organisation through which the funding can most appropriately be distributed.

### Size of provision

The overwhelming message coming through from the consultation events was that size of provision must always be dependent on local circumstances – in terms of what is there already and what local people want. However, when pressed on this there was a general shift towards small and medium sized provision rather than large, to allow greatest

access and provide an inclusive approach. Generally people also felt that there were other factors which were more important than size of provision – in an ideal world areas would be served by both. Another strong message was that mobile provision does not strictly fall into either category and that particularly in rural areas it is the most effective type of provision – this was a particularly strong message from the consultation in Wales.

### Priorities for provision

In this session attendees were asked to discuss and prioritise the following types of provision: supervised/ unsupervised/ more play in childcare/ more play in nurseries and play-groups/ more play in school/ mobile provision. Many groups found it hard to prioritise in this way and discussion was often considered more useful than the actual priorities that groups came up with. However, general provision with supervised and unsupervised was by far the highest priorities. In rural areas mobile provision was considered a high priority. Childcare, nurseries and schools were a noticeably lower priority and the overriding message seemed to be that these types of setting were likely to get funding from other sources. Strong feelings were expressed in Northern Ireland and Scotland that priorities should not be strictly applied to the programme.

### **Lead agency**

There was no clear consensus about what type of organisation should lead the programme. It was felt very strongly that it is dependent on local circumstances. It became apparent that it would be more useful to spend the time devising a criteria for how the lead agency should be selected – the following factors were identified an overview of play in the area/ partnership working/ the capacity to deliver the local projects and a good track record. The emphasis that should be put on partnership working was clear and voluntary sector organisations were also very concerned to ensure that local authorities did not have too much control over the process.

### **Quality assurance**

The overwhelming message from this session was that quality should measure: the involvement of children and young people, parents and the community, practicalities (in terms of health and safety) and values (in terms of equal opportunities, inclusivity and sustainability). Mixed feelings were expressed about the usefulness of existing resources. The general message was that new resources, drawing on existing best practice, might usefully be developed for the purpose of the programme.

### **Sustainability**

The clear initial message coming through in this workshop was that core funding was needed to fund new play opportunities in

order to make them sustainable. However, when it was emphasised that there was a clear need for alternatives means of sustaining projects the following ideas were suggested: a community based approach, regular reviews, creativity and innovation and trained community representatives. Other ideas included the suggestion that commercial sponsorship should be allowed and also that organisations delivering local projects should have to demonstrate that they are sustainable.

### **Training**

It was apparent from these workshops that there was a great need for the investment of time, thought and money into ensuring that staff were effectively trained. It was suggested that more local training mentoring schemes and training in play work settings were required. The idea that bids or plans should contain job descriptions was also proposed. Some attendees also reported that specific training was required in working with disabled children and those with special needs.

### **Good practice support**

A clear message was that existing examples of good practice should be drawn upon for the purpose of the review. Useful examples of best practice were generated at the events and these will provide a source of information for NOF. Suggestions for means of sharing information on best

practice included: centres of good practice, partnerships, networking and forums, directories and websites, pilot projects and databases. In the development of any ideas on good practice it was clearly felt that children and young people should be heavily involved and that where possible and appropriate provision should be devised to cater for all children.

### **Strategy and planning**

The key message coming through from this workshop was that emphasis should be put upon partnership working and existing structures should be used or built upon where appropriate. Organisations taking forward local programmes should have to develop local play strategies which demonstrate a good local knowledge of play provision, and include a comprehensive mapping exercise. It was strongly felt that children and young people should be included in partnerships.

### **Written consultation**

Respondents welcomed the injection of lottery funding as a much needed boost to the play sector and the recognition of the importance of play which it signified. A recurring theme was the need for provision to be in accordance with local need – for this reason respondents sometimes found it difficult to tick boxes or allocate ratings. Overall however, supervised open access play was identified as a priority, mostly aimed at children in a local neighbour-

hood and with some emphasis on innovative projects, the main considerations being safety, travel and cost. Some expressed the view that funding should be universal and that disadvantaged areas should not be prioritised. Respondents thought that the programme should be led by partnerships and that it should be possible to apply for commercial support. The development of play policies and strategies and multi-agency collaboration were seen as effective methods of achieving these objectives. Respondents suggested that dedicated advisors, guidance, networking and funding would ensure that those planning and delivering projects were supported effectively.

### **Children's consultation**

The following findings are from the consultation events and online consultation with children. Children favoured smaller, local provision and the strong consensus was that funding should be used for supervised, open access play provision. Unsupervised provision was a clear second priority. Over a third of the children who responded to the BBC Newsround online consultation said that the worst thing about where they hang out is that it is boring. A third also felt that it was 'really important' to have an adult presence at play spaces.

### **MPs' responses**

All MPs were invited to give their views on the Play Review.

119 responded. Some emphasised that the NOF programme should involve children and young people in the development of local play spaces through consultation and ensuring that they are involved in partnerships. Some felt the programme should work towards full participation of all excluded or under represented groups. Others emphasised that a geographical mix of comfortably off residents and pockets of extremely deprived communities could result in the deprived communities not being seen as in need and therefore falling through the net. Some urged that heavily bureaucratic processes should be avoided.

### **Parent's focus groups**

Key messages from these groups were that: parents agreed about the value of giving their children freedom as an ideal, but disagreed about whether they should do this themselves – some were not persuaded that it was worth the risk. All parents felt that older young people were most neglected in terms of play provision and that it should be ensured that facilities are provided for this group. In terms of priorities parents were keenest on supervised spaces although they would support unsupervised spaces if close to home. The idea of school based provision was met with mixed feelings as some felt that children and young people would not want to go there.

### **Final event**

The final event was used to provide attendees with an opportunity to comment on draft recommendations. Sessions were organised as follows:

#### Allocation of funding

It was felt that funding allocation should be 'rurally proofed' and that factors other than those included in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) should be included in a more sophisticated method of allocation. Existing structures should be used to organise distribution and funding should be released early to allow the development of proposals and strategies. A proposal to create 'Centres of Excellence' was not strongly supported and the consensus was that this should be incorporated elsewhere.

#### National/regional support and infrastructure

It was unanimously felt that there should be a NOF director with responsibility for the project and that independent advisors should be accessible to those submitting projects. Attendees were less certain about the idea of branding projects, although only a very small proportion thought it was a bad idea. The need for a strong support network was very clear as was the need not to see disability as an issue that should be addressed separately. The need to avoid duplicating work and reinventing the wheel was a key concern.

### Overview of programme workshop

The need for clear design criteria was emphasised and also the means to ensure that provision is of a high standard. The need to ensure that the programme actively includes black and minority ethnic children, those with disabilities, all age groups and children who live in rural areas was considered a high priority. Attendees were supportive of the flexibility that the recommendations allowed and were unanimously in favour of the outline given of the main strand.

### Programme delivery

The majority of attendees agreed that the local authority should support the nomination for the lead agency. The need for a play champion was strongly endorsed and it was clearly felt that any funding should be dependent on local planning. It was suggested that planning should inform, and be informed by, other local planning processes. It was agreed that in some cases advance funding should be released, particularly if voluntary organisations are leading the programme. Attendees felt strongly that NOF must have robust methods for ensuring that NOF funding does not replace existing funding.



# ANNEX B

## Good Practice Research

### INTRODUCTION

This annex gives the main findings of a case study review of play settings commissioned by the Children's Play Council on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The project aimed to discuss and describe the approach, user profile and costs of a number of different real-life play projects in order to inform the DCMS play review about their strengths and weaknesses and their appropriateness in a range of local contexts. More detailed findings, including background information on each of the

case studies, can be obtained from the Children's Play Council.

The project was completed by Marc Armitage and Andy Crossland from the children's play research and consultancy company PLAYPEOPLE between February and March 2003. It involved visiting twelve different play settings around the whole of the United Kingdom. The project was funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, with additional funding for the Scottish projects provided by the Scottish Executive.

### THE 12 PROJECTS IN DETAIL

#### Acklam Playspace, London

A voluntary-sector adventure playground run by Kidsactive offering supervised challenging, adventurous play opportunities for physically disabled and non-disabled children on an integrated, open access and closed access basis. The playground is due to close in 2004 following expiry of the lease; Kidsactive will be managing the transition to successor services.

Estimated capital set-up cost:  
£250,000

Project Name	Description	Capital cost	Annual Running cost
Acklam Playspace	Staffed inclusive adventure playground	£250,000	£216,000
The Venture	Large staffed adventure & other playground with sports facilities	£800,000	£350,000
Brentor Village Hall	Small public playground	£17,500	£450
Mallusk Play Area	School playground open for public use out of school hours	£74,000	£3,000
South Somerset Youth Programme	Outdoor unsupervised sport & informal recreation sites for young people	£6,000 - £40,000	5-10 per cent of capital cost
Highbury Fields	Large public playground with parkkeeper	£120,000 (estimate)	£4,000 (estimate, excluding salaries)
South Lakeland Playbus	Mobile play project	£68,000	£80,600
Stirling Council Play Services	Play delivery, support & development covering public playgrounds, out of school care and other		£410,000
Cambridge City Council Reccy Rangers	Mobile playwork team working in public green spaces and community centres	£125,000	£125,000
Bulwell Community Toy Library	Toy library with outreach projects		£175,000
Play@Home	Education & support for parents with young children		£114,675
Yipworld	Youth project with cyber cafe theme		£276,000



Expenditure: £216,000 annual running costs. Staffing costs account for the largest area of expenditure at around 70 per cent, with management fees to Kidsactive the second at around 14 per cent. Other main budget headings include utilities (5 per cent), transport (4 per cent), equipment and structures (3 per cent).

Income: around 81 per cent of annual running costs are provided by funding from two local authorities. The remainder is provided by various trust fund applications and other donations. The playground has no membership or entrance fees.

**The Venture, Wrexham**

A large adventure playground with self built features, made up of a large building housing an office and training space, smaller workshops and storage huts, kitchen facilities, toilets and indoor rooms for art and craft activates and large indoor activities such as sports and games, and an indoor Early Years Centre on site.

Estimated capital set-up cost: £800,000

Expenditure: £350,000 annual running costs. The largest single budget heading is for staffing costs at around £290,000 (83 per cent). Maintenance costs come next at about £10,000 (3 per cent), and administrative costs at about £7,000 (2 per cent).

Income: the bulk of the project's funding comes from the local Borough council who provided around £160,000 or 45 per cent of the total. Other areas of main funding include the Welsh Assembly £78,000 (22 per cent), £40,000 from local YIP and Splash funds (11 per cent) and three years funding from the BBC Children in Need Fund of £28,000. Other funding comes from the Community Council, New Opportunities Fund and the European Social Fund.

**Brentor Village Hall & Playing Fields Association, Devon**

A small public playground in a rural location. It is still in the process of development but currently has a willow sculpture, a long zip slide, an embankment slide and a number of mounds. The playground also has a bicycle frame in the shape of a dragon, representing a local myth.

Estimated capital set-up cost: £17,500

Expenditure: £450 annual running costs. This is a community led initiative with no direct paid staff (although there has been support and advice from other organisations, notably Devon Play Association). The costs above include annual insurance (around £100 per year), an annual playground inspection fee (around £70), and the remainder on the employment of a local, profes-

sional grounds maintenance person on a contract basis to carry out such as grass cutting, etc. The project is managed by a voluntary management committee and holds regular maintenance days when volunteers gather and give their time.

Income: the project has had problems raising funds and so relied on donations from a wide variety of sources. The largest grant was for £6,000 from Rural Development Agency funding (around 34 per cent). Others included grants from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, West Devon Borough Council, West Country TV, and other local funders, and around £2,000 (about 11 per cent) raised by fundraising events. The project also received help and support 'in kind' as well as more quantifiable help, such as the donation of trees from the Dartmoor National Park Authority. Funding for revenue costs is raised by fundraising events.

**Mallusk Play Area - Mallusk Primary School, Northern Ireland**

A small playground based on school grounds provided for use by the school during the day with full public access by the local community after school hours.

Estimated capital set-up cost: £74,000

Expenditure: annual running costs not known but estimated

to be around £3,000 per year. The playground has been leased by the local Education and Library Board to Newtonabbey Borough Council who are covering on-going maintenance costs. The most expensive budget heading on the construction of the play area was the purchase and fixing of play equipment at about £19,000 (25 per cent) with walls and fencing at about £17,000 (18 per cent) and paving at £13,000 (17 per cent) coming a close second. Other budget headings include plants (£8,500 or 11 per cent) and professional fees (£8,000 or 10 per cent).

Income: all the funding required for the project came from the Landfill Tax Scheme.

### **South Somerset Youth Programme**

This programme has developed unsupervised, open access outdoor provision for older children and young people. Since 1999 an officer from South Somerset District Council has helped communities to plan, fund and construct a range of facilities including BMX cycle areas, skating ramps, goal units, MUGA's (Multi-use Games Areas) and youth shelters. Facilities differ on a parish-by-parish basis following local consultations with young people.

Within the programme an emphasis has been placed on communities taking ownership

of their specific project with each parish appointing a 'project manager'. The district council has provided support to these project managers through advice on the range of facilities available, youth participation, health and safety, insurance, design and funding.

Estimated capital costs vary depending on the facilities. Example costs include: BMX track construction from £8,000; goal units from £6,000; a MUGA from £40,000; youth shelters from £3,000; and a skateboard area from £15,000. These represent the minimum cost for each type of facility with the potential to spend much more.

Annual running costs range from 5 – 10 per cent of the capital cost depending on the type of facility. Costs for a specific facility will include insurance, on going maintenance, weekly inspections, an independent annual inspection and provision for the eventual renewal of the facility. The district council provides a quarterly inspection service free of charge.

The programme received £90,000 from the district council, which was apportioned to the parishes in the project area with the rider that they match fund with an additional 10 per cent of the total capital cost. So far sixteen facilities have been provided with a further £200,000 secured by parishes from a variety of sources

including the National Lottery, Foundation for Sport and the Arts and Wyvern Environmental Trust (the local land fill tax credit scheme). A further eleven facilities are planned in due course.

### **Highbury Fields, London**

A long-established large public playground in a park setting with supervision in the form of an on-site member of staff. The playground is beside a municipal swimming pool and is divided into a number of distinct areas including an area for young children, an area for older children, and a number of natural wild areas including an artificial mound with a long slide attached that can be accessed by all age groups.

Financial information was unavailable. However, a large playground like this will cost at least £120,000 to construct, with annual maintenance and inspection fees in the region of £4,000. To this should be added the salary of the on-site ranger.

### **South Lakeland Playbus, Cumbria**

A double-decker mobile play bus project that runs on both a childcare-based and drop-in basis. All the seating on the upper and lower deck have been replaced with, on the upper deck, side seating, book shelves, storage space for toys and play materials, fitted tables and a small kitchen, and on the lower deck, a toilet, a sand



and water play area, open space, more storage and a space for administration .

Estimated capital start-up cost: £68,000.

Expenditure: £80,600 annual running costs. Staffing costs account for around 50 per cent of expenditure with capital payback costs (for the purchase and coach building of the current bus) of around 12 per cent paid back to South Lakeland District Council. £6,500 (8 per cent) is spent on repairs and maintenance, and £3,000 (4 per cent) on fuel cost.

Income: South Lakeland District Council provides around £60,000 (75 per cent) of funding. A further £12,000 (15 per cent) comes from Cumbria County Council via the area committee, and around £3,600 (4 per cent) comes from user fees. Typical charges to users are £1.50 for a pre-school session and £2.00 for an after school session. Some concessions are available.

### **Stirling Council Play Services**

A local authority play services department providing a wide range of play opportunities and support. The service includes a play bus (the ‘Superbus’), two play vans, staffed play projects throughout the year, crèche provision, advice and support to other play organisations in the area and training for playworkers. The service also has responsibility for the management and

development of the council’s 106 public playareas, skateparks & ballcourts.

Expenditure: £410,000 annual running costs. The largest budget heading is for revenue funding of the service’s public play areas at £167,000 (41%) - £36,000 on capital projects and the rest on revenue. Revenue funding of staffed play provision (play projects, crèches, etc.) accounts for £155,000 (38%) and general management, administration and premises accounts for £88,000 (22%).

Income: as a part of Stirling Councils Children’s Services, most of the funding comes from the local authority. Other sources of funding include New Opportunities Fund money for summer schools in Social Inclusion Partnership areas and additional funding from a variety of sources for the creation of new public playgrounds.

### **Cambridge City Council Reccy Rangers**

Peripatetic Play Ranger Service. The project, managed by the Children’s Team within the local authority, has six rangers working 20-25 hours per week each with a focus on year-round provision including play days during the school summer holidays, links with after school activities at local schools, and the training of school midday supervisors. Each ranger operates on up to four ‘recs’ each running mainly open

access early evening outdoor play activities during the good weather months and indoor activities during the winter in local community centres. Casual playworkers are employed for school holiday periods.

Expenditure: £125,000 annual running costs. Staffing costs for the rangers account for the largest budget heading at £56,000 (45 per cent) but this includes a small amount for materials and additional on-costs. Senior playworker costs and the employment of casual playworkers is the second largest amount, at £47,000 (37 per cent), with support costs and management time third at around £22,000 (18 per cent).

Income: as a Cambridge City Council project, 100 per cent of the funding for the employment of the rangers comes from the council’s budget. A fee is made for some term time activity sessions (usually around £2) and also for summer playschemes and play days.

### **Bulwell Community Toy Library, Nottingham**

A community toy library offering support, advice and training to local parents on a membership basis. The toy library is based in a community centre on the edge of Bulwell in Nottingham but takes its services out to community based facilities to run lending and play sessions. Between April 2001 – April 2002, for example, the toy library provided over 100 “play

'n' learn" sessions in the community, in addition to other projects and special events.

Expenditure: £175,000 annual running costs. Staffing costs account for by far the largest area of expenditure at 89 per cent. General running costs, travel/transport, volunteer support and the purchase of toys and play materials.

Income: most is from Nottingham City Council, with the council main budget providing nearly £23,000 (or 28 per cent) of annual income. Single Regeneration Budget is the principle source of funding accounting for almost £60,000 (or about 70 per cent) of the total. Around £3,800 (4 per cent) comes from the Bulwell Education Action Zone, and a very small amount coming from fees for loans and play sessions.

### **Play @ Home, Fife**

A physical activity programme for parents and children aged from birth to five years. Its aim is to encourage babies to start 'on a life of healthy exercise' and it does this by distributing a series of materials to the parents of young children at birth (the Baby Book), between one and three (the Toddler Book) and between three and five (the Pre-school Book), and also other play resources such as 'play bags' containing basic play materials.

Expenditure: £114,675 annual running costs of which

£60,000 (52 per cent) was on books. 20 per cent was spent on salary, travel and secretarial support. Other headings include copyright (13 per cent) and the establishment of the playbags scheme (11 per cent).

Development costs were high to begin with but now that the project is established in Fife and is operating as a universal service, costs are estimated at about £20 per child over the five years of the programme, or about £4 per child per annum.

Income: around £135,500 of which £76,000 (56 per cent) is core funding from Fife Primary Care Trust and annual funding from Fife Council. In addition to this funding, the project generated sales of around £57,500 (43 per cent).

### **Yipworld, Cumnock, East Ayrshire**

An extensive Social Inclusion Partnership project providing a range of activities through provision of drop in services for young people aged 10 – 25 years. Additional support includes advice and information for children and young people. An after school club operates on a daily basis from 3p.m. – 6p.m. as well as a crèche for pre-school children Monday to Friday. The Project offers a free internet cybersuite, café and recreational room, issue-based workshops, Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, Business Enterprise Schemes as well as outdoor opportunities including snowboarding and summer

mountain biking. The project is open six days per week through to 9.30p.m. each evening, excluding Sunday.

Expenditure: £140,000 core funding from East Ayrshire Coalfield Area Social Inclusion Partnership funding of £156,000 for other projects including after school club, outreach/detached streetwork service, café and crèche. Salaries cost £77,385 from the core funding, vending costs, office costs such as postage, and general running expenses came joint second highest at around 6 per cent of the total each.

Income: grant aid from various bodies formed the highest amount of income at £239,979 (87 per cent) of the total. Vending and other forms of income generation total £16,239 (6 per cent).

### **APPROPRIATENESS AND REACH OF EACH TYPE OF PROJECT**

The projects included in this project showed a range of approaches to providing play opportunities. The history of each project means that they are all strongly shaped by local context. However it is possible to identify a number of factors that seem to make some types of provision more appropriate in some circumstances than others.

### **Adventure Playgrounds**

Adventure playgrounds offer children access to play



opportunities that may be difficult for children to experience elsewhere. The two adventure playgrounds in the review (Acklam Playspace in London, and The Venture in Wrexham) both offer children the opportunity to use tools, build structures, adapt and develop their own spaces; to play in waste and wild spaces, dig holes and make dens. All these play opportunities allow access to forms of play that children seem to be naturally drawn to - further they allow and support these forms of play with adult supervision in a specific environment put aside for it. As a result, both Acklam Playspace and the Venture attract very large numbers of children. This suggests that an effective adventure playground needs to be located centrally to the homes of a large number of potential users from a wide age range, most likely in built-up areas. They should also be physically big enough and well staffed to cope with these numbers.

To purchase or acquire a long lease on a large site and build initial structures like that at Wrexham requires large amounts of start up funding followed by continuous funding to employ an effective number of staff. The playground at Acklam, although small, has an estimated replacement cost of around £250,000. It is estimated that the Venture, a much bigger playground, would require in the region of £800,000.

The case studies arguably show that a well resourced adventure playground presents good value for money. If well resourced, adventure playgrounds can extend the services they offer beyond the boundaries of the playground and engage with other members of the local community.

Conclusion – adventure playgrounds serve large, urban communities particularly well, but require substantial start up sums and continuous revenue funding to enable them to grow and develop their links into the community.

### **Public Playgrounds**

Four of the projects in the review were public playgrounds, but they were very different. Brentor Playground in Devon is a small, rural playground aimed at a very specific group of local children. As a community and mainly voluntary project which involved children as well as adults in the initial design, the project has provided a playground that caters for the majority user group in the area – because the majority group helped design it. Costs for the whole project have also been low through community effort and the commitment of a relatively small group of individuals. The people involved did struggle at times, and felt that fundraising was made more difficult because the project's small and rural nature made it harder to compete with larger /urban projects. The help and

support of a local play network proved an important element in this group realizing their project. Now that they have done so, they too are beginning to provide advice and support to other similar local projects.

The community playground based in the grounds of Mallusk Primary school in Northern Ireland had a less well defined user group. The play equipment in the playground is aimed at older children (who also appear to be the majority user group in the area) but the way the playground has been promoted suggests it is for younger children. Some features in the playground that are definitely aimed at this younger age group have been subjected to attacks of vandalism. In many neighborhood areas the school playground is the most central – if not the only - outdoor space for community use. To provide a fixed equipment playground on school grounds for dual use by the school population during the day and for use of the wider community after school hours makes economical sense. However, the example at Mallusk shows that there are other factors to be considered too: if the layout of the school grounds does not allow the playground to be built close to the spaces used by the school for playtimes and lunchtimes and in a position to allow easy access for out of school hours community use, then usage by one or both sides may be limited.

The lesson in these two examples seems to be that care needs to be exercised in designing a playground that meets the needs of whatever user group(s) live within the catchment area – to ignore older children, in particular can result in problems.

The South Somerset Youth Project has tackled the potential problem of conflict by different user groups of playgrounds directly, by prioritizing the provision of facilities in community open space in favour of older children and young people. This has been done partly to reverse a perceived imbalance in provision in favour of younger children. The provision of skateboard ramps, BMX cycle areas, enclosed ball game areas and youth shelters, all in appropriate locations, appears to be attracting good use from the intended older users. The project has provided such areas in small and large rural communities as well as small town areas, with some success.

At a start up cost of something like £200,000, an extensive playground like Highbury Fields, providing a wide variety of opportunities for different user groups, is expensive to establish (although less so than adventure playgrounds). The follow-on maintenance and running costs are, however, much lower than for adventure playgrounds, particularly the staffing costs.

Large public playgrounds in park settings can be subject to vandalism. The Highbury Fields playground provides a good example of a playground that can be flexible in provision (because being based in a park it has the benefit of space).

Because it is located at one end, rather than in the centre, of the park area it is not only close to the homes of a large number of potential users but also has a degree of informal supervision from nearby houses. Evidence of vandalism here is relatively low.

#### Conclusion

- Small rural communities can provide good, small playgrounds for local children at low cost, but benefit greatly from specialist support and advice to do so effectively.
- Public playgrounds located on school grounds can serve the school and the wider community, but the location has to be carefully chosen and in some cases an ideal location may be impractical.
- Facilities provided for older children and young people are well used when provided, but a balance needs to be achieved between the needs of different user groups. If care is not taken it is possible, inadvertently, to reverse the bias in favour of older children at the expense of younger ones.
- Large public playgrounds can also be well used spaces by children, but location is important – both in relation to out of hours use (or misuse)

as well as in potential usage. Although cheaper to construct and maintain (even with an on site member of staff) this public playground may not get the same high rate of use as adventure playgrounds.

#### **Mobile and outreach projects**

Three of the projects in the review were mobile play projects in that the whole project went out to users rather than users coming to them. South Lakeland Playbus uses a converted double-decker bus to go out to small local communities with little or no alternative provision to provide what, when the bus is parked up, is an 'in-door' playspace. Stirling Council Play Services also operates a double-decker play bus and a number of play vans.

At a start up cost of around £68,000 the South Lakeland Playbus was amongst the cheapest to get started but, as they have at times experienced, need can sometimes far exceed delivery. A double-decker bus, restricted to the number of users who can access it at any one time and with issues of time to travel to outlying communities, can mean that the bus is pushed to its mechanical limits and maintenance costs can be high. However, the flexibility of having such a large and mobile play resource is valuable – particularly in local communities that have no available indoor space to use as a play setting.



Stirling Council Play Services is a mobile service in that it has no dedicated premises, and uses its Superbus, playvans and community facilities and open spaces throughout the Council area to deliver a genuinely Council wide service. A big central office base and storage and preparation space enable the operation of this entirely mobile service.

The Reccy Rangers Scheme at Cambridge is another mobile project, except here there is a compromise: the play rangers go out to the local recreational areas but also encourage children to come to them providing, in consultation with them, activity and play sessions during early evenings. During the warm weather months these sessions are held outdoors. This project seems to work particularly well with urban or suburban areas where there are significant numbers of children and existing open recreational space that can be used and promoted. In the last year this project has generated large numbers of attendances (estimated at something like 20,000) but requires little in the way of physical resources; almost all of the funding here is used on staffing costs.

Similarly, although all but two of the projects in the review provide some kind of holiday playscheme provision, the Reccy Rangers, South Lakeland Playbus, Bulwell Toy Library and Stirling Council Play

Services all offer play projects and special play activities and events away from their home base, mainly in local facilities and local parks and recreation grounds. With the exception of transport costs (particularly for the two double-decker play buses already mentioned) these projects are also able to provide large numbers of children from rural and urban communities access to play opportunities during the school holidays at relatively little cost.

#### Conclusion

- Out-reach play projects, which leave their home base and go out to where children are to provide services directly, can do so very cost effectively. Staffing costs are often the only real major expenditure.
- Maintenance costs on a double-decker bus can be high, but this type of play provision serves out-lying and small rural communities with little or no existing provision particularly well.

#### **Other projects**

Play@Home and Yipworld, differ from the others in that these projects did not begin as 'play projects', but rather began to offer play provision as an extension to other services they were providing.

Both of these projects are well funded and are able to access large numbers of users as a direct result – Yipworld has almost 2000 regular members,

and the Play@Home project provides resources to the parents of around 4000 newly born children each year.

#### Conclusion

These projects show how the improvement of play opportunities can emerge and develop from an initial focus on other issues – in these cases parent support and youth inclusion.

#### **A comprehensive approach**

Stirling Council Play Services brings together different services within the same organization. As a part of the local council, within Children's Services (which also includes education and social work), this project provides direct access for children throughout Stirling Council area from birth to 16 years through the provision of a full range of play provision. The service is responsible for public play area development and maintenance, co-operates with local schools on grounds and play development, provides playsprojects and special events, equipment loans, and mobile play. In addition, the project also provides support to other play agencies in the local authority area.

The service is extensive and well funded and is able to carry out a wide range of provision as a direct result. It can do this because it has a well developed 'play ethos' which has led to the continued political support of elected members, due in part to an ability to show the difference

it makes to children's lives.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of provision**

Most of the projects in the review have gone through a natural process of reviewing and extending their services from what was at first a purely play project to greater involvement in other issues connected to children and the communities they come from. The South Somerset Youth Programme for example is providing facilities that are aimed at engaging young people and reducing crime – an issue that will have a direct impact on the communities the programme is working in. The Play@Home project is approaching the issue of play from a health perspective, but is at the same time supporting parents in a very direct way which is also leading to their contact with other agencies and to other services.

However, most of the projects in the review had uncertainties about their future. Most of these revolved around money and it does not seem co-incidental that those projects in the review that were the most confident and were extending their services further were also those projects that felt secure in their funding. Bulwell Toy Library and The Venture have recently secured large amounts of funding but perhaps more significantly, they have secured that funding over the medium/long term. This has allowed them to reflect on and extend their services. In the

case of The Venture this funding has led to a dramatic increase in staffing which has allowed them to begin operating outside the boundaries of their playground, making further links with the community and other agencies, even to the extent of becoming involved in re-furbishing a public playground in the housing area that the playground serves. At Bulwell the feeling was that 'we are dispelling the myth that toy libraries are just about toys' by becoming more closely involved in direct learning initiatives for children and training opportunities for local adults.

By contrast, many of the other projects are receiving their funding on a year to year basis and are generally dependent on a single funding body for the bulk of their revenue. But to continue to operate many have also to find money and resources from a number and variety of other sources. This means that a significant amount of their time and effort is spent securing future funding. This situation creates stress and, where staff are employed, concerns over job security. A number of the projects in the review expressed concerns that they are really only 'treading water' and do not have the time or energy to consider future developments.

Closely related to this point is the finding that nine of the twelve projects have experienced - or are about to experience - forced change, either through re-organisation or through

changes to funding requirements. Nor is this a new thing as many of these projects have been through major changes at least once in the last five years. One of the settings in the study may not survive the coming changes, and there are doubts about at least two of the others. As was said at one project, "We have to keep jumping through different hoops every few years".

The overall theme here seems to be a lack of stability, which in turn seriously affects projects' ability to adapt and develop, or even survive.

### **The effectiveness of inclusion policies and demographic knowledge**

Very few of the projects with the exception of Stirling Council Play Services made use of local demographic information and the number of those completing regular monitoring exercises amongst their user groups was low. The reason for this is partly because all the community based projects in the review felt that they knew the local communities they serve intimately and could react to changes in needs quickly (three of the projects have staff or regular volunteers who were themselves once users). There is also an issue of resources – completing a local demographic analysis, keeping regular monitoring information and regularly comparing this to local need requires resources in itself. As noted above, the majority of the projects in the



review feel pressed for time, and completing such an exercise may be difficult to prioritise. However, it also means projects will find it difficult to show the difference their provision is making.

On the question of inclusion in particular, many of the projects found it difficult to answer questions about how many of the children living within their catchment area had specific needs that might discourage them from using the settings. Use of the projects by disabled children in particular was not common, with the exception of Acklam Playspace and Stirling Council Play Services. Stirling Council guarantees a quantified entitlement to play, social and leisure opportunities to all disabled children and young people in the area, and achieves more than 90% take up. In the case of 5 – 12 year olds, this is a largely inclusive service, and is achieved mainly through well established partnership working between Stirling Council Play Services and Playplus (a local voluntary organisation that receives core funding from Stirling Council and the Scottish Executive). Without effective demographics and monitoring information it can be difficult for a project to assess demand and react to it. Written inclusion policies were also rare, although all the projects that did not have such a policy did demonstrate a broad understanding of inclusion.

This could also be another result of a lack of time, and the fact that these projects feel that they know their communities and their users well enough not to have to compare potential usage against actual usage or measure their successes. But mainstream play provision must not only be accessible and attractive to disabled children and others with specific needs, but it must also market itself to them and their families if it is to be really inclusive. If local providers do not know who and where the disabled children in their communities are, they cannot do this effectively.

### **OVERALL CONCLUSION**

The case studies in this review suggest that a 'one cap fits all' approach to providing play provision will not work. The 12 different projects visited during the review represent a great diversity of provision. This reflects the diversity of children's needs and demonstrates that differing local needs can be met in differing ways by different types of organisation. And yet there is still one element that is common to them all – children and their play.

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All other schools/organisations involved/not mentioned.

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SPRITO – Lesli Godfrey

**North West**

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DCMS GO – Janet Matthewman  
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**Yorkshire and the Humber**

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**East Midlands**

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**West Midlands**

RCC - contacts not in place  
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Steve Dunningham	Scottish Land Department
Elsa Davies	NPFA
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Amar Abass	Youth forum, Blackburn

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Ian Day	Outdoor Amenities, Arts, Heritage & Leisure for Bradford

### Manchester

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Ken Davies	Learning through Landscapes
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Steve Duckill	Grumpy

## Copenhagen

Brita Fabricius	Leader of Murergaarden
Helle Nebelong	Danish play/parks/landscape designer
Claus Jensen	BUPL, Aarhus
Mikkel Strøm	Fritids - og Ungdomsklubben ved Bryggens C, Centre
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Allan Baumann	BUPL
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Peter Williams	Freelance Consultant
Ben Spencer	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)
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**Publications and organisations who publicised the play review:**

SPRITO (now SkillsActive)  
National Centre for Playwork Education - North East  
Schools Out, Kids' Clubs Network  
LGA monthly cultural services bulletin  
NOF Newsletter – Initiative  
NOF website  
Various DfES publications  
Children's Play Policy Forum (via LGA)  
Children's Play Council members list (via Issy Cole-Hamilton)  
Play Today (published by the Children's Play Council)  
Regeneration & Renewal  
New Urban Futures  
Horticulture Week  
New Start  
ILAM - Leisure News and Jobs publication, also its Children's Play Network  
Community Care  
Urban Environment Today  
Municipal Journal  
Local Authority Newsletters  
Contact a Family  
Scottish Executive  
IPA Scotland  
Play Scotland  
ILAM Scotland  
SPRITO Scotland  
Scottish Out of School Care Network  
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