

A Play Strategy for Newcastle upon Tyne

May 2006

Contents

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Scope of the strategy
- 1.2 Context of the strategy
- 1.3 Purpose of the strategy
- 1.4 Who will benefit from the strategy?
- 1.5 Listening to children's voices

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 What is play?
- 2.2 The variety of play environments
- 2.3 The importance of play
- 2.4 Play for all children
- 2.5 Barriers to play
- 2.6 Questions of risk

3 VISION AND PRINCIPLES

4 ABOUT NEWCASTLE

4.1 General summary

4.2 Deprivation

4.3 Children and young people in Newcastle

5 PLAY – CURRENT POSITION

6 LISTENING TO FEEDBACK - ISSUES AND FINDINGS

6.1 Existing feedback

6.2 Results from the Consultation

6.3 Key issues from the Consultation and feedback

7 DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

7.1 Links with other plans and strategies

7.2 Working in partnership

7.3 Recommended future structure

7.4 Resources

7.5 Monitoring and evaluation

8 OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES

“... play is an end in itself and must be encouraged for its own sake ... (as well having a)...vital role in helping children to achieve the key outcomes” of the Every Child Matters agenda.”

Beverley Hughes, Minister for Children

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE SCOPE OF THE STRATEGY

Play is important because play is one of children and young people’s key priorities. It is an issue that impacts on a range of service providers and vast range voluntary organisations and groups. Planning based on a corporate strategic play policy is important if all children and young people are to have access to a range of high quality play opportunities. The strategy will support the development of play opportunities by clarifying what is meant by play, what children and young people can expect as an entitlement and by sustaining an effective, efficient and coordinated Play Service which works in partnership with key providers to prevent the duplication of services and promotes high quality play opportunities.

This strategy will need to dovetail with Newcastle’ s Green Space Strategy (2004-2009), its Children and Young Peoples Plan as well as reflecting its corporate strategies and link with Newcastle’s Community Strategy and Cultural Strategy.

This strategy has been produced in line with the government review of children’s play: “Getting Serious About Play” – a review of children’s play produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sports (2004), that included the outline of a proposed funding stream from The Big Lottery fund to enhance and develop play provision.

A key recommendation of the review was the designation of ‘Play Champions’ to advocate the Play Strategy and provide leadership. The challenge for Newcastle is to move beyond simply listening to children and young people to really hearing what they actually want.

The evolution of the Newcastle Play Strategy has been informed by ‘ Planning for Play’ the guidance on the development and implementation of a local play strategy, Children’s Play Council March 2006

Producing a play strategy is a key recommendation from The Children's Play Council document: The Future for Children's Play. It states: 'every local authority (should) work... with local partners to develop and promote a corporate play strategy as described in Play as Culture'².

1.2 THE CONTEXT OF THE STRATEGY

The National Context

The national policy context for the play strategy occurs in a variety of legislative enactments.

The Children Act (2004) specifies recreation as one key outcome for Children's Services.

The play strategy will play an important role in contributing to the improvement of children's well being (as defined by reference to the five key outcomes in the **Every Child Matters** framework – being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic well-being.) The Every Child Matters framework, version 2 refers directly to 'play' in points 3.6 and 3.61.

'Planning for Play' the guidance document of the Children's Play Council 2006 refers to the development of local play strategies and explains the synergy between play strategies, the five outcomes and the Joint Area Review requirements of Children's Services by Ofsted as follows -

Meeting the five outcomes

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

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

Being healthy

Play is crucial to health and development throughout childhood, contributing to social, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional and psychological development. The physical activity involved in energetic play provides children and young people with a significant amount of their regular exercise. Research shows that school-aged children and young people get more exercise in free play than from most structured activities, excepting only P.E. Good play opportunities give children and young people the chance to try out and experience a range of emotions in a 'safe' way. It allows them to learn and develop emotionally by promoting resilience and fostering self-esteem.

Staying safe

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

Enjoying and achieving

The essence of play is enjoyment. When playing, children define their own goals and interests, decide what is success or failure and pursue those goals in their own way. Children's enjoyment through play is linked to the control and choice they are able to exercise. Giving children the chance for free, uninhibited play allows them a psychologically safe space in which to try out new roles and experiences and enhances their enjoyment of life. There are many developmental and experiential advantages associated with children's play – providing children also with the opportunities for achievement and enabling them to reach their full potential. These include the development of problem solving and language and literacy skills as children and young people develop their social skills and express their emotions. Play is also seen as important in the development of children's imaginations and creative interests and abilities. Play allows children and young people to explore boundaries, be fully absorbed in what they are doing and feel satisfied with what they have achieved.

Making a positive contribution

Children's involvement in the development of their own play is fundamental. Children learn, from the way others and the environment react to their play, the effects of their actions and value others place on them. When there are no adults present, children will create and make their own choices. In good supervised play provision, adults involve the children and young people in decisions about resources and facilities that might be available to them. Local authorities and community groups are increasingly involving children and young people in local play audits and discussions about their play and free time needs. This results in more appropriate provision, helps children and young people develop their skills and knowledge and ensures they are valued as active community members. Respecting and incorporating children and young people's views into plans and provision helps develop motivation and, potentially, participation in society.

Economic well-being

Good play provision enables parents to work or train and allows them to feel their children are happy, safe and enjoying themselves. Offering parents the opportunity to have time away from their children can also be an important benefit of play provision. Play provision often acts as a focal point for parents and carers to meet, giving them an opportunity to socialise with other adults. The creative and social skills that children develop through play help them to develop the lateral thinking and emotional intelligence that are becoming increasingly important in a globalised, non-hierarchical economy. Good play provision promotes community well-being and security. It brings economic benefits through jobs and training, and parents can feel confident their children are occupied and enjoying themselves. Good play provision, which offers those seeking it genuine challenge and excitement, can help prevent bored children and young people behaving in ways that are socially unacceptable. Development of outside play and recreation spaces has been shown to have a measurable impact on local interaction, new friendships, community cohesion and community safety.

Joint area review

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

Key Judgments

Parents and carers receive support in helping their children to enjoy and achieve. All children and young people can access a range of recreational activities, including play and voluntary learning provision.

Evidence

- *Targeted guidance and support is provided to parents and carers, in line with their expressed wishes, in helping children and Young people to enjoy play, achieve educationally and make productive and enjoyable use of leisure time.*
- *There are safe and accessible places where children and young people can play and socialise.*

- *A range of affordable, accessible, challenging and rewarding recreational and voluntary learning opportunities is provided.*
- *Action is taken to ensure that the cost or availability of transport are not undue barriers to participation in recreational and voluntary learning activities.*
- *Recreational and voluntary learning opportunities reflect the needs and interests of individuals as well as groups.*

National planning policy is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and circulars. PPG17 (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2002) declares that 'well designed and implemented planning policies for open space, sport and recreation are...fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives'

Newcastle has set out its strategy for preserving and enhancing open spaces and playing fields and children's play areas within its Unitary Development Plan. This is currently being reformed in the Local Development Framework 2006 and will in turn inform and is informed by its 'Playing Pitch Strategy', 'Parks Strategy' and in the 'Green Space Strategy' 2004. In addition, the extended schools initiative has begun to look at opening schools for activities including children's play. OFSTED regulates play-schemes⁵ including open access provision for under 8's under the National Standards for Out of School Care.

The Sub-regional Context

A local strategy for play in Newcastle is part of a regional policy framework to make the North better for all children and young people. Particularly important in this respect is the co-operation between Gateshead MBC and Newcastle City Council in terms of cultural development.

The Local Context

The Play Strategy is linked to many local strategies and it can crucially and fundamentally contribute to meeting the aims and objectives of Newcastle's Strategy:

- Supporting children and young people to achieve their potential

Engaging and involving children and young people is a core aspect of the strategy. Supported play facilities fill a crucial need for all children and offer activities to many children and young people at risk from social exclusion.

- Promoting the quality of life and the environmental agenda

The Strategy supports the aim of ensuring green spaces, quality play areas and equipment to be available for all children and young people. Play has a crucial role in encouraging children and young people to be more active.

- Regeneration and priority neighbourhoods

The Strategy aims to develop play facilities in the most deprived communities and reducing the play gap between disadvantaged and other areas.

- Building safe and clean neighbourhoods

Good local play and sports facilities, improves the quality of local areas, engages young people in creative activity and away from crime and social exclusion.

1.3 THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAY STRATEGY

This document aims to be a practical working tool, to be referred to whenever decisions about play need to be made. It is applicable to all forms of children and young people's services. It is intended that the Strategy will have an impact on individual council departments, key partner agencies and voluntary sector organisations.

The purpose of the strategy is to:

- address the play needs of children and young people in Newcastle
- respect and celebrate the range and diversity of play provision and developments across the City
- strengthen and develop partnerships with the voluntary sector
- recognise the key contribution that a range of specialist and specifically targeted projects and services make to play evolution and development
- act as a clear template of how Newcastle intends to develop play provision and facilities from 2006-2009
- develop opportunities and programmes for parents to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of the value of play
- make explicit a distinctive play entitlement which relates to key providers both voluntary and statutory with clear links to the Youth Service and schools curriculum
- develop the ways in which play contributes to the ECM agenda
- design in the ability to respond to the changing needs, wishes and aspirations of young people and their carers related to play
- improve the quality of play provision
- provide a framework for the potential allocation of resources linked to quality and performance
- continue to emphasise the close co-operation between all agencies in the provision and development of play facilities and provision
- improve communication about play
- ensure that all children and young people regardless of race, disability and gender have equal opportunities and are treated equally

1.4 WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THE STRATEGY?

This strategy will focus on children aged 0-18 and will take account of children's different abilities, their age, gender, and cultural backgrounds, social, family, economic and environmental situation in order that it is truly inclusive.

The strategy will therefore benefit:

- children, their parents, schools and communities as services and facilities are improved and developed, addressing their needs
- elected members and managers in the authority by creating the basis for working in a more efficient, effective and co-ordinated play service.
- voluntary sector providers and community groups being clearly recognised as being key partners in the development of play services and provision
- those working in play focused services, establishing common values and clear principles to guide staff, allowing good practice to be shared and providing consistency throughout the whole play-work field.

1.5 LISTENING TO CHILDREN'S VOICES

This strategy was developed in response to a request by the Children and Young Peoples' Strategic Board for a Play Strategy for Newcastle. The strategy has in turn been informed and shaped by the children's consultation "What Matters To Us" Children and young people's priorities for Newcastle, 2005. The What Matters To Us Report was the result of partnership working between Investing In Children, The Voices Project, The Children's Society, Connexions Tyne & Wear, Play & Youth Service and Sure Start Armstrong. It is implicit in the strategy that the development and future direction of planning for children's play should be informed by the involvement and engagement of children and young people. Consultation will need to be informed by the development and consultation work undertaken by Investing in Children. Not only should children be consulted and listened to but that where appropriate projects should be children-initiated and directed, in line with the citizenship and respect agendas. Moreover, it is

essential as part of this process that support is given to children in mediating their needs with the sometime competing demands of adults.

This perspective is supported by Government research, the Children and Young peoples Unit (DfES, Children's Consultation Report, 2002), found, for example, that children under 12 rated more activities and parks as the most important things that Government could do for them.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 WHAT IS PLAY?

It is widely acknowledged that play is essential to every area of children's development and to their health, well-being and happiness.

Play brings about important benefits to children as individuals and as groups but also to families, communities and society as a whole.

Children are seen to play anywhere and at anytime provided they are not in extreme circumstances of fear or illness. While some of children's play takes place within play provision and playgrounds it is important to remember that play happens wherever children are: at home, in the streets, in their neighbourhoods, on the way to school etc.

Play is a universal language, strongly associated with childhood, but accessible throughout our lives. It is common to all countries and cultures, though the form or content of it may differ and each individual's experiences through play are unique. However, the benefits of ensuring that children have access to play opportunities cross and link a number of areas such as education, health, social relationships, family and community.

We recognise play, because we have experienced it, but it is notoriously hard to define. Play has been variously described as a drive, a need, a survival mechanism, an orientation or mode. Certainly play that is open-ended, spontaneous and joyful is considered an essential expression of child like engagement.

For the purpose of this strategy we use the definition of play given in Best Play: 'Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child'. A version of the formula is included as an underpinning

assumption in the National Occupational Standards for Play-work. The assumption goes on to highlight the importance of play to children's development: 'by playing children learn and develop as individuals and as members of the community'⁶. The current underpinning values of play-work from the National Occupational Standards are given in appendix B. There is a great richness and variety in children's play. The play-work profession identifies 15 'play types', which are described in section 3.

There is a lack of understanding of children's play, what it is, the benefits of it, the value and necessity of it, and how it is best delivered. Play is still regarded by most adults as a recreational pastime and as a way of occupying children's free time, hopefully keeping them quiet, out of sight and off the streets.

Play: a fundamental of development

Play provides a fundamental developmental process for children, allowing them to expand their skills, knowledge and understanding of the world. It allows them to test their abilities, use initiative, take risks and make mistakes without fear of failure. Children's learning through play is broad ranging and crucially is not fixed to adult expectations of what should be achieved by children. The motivation for play, exploration and discovery comes from the child him or herself, rather than from any outside reward.

Play promotes increasing levels of flexibility in the individual (problem solving, creativity, new combinations of thoughts and ideas, adaptability) - exactly the kind of 'higher order' skills that are required in a fast changing world.

Through risk and challenge encountered in play, children are able to develop skills and judgement vital to negotiating every-day life. Without such opportunities children may not be able to learn to judge risk appropriately for themselves and will be vulnerable to misplaced feelings of fear or conversely have little sense of danger.

Play in the outdoors allows children and young people to explore and use the natural environment creatively.

Given the current pressure for children to achieve academically, the learning that comes about through play is beginning to be identified as a valuable tool for personalising learning and fostering inclusion e.g. play is now recognised as an essential part of learning for all in Scotland: Curriculum for Excellence 3-18.

2.2 THE VARIETY OF PLAY ENVIRONMENTS

For children to get the maximum developmental, experiential and experimental benefit from their play, they need to play in a variety of ways and be involved in different types of play. Children and young people play in a range of public and green spaces as well as in dedicated provision. Children themselves tend to be very clear about what they need and desire from a range of play opportunities and activities (see the results of Newcastle's consultation below).

2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Article 31 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child⁷ (ratified by the UK Government in December 1991) recognises the importance of play for the child: 'States parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts'. Allowing children adequate playtimes and appropriate play opportunities gives children and young people a number of benefits:

'Work consists in whatever a body is obliged to do, play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do' Mark Twain

REDUCING CRIME, ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Quality play provision has the potential to significantly improve social inclusion and promote social and community development. This is particularly relevant to Newcastle's environment with the problem behaviours of youth crime, school-failure, teen pregnancy and drug misuse.

There is evidence to suggest that access to play opportunities is a significant compensatory factor in alleviating the effects of disadvantage on young people's well being. State of London's Children Report (2001).⁸ In addition, evidence, supported by the Police Crime Prevention Unit,⁹ indicates that good local play and sports facilities steer 'hard-to-reach' young people away from crime and social exclusion.

Tackling crime and community safety is a key priority in Newcastle's corporate strategy, and the successful implementation of this play strategy will have a role in supporting this goal.

Anti-social behaviour is a problem that disrupts the lives of many people bringing misery and despair. 'Young people are often represented as the perpetrators of crime, but in parks and play spaces they suffer from anti-social behaviour in the form of bullying and from other groups e.g. those who let their dogs roam free in play areas, litter, and from threats of attack and fear of others'.¹⁰

Children in Newcastle have themselves highlighted the problems with anti – social behaviour, traffic, transport, dirt and safety in preventing them from using existing play spaces. Young children (under four's) took a range of photographs to highlight many of these issues supported by the Sure Start Children's Participation Worker.

The play strategy also has a role in supporting the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers particularly by supporting and providing opportunities that help them play safely without fear of prejudice or discrimination.

BENEFITING THE COMMUNITY

Play also benefits the wider community allowing parents to train and work giving economic benefits to Newcastle. Play services can be seen as a focal point for communities offering opportunities for social interaction and developing a greater sense of community spirit. Promoting social inclusion can encourage inward investment and economic growth.

IMPROVING HEALTH

Research indicates that the current generation of children are less physically active than their predecessors. Television, computer games and the motor car combined with a fat rich diet has caused a reduction in time spent outdoors involved in active play, and a marked increase in child obesity. Research goes on to predict an increase in coronary heart disease in adulthood as a consequence if this issue is not addressed. Active children's play can help address health issues.¹¹

Play is essential for children's healthy physical and emotional development. The Chief Medical Officer in At Least Five a Week (2004), advises that 'children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of at least moderate-intensity physical activity each day'.¹² There is growing research evidence that increased opportunity for free play is the most effective way to ensure this for children, and that a range of increasing health problems are associated with the decline in such opportunities.¹³

The development of the Governments 10-year plan for improving children's health -The National Service Framework¹⁴ is part of their explicit commitment to improve the lives and health of children and young people and it acknowledges the importance of varied and proactive initiatives to make maximum use of early years settings, schools, extended schools and the Healthy School Programme for health promotion and early intervention to ensure improved long-term health outcomes for children and young people. Standard four of the framework identifies the need for age-appropriate services that address children's social and emotional needs.

SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Play provision can support the objective of raising educational standards of achievement, by extending opportunities for learning prior to compulsory schooling; outside the normal school day and year and by supporting teachers and other staff in their use of structured play as a specific learning methodology.

Play experiences and the support of play providers can help to motivate and enthuse pupils; building their self-esteem and helping them reach high standards of achievement and thus raise educational standards. (This relates to Newcastle's Corporate Strategy's vision for supporting children and young people).

The importance of play to learning is recognised in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, QCA, 2000.¹⁵ The guidance states: 'Well-planned play, both indoors and outdoors, are a key way in which young children learn with enjoyment and challenge. In playing, they behave in different ways: sometimes their play will be boisterous, sometimes they will describe and discuss what they are doing, and sometimes they will be quiet and reflective as they play. Through play, in a secure environment with effective adult support, children can:

- explore, develop and represent learning experiences that help them make sense of the world;
- practise and build up ideas, concepts and skills;
- take risks and make mistakes;
- think creatively and imaginatively;
- communicate with others as they investigate or solve problems;
- express fears or relive anxious experiences in controlled and safe situations.'

All of these skills can contribute to achievement beyond early years education.

2.4 PLAY FOR ALL CHILDREN

In supporting The New Charter for Children's Play ¹⁶ the Strategy supports the belief that every child has the right to adequate and appropriate play opportunities. In the values and principles section of this document, it is contended that the play needs of different groups of children and young people will differ.

AGE AND GENDER

Providing a range of provision for all ages is crucial. Children and young people of different ages require access to different kinds of play opportunities and experiences that are appropriate to both their age and needs. There are for example over 135 parent and toddler groups spread across the City, developing provision for the youngest children and supporting parents and carers. As children get older, they begin to move further away from home as they play. Their interests change and their physical and mental capacity is extended. It is often these older children whose play needs is not always being adequately met.

Girls and boys tend to choose different types of activity. The Children's Play Council review ¹⁷ indicates that girls were more likely to enjoy activities such as dance and drama, whereas boys preferred more sport-based activities.

'We are completely at one in the importance we attach to play as a developmental aspect of children's lives in terms of learning and enjoyment...'

Baroness Andrews -Children Bill Amendment Debate 2004

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

David Lloyd George

Therefore, in order for play opportunities to be utilised to their fullest potential and hence provide maximum benefit for uses, they must complement the characteristics of the group they are targeting. Children's needs at different ages must be taken into consideration when planning provision.

BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Children from black and minority ethnic communities play needs may be different. These must be identified and taken into account when developing play opportunities. Kapasi in Asian Children Play (2001)¹⁸ found that Asian children sometimes preferred to play out on the streets than go to supervised provision. This is because they did not feel comfortable in staffed provision and did not feel a sense of belonging. Kapasi in Playing in Parallel (2002)¹⁹ found that a play environment with a positive environment and good quality staff with representation from Black and Minority Ethnic groups attracted most black and ethnic minority children.

HOMELESS FAMILIES

These children face barriers to adequate opportunities such as lack of space, transience and dislocation.

REFUGEES / ASYLUM SEEKERS

There is some research evidence to show that refugee children may not pursue leisure activities and are less likely to spend time outside with friends, suggesting that their free play opportunities maybe restricted.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Including disabled children is about focusing on diversity and responding to the individual rights of every child as well as meeting the statutory obligations of the Disability Discrimination Act. It is about striving to create a context in which each child can join in play with other children and where possible additional appropriate staff and resources are there to support them. Inclusive play can

give ordinary childhood experiences to the child, and reduce social isolation for children and parents. Consultation has shown that parents and children with disabilities want to be able to access specialist as well as inclusive provision.

2.5 BARRIERS TO PLAY

Play opportunities are under threat right across Britain and play space is being lost. In Newcastle the lack of supervised open-access playgrounds and adventure playgrounds is noticeable.

Children and young people commonly identify many barriers to play, recreation and their enjoyment of public space. [Cf., The State of London's Children report (2001)]. These include: fears for their safety, especially from bullying; traffic; dirty and/or run-down play areas and parks; lack of choice; and lack of access.

For parents, fear of 'stranger danger' is often cited as a major reason why children are not allowed to play out, but other studies have shown that traffic is the more significant factor.

Research in Zurich compared children aged five who could play out by their own homes, with those who could not. It found that where they could play out, the children and their parents had more friends, and the parents had three times as many people they could call on to look after their children. The children who could not play out had less physical and social development and were less autonomous. (M Huttenmoster and D Degen-Zimmermann, Zurich 1994)²¹

The growth of out of school activities and focus on providing care and increasing attainment through study support means opportunities for free play are being squeezed out.

The following barriers were identified during the consultation as relevant to the implementation of the strategy

- **Traffic**, fear of being run down by motors and parked cars taking up space
- **Stranger-Danger**, fear of abduction, sexual assault and murder
- **Poverty**, some parents may not be able to afford to let their children go to paid-for provision such as cinemas, bowling alleys or sports centres

- **“Grown-up” gripes**, children’s fear of being told off by angry neighbours/adults
- **Lack of Spaces and Places**, the perception that there is nowhere suitable to play locally, or that play areas have been vandalised and not repaired
- **Safety fears**, leading to the purchase of activities or toys such as TV or computer games that keep children and young people in doors
- **Keeping Clean** parents may be concerned at children spoiling expensive new clothes, and reluctant to allow them to wear old or worn ones
- **Stereotyping** of children and young people playing out as being anti-social may result in adults demanding that children and young people should not play near them or their house or car
- **Bullying**, children and young people may be afraid of bullies or teenage gangs
- **Prejudice**, some children and young people and parents are afraid of racist, sexist or anti-disabled prejudice from others
- **Building and Development** has taken over space once used for play
- **Age/gender-suitability** there may only be a local play area for younger children, or for boys
- **Parents Indifference** some parents may think play a waste of time compared to learning, homework or household chores, or they may not know how to play
- **Bad Company**, parents may be afraid their children will be encouraged or bullied into anti-social or criminal activity by peers
- **Parental Peer Pressure**, parent’s fear of being seen as uncaring or colluding in the possible anti-social behaviour of their children by neighbours or friends, if their children are out unaccompanied

Of the above increasing physical and psychological restrictions on children and young people’s ability to travel caused by increase in traffic and the widespread fear of ‘stranger danger’ places greater importance on local and easily accessible play facilities. The lack of playing facilities within walking distance must therefore be considered a priority when deciding upon future developments, as must the availability of supervised play. Good management of amenity green space is vitally important, as it is often the space closest to where young people actually live and is potentially the easiest to access.

Organised play provision needs to be delivered by skilled, knowledgeable and trained staff who are committed to promoting and enacting a play curriculum, quality standards and providing high quality training.

2.6 QUESTIONS OF RISK

Children and young people need and want to take risks. Concepts of “acceptable risk” and “unacceptable risk” are critical to making informed judgements about what constitutes a best possible play environment. This strategy supports the statement Managing the Risk in Play Provision from the Play Safety Forum²² (Appendix D) and therefore play providers must take steps to ensure that the risks are managed and controlled so far as is reasonably practicable while allowing the potential benefits to be delivered. However, in relation to risk the Strategy also recognises the need to have well-documented safeguarding systems related to staff screening, qualifications and deployment.

All children and young people both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities. It is the job of all those responsible for children at play to assess and manage the level of risk, so that children are given the chance to stretch themselves, test and develop their abilities without being exposed to unacceptable risks. If we do not provide well controlled opportunities supported by clear safeguarding systems for children to encounter and manage risk then they may be denied the chance to learn these skills.

Nationally, opportunities for adventurous outdoor play have declined in recent years as local authorities have sought to eliminate areas that may give rise to insurance claims. However, this is the type of issue that demonstrates the need for consultation with children and young people about their play preferences and the importance of involving departments other than simply play providers in the formulation of this Strategy.

If we fail to do this children and young people may also be more likely to choose to play in uncontrolled environments where the risks are greater. If we are therefore going to meet young peoples’ needs in play provision there may be occasions where they are exposed to the risk of minor and easily-healed injuries such as bruises, grazes or sprains. Providers need to strike a balance between the risks and the benefits and this should be done on the basis of rigorous safeguarding systems including but not confined to risk assessment and a regular review cycle.

3 VISION AND PRINCIPLES

SUMMARY

This section sets out the values and principles, which underpin this citywide Play Strategy. These developed out of the Newcastle City Council Play Policy (Appendix C) and through the wider consultation process and it also crystallises our beliefs in the value of play, play-work and the key role it has to play in helping all young people in Newcastle develop to their full potential.

Context

This Strategy is founded on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by the UK Government in December 1991), which recognises the significance and importance of Play in children's lives. Article 31 of that Convention committed its signatories to supporting the child's right to engage in play and recreational activities, and to the promotion of appropriate provision. In the UK the child's right to play is articulated in the Charter for Children's Play, developed by the Children's Play Council (Appendix A).

Play therefore is a right, which should be recognised and promoted at a City level because it is part of what it is to be a citizen of Newcastle and the United Kingdom.

As a result of the consultation process fifteen of guiding values and principles were identified:

1. Children need the opportunity provided by play in order to experience the true wonder of childhood. Play is their common experience.
2. The active involvement of children and young people is the bedrock of play and play development and the adult role in play provision is to enable rather than to direct.

3. Promoting partnership working, social inclusion and community involvement is vital to the development of a successful play strategy.
4. All children should be able to play within their local neighbourhoods and have safe, attractive and accessible play spaces within easy walking distance of their homes. For older children and young people, having opportunities to meet friends and to enjoy and develop their own cultural and recreational pursuits is equally important.
5. Play is essential for children's healthy development and well-being. As children grow up, the ability to meet up with friends to visit the local park, swimming pool or shops under their own steam is central to their developing competence.
6. Being able to have fun in public spaces and participate in cultural life is one of the hallmarks of a vital and vibrant city: Cultural strategies should reflect that play is an essential aspect of children's culture and quality of life. Newcastle should be a city where childhood is cherished and children are heard.
7. 'Children's. ...play which necessarily involves some risk.... shouldn't be sacrificed in the pursuit of the unachievable goal of absolute safety.'
Health and Safety Executive, 2005
8. The decline in play opportunities affects children generally and the impact is disproportionately greater on disabled children and those living with other forms of social or economic disadvantage.
9. Children are losing their connection with the natural environment and their well-being and environmental quality are inextricably linked. The worse condition or more dangerous a local environment is in, the less able children are to play freely.

10. Some play space should be visible and readily accessible at the heart of the communities and in the environments in which children are familiar and where they feel socially secure and better access to and use of school grounds can help provide this.
11. The threat of traffic and other perceived dangers to children playing outdoors should be minimised.
12. Play is about more than swings and roundabouts in the park. It is more than good quality childcare. It is important to recognise the diversity, complexity, richness and intrinsic value of children's play.
13. Play should allow children to be socially safe (to 'see and be seen'), but as their development progresses there should opportunities for children to experience play that is exciting and physically challenging.
14. Children sometimes need a forum and the support of trained staff to manage the impact of their play with the sometimes-conflicting demands and actions of adults.
15. Play spaces and play provision should not be viewed in isolation or as the sole responsibility of a single service area, but as a corporate priority reflected across a range of developments such as neighbourhood renewal, housing and regeneration programmes.

The City recognises these values and principles as being the embodiment of the UN Right of Children to play. They are concisely reflected in our;

Corporate Vision

“Newcastle, where quality play makes childhood special”

and given form in our,

Play Pledge

“We will work with pride and determination to ensure that all our children in Newcastle have a childhood in which they can play freely in a range of good quality play environments which offer challenge and stimulus and where appropriate provide structured support or supervision”.

4. About Newcastle

4.1 General Summary

Context

Newcastle serves as the regional capital for a population of over two million people across North East England. Newcastle is also a local authority serving 266,000 people within a tight administrative boundary. There were approximately 64,000 young people in the 0 – 19 age range (2004 mid year estimate).

It is a city of influence that exhibits the diversity of the region. It includes a lively City Centre that provides entertainment, employment and commerce for people throughout the North East and visitors from around the country and beyond. Its residents are diverse with affluent areas to the north and west and areas of significant deprivation in the east and inner west. Minority ethnic communities make up 6.9 per cent of the population. This proportion is higher among young people with people from minority ethnic groups making up 10 per cent of the school population.

Newcastle, together with the area covered by Gateshead to the south of the river Tyne, is widely recognised as a regional centre and is a focus of transport, commerce, services, knowledge and culture. There are 143,000 jobs within the city and 80,000 people come in each day from neighbouring local authorities to work. Although historically an area associated with 'heavy industry' the sectors now employing the greatest numbers of people in the city are finance, retail and business, health and social care, education and public administration. The traditional industries associated with the area: coalmining, shipbuilding and manufacturing now account for less than 10% of the working population. Unemployment is high. Local data records show that in 2004, 7.6% of the working-age population was unemployed, higher than the average of 4.9% for England and Wales. Employment in manufacturing is now below average.

The majority of the population (93.1%) identify themselves as white, above the average of 91.3% for England and Wales. Nevertheless there is an increasing ethnic diversity within the City's population with strong Pakistani (1.9%), Indian (1.2%) Bangladeshi (1%) and Chinese (0.7%) communities, which contributes to the dynamism of the area. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is higher in the school-aged population (9.7%) and at Newcastle College (9.1%). In recent years, refugees and asylum seekers have come into the City from areas such as Eastern Europe, Africa and Afghanistan. The ethnic minority population is concentrated in some wards of the city e.g. 46% of the BME population live in Riverside West and 14.6% of the population of Inner West is from the BME community compared to 6.9% of the City as a whole.

In 2001, there were 63,800 young people aged 19 years and under in Newcastle upon Tyne, out of a total area population of 259,600, of these 32,400 were male and 31,400 female.

Age	Males	Female	Total	%	UK %
0-4 years	7,300	6,900	14,200	5.5	6.0
5-15 years	17,800	16,600	34,400	13.2	14.1
16-19 years	7,300	7,900	15,200	5.9	6.0
Total 19 years and under	32,400	31,400	63,800	24.6	25.1
20+ years	93,200	102,600	195,800	75.4	74.9
Total	125,600	134,000	259,600	100	100

4.2 Deprivation

Newcastle is ranked 20th out of 159 on the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation. This is a change from 2000 when Newcastle was ranked 48th. In terms of intensity of deprivation, Newcastle in 2004 is ranked 5th. It has the most deprived score of the five Tyne and Wear authorities. Newcastle has 53 Super Output Areas (out of 173) in the 10% most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in the country a figure that is much higher than would be expected. 31.4% (81,552) of the population live in the most deprived areas of Newcastle. In contrast, underlining the stark social contrasts that characterise the city, 3 Newcastle wards are amongst the most affluent in the northeast and figure above the mean for England.

Within Newcastle, it is evident from the Index that some areas of the City are considerably more deprived than others. There are pockets of high levels of deprivation in the Outer East (including Byker, South Heaton, Walker and Walkergate), Inner West (including the wards Benwell and Scotswood, Elswick, Westgate) and parts of the North and Outer West (including Blakelaw, Kenton, Denton, Newburn and Woolsington). On average 70% of children on the Child Protection Register and 70% of Looked After Children come from these wards. The falling population that has been experienced in recent years is both a symptom and a cause of Newcastle's problems. In affluent areas of Newcastle there is a severe housing shortage and high house prices. This contrasts with large numbers of empty houses, high levels of long-term unemployment and low levels of educational attainment in the east and inner west areas. The proportion of pupils in secondary schools eligible for free school meals at 28.5% is considerably higher than the national average of 17.1%.

Life expectancy figures are below the national average with male life expectancy in 2001 being 73.7 (England and Wales average 76) and female being 79.1 (England and Wales average 80.6). A total of 22 percent of people in Newcastle live with a long term limiting illness, as opposed to an England and Wales average of 18 percent.

4.3 Children and young people in Newcastle

Childhood Obesity

The baseline assessment of children starting school in 2004 suggested that 30.4% of 4 and 5 year olds were overweight or obese compared to a national figure of 27.7% (children aged 2 to 10 years). If this rate of obesity continues into adolescence there is cause for concern as obesity in adolescence is associated with increased morbidity and mortality in adult life. The youngest children in the Newcastle cohort were more likely to be overweight or obese.

Young Carers

Data from the 2001 census shows that there are 475 carers under 16 in the City who provide 1 hour or more per week care to someone who is old or ill. Of these 390 provide between 1 and 19 hours, 55 provide between 20 and 44 hours and 30 provide 50 or more care hours per week.

Children with disability or complex health needs

The Northern Region has the highest proportion of children with disabilities in the country (3.9% cf. 3.1% nationally). The RVI Neonatal Unit (part of Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals Trust, providing tertiary services across the region) has the lowest mortality rate in the country, which increases the number of children requiring support from Health and Social Services. The needs of children with complex health issues and those of disabled children are often very similar. Children become disabled if the complex health issues remain over time

Looked After Children

The number of looked after children in Newcastle at 31st March 2004 was 420 which was a rate of 77/10,000 children under 18 which was significantly higher than the rate for England, 55/10,000. The number of looked after children at 31st March 2005 had increased to 458.

Given the multi-faceted and complex needs of children and young people outlined above, the Play Strategy represents a way in which we can not only help by providing for them, but also involve children and young people in determining their own lives in a way which will foster their personal growth and improve the quality of life for all citizens of Newcastle.

5 PLAY PROVISION

The development and implementation of Newcastle's Play Strategy presents substantial challenges to all involved. The sheer diversity of provision, the variety of its organisational locations and the diversity of providers and clients make strategic delivery a real issue. The City's response to this scenario has been to develop the local management of service delivery. Play is a considerable tool in the development of local involvement since it is an issue at the heart of families and their children. This community development approach builds local community capacity and complements regeneration strategies by building mutual respect between the generations. This is "social inclusion" developed through community based self-help and proactive parenting. The play strategy will utilise these tools in developing local approaches and solutions.

The local approach will be supplemented and further developed through a strategic approach to services with a variety of proposals contained elsewhere within this document. The provision will be shaped through lessons learned in other initiatives already mounted by providers around the City. Schemes such as the Junior YIP in Scotswood and Byker are good examples of this practice that need to be replicated in other areas. The work of Investors in Children and others in developing the "voice" of children and young people will ensure that their needs are paramount in delivering provision that is fit for purpose.

As indicated earlier the sheer diversity of provision that has play as part of its work is enormous. The following list gives an indication of the scope of play providers.

- Children's Play Service Centres
- P&Y Centres,
- Play schemes,
- Play within families and at home.
- Special needs schemes and integrated provision.
- Family Learning Service
- Early Years Service
- Surestart /Children's Centres
- Youth Service
- Schools
- Extended Schools
- Social Services
- Activities funded by direct grant or community fund
- Parks and Countryside and Environmental Services
- Planning Services
- Sports Service and provision
- Regeneration Initiatives
- Health led initiatives
- Voluntary Sector provision
- Community based provision
- Private sector play i.e. play areas in pubs, soft play, bowling alleys etc
- Play areas & playgrounds, skateboard parks etc
- Sports grounds
- Supervised Play i.e. as in childcare
- Out of School Clubs
- Sunday Schools
- Uniformed Organisations

- Nurseries
- Playgroups & Parent/Toddler Groups
- Crèche's
- Mobile play projects

The above list illustrates the scale of provision and both the problems and opportunities in developing a strategic response. The approach suggested here has in essence two layers where the delivery of services will be managed locally whilst other aspects will be developed at a strategic level through local partnerships at a citywide level. This dual approach builds upon the best practice developed over a number of years within the city. The local authority will also have a role in ensuring synergy between its different strategic arms to develop and maintain appropriate quality standards and to ensure compliance with current legislation.

6 LISTENING TO FEEDBACK - ISSUES AND FINDINGS

6.1 Participation: Children and Young People

The views of children and young people were built into the strategy using existing reviews and documentation as well as extensive checking with children and young people of all ages, from all areas of Newcastle and from different social groups. This consultation formed the basis of "What Matters To Us" (op.cit.) and in it children and young people identified the priorities that would improve their day-to-day experience in Newcastle. They are:

- Space and opportunities to spend time with friends
- Good quality outdoor play spaces
- Involvement in decision making
- Respect for children and young people in relationships with adults
 - between different groups of children and young people

- fair treatment from organisations
- Accessible leisure and sports provision- cheap, or free for all
- Road safety
- Discrimination including bullying, racism and homophobia
- Policing, crime and anti-social behaviour
- Decent neighbourhoods to grow up and live in
- Public transport
- Healthy lifestyle issues (around food, exercise, drugs and alcohol)
- More interesting lessons and fairer treatment in schools

The Play Strategy recognises that meeting these concerns and aspirations particularly those related to self-direction are central to the successful implementation of the strategy. The active participation of children and young people in the planning and evaluation of play activities and areas was also identified in the wider consultation as one of the most important policy objectives for play.

6.2 Results from the Consultation

The consultation revealed a broad agreement about the value of play as an end in itself and as a developmental process. This was demonstrated in the very strong consensus about values principles and beliefs outlined above in Section 3.

However this was also matched by a general unease about the status of play and a sense that there was no clear voice for play or well defined course by which improvement could be brought about. This is perhaps evidenced in some of the responses to a question that asked for a name for the Play Strategy assuming it was in fact a game. Responses included: “Elephant in the room”, “Snakes and Ladders”, “Football” and “Follow my leader”.

The quality of responses demonstrated that staff were focused and committed and that there are an ample number of projects, centres and activities demonstrating good practice on which to build. Several excellent examples of play work were identified e.g. St. Anthony’s Children’s House, Walker, Benwell Junior Youth Inclusion Programme, Raby Street Interactive Project, West End Women and Girls Project. The Kids’ Kabin, Kids’ Café and NCH St Anthony’s Children’s House were similarly cited while the play yard in Wharrier Street Primary school was highlighted as a well designed and much enjoyed play space. The work in Walkergate and Cruddas Park nurseries was also referred to as an example of outstanding work, similarly a range of projects providing activities and support to disabled children were also mentioned as being exemplary.

There was no single age range that was identified as being particularly relevant for the delivery of play. There was however a significant number of returns suggesting 4 – 12 as a core age range, but overall, play was seen as being a legitimate and valued mode of experience for all ages. Indeed, when discussing strategy implementation a number of respondents cogently made the case for play staff working together in a way they would want to facilitate in their work with children i.e. “make it exciting for all involved...if adults don’t find it exciting what message are we giving the children” or “Share, respect, listen, action, communicate...(like) a giant game of tag”.

With regards organisation there was a significant degree of recognition that “play” was more than direct provision and within the context of the strategy a number of respondents stressed the need for fixed play and open spaces to be fully involved from the start. However, a common theme was the need for all sectors to work together, council, voluntary and community. There was also a belief that the Play Service could refocus itself and thereby work more effectively with other sectors. Moreover, it could also make a number of internal changes to become more effective, not least by appointing a Senior Play Officer.

There was also concern expressed that play did not have influence or was not perceived as being important in terms of local politics and as part of the planning system including the emerging Local Development Framework. Most respondents felt that the very unique contribution of play was overlooked or deemed unimportant. Some even saw this as a consequence of an undue focus on the examination of children within schools. One respondent however had a different view of this dichotomy “(some

believe)...that play and education are mutually exclusive, whereas play is education and the best education is play.” It was felt that at the moment, too many see play as an opportunity for children to ‘let off steam’ before they get down to ‘proper learning’. Research demonstrates that when children’s play is supported sensitively, wisely and intelligently it is a major source of learning and development. Adults need to be interested, proactive, enthusiastic and facilitative of play. Regardless of whether or not there is a “right view” there is clearly scope within the strategy for play expertise to inform the practice of the whole spectrum of practitioners that work with children and young people.

There was a view that one of the best ways of demonstrating the impact of play would be through the development of a range of case studies of those who have had both good and negative play experiences. Seeing what happens to children and young people deprived of play opportunities could be a real wake up call and focus the minds of practitioners.

There was almost unanimous recognition of the value and need for joined up thinking and action particularly with regard to Council services and the formulation of local and sub-regional policy. This was not merely an intellectual recognition there was a genuine willingness amongst almost all of those involved in the consultation to commit to working across traditional divides especially if it was going to make a real difference to children and young peoples experience of play. Examples ranged from a willingness to tackle dog fouling that restricts play opportunities to consideration of new methods of delivering services such as commissioning. The main proviso in most returns was that innovations should produce demonstrable improvement to play opportunities and provision. Quality mattered to everyone.

“We are more likely to be effective if we pull together in this and build up shared understandings.” Play-worker .

6.3 Key issues from the Consultation and feedback

It would be wrong to say that there was agreement in all areas, some respondents believed that play should only be delivered directly by the Council while others felt suspicious of particular issues or anxious about change. The voluntary sector want to be able to have their say in how priorities are set. Nevertheless, there was such an impressive congruence of values and a common belief in the importance of play that it was relatively straightforward to condense these into objectives relevant to play policy, organisation and delivery.

The following objectives were synthesised from the whole consultation process and they give a focus to the strategy and provide a framework for implementation.

Overarching Objective

To improve the understanding of parents, carers, service providers and practitioners of how children and young people learn in order to promote and develop good quality play opportunities.

Impact on Children's Play

Objective 1

To strive towards every child and young person in Newcastle having access to good quality green play spaces within easy walking distance of their homes, which meet their needs for variety, accessibility, choice, open space, adventure and other play aspirations.

Objective 2

To maximise the participation of children and young people, local communities, in the provision, management and evaluation of play provision in their neighbourhoods.

Objective 3

To ensure that children and young people with disabilities have access to the widest possible range of play opportunities and that play in Newcastle conforms, at a minimum to the requirements set out in the Disability Discrimination Act.

Objective 4

To provide a range of play opportunities in the built environment, city parks, natural spaces (managed or wildlife) open spaces, woodlands, riverside and other areas used for play where risk is managed and risk of death and serious injury eliminated while also helping children learn to manage an acceptable level of risk in their play.

Service Management for Children's Play Improvement

Objective 5

To agree standards and performance indicators for play and use these to improve provision across the City; ensure that relevant training is available to practitioners involved in the delivery of services to children and young people.

Objective 6

To organise the human and financial resources of Play to provide a clear framework for investment, action, workforce development and partnership working.

Objective 7

To improve the awareness of play amongst policy makers and the public so as to promote good quality play as a right that fosters children and young people's growth, learning and development.

Objective 8

To communicate effectively about all aspects of play with the public, including "hard to reach groups", play providers, internal and external partners and other organisations with the aim of improving the quality of provision and participation.

7 DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

7.1 LINKS WITH OTHER PLANS AND STRATEGIES

The Play Strategy has links with other plans and strategies within the Council and with external agencies. It needs to link to the departmental service plans which impact on the delivery of play. This avoids duplication of resources and ensures that there is a joined up approach to achieving the aims of the Play Strategy.

The Play Strategy will contribute to meeting the aims and objectives of the Newcastle Corporate Strategy:

- Promoting the quality of life and the environmental agenda
- Regeneration and priority neighbourhoods
- Building safe, clean and green neighbourhoods
- Supporting Children and Young People to achieve their potential

Play clearly has a role within these priorities (as outlined in section 2 of this document) and in particular to the aim of supporting children and young people.

The Newcastle Strategy has the declared intention of helping all children and young people “fulfil their aspirations and potential, encourage everyone to learn, develop skills and build self-esteem. Ensure excellent outcomes for children and young people that encompass good health, safety, achievement and economic well-being.”

The Play Strategy needs to dovetail with the timescales set for all other ECM work, particularly the Children and Young People’s Plan.

The Play Strategy is informed by Newcastle’s Corporate Strategy that aims to enhance the quality of life of local communities, through promoting and improving the economic, social, and environmental well being of the City.

The Play Strategy also links with many other local strategies and initiatives. Newcastle's Play Area Strategy will be part of the implementation plan for play. Having already identified gaps in the provision and consulted widely with young people about their preferences an action plan to develop and improve play areas will be produced in line with the principles and recommendations of the Play Strategy.

The Play Area Strategy is informed by Newcastle's Local Development Framework which sets out the statutory planning framework on the development and preservation of the urban and green environment, and in particular its outdoor space and indoor sports facilities. That framework will further inform the Green Space Strategy.

The action plan for play areas will also make links with the Children's Fund Strategy, the Early Education and Childcare Plans, Children's Centres and Extended Strategies and the Cultural Strategy.

7.2 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The aim of working in partnership with all organisations that have an impact on children's play is to create a continual dialogue in order to develop and provide a range of play services and opportunities which meet the needs of all children, young people and their families in the City.

To do this we must:

- Support local networks, neighbourhood partnerships associated with children and young people and recognise the need to increase involvement in national networks
- Work even more closely and effectively with the voluntary and community sector, children and young people, their families, schools and local communities and recognise and celebrate the diversity of provision.
- Continue to work closely with and seek opportunities for joint working with different departments within the Council e.g. Education, Planning, Regeneration, Housing and Transport. In order to ensure that Play is considered in all areas even those where it may be less obvious e.g. developing tenancy agreements that recognise the need for children and young people to play.
 - Maximise the use of existing community buildings.

7.3 RECOMMENDED FUTURE STRUCTURE

To ensure an efficient and effective strategic delivery of play services, there should be a clearly defined management infrastructure in place. Play is a major contributor to the Children's Service and needs to have a strategic link also to the range of services and providers that influence play opportunities and developments. This Strategy recommends that service decisions that could have an impact on children's play should be referred to the Senior Play Officer in the Play Service for comment and that a stakeholders group in the form of a City Play Forum should be created to review the implementation of the Play Strategy and make recommendations for future development and priorities. The Senior Play Officer should also represent Play on the Children's Trust.

The Senior Play Officer would be, along with senior colleagues, play practitioners and partners responsible for:

- Implementing the Play Strategy
 - Supporting and developing the work and potential of the City Play Forum
 - Ensuring that Play issues are addressed at ward level
- Raising the awareness of play
- Publicising, promoting and disseminating the Play Strategy
- Developing a coherent, cohesive and co-ordinated approach to the development of play opportunities
- Allocating resources and investment in ways that support the Strategy
 - Develop effective working partnerships with appropriate voluntary sector organisations
- Ensuring that Council funded or play provision provided directly by the Local Authority will make reference to the Play Strategy
- Encouraging and supporting all play providers to adopt the values and principles highlighted in the Play Strategy
- Developing partnerships across different forms of provision and between departments, sectors, organisations and projects
- Identifying additional funding sources for play and disseminating funding information to relevant groups
- Stimulating the creation of innovative projects or partnerships in support of children's play Linking with existing and future policies e.g. Regeneration Strategy, Green Space Strategy and the Local Development Framework.
- Monitoring the targets set for Play and the actions identified in the Play Strategy
- Reporting on progress and issues to the City Play Forum, Children's Trust and the City Council

7.4 RESOURCES

A commitment to children's play implies there will be adequate, secure and ongoing resources allocated. The best use of resources can be made through co-ordination of council departments, voluntary organisations and external agencies in their effort to provide suitable play opportunities.

A strategy is directly instrumental in the Council's ability to attract a range of new resources and to focus on development programmes, leading to more efficient service delivery.

Key providers and funders will need to:

- Commit to working and allocating resources in a child facing way at a local/neighbourhood level as well as working strategically at a City level.
- Extend the operational scope of play to include fixed play and neighbourhood play space development.
- Maintain a "mixed economy" of Council, Voluntary Sector and community provision and examine other provision opportunities e.g. social enterprise.
- Develop resources to support the Strategy.
- Aim to increase funding for staff development, equipment and quality improvement.
- Bid for central government funding to develop open-access play particularly of an adventurous nature.
- Examine the impact of financial commitments arising/likely to arise from building conditions as part of an asset development plan designed to maximize the long-term impact of the Strategy.
- Continue to give grants to develop local play e.g. holiday play groups and seek funding for additional facilities and play activities.
- Support innovative projects and those targeted at specific groups e.g. disabled, BME and hard to reach groups.

This will be an opportunity for Newcastle to help fund and support local solutions in response to the needs, problems and issues identified in the Strategy.

7.5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Appropriate monitoring procedures will be developed and implemented as an ongoing and integral part of service delivery and will include active involvement of service users in identifying and responding to children's needs.

A framework will be put in place to ensure:

- Common standards (linked to national and local best practice) and quality assurance systems are used to evaluate all play-work in Newcastle
- Delivery against targets and objectives is monitored
- Progress is reported back to management and stakeholders
- Governance and Performance Management is part of the Children's Trust arrangement
- The Strategy is monitored annually with a comprehensive review at least every three years.
- There are clear and well documented safe-guarding systems in place for all aspects of play and play-work that are centrally managed and in addition work with all other providers to establish common standards in this area.

8. Outcomes and Objectives

The objectives below fall under the overarching Every Child Matters Outcomes. They are central to the development of play opportunities in Newcastle.

Key Aims

Play Strategy Objectives matched to ECM outcomes

Be healthy

- a) physically healthy
- b) mentally and emotionally healthy
- c) healthy lifestyles

- Promote the importance of play to children's health, well being, their learning and creativity, to parents and carers and those working with children.

Stay safe

- d) Safe from accidental injury and death
- e) Safe from bullying and discrimination
- f) Safe from crime and antisocial behaviour

- Ensure that all children and young people have the chance to encounter acceptable risks in stimulating and challenging play environments.
- Work to ensure that play spaces, routes to school, parks, thoroughfares, housing estates and other public spaces within the borough are as safe as, and as conducive as, possible to children's play.

Enjoy and achieve

- g) Achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation
- h) Achieve stretching national educational standards at primary and secondary school

- Create, develop and maintain a variety of safe, local, and high quality play spaces and play provisions i.e. Make play fun!
- Support schools, childcare providers and other children's services to develop opportunities for, and recognise the value of play within their provision.
- Work to ensure that an expanding range of play opportunities is available to disabled children and young people, and that all provision aims towards becoming fully inclusive and accessible.

Make a positive contribution

- i) Engage in decision-making and support the community and environment
- j) Engage in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school
- k) Develop positive relationships and choose not to bully or discriminate

- Ensure children are consulted and involved with the development of new provision
- Work to ensure that play providers actively seek to address the needs of children from diverse communities and those at risk from social exclusion.
- Work with children and other providers to ensure that activities that develop social interaction and emotional growth are part of the Newcastle play entitlement.

Achieve economic well-being

- l) Live in decent homes and sustainable communities

- Work with partners and providers to that the needs of children are met in the provision of play spaces and open green spaces and other public spaces within the city and that play provision is sustainable.

Actions	Targets & Indicators	Timescales & Resources	Links
<p>Organise the human and financial resources of the Play Service so as to provide a clear framework for investment, action, workforce development and partnership working.</p>	<p>Appoint a Senior Play Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ work with all of the Council Departments to ensure that play is developed and delivered in a co-ordinated, coherent way; ○ seek advice from, consult with and work with the Voluntary Sector and other partners in order to develop play provision and complement existing best practice; ○ establish a Newcastle Play Forum and a network of local play forum across the city; ○ consult with children and young people on play provision and playground development to provide supervised play activities in playgrounds, parks and open spaces, to consult with children and young people and to implement, as appropriate, elements of the Play Strategy; ○ provide experienced staff to consult with children and young people, ensuring their views continue to be included in the development of Council strategies e.g. the Open Spaces Strategy. ○ provide guidance to Council departments and the voluntary sector on consulting with children and young people; ○ establish internal partnerships and projects across Council service areas and departments; ○ seek to build partnerships with external organisations to develop play initiatives and projects; ○ ensure that play is considered in the planning and decision making processes in every Council Department that has an impact on children; ○ identify and help access funding sources; ○ provide a one stop contact point for all queries, complaints and information about play in Newcastle; ○ provide support to Voluntary Organisations to prepare funding applications; 		

- manage a dedicated budget to provide grant support for play events and activities;
- plan and co-ordinates play events, outreach play programmes and mobile play activities. Where relevant these should be planned and developed in co-operation with play providers in the community;
- manage a team of Play-workers and facilitators;
- develop and co-ordinates a training programme to raise play awareness in Council Departments and with front line workers;
- facilitate the development of a joint planning strategy for playgrounds and play areas in parks and open spaces.

To improve the awareness of play amongst policy makers and the public so as to promote good quality play as a right that fosters children's growth, learning and development.

Appoint a Play Champion and link this to the adoption of the Play Strategy by the City. The Play Champion will actively support the Senior Play Officer work to:

- Provide of a copy of the strategy to all organisations who contributed to its development.
- Develop commitment to the Play Strategy by means of a statement of intent, which will be disseminated to relevant organisations and to the press.
- Promote the Play Strategy to Council Officers and Elected Members.
- Deliver training on the importance and role of play to key staff in all Council Departments and organisations funded by the Council in order to ensure the effective adoption of the Play Strategy.
- Devise a media campaign to raise public awareness about the benefits of play and the needs of children and young people to access positive play opportunities.
- Carry out an audit of organisations funded by the Newcastle City Council to

identify how their activities relate to play and what they are doing to promote play. Make the adoption of the Play Strategy form part of the criteria for future Local Authority grant aid to community organisations.

- Provide practical and financial support to local play events and encourage other Council partners to fund play events.
- Develop appropriate partnerships with schools to raise awareness and improve attitudes towards play and play opportunities as a method of learning and as an entitlement.
- Run a seminar to raise the awareness of play amongst decision makers in external organisations, for instance the Housing Corporation, housing developers, property developers, Police, Health Trusts and regeneration initiatives.

Every child and young person in Newcastle will have access to good quality play spaces within easy walking distance of their homes which meet their needs for variety, accessibility, choice, open space, adventure and other play aspirations

Have safe and attractive play spaces for children within easy walking distance of their homes.

- Pedestrian and community needs are placed ahead of traffic considerations. Transport Strategy to include speed restrictions and safe routes to schools and a variety of play areas.
- Examine ways to limit/control the access of dogs to these zones and implement environmental enforcement of any agreed policy.
- Plan opportunities for older children and young people to meet friends and to enjoy and develop their own cultural and recreational pursuits in designated areas and more informally.
- Draw up a plan to facilitate informal, unsupervised play within neighbourhoods for disabled children.
- Undertake a survey and assessment of areas with the potential of being Home Play Zones

To further develop the participation of children and young people, local communities, in the provision, management and evaluation of play provision in their neighbourhoods.

Establish a City Play Forum and consider the benefits of Neighbourhood Play Forums linked to the three designated Children's Service areas within the City. Create links at ward level to represent Play requirements and the voice of young people.

- Invite all organisations providing play, special interest groups as well children and young people to review city wide provision and development properties within the City Play Forum. (The format and organisation of the forum to be established with the active involvement of young people so as to maximise their engagement.)
- Establish local Forum to be based on Wards and neighbourhoods with Primary Schools and Children's centres as community focal points.
- Review and help plan provision within each neighbourhood based on the views of the local Play Forum
- Produce an annual survey of popularity of and use by, children and young people within a particular neighbourhood, of local facilities (including an assessment of physical access);
- Make local resource allocation decisions related to play in the light of local Play Forum views;
- Represent the views of young people and provide local input in the Local Development Framework, Green Space Strategy and Community Plan;
- Provide older children with a forum and support of trained staff to manage the impact of their play with the sometimes-conflicting demands and actions of adults.
- Map play provision and facilities within the City

To provide play areas in the built environment, city parks, open spaces, woodlands, shorelines and other areas used for play where risk is managed and risk of death and serious injury eliminated while also helping children learn to manage an acceptable level of risk in their play.

- **Examine the co-ordination and effective contribution of Ward Co-ordinators, Neighbourhood Response Managers, Enforcement and Community Development Staff**
 - Strengthen the Community Safety Role of staff with neighbourhood responsibilities
 - make them the guardians and promoters of Home Play Zones
 - responsible for checking vandalism
 - helping maintain the designated areas as safe environments for playing, meeting friends, having opportunities for children to stretch themselves physically, while being free from bullying, harassment and racism.
 - Linking with the Green Space Strategy and with appropriate officers, consider the options for establishing new play areas, which offer adventure and environmentally focused play opportunities (with managed risk) in city parks and other open spaces.
 - Contribute to the cross-departmental review and action plan of planned play areas in green spaces (their design, maintenance and supervision) to include young people and Play Forum in the evaluation of any development.
 - Further develop the joint planning strategy to improve the safety of provision and development of play areas and playgrounds.
 - Identify suitable areas, including parks, green spaces, woodlands and riverside for facilitated play sessions to be available to organisations, groups and individuals.
 - Further develop the holiday and term time programmes of facilitated play sessions taking in to account the play/recreation aspirations of children and young people in Newcastle.
 - Develop dog free play areas in playgrounds, parks and open spaces.
 - In partnership with Environmental Services and Enforcement, identify and

implement methods to improve the cleanliness of play areas.

- Invite applications for innovative pilot project to achieve the best quality of play in public spaces in Newcastle.
- Address the use of school grounds and premises for out-of-school children's play and establish clear protocols for the use of school grounds for out of hours play.
- Be vigilant and aware of crime and anti-social behaviour particularly as it impacts on play. Liaise with the Safer Newcastle Team to resolve problems.

To agree performance indicators for play and use these to improve provision across the City; ensure that relevant training is available to professionals involved in the delivery of services to children and young people.

Produce a Newcastle Play Charter & Charter Mark. Based on best play principles and to be linked to quality assurance, rigorous safeguarding systems and grant aid allocation.

- Establish a Play Professionals Network.
- Identify and/or provide citywide CPD opportunities in play as well as developing a common Quality Assurance Framework* for play work in Newcastle. *The quality assurance system to meet the Investors in Children (IiC) standard and to be developed through collaboration. The system will link to other systems in related provision and be sufficient to enable accurate reporting.
- Develop a range of Performance Indicators for play/play work linked to best practice and national agreed standards;
- through the offices of the City Council, link grant aid allocation to adoption of the charter by those organisations who provide play opportunities for children and young people.
- Produce a Workforce development plan, making reference to the national play framework and providing basic play awareness training for all relevant staff.

To communicate effectively about all aspects of play with the public, play providers, internal and external partners and other organisations.

Develop an ICT/Web-based resource to support the Strategy

- Provide a one stop contact point with a web presence for all queries, complaints and information about play in Newcastle with links to other relevant sites e.g. Ward Web-sites and Libraries and Arts information.
- Use the site to inform children and young people of available opportunities.
- Monitor the use of play areas and parks, linked to maintenance and risk assessment e.g. GIS database, or database system linked to GIS or as a more sophisticated tool to assist in the maintenance of play space (c.f. Newcastle Neighbourhood Service Department).
- Develop the Web site as a professional development tool to facilitate the sharing of good practice and CPD.
- Examine the possibility of linking the Web site to quality assurance and monitoring systems thereby creating a complete portal for Play.

Ensure that children and young people with disabilities have access to the widest possible range of play opportunities and that play in Newcastle conforms, at a minimum to the requirements set out in the Disability Actions Discrimination Act.

Use the expertise available within the Newcastle City Council and within the Voluntary Sector to achieve this objective.

- Promote and facilitate inclusion in play through the play programme at community level.
- Develop further consultation with children and young people with disabilities about the development of play and play areas and facilitate their participation in decision-making, using Play Forum as they develop.
- Review the access for people with disabilities into and around playgrounds in Newcastle as part of the play areas survey.
- Extend the use of the design standards, developed by the City Council, thereby ensuring all play areas conform to a minimum standard, e.g. there will be no design features preventing access to the playground by people with disabilities. This will also facilitate usage by people pushing buggies and

prams.

- Develop a play opportunities policy, which ensures that the needs of all children and young people including those with disabilities are taken into account in decisions relating to the development of play provision in Newcastle.
- Work with national and local organisations to ensure that play opportunities are developed, which are suitable for, unsupervised use by children with disabilities.
- Support facilitated play sessions to assist children with disabilities and their carers to use play equipment in imaginative and creative ways.
- In addition, to the play sessions specifically for children and young people with disabilities and their carers, ensure all facilitated play sessions provided directly are integrated.
- Provide clear, accurate information about the level of accessibility to play opportunities, activities and facilities.
- Support an on-going programme of inclusive play and disabilities awareness training to workers involved in the delivery of services to children and young people.

References

1. Department of Culture, Media and Sports, Getting Serious about Play – a review of children’s play, 2004
2. Children’s Play Council: The Future for Children’s Play,
3. Department for Education and Skills - Every Child Matters: Change For Children (December 2004)
4. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Planning Policy Guidance Note 17, Section 1 - ‘Planning Objectives’, 2002
5. Department of Education and Skills, National standards for under 8s day care and childminding - out of school care, 2003. See also: Promoting Positive outcomes - a report on the impact of OFSTED registration on play and open access schemes PLAYLINK 2003
6. This definition of play [given in: Children’s Play Council/National Playing Fields Association/PLAYLINK, Best Play - what play provision should do for children, (2000)] is attributable to the work of Bob Hughes and Frank King and has been adopted by the National Occupational Standards for Play-work in its set of Play-work Assumptions and values. Skills Active, the new Sector Skills Council for Play-work, is currently developing a new set of ‘Play-work Principles’ which will shortly replace the Play-work ‘Values and Assumptions’, (given in Appendix B)
7. UNICEF, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
8. S Hood, The State of London’s Children report, Office of Children’s Rights Commissioner for London, 2001
9. Quoted in A Strategy for Brent Parks 2004-2009 p26
10. Groundwork research report to the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, 2002
11. For example see: The British Medical Journal (Vol. 322) 10 February 2001, Department of Health, ‘Choosing Health? Choosing Activity’, consultation 2004
12. Department of Health, At Least Five a Week, 2004
13. Prof Roger Mackett, UCL Making children’s Lives More Active, Centre For Transport Studies, 2004
14. Department of Health/Department of Education and Skills, National Service Framework for Children Young People and Maternity Services, 2004
15. Qualifications & Curriculum Authority, Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, 2000.
16. Children’s Play Council/The Children’s Society, New Charter for Children’s Play, (© National Children’s Bureau 1998)

17. Cole-Hamilton, I. "Something good and fun; children and parent's views on play and out-of-school provision" in Cole-Hamilton, I. Harrop, A. & Street, C. Making the Case for Play; Gathering the evidence, NCB (2002)
18. Kapasi, H Asian Children Play; increasing access to play provision for Asian children, Play Train. Second edition, (2001)
19. Kapasi, H Playing in Parallel: A study of access to play provision by Black and minority children in London. London Play (2002)
20. Scott, R Side by Side: Guidelines for inclusive play. Kidsactive (2000)
21. M Huttenmoster and D Degen-Zimmermann, Zurich, Lebensraume fur Kinder, 1994
22. Play Safety Forum, Managing risk in play provision: a position statement, Children's Play Council, NCB 2002 (c.f. Appendix D)
23. Planning for Play, Guidance on the development and implementation of a local play strategy, Children's Play Council March 2006

Additional Sources

Connexions Analysis of Need 2005

Safe Newcastle Strategy 2005-8

A Strategy for Children and Young People in Newcastle 2004

Homelessness Review and Strategy: Newcastle City Council

Children's Trust Development Plan

Best Value Review of Educational Attainment: Baseline Report

APA Self-assessment

Hidden Harm Briefing

Teenage Pregnancy in Newcastle: A Needs Assessment and Health Equity Audit

Childhood Obesity in Newcastle: A Baseline Assessment May 2005

APPENDIX A: THE CHARTER FOR CHILDREN'S PLAY

The New Charter for Children's Play was written by the Children's Play Council and was originally published in 1992 by the National Children's Bureau. A new edition was published in 1998 by the The Children's Society. The Charter provides a framework for the development of local authority and other organisations' play policies. Given below are the ten headline standards of the Charter. The full text is available from the Children's Society.

THE CHARTER

- All children need to play and have a right to play. Children of all ages should be able to play freely and confidently on their own and with other children.
- Parents and other carers should respect and value their children's play and try to maximise their opportunities for safe and stimulating play within and outside the home.
- All children should have equal access to play opportunities and services
- All children should be able to play safely outdoors wherever they live, in cities and in the countryside. Older children should also be able to get around safely on their own.
- Central and local government and voluntary organisations should think creatively and strategically about children and their play needs.
- All children should have access to a range of good quality early years, play and out-of school services, such as play centres, holiday play schemes, adventure playgrounds, after-school clubs, playgroups, toy libraries and play buses.
- All schools should support and facilitate children's play. Play and learning are not separate; play is part of learning and learning is part of play. Learning through play supports and enriches learning through formal education.
- Play opportunities should challenge and stimulate children's abilities but not threaten their survival or well being.
- Hospital admissions, visits to a doctor, or a stay in temporary accommodation are some of the situations where children are in strange surroundings, perhaps experiencing fear, pain, anxiety and discomfort. They should be provided with play opportunities led by staff and volunteers who understand their special needs.
- All play work education and training should be flexible, adaptable, reflective of existing good practice in play work and should involve a significant fieldwork practice component.

The set of Best Play Objectives set out below is from 'Best Play' a widely recognized benchmark document describing the objectives for good play provision. (Best Play: What play provision should do for children. Children's Play Council, NPFA and Playlink; 1999)

OBJECTIVES FOR PLAY PROVISION

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

ELEMENTS OF RICH, HIGH QUALITY PLAY ENVIRONMENTS

1. A varied and interesting environment
2. Challenge in relation to the physical environment
3. Playing with the natural elements
4. Movement, such as running, jumping, rolling climbing, swinging, balancing
5. Manipulating natural and fabricated materials
6. Stimulation of the five senses
7. Experiencing change in the natural and built environment
8. Social interactions
9. Playing with identity
10. Experiencing a range of emotions

APPENDIX B: PLAYWORK ASSUMPTIONS AND VALUES

Play work Assumptions and Values

The National Occupational Standards for Play-work focus on and describe work functions, but are based on a number of assumptions and values (the philosophy) that underpin good practice in play-work. These are currently under review and may soon be replaced with a new set of 'play-work principles'. Here are the current assumptions and values:

Assumptions

- The first assumption is that children's play is freely chosen, personally directed behaviour and motivated from within. Through play children are able to explore the world, and his or her relationship with it, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges he or she encounters. By playing, children learn and develop as individuals.
- The second assumption is that whereas children may play without encouragement or help, adults can, through the provision of an appropriate human and physical environment, significantly enhance opportunities for the child to play creatively and thus develop through play.

In this way the competent play-worker always aims to provide opportunities for the individual child to achieve his or her full potential, while being careful not to control the child's direction or choice.

Values

1. Play opportunities are provided in a number of settings (e.g. Local Authority, voluntary or commercial) for children with a variety of needs. Competent play-work always has the following underlying values regardless of social and cultural diversity.
2. The child must be at the centre of the process, and the opportunities provided and the organisation, which supports, co-ordinates and manages these, should always start with the child's needs and offer sufficient flexibility to meet these.

3. Play should empower children, affirm and support their right to make choices, discover their own solutions and allow them to develop at their own pace and in their own way.
4. Whereas play may sometimes be enriched by the play-worker's participation, adults should always be sensitive to children's needs and never try to control a child's play so long as it remains within safe and acceptable boundaries.
5. Every child has a right to a play environment, which stimulates and provides opportunities for risk, challenge and the growth of confidence and self esteem.
6. The contemporary environment in which many children grow up does not lend itself to safe and creative play. All children have the right to a play environment, which is free from hazard, which ensures physical and personal safety and a setting within which the child ultimately feels physically and personally safe.
7. Every child is an individual and has the right to be respected as such. Each child should feel confident that the adults who work and play with them value individuality and diversity.
8. A considerate and caring attitude to individual children and their families is essential to competent play-work and should be displayed at all times.
9. Prejudice against people with disabilities, or who suffer social and economic disadvantage, racism and sexism has no place in an environment, which seeks to enhance development through play. Adults involved in play should always promote equality of opportunity and access for all children and seek to develop anti discriminatory practice and positive attitudes to those who are disadvantaged.
10. Play should offer the child opportunities to extend his or her exploration and understanding of the wider world and consequently the physical, social and cultural settings beyond their immediate experience.
11. Play is essentially a co-operative activity for children both individually and in groups. Play-workers should always encourage children to be sensitive to the needs of others. In providing play opportunities they should always seek to work together with children, their parents, colleagues and other professionals and where possible to make their own expertise available to the wider community.
12. Play opportunities should always be provided within current legislative framework relevant to children's rights, health, safety and well being.

13. Every child has a right to an environment for play, and such environments must be made accessible to children.

Appendix C: The Newcastle City Council Play Policy

DRAFT NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL PLAY SERVICE POLICY

“The right to play is a child’s first claim on the community; Play is nature’s training for life. No community can infringe upon that right without doing deep and enduring harm in the minds and bodies of its citizens.” [Lloyd George.]

Introduction

The decision to develop a Play Policy is an explicit demonstration of the importance Newcastle City Council places on the value of Play and the importance of Play to the City’s children, the wider community and society as a whole.

This Play Policy reflects the commitment made, to ensure that children are involved in decision-making and the development of policies, which affect them. It is designed to show that Newcastle City Council is responsive to the needs of the children in Newcastle.

The Play Policy is a broad statement of principles, rather than a detailed description of how Play provision should be implemented. The Play & Youth Service will use the Policy to develop a more detailed Play Strategy for the City, in partnership with other relevant Council Directorates, Voluntary and Community groups and local, regional and national Play practitioners.

The Play Strategy will inform the development of quality play opportunities, play spaces and play provision across the City.

The development of this Play Policy and the corresponding Play Strategy will contribute to the overall Children and Young People’s Plan, for the City. It will also demonstrate how the provision of quality play opportunities contributes to the Every Child Matters Outcomes, as well as other relevant strategies.

Background

Newcastle City Council is committed to working towards enabling every child to exercise their right to play, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, (ratified by the Government of the United Kingdom in December 1991.) The UN Convention recognizes the significance and importance of Play in children's lives.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, ARTICLE 31, STATES:

“States parties recognize the right of the child to rest, 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.”

“States parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural and artistic, recreational and leisure activity.”

In the United Kingdom, the child's right to play is expressed in the Charter for Children's Play, developed by the Children's Play Council.

Benefits of Play

- Play promotes children's development, learning, creativity and fosters independence and self esteem. Children exhibit a behavioural imperative and instinctive desire to Play. A child's development will be affected by the range of Play opportunities they have access to.
- Play keeps children healthy and active, throughout their childhood and transition to adulthood. Children engage in Play for its own sake not for any external goal or reward.
- Play fosters social inclusion

- Play allows children to find out about themselves, their abilities and their interests. Play is a vital way for children to understand themselves and the world around them.
- Play is therapeutic, it helps children to cope with difficult and stressful situations
- Play offers opportunities for children to test boundaries and explore risk. Risk taking is an essential element of children's play; children need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, embark on new experiences and develop their capacities.
- Play develops children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.

Principles

Play is a natural and universal activity. It is a process with no necessary outcome. Play is **freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated**, that is Play is entered into by the child because they want to do so; they control the play and undertake play because it is personally satisfying to them.

This strategy was therefore formulated on the basis that children:

- want to play and have the right to do so, in a variety of public spaces, near to their home; including designated play spaces and shared public space.
- have had their play space eroded by the impact of modern society and have a shortage of quality play opportunities in their local environment.
- The community as a whole benefits from an environment in which children are able to play in public space, free from unacceptable risks.

- Designated play areas can provide enhanced play opportunities for children, beyond those offered in public spaces. Staffed facilities enable children to experience a wider range of play activities, take more managed risks, both physical and emotional, than would otherwise be available.
- Stimulating and challenging play environments ensure children can experience acceptable levels of risk.
- Some children have more limited access to play opportunities than others, due to personal or family circumstances, their social and physical environments. The play needs of these children must be addressed when developing play opportunities.
- Play opportunities must reflect and meet the needs of the black and minority ethnic communities in the City.

Commitment

Newcastle Play & Youth Service will work in partnership with other Council Directorates, the Voluntary Sector, community groups and children and young people, to develop a comprehensive Play Strategy.

The Play Strategy will endeavour to ensure that children can access a range of quality play opportunities and environments.

The importance of Play will be promoted to all those who work with children, parents / carers and all those who develop services for the community.

Schools, childcare providers, and all services for children will be supported to recognize the value of Play within their provision.

Parks, housing estates and public spaces will be as conducive to Play as possible and appropriate.

Local, accessible and inclusive play spaces will be developed. These will include dedicated play areas and staffed Play provision. Staffed provision will be informed by the aims and objectives outlined in the 'Best Play' document, published for the Department of

Culture, Media and Sport, (DCMS,) by the National Playing Fields Association, The Children's Play Council and Playlink. Staffed provision will also operate according to the Play-work Assumptions and Principles.

Play opportunities will aim to offer children the chance to experience acceptable risk within a safe, stimulating and challenging environment.

All Play provision will aim to become fully accessible and inclusive.

A wider range of play opportunities will be made available to disabled children

Play provision will aim to address the needs of children from 'hard to reach' communities and children who are, or are at risk of social exclusion

Children will be actively consulted and encouraged to participate in making decisions about their opportunities to play and the spaces in their communities where they play.

All decisions and activities that may affect play spaces and opportunities will be informed by this Play Policy.

In light of these commitments Newcastle City Council will adopt the Charter for Children's Play and endeavour to implement it.

APPENDIX D: MANAGING RISK IN PLAY PROVISION

MANAGING RISK IN PLAY PROVISION: A POSITION STATEMENT

PLAY SAFETY FORUM

SUMMARY STATEMENT

'We consider Managing Risk in Play Provision to be an important document that will contribute to the debate on the provision of children's play.'

Health and Safety Executive

SUMMARY STATEMENT

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

Introduction

The Play Safety Forum, a grouping of national agencies involved in play safety, has produced Managing Risk in Play Provision to support the work of those involved in play provision of any kind (for example play areas, playgrounds, adventure playgrounds, play centres and holiday play-schemes). These include local authorities, voluntary organisations, play equipment manufacturers and inspection agencies.

The statement has relevance to other settings and environments in which children play; such as childcare provision, schools, parks and public open spaces. It will also be of interest to those involved in insurance and litigation in relation to play provision. The statement has equal relevance to children and young people of all ages from 0 to 18, and it uses the term 'children' to cover the whole age range. It focuses on physical injuries resulting from accidents. However, the overall approach, namely that a balance should be struck between risks and benefits, is also relevant to agencies concerned with other issues such as the personal safety of children.

The statement is in two forms: a summary and a full statement. The summary aims to state the key points of the full statement in a more accessible form, for a non-technical audience.

Context

There is growing concern about how safety is being addressed in children's play provision. Fear of litigation is leading many play providers to focus on minimising the risk of injury at the expense of other more fundamental objectives. The effect is to stop children from enjoying a healthy range of play opportunities, limiting their enjoyment and causing potentially damaging consequences for their development.

This approach ignores clear evidence that playing in play provision is a comparatively low risk activity for children. Of the two million or so childhood accident cases treated by hospitals each year, less than 2 per cent involve playground equipment. Participation in sports like soccer, widely acknowledged as 'good' for a child's development, involves a greater risk of injury than visiting a playground. Fatalities on playgrounds are very rare – about one per three or four years on average. This compares with, for instance, over 100 child pedestrian fatalities a year and over 500 child fatalities from accidents overall. In response to this situation, and in order to ensure that children's needs and wishes are properly acknowledged, the Play Safety Forum has prepared this statement.

FULL STATEMENT

Acceptable and unacceptable risk

In any human activity, there is an element of risk. Three factors are central to determining whether or not the level of risk is acceptable or tolerable:

- the likelihood of coming to harm
- the severity of that harm
- the benefits, rewards or outcomes of the activity.

Judgements about the acceptability of risk are made on the basis of a risk assessment. Risk assessment and management are not mechanistic processes. They crucially involve making judgements about acceptability based on an understanding of the balance

between risks and benefits. Even where there is a risk of fatal or permanent disabling injury, this risk may sometimes be tolerable. For instance, going paddling at the seaside involves an unavoidable risk of fatal injury, but this risk is tolerable for most people because in most circumstances the likelihood of coming to harm is very low and there are obvious benefits. Social and psychological factors are also important in risk assessment. Risks that are acceptable in one community may be unacceptable in another, and policies should take this into account.

Almost any environment contains hazards or sources of harm. In many cases the existence of hazards can be justified, perhaps because they are impossible to remove or perhaps because their removal would have undesirable consequences or be too costly. Where the existence of a hazard can be justified, measures should be in place to manage it. In a controlled environment such as a workplace or a playground, those responsible are required by law to identify, and make informed judgments about, the hazards to which people are exposed. They must take steps to ensure that the risks are managed and controlled so far as is reasonably practicable while allowing the potential benefits to be delivered.

Children and risk

All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury. Children with disabilities have an equal if not greater need for opportunities to take risks, since they may be denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers. It is the job of all those responsible for children at play to assess and manage the level of risk, so that children are given the chance to stretch themselves, test and develop their abilities without exposing them to unacceptable risks. This is part of a wider adult social responsibility to children. If we do not provide controlled opportunities for children to encounter and manage risk then they may be denied the chance to learn these skills. They may also be more likely to choose to play in uncontrolled environments where the risks are greater.

Any injury is distressing for children and those who care for them, but exposure to the risk of injury, and experience of actual minor injuries, is a universal part of childhood. Such experiences also have a positive role in child development. When children sustain or witness injuries they gain direct experience of the consequences of their actions and choices, and through this an understanding of the extent of their abilities and competences. However, children deserve protection against fatal or permanently disabling injuries, to a greater degree than adults.

Children have a range of physical competences and abilities, including a growing ability to assess and manage risk, which adults arguably tend to underestimate. However, children typically have less experience than adults of assessing the broad range of risks and hazards that they may encounter. So it is important to give them appropriate controlled environments in which they can learn about risk.

Play provision and risk

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision, and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. In the words of the play sector publication *Best Play*, play provision should aim to 'manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm'. While the same principles of safety management can be applied both to workplaces generally and play provision, the balance between safety and benefits is likely to be different in the two environments. In play provision, exposure to some risk is actually a benefit: it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about the real consequences of risk-taking. Therefore it is acceptable that in play provision children may be exposed to the risk of minor and easily healed injuries such as bruises, grazes or sprains. On the other hand, play provision should not expose children to significant likelihood of permanent disability or life-threatening injuries. However, it may on occasions be unavoidable that play provision exposes children to the risk – the very low risk– of serious injury or even death. But this would only be tolerable in the following conditions:

- the likelihood were extremely low
- the hazards were clear to users
- there were obvious benefits
- further reduction of the risk would remove the benefits
- there were no reasonably practicable ways to manage the risk.

For example a paddling pool, even if shallow, involves a very low but irremovable risk of drowning (even with parental supervision), but this is normally tolerable. The likelihood is typically extremely low; the hazard is readily apparent; children benefit through their enjoyment and through the learning experience of water play; and finally, further reduction or management of the risk is not practicable without taking away the benefits. Providers should strike a balance between the risks and the benefits. This should be done on the basis of a risk assessment. Crucially, this risk assessment should involve a risk-benefit trade-off between safety and

other goals, which should be spelt out in the provider's policy. Given children's appetite for risk-taking, one of the factors that should be considered is the likelihood that children will seek out risks elsewhere, in environments that are not controlled or designed for them, if play provision is not challenging enough. Another factor is the learning that can take place when children are exposed to, and have to learn to deal with, environmental hazards. Play provision is uniquely placed to offer children the chance to learn about risk in an environment designed for that purpose, and thus to help children equip themselves to deal with similar hazards in the wider world.

Good practice

Clear, well-understood policies, together with procedures that put these policies into practice, are the key to good practice in risk management in play provision. Policies should state clearly the overall objectives. Procedures, including risk assessment, should state how these policies are put into practice, giving guidance but also recognising the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and other goals. Such judgements are clearly multidisciplinary in nature. For example, while they may contain an engineering dimension, of equal or greater importance is likely to be knowledge of child development and play itself. The Children's Play Information Service (see References below) has information on sources of authoritative, relevant guidance on good practice.

One valuable approach to risk management in play provision is to make the risks as apparent as possible to children. This means designing spaces where the risk of injury arises from hazards that children can readily appreciate (such as heights), and where hazards that children may not appreciate (such as equipment that can trap heads) are absent. This is particularly useful in unsupervised settings, where the design of the equipment and the overall space has to do most of the work in achieving a balanced approach to risk.

Conclusion

Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play provision is first and foremost for children, and if it is not exciting and attractive to them, then it will fail, no matter how 'safe' it is. Designers, managers and providers will need to reach compromises in meeting these sometimes conflicting goals. These compromises are a matter of judgement, not of

mechanistic assessment. The judgements should be based on both social attitudes and on broadly based expert opinion informed by current best practice. They should be firmly rooted in objectives concerned with children's enjoyment and benefit. And they should take into account the concerns of parents. Ultimately the basis of these judgements should be made clear in the policies of the play provider as written down in policy documents. These policies should in turn be understood and embodied in practice by all the key stakeholders. " We consider Managing Risk in Play Provision to be an important document that will contribute to the debate on the provision of children's play. It articulates the balance between the benefit and the need for children to play against the duty of play providers to provide safe play. It makes clear that the safety must be considered at all stages of play provision but that, inevitably, there will be risk of injury when children play, as there is risk of injury in life generally. We must not lose sight of the important developmental role of play for children in the pursuit of the unachievable goal of absolute safety. The important message is though that there must be freedom from unacceptable risk of life-threatening or permanently disabling injury in play"

Health and Safety Executive

References

Ball D (2002) Playgrounds – risks, benefits and choices, Contract Research Report No. 426/2002, Health and Safety Executive.

British Standards Institute (1998) BS EN 1176-1 Playground equipment – Part 1, British Standards Institute.

National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and LAYLINK (2000), Best Play: What play provision should do for children (available from National Children's Bureau)

Information on these and other relevant publications, and contact details for Play Safety Forum members, can be obtained from the Children's Play Information Service, National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE

(Tel: 020 7843 6303, e-mail cpis@ncb.org.uk, website www.ncb.org.uk/library/cpis)

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Sutcliffe Play for its financial support in the production of this statement. Thanks to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport who's financial support for the Children's Play Council enables it to host the Play Safety Forum.

The publisher makes no representation, express or implied, about the accuracy or completeness of the information in this publication, and cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may be made.

For further copies of this statement contact the Children's Play Council on 020 7843 6016, or e-mail cpc@ncb.org.uk

The Play Safety Forum

The Play Safety Forum brings together the main national organisations in England with an interest in safety and children's play. Members include representatives from providers, regulatory bodies and expert agencies. The aim of the Play Safety Forum is to

build consensus on issues around risk and safety in relation to play provision. It is an independent body hosted by the Children's Play Council at the invitation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Play Safety Forum members

- Association of Play Industries
- Child Accident Prevention Trust
- Children's Play Council
- Health and Safety Executive
- Institute for Sport and Recreation Management
- Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management
- Kids active
- Local Government Association
- National Early Years Network
- National Playing Fields Association
- National Family and Parenting Institute
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- PLAYLINK
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
- Adviser: David Ball, Centre for Decision Analysis and Risk Management, Middlesex
- University
 - Observer organisations: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Play Wales

Circulation Target List

Children's Play Service Centres
Play Schemes
Special Needs
Early Years Education & Childcare Service
Sure Start
Youth Service – Newcastle upon Tyne
Play Service – Newcastle upon Tyne
Schools – Newcastle upon Tyne
Activities funded by direct grant or community fund (NCVS)
Regeneration Initiatives
Voluntary Sector Provision – Primary Care Trust
Community based provision
Private Childcare
Out of school clubs (private sector/voluntary out of school clubs)
Family Learning Advisor – Education & Libraries
Green Space Strategy Officer – Newcastle City Council
Ward Co-ordinators – Newcastle City Council
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Volunteer Forums
Scouts/Guides Associations
Newcastle Children's Trust
Social Services – City of Newcastle upon Tyne.

