

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAY STRATEGY: A briefing note to accompany the Play Strategy for Scrutiny purposes.

Leeds has published this Play Strategy. The strategy recommends the recruitment of a Play Project Officer to strategically lead on the implementation of the strategy and the establishment of the Play Partnership.

It is proposed to combine resources of Leeds Children's Fund Play projects for 2008-09 with funding within the Early Years Service for a Play Development Officer at PO1, a post that is currently vacant. The combined resources will enable the recruitment of an officer at PO5 to drive the strategy forward in Leeds. The officer will work with the Children's Fund team within the Early Years and Integrated Youth Support Service. It is hoped this post will be recruited in the new year.

Leeds has been successful in securing Big Lottery funding of around £1.3 million to support the development of key projects that will support the implementation of the Play Strategy. This will involve joint working with Parks and Countryside service in City Development. Details of the projects approved are attached as appendix 1

Play is sorted is an example of excellent practice in the West of the city and this model could be developed across the city.

Play sub groups are operating in each of the 5 wedges and bringing together local practitioners with an interest in play. This is improving co-ordination and delivery.

One key task for the Play Officer when they are in post is to develop a strategic play partnership that can link into other relevant strategies e.g. Youth strategy, Family support and Parenting, obesity strategy etc.

This partnership would take a governance role in developing an integrated commissioning plan for play.

Currently links are being identified with other play provision through out of school activities, child care. Youth provision and Positive Activities for Young People these are areas where integrated planning will maximise benefits.

The Leeds Play Strategy

Playing our Part: *Creating the Play Friendly City*

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

Children Leeds

Foreword

We are pleased to present the Leeds Play Strategy. This document sets out our commitments for play that are part of our ambition to make Leeds the 'best place in the country to live', a place where every child is happy healthy, safe, successful and free from the effects of poverty.

Improving play in Leeds is vital if we want to improve the lives of children and young people. Children and young people tell us that more places to go and more things to do in the city is very important for them and we need to work to meet their expectations. Play is so important because opportunities for good, free play help children and young people to thrive – helping them to be happier, healthier, safer and to develop new skills, new confidence and new friendships. Above all, play allows children to enjoy life.

Whilst play is important for all children and young people, not all of them enjoy the same opportunities. Many of our children and young people have more limited opportunities for play because of their own circumstances or because there are fewer facilities and choices in their neighbourhood. We want to narrow the gap to make sure that all children and young people in Leeds have the chance to play.

This is why we have made play a key aim in the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan, and why we have developed this Strategy. We have used the development of this document as a chance to bring together children and young people, their parents, carers and communities as well as the organisations that serve them, to agree new ways of working together to improve play. We will continue to use this partnership approach to deliver this strategy, as we know that only by working together will we achieve our aims, and create the kind of city that our children want and deserve.

Cllr. Richard Brett,
Lead Executive Member for Children's Services

Rosemary Archer,
Director of Children's Services

A Partnership Strategy

This strategy has been developed, agreed and approved by all key local partners. This strategy sets out our shared commitment to ensuring that Leeds becomes a 'play friendly city'.

In February 2007 all the partners of the local children's trust signed up to working together to deliver this Strategy.

[Logos of partners to be added to publication version]

- ?? Director of Children's Services Unit
- ?? Education Leeds
- ?? Learning and Skills Council
- ?? Leeds Children's Fund
- ?? Leeds Play Network
- ?? Leeds Primary Care Trust
- ?? Leeds City Council Early Years
- ?? Leeds City Council Neighbourhoods and Housing
- ?? Leeds City Council Parks and Countryside
- ?? Leeds City Council Social Services
- ?? Leeds Voice
- ?? West Yorkshire Connexions
- ?? West Yorkshire Police
- ?? Youth Offending Service

INTRODUCTION

'Play' is one of few things that almost all of us have experienced in our lives, and many adults look back on their own childhood with fond memories. But in the 21st Century many adults have become concerned about the *loss of childhood* and the possibility that children have *forgotten how to play*. They need not be concerned,

"The truth is that, unless they are seriously undernourished or in a state of fear, children will always play when they are on their own, unsupervised, in the freedom of open space."
(Peter and Iona Opie, 1997)

What children and young people of all ages still choose to do today during their freely chosen time is play. However, the amount of time they have available in which to make their own choices may be less than it was for us and the places that they have available to meet and spend time with their friends may be restricted – especially outdoor places. These problems are not usually created by children and young people – they are generally adult creations that in the main require adult solutions.

This *Play Strategy* for the city of Leeds calls on all of us to *play our part* in providing those solutions and to involve children and young people themselves in doing this so that we can create a place to live where childhood can be as creative and as happy a time for our children now as it was for many of us in the past.

The importance of Play

Play is intrinsic to children's quality of life; it is how they enjoy themselves and is essential to their development. Research increasingly shows that for children and young people to stay healthy, be safe, enjoy their childhood, achieve their potential, contribute to society and achieve economic well-being they must have opportunities for free play and informal recreation, throughout their childhood.

Children at play embody the essence of childhood and much that is healthy and vibrant in a society. Regular enjoyment of time, space and opportunity to play is fundamental to children's happiness and essential to their healthy development. Children out playing – in public spaces and in dedicated play areas – also signify a healthy community and a public realm that is meeting the needs of its people.

The provision of Public Playgrounds, open spaces, and staffed provision whose primary purpose is play for its own sake is one of the very few ways in which society provides resources directly to children without expecting some kind of directly measurable outcome in return.

Barriers to play

Modern living has thrown up a range of barriers to children playing. More traffic, less open space, real and perceived dangers from crime, changes in family life and new patterns of work have all conspired to deny more and more children the opportunities that previous generations took for granted. The consequences are profound. Increasing childhood obesity, 'anti-social behaviour' and mental health problems have each been at least partly attributed to young lifestyles that are more sedentary and restricted than at any time in our recent history.

Defining Play

'Play' is not easy to define, and a detailed attempt to do so has not been made in the Play Strategy, however we can say that play is a natural process that almost all of us have experienced in our lives. In line with the *Department for Culture Media and Sports*, 'National Review of Children's Play (2004)' – *The Dobson Report* – is considered to be '*what children and young people do when they themselves choose what to do*'. This means that such already well catered for forms of play such as directed play in a learning context, for example, is not covered in the Play Strategy but play at school playtime is.

Young people, particularly teenagers, would not use the word 'play' themselves to describe what they do. However, in the context of the above definition what they do in the company of their friends and in their own time fits, and so 'play' is used to cover provision for them too. This is also in line with the Dobson Report.

The Play Strategy recognises that children and young people play in both supervised settings where adults are present and non-supervised contexts and places where adults are not usually present. This includes such places as playgrounds, waste and wild places, and the wider neighbourhood environment. Both supervised and non-supervised forms of play are important to children and young people, but we should remember that,

"Play is something that children [and young people] engage in of their own free will. In no way is it essential for adults to be part of children's play and, often, children's play goes on to the total exclusion of adults. However, for play to take place in a free and spontaneous way the conditions have to be right." (Paul Bonel & Jennie Lindon, 1996)

The Play Strategy challenges us adults to *play our part* in contributing to *making the conditions right* for the children and young people of Leeds to be able to get the most out of their play whether it is in a supervised or non-supervised setting.

The purpose and scope of the Play Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to help to engage local services, organisations and communities in playing their part in improving opportunities for play in Leeds. We need this new approach because play has historically been too divided between organisations and too much considered as an unimportant afterthought or as the responsibility of others. A key aim of this Strategy is to create a common culture in the city where everyone recognises the importance of play in their work and for children, young people and their families.

The strategy provides a framework for joint working, a common agenda for services, and clear aims and targets for the future. The strategy sets out the key objectives for change to improve play for all across the city, but also creates a focus on those children, young people and communities where more effort and more resources are needed to ensure that they are included and enjoy the same opportunities.

However, this strategy should be seen as a beginning rather than as an end in itself. The strategy sets out the broad aspirations and direction, the framework for change. The next

step is to use this foundation to develop clear action plans, and new ways for commissioning and delivering play services across the city.

CONTEXT

This section provides a brief explanation of the wider context for this strategy and the factors that have shaped and informed the priorities we have chosen. This section includes: a consideration of how play links to wider national and local developments; key information about children and young people; a summary of the views of key stakeholders and lastly a review of current provision for play in Leeds.

Play in context

There are strong links between this Play Strategy and wider national and local developments, plans and policies. These are both drivers for change in play and, in turn, supported by our agenda for play.

The National Context

The importance of *play* and the contribution that making space and provision for play makes to the lives of children and young people on many levels has been the subject of campaigning and awareness raising at a national level for a number of years. Local authorities have had available an increasing number of significant documents that have been aimed at informing and advising them in making quality play provision.

The Children's Play Council, the national organisation for children's play in England, for example, has produced a number of significant documents in recent years including Best Play: what play provision should do for children – a document sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2000); The Local Government Association detailed briefing paper Realising the potential of cultural services: the case for play (2001); and the national play organisation PLAYLINK document Play as Culture: incorporating play in cultural strategies (2002), supported by the DCMS, Department for Transport, Local Governments and the Regions, and Department for Education and Skills are just three of the more significant.

In 2003, central commissioned the MP Frank Dobson to conduct a major national review of children's play provision around the whole of the United Kingdom with the aim of producing a series of recommendations for central government in how best to support the provision of play services. The report, Getting Serious about Play: a review of children's play was published by the DCMS in 2004 and has proved to be significant in persuading central government to make significant funding available to develop and support new and existing play provision including the announcement in March 2005 of a new £155 million fund available to support play from the Big Lottery Fund.

The introduction of the Children Act as the legislative framework of the governments Every Child Matters programme has also added new commitment and vision to providing a more coordinated approach to children's services in general at local authority level. Play has

been a given a significant part in this process with Tessa Jowell stating recently (April 2005),

“Both my department [Department of Culture, Media and Sport] and the Department for Education and Skills believe that play, recreation and leisure outcomes sit equally alongside the others that authorities and their partners need to consider when making decisions about the provision of coordinated children and young peoples services.”

Other national initiatives that are proving relevant for the near future in terms of play, including the current Public Health White Paper and the National Childcare Workforce Review, both of which are likely to result in significant new funding opportunities being made available. But of equal significance to the welcome additional resources and potential resources must be the level of prominence that central government is giving to the issue of play and which in turn is being taken up by local government.

The challenge inherent in these initiatives is for local authorities to approach the issue of play provision in a strategic way.

The Local Context

The draft Play Strategy is one of a number of significant documents that supports the Leeds Cultural Strategy as part of Leeds Initiatives Vision for Leeds. The Play Strategy also supports and underpins the Leeds Children’s Services Plan. The following summarizes some of the links that exist with the draft Play Strategy.

Cultural Strategy

The Leeds Cultural Strategy points out that Leeds has the highest concentration of children and young people in the Yorkshire region (over 20% under 17) and notes that children’s play and play activities are justifiable in the definition of ‘culture’, stating that ‘for children play is a key expression of their culture; and that ‘the importance of play for children and their families cannot be underestimated’ (p12). This sits well with the draft Play Strategy Action Points on promoting the value and importance of play in the lives of children of all ages.

The Cultural Strategy also recognizes the importance of good neighbourhoods for children as well as adults, particularly those with restricted mobility which links with the draft Play Strategy Action Points on inclusion and on providing provision close to home.

Parks and Green Spaces Strategy

There are a number of significant links between this strategy and the Play Strategy, particularly the way public spaces are planned and organised. Consultation carried out

with children and young people in the development of a new Parks and Green Spaces Strategy complements that done for the draft Play Strategy.

Access of children and young people to local parks and on the development of a network of different types of play space are further relevant links between the two strategies.

Leeds Forest Strategy

This strategy is in the early stages of development but given the value that children and young people place on being able to play in the natural environment there are clear links to be made. It is helpful that the Forestry Commission have recently produced their own Play strategy from which lessons can usefully be drawn.

Fixed Play Equipment Strategy

Leeds City Council Fixed Equipment Play Strategy relates specifically to the provision of playgrounds and youth zone type provision. The strategy calls for a significant change in the way that such spaces are currently managed, particularly in the defining of a new hierarchy of playgrounds and other forms of space.

Links between this strategy and the draft Play Strategy Action Points on creating a network of different types of community based play spaces is particularly relevant.

Active Leeds: Sporting City – a sport and active recreation strategy for Leeds

Although catering more for adult led, supervised activities than the Play Strategy, the current Sport Leeds Strategy recognizes the important role that sport and active recreation plays in people's lives (p1) and has amongst its principle aims: 'Prioritising young people'; 'Investing in people and places' and also 'Contributing to neighborhood renewal' – all of which relate closely to Action Points within the draft Play Strategy.

The strategy also stresses the need for a partnership approach to delivering strategy developments and provides practical experience in doing so with the creation of Sport Leeds. A second, supporting strategy to the above has been proposed that will look more closely at informal recreation and the promotion of healthy lifestyles, which will be of further relevance to the draft Play Strategy.

Leeds Preventative Strategy

The Leeds Preventative Strategy begins from a similar starting position to the draft Play Strategy in that it considers that, "The children and young people of Leeds [are] regarded as individuals but they are also Leeds' future." (p5). The overall Values and Principles of the strategy are also very compatible.

More directly, the strategy links the needs for children to be at the centre of a process that reduces risk by making preventative interventions that raise 'resilience'. The measures

stated in the strategy are particularly relevant for the Action Points in the draft Play Strategy relating to the involvement and value placed on young people, on being safe from harm and also in the development of a network of adventure playgrounds.

In addition, there will be links between the two strategies in promoting the requirement for prevention services to be within broader universal services and making such services accessible. The need for partnership working is also stressed in both.

Safer Leeds Community Safety Strategy 2005 - 2008

The community Safety Strategy aims to tackle both 'Crime prevention' and 'the fear of crime' (p2) and states that in doing so dealing with 'perceptions of crime' is an important element in providing 'reassurance' to local residents. This links particularly well with Action Points in the draft Play Strategy relating to young people and feeling safe.

Other initiatives, such as the appointment of an architectural liaison officer 'to advise on the community safety aspects of building design'; and the 'use of neighborhood and street warden schemes' also link well to the draft Play Strategy Action Points on creating the play friendly city, neighborhood design, and stewardship and involvement of the local community.

Leeds Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

The Renewal Strategy points out that "People do not live in isolation but within the complex structures and arrangements of our communities." (p2) and bases the strategy in the context of neighborhood renewal and the tackling of social exclusion in the overall development of Leeds as a city.

Despite the fact that the strategy does not directly relate to children and young people in a play context, the importance of improving the environment as an important factor in neighborhood renewal is stressed. The Play Strategy also raises this point in Action Points relating to neighborhood design and in developing the network of playgrounds and other play spaces. The Play Strategy also points out that providing play facilities in a local community can often be a method of promoting community involvement in the broader context of renewal.

Every Child Matters and the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan

Play is an element of the Every Child Matters agenda and contributes to each of the five 'ECM outcomes'. Play has a particularly strong role in 'Enjoy and achieve' but has an often important wider role, for example in raising activity or in promoting confidence, resilience and self-esteem.

In addition, partnership working and the development of new forms of accountability, commissioning and integrated delivery are key themes of Every Child Matters and also

central to the approach of this strategy. Leeds children’s trust arrangements will be central to the delivery of the Play Strategy.

These linkages are best explained through showing how the Play Strategy links to the aims of the Leeds Children and Young People’s Plan, as shown in the table below.

CYPP Aim	Linkages to play
Healthy Start and Healthy Lifestyles	Play has a key role in raising activity and reducing obesity as it has been shown to raise activity levels far more than more structured activities such as PE or sport. Play can also contribute to the wider agenda in creating desirable and positive alternatives to unhealthy lifestyle choices such as alcohol use.
Mental and Emotional Wellbeing	Play can contribute to promoting mental well-being as it has been shown to be beneficial to raising self-esteem and reducing stress.
Safe, secure and cared for	Play contributes to developing ‘resilience’ in children and young people - an awareness of, and ability to mitigate, risk. This can be done through play by encouraging learning and confidence through controlling challenge and risk in play.
Safe in their community	The Play Strategy has strong links to this section of the CYPP through its aims to reduce accidents in play, to develop safer and more accessible play provision and to promote feelings of safety.
Achieve their personal learning goals	The Play Strategy links to this aim through the drive to create ‘brilliant learning places’, which include high quality provision for play during and outside the school day, a key action point of this strategy
Enjoy life and learn through play, sports and arts	This is the key link between the Play Strategy and the CYPP. This is one of the ten key aims of the CYPP, and was chosen as part of the plan because consultation with local children, young people and parents, as well as local services, emphasised the importance for young people of play, and places to go and things to do.
Are valued by their communities	The Play Strategy links with the CYPP here in the shared concern to address the often negative perception of children and young people in communities, and through the strong emphasis on involving children and young people through play.
Value their communities	The Play Strategy is an important part of developing a wider range of positive activities for young people. Improved play opportunities have been shown to have a marked impact on reducing offending and improvements in social skills and interactions.
Develop the skills and confidence for work and adult life	Play contributes to this aim through its role developing children’s confidence and social skills, important elements of this agenda.
Thriving families, thriving communities	The Play Strategy has linkages here in the proposals to ensure that play is built into the design and regeneration of neighbourhoods and housing across the city, and the role that play has in raising quality of life for families and the wider community.
Transforming services	The Play Strategy links to this section of the plan via the development of opportunities for play in extended schools and children’s centres. In addition the Play Strategy’s section on play workers links to wider developments in the Children’s workforce. Lastly the new forms of partnership and integrated

Key data

This strategy needs to be informed by a good understanding of the children, young people, families and communities it aims to serve. To achieve this we have reviewed local information on identified the following key points that will inform the development and implementation of the strategy:

- Children and young people make up just over a quarter (25.5%) of population of Leeds.** There are 183,000 children and young people between the ages of 0 and 19 in Leeds. Falling birth rates and demographic change meant the number of young people fell in the recent past. However, more recently this has stabilised and the number of young people is growing in some parts of the city, particularly in the inner city and in black and minority ethnic communities.
- More than one in eight children and young people are from Black and Minority Ethnic groups.** 23,000, or 13.6%, of children and young people in Leeds are of Black and Minority Ethnic heritage. According to the 2001 Census the largest groups are Asian or Asian British Pakistani (7,050), Asian or Asian British Indian (3,704) Mixed: Black Caribbean and White (3,196). In the Census 2.3% (3693) of dependent children in Leeds were born outside the UK and 10.3% were judged to be in households that used languages other than English. Approximately 500 children and young people in Leeds are Travellers
- A significant number of children and young people in Leeds live in local authority care.** In March 2005 there were 1,332 children and young people under 18 who are 'looked after' by the local authority and evidence of significantly lower achievement and multiple needs amongst these young people. Leeds has a higher than average 'Looked After' population.
- A significant number of children and young people in Leeds have learning difficulties or disabilities.** There are various measures that suggest the numbers with additional needs. In August 2006 just under 3000 under-16s were eligible for Disability Living Allowance. Over 600 Leeds pupils have a formal 'statement' of Special Educational Needs, indicating that they have needs that require intensive support. In addition over 150 pupils receive extra support for physical and mobility needs and 149 for sensory needs.
- Children and young people in Leeds live in a wide variety of family types.** Whilst over 60% of dependent children live in married couple families, 26.3% live in lone parent households, 12.2% in cohabiting couples families, and 1.3% (nearly 2,000 children) are not in a family.
- A large number of children and young people in Leeds live in poor housing with limited facilities.** According to the census approximately 20,000 dependent children and young people (about 1 in 8) live in overcrowded households. Over 32,000 dependent children and young people (about 1 in 5) live in housing without central heating. These indicators can be used as a proxy for limited access to play provision in their home.
- A large number of children and young people live in households with limited income and limited access to transport.** Nearly 1 in 5 (29,540) dependent children in Leeds live in households where there are no adults in employment. Over 37,000 dependent children and young people (nearly 1 in 4) live in households without access to a car or van.

~~///~~ **A significant number of neighbourhoods in Leeds rate amongst the most deprived in the country.** Around 150,000 people in Leeds (almost 20% of the population) live in areas officially rated as among the most deprived in the country. Many of these are in the inner-city areas, but there are also pockets of deprived neighbourhoods in the wealthier outer areas. Within this there are areas of very high deprivation - thirty one neighbourhoods in Leeds rate amongst the 3% most deprived in the country.

Key messages from stakeholders

If this strategy is to make a difference then it is vital that it is shaped by the interests and views of those who are most involved – principally children and young people, but also their families and communities as well as the organisations that serve them. Therefore many people and organisations have been closely involved in developing this strategy. Consultation and engagement has included:

- ~~///~~ A Breeze survey of over 1000 children and young people
- ~~///~~ Household survey of 30,000 residents by Parks and Countryside
- ~~///~~ Similar survey of 2,500 children and young people by Parks and countryside
- ~~///~~ Qualitative assessment of a sample of provision involving Questionnaires from 27 supervised play settings, 27 schools, 130 parents, 245 children, and a focus group of 24 children between 4 and 14 over a period of 3 months.
- ~~///~~ Additionally a desk based review of the findings of the following consultations was conducted:
 - o Talking Play – 240 children and young people
 - o Talking Rights – installation
 - o Young Delegate Events 2003 – 2005
 - o National Playday consultations 2003 – 2006
- ~~///~~ Focused conversations with 19 professionals from Local Authority department, Other Statutory agencies and the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- ~~///~~ Early Drafts of this document were sent to in excess of 350 named individuals and were made available on the web.

The following section sets out the main messages from each of the main groups of stakeholders.

The views of children and young people

The following are key messages from consultation with children and young people:

- ~~///~~ **Reasons for visiting a park or open space:** Visiting the playground, bike riding, walking and football were the most important reasons for going to a park or open space
- ~~///~~ **Safety and accessibility:** a recurring concern from children and young people was in safety for play. Concerns included getting to the play space safely due to traffic etc., as well as concerns about bullies, gangs and 'stranger danger'. Children and young people wanted more places to play near their home or on their street and commonly raised the issue of transport to more distant play spaces and provision. Most children and young people wanted access to school playgrounds outside of the school day.

- ✍ **Choice, variety and quality:** Children and young people have a variety of views on the sorts of spaces for play they prefer but all emphasised that they wanted more choice and more exciting options to choose from. They would like: hard surfaces for bikes and games; open, wilder spaces for their own games; more exciting equipment to use and lastly more adventure playgrounds in the city. Many children and young people expressed concerns about the quality of some play provision in their area. Frequent issues raised including: maintenance, security, and cleanliness.
- ✍ **Different views of different age groups:** Younger children prefer playgrounds and parks whereas older children want wilder open spaces for free play, as well as places where ball games are possible.
- ✍ **Differing needs of different groups:** different groups of children and young people had particular concerns and issues. Asian and Black heritage children and young people were the most concerned of any group about access to areas for play and meeting their friends. Asylum seekers and refugees had very limited opportunities for play. Lastly young carers had very little time and opportunity for play and leisure.

The views of parents, carers and communities

The key messages from parents, carers and the wider community were:

- ✍ **More places to go and things to do:** all adults agreed that children and young people needed more options and activities. In general parents and carers saw this more positively whilst the wider community often saw this mostly as a way of discouraging anti-social behaviour and too many young people 'hanging around'.
- ✍ **Safety:** parents and carers were particularly concerned about the safety of play for their children. Common concerns included traffic, gangs and 'stranger danger'. To address this, parents wanted more staffed provision and more facilities close to home.
- ✍ **'Not in my backyard':** whilst many adults wanted more opportunities for play for children and young people there was a widespread and consistent reluctance for new facilities to be sited too near to their own home.

The views of partners

Consultation with the organisations involved in play in Leeds sought to identify their main concerns. From these discussions four main themes emerged:

- ✍ **Need for Focus.** Providing a clear focus to achieve a common approach to play provision can prove problematic simply because of the diversity of provision. Leeds, in common with other local authority areas, suffers from a lack of clear focus in terms of play that is cross department, cross agency, and cross sector.
- ✍ **Older Children and Young People** In line with central government targets and initiatives, Leeds has been particularly successful in gaining resources to greatly extend and develop the services for younger children (particularly pre-schoolers) throughout the city. Older children and young people have also benefited from new and extended opportunities locally, but not to the same extent. However, extending provision for older children and young people has been recognised as a valuable contribution to tackling obesity and promoting healthy lifestyles as well as a diversion to perceived anti-social behaviour.

- ✎ **Open Access Provision.** Despite significant increases in childcare places for pre-school and school age children, a majority of children still spend a majority of their time outside of structured, adult organised settings. The resources available to establish and maintain supervised, mainly indoor play settings has improved greatly in recent years, increasing the number of places available to children and young people in the city. However, at the same time there has been a marked reduction in the number of supervised, open access play opportunities.
- ✎ **Supporting Playworkers:** Having a single point of contact where parents, organisations and individual playworkers can turn to for advice and support can be invaluable in developing new and existing play provision and a number of the

A review of current provision for play

The contribution of partners

In terms of providing for children's play, Leeds City Council and its partners currently provide a significant number of services that could be described as 'play services' that are being delivered through various departments. These include:

The *Early Years Service*, for example, provides support to play in-directly via funding Voluntary Sector *Playschemes*, and through various elements of existing and proposed *Children and Family Centres* and through the *Children's Information Service*. More directly, the Early Years Service provides and supports a wide range of childcare provision across the city.

The *Youth Service* provides directly via its *youth clubs* and citywide involvement projects, but particularly through its *detached workers* who make contact with young people in their own neighbourhoods.

Parks and Countryside, provides directly and indirectly via its *parks and open spaces* and provides for a wide age range through its *fixed equipment playgrounds* and *Youth Zones*. Future initiatives such as the *Green Spaces Strategy* and the *Fixed Equipment Play Strategy* will broaden this provision further.

Sport Development does not currently provide directly in strictly 'play' terms, but does support direct sport projects that children and young people access. However, a future proposed '*informal activity*' strategy will create an opportunity for more indirect involvement in play provision, particularly in the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Education Leeds, provides directly for younger children through a play based approach to the *Foundation Stage Curriculum*; and more indirectly via *playtimes* in primary schools and *lunchtimes* and *break times* in secondary schools, as well as access to outside spaces for these periods and for after school use.

The *Voluntary, community and faith sector* provide a wide range of play related services and opportunities. These include Community based *Playschemes* in the holidays, Mobile Street based play teams, targeted provision aimed at specific groups or localities, various one off or time limited Fun days and events.

Other council departments such as *Planning, Community Safety, Regeneration, and Housing* among others also have links with providing forms of play provision. As do other

sectors, with the non-statutory, voluntary and the private sector all providing access to play.

In short there are many examples of play provision being provided in Leeds and, as is the case in other local authority areas, this provision is being met diversely by a wide range of departments, agencies and sectors.

The 'State of Play' – an audit of current provision

As the section above makes clear, there are many agencies and organisations involved in play in Leeds. The range, quality and accessibility of existing play infrastructure and services in the city has been audited in detail to inform this strategy. The key findings of this audit are:

The range of provision:

Unstaffed provision

Leeds City Council *Parks and Countryside Service* currently (2006) provides 147 playgrounds, 12 Teenzones, 18 Skate Parks and 29 MUGAs (Multi Use Games Areas).

Staffed Provision

The current budget for funding holiday playschemes, which is managed by the *Early Years Service* within Learning and Leisure, is in the region of £135,000 per year and supports 33 community playschemes and 11 Special Needs Schemes.

Other provision

Leeds Children's Fund currently supports three voluntary sector play projects with funding of £173,060 (07/08), down from a peak of £250k (05/06).

In addition there are many short term, small-scale play schemes and events run by the community and voluntary sectors that respond creatively to children's play needs.

The quality of provision:

A qualitative survey of a representative sample of 25% of playgrounds was carried out by both an adult play specialist and a group of children and young people (supercheckers). The sites were assessed for play value and for damage and informal supervision.

Play Value	GGGGGG	GGGGG	GGGG	GG	G
Supercheckers score	9%	14%	28%	14%	28%
Adult Score	1%	16.6%	61.4%	18.7%	3.1%

The major differences between the adult and children's views related to damage (children interpreted some normal wear and tear as damage and scored low when the adult saw it

as evidence of play value and scored high. The table below shows a high correlation between levels of supervision and damage.

	Very Good	Good	Reasonable	Poor	Very Poor
Damage	2 (6%)	5 (16%)	5 (16%)	6 (19%)	14 (44%)
Informal Sup	6 (19%)	4 (12%)	4 (12%)	11 (34%)	7 (22%)

Consistent qualitative data for staffed provision is not currently available and should be a priority for collection for the next report. However the information that is available shows that 98% of provision has qualified staff, and 71% of all staff and volunteers in the settings surveyed had some form of qualification for working with children and young people although only 36% held a specific Playwork qualification. This in part reflects the fact that many staff also work in other children's services and in part the fact that other qualifications are more readily available.

The accessibility of provision:

The audit identified the children and young people from the following groups faced particular challenges in accessing play provision:

Looked After Children

Leeds has one of the highest percentages of looked after children in the country and play provision for this particularly vulnerable group is particularly challenging. Often the children will not know the area in which they are placed, in which case accessing the open informal play spaces that we know most children value is difficult and in addition their freedom to come and go is often more constrained than children in more stable domestic arrangements. Children in the care system are rarely able to acquire the same quantity of toys and other possessions that can stimulate play and in particular, Health and safety constraints often prevent access to garden play equipment such as trampolines and climbing frames. The paperwork involved in trips out often inhibits care staff from allowing such activities and can stifle the spontaneous response to a day out in the park. Such staff rarely receive training in the play needs of their charges.

Disabled children and those with other support needs. –

There are a significant number of children in the city who need some form of additional support to access services and facilities. Such children are often educated some distance from where they live for example, which limits their opportunities to make friends in their neighbourhood and thus to engage in social play. For those with mobility difficulties play areas can be difficult to access and the demands on their already stretched parents and carers limits their freedom to come and go. In school, those in need of medical or personal support are likely to receive it during break times further limiting their opportunities to interact with their peers.

Semi-rural fringes of the authority

Smaller concentrations of children and young people in these areas makes play provision proportionately more expensive, and despite the appearance of a rural idyll, the green spaces around them are often intensively farmed limiting their access to them. For older young people the cost and frequency of independent transport is often cited as a major limitation on their freedom of movement, as is the dominance of the motorcar. In addition, schools are likely to be small with limited outdoor space for play.

Inner city areas

These areas house our highest concentrations of children and young people living in economic difficulties and therefore those least likely to be able to pay to access play provision. The high value of land and competition for the use of spaces makes dedicated provision expensive and the higher concentration of children and young people means that their presence in open spaces is more likely to be seen as problematic. However, the concentration of housing allows for the sort of informal supervision that is most likely to make places feel safe to children and young people providing a balance can be struck between proximity to housing and sightlines for supervision.

The City Centre is particularly attractive to children and young people, offering a range of social and leisure opportunities. However unaccompanied young people are often viewed with suspicion and their use of open spaces seen as inappropriate.

High-density housing offers particular challenges. High-rise accommodation is often surrounded with open space that is easy to maintain but offers a limited range of play opportunities. Space close to home is often dominated by parking and play spaces sited further away are vulnerable to vandalism.

Houses without gardens such as the terraces in Harehills for example, offer particularly poor spaces for play. The dominance of the motorcar coupled with perceptions of stranger danger mean that children are rarely free to play out. Some attempts to improve things have been made but more progress is needed. For example, Leeds provided one of the first Home Zones in the country in the Methleys area but little seems to have been done to build on this. In addition some Community Safety improvements have had the perverse effect of making some spaces less safe in children's terms. As an example, some Alleygating schemes have created spaces from which children have limited opportunities to escape bullying or to move away from those engaged in genuinely anti social behaviour.

Mobile and transient families

A small but significant number of children and young people in Leeds live in transient accommodation. They may be seeking asylum, fleeing domestic violence or having been made homeless. The urgent (and quite proper) focus on issues such as accommodation, clothing and schooling is often at the expense of their opportunity to play. Such children are then doubly disadvantaged, since they lose the opportunity to explore and resolve some of the emotional issues of their situation through their play. In addition they are less likely to know and be able to access the local neighbourhood spaces.

Black and minority ethnic groups

For some children there are issues related to their culture and or ethnicity that universal provision fails to address. For example, older Bangladeshi heritage girls are often discouraged from attending provision that is open to males. Other cultural groups such as

traveller children are viewed with hostility by their host communities and are unlikely to be welcomed at universal provision

Conclusion and emerging themes

Children generally and young people in particular are seen as problematic when they are unsupervised in the general environment and action needs to be taken to address this by:

- ?? Challenging public perceptions
- ?? Promoting the value of play for its own sake

Children and young people most value being able to play in spaces that are close to their homes and not always specifically designated for play. We need to address this by:

- ?? Ensuring play needs are considered in the design and layout of the wider environment and other services that affect them directly or indirectly
- ?? Promoting the greater involvement of children and young people in the design of services and their neighbourhoods.

Some groups of children and young people face particular disadvantage in accessing play provision. We will address this by:

- ?? Ensuring that universal services take account of the particular needs of these groups
- ?? Specifically targeting resources

Real and perceived danger to children and young people has a significant effect on their play, as does the fear of litigation. We will address this by:

- ?? Promoting a greater understanding of the issues of risk and play
- ?? Greater involvement of children and their communities in the location and design of play provision
- ?? Addressing genuine dangers through better informal supervision and more local provision that is safer to access.

Although there is a considerable amount of information held within the authority regarding children's play individual services and departments hold much of it and there is little consistency in the types of information held or the formats in which it is stored. There is also limited consistency in how often it is collected or refreshed. There is little agreement on what indicators of quality should be applied. We will address this by:

- ?? Better coordination of the collection and sharing of data, minimising duplication and repetition
- ?? Agreeing high-level and more detailed indicators of quality (involving children in the process) and ensuring our data collection and monitoring systems capture this.

Our Strategy for Play

This section sets out our strategy for improvement, informed by the factors and context set out above.

The strategy contains a range of objectives that are grouped into three sections and six themes.

The 'Play Friendly City'

The first section focuses on the aim of the 'Play Friendly City', the first four of which present broad, aspirational Action Points that are aimed at providing a 'way of working'. These cover:

- the Child and Play Friendly City;*
- the Involvement and Participation of Children and Young People;*
- Inclusion and Equality; and*
- Being Healthy, Being Safe, and Feeling Safe.*

The bulk of the Action Points are contained in the fifth heading:

Building the Play Friendly City.

This second section includes actions and objectives that are more specific and are the means by which the partnership will put the Play Strategy into action.

Not all of these Action Points call for completely new initiatives – a number of agencies in the city, including *Leeds City Council*, have a successful history of providing play opportunities for children and young people of all ages and have initiatives in place or planned for the near future that will significantly contribute to making Leeds a *Play Friendly City*. What the Play Strategy does is bring those initiatives together with newly proposed ideas in a single, citywide strategy for children's play.

Delivering the Strategy

This last section deals with how the strategy will be delivered and the new governance, leadership and management systems that will be put in place to assure success. The main theme here is:

- Implementation and Monitoring*

THE PLAY FRIENDLY CITY

To help create a play friendly city we will:

1.1 Promote positive images of children and young people. We will promote positive images of children and young people, celebrate their achievements and encourage the view that children and young people are a vital element in the life of the city, and are valuable members of their local communities, both in the future and in the present.

1.2: Promote free play We will promote the value and importance of freely chosen, self directed play in the lives of children and young people of all ages as an essential element in the way in which they learn, grow, develop healthily and come to make sense of the world in which they live - physically, socially and culturally.

1.3: Promote play in the built environment We will promote a city in which the built environment meets the needs of children and young people in general and their freely chosen play needs in particular: at home, in their local neighbourhood, institutional settings, recreational and leisure facilities.

1.4: Adopt Children and Young People's Impact Analysis and Audits We recognise that children and young people are sometimes unintentionally affected in negative ways by changes to services, physical developments and building projects that may have been avoidable if a prior analysis of impact had been made. The Leeds Play Partnership will work closely with planning authorities to ensure that adopting a Children and Young People's Impact Analysis is considered when changes to services and physical developments are at the planning stage.

2: Involvement and Participation

Delivering this strategy and creating a play friendly city requires the participation and involvement of children and young people. We will actively seek, listen to and act upon the views and opinions of children and young people; provide them with an opportunity to influence the development of Leeds as a Child friendly and Play friendly city; and shape solutions to issues that affect them, particularly regarding the built environment and play provision. To achieve this we will:

2.1: Involve children and young people in decision making, evaluation and monitoring. We will ensure that children and young people are involved in the decision making and planning processes, the evaluation and the monitoring of projects, initiatives and service provision where issues are involved that affect them on both a city wide and local basis.

3: Inclusion and Equality

We are committed to ensuring all children and young people in Leeds have the best opportunities for play, and will target effort to ensure those vulnerable to social exclusion. We will promote strategies of social inclusion and equality of access that ensure that Leeds is a Child friendly and Play friendly city for all children and young people who live here permanently, temporarily, and those who are visiting the city. To do this we will:

3.1: Ensure equal access to participation in making decisions We will ensure the involvement of hard to reach and under represented groups of children and young people in initiatives that are aimed at promoting the participation of children and young people in decision making, planning, and the evaluation and monitoring of play projects, initiatives and service provision.

3.2: Develop provision that is close to home and accessible We will ensure that all children and young people have access to opportunities for freely chosen play in their own neighbourhoods; and that facilities such as local parks, open spaces, playgrounds and the wider outdoor environment are accessible to all children and young people, particularly those who are disabled.

3.3: Target resources for the children and communities with greatest need We will target resources and establish specific strategies to prioritise the development of new service provision and facilities in those communities and for those groups of children and young people that currently have the poorest access to freely chosen play opportunities. An emphasis will be placed on children living in densely built areas, disabled children, teenagers, children in emergency accommodation, the children of refugees and asylum seekers, and of gipsy and traveller children.

4: Health, Safety and Feelings of safety

The Leeds Play Partnership will provide a Child friendly and Play friendly city that contributes to children and young people's health and happiness; ensures that their places for freely chosen play and the wider environment that they use are free from unacceptable hazards and free from the threat of bullying. To achieve this we will:

4.1: Develop play provision that promotes feelings of safety We will actively engage with local communities to provide neighbourhoods and particularly places for freely chosen play that are not only safe but FEEL safe, through such things as street play initiatives, awareness raising, stewardship schemes and greater 'on the street contact' between professionals such as park rangers, youth workers, and playworkers with local residents and children and young people in their own communities.

4.2: Develop play provision that is safe to access and use We will work towards providing neighbourhood areas in which children and young people are protected while at play from the dangers of traffic by such initiatives as homezones, traffic calming, and safe routes schemes – but principally by providing parks, open spaces and playgrounds close to children's homes and within their own neighbourhoods in such a way that children and young people can get to them without the need to cross busy roads.

4.3: Develop stewardship and community involvement for play We will promote a greater involvement of the local community in the planning, establishment and stewardship of local parks, open spaces, playgrounds, school grounds and the wider neighbourhood environment as a contribution towards protecting the physical environment from unacceptable damage, and ensuring the safety and feeling of safety of local children, young people and their parents and carers and greater contact with professionals.

BUILDING THE PLAY FRIENDLY CITY

The first four themes in the Play Strategy call for the creation of a Play Friendly City as a direct contribution to Leeds becoming a broader Child Friendly City. The following Action Points in this section relate directly to that aim and are more practical in nature.

5.1: The local neighbourhood and Places for Freely Chosen Play

The first focus for building a Play Friendly City will be in local neighbourhoods and other local spaces for play. To achieve this we will:

5.1.1: Promote Play Friendly Neighbourhoods We will work towards creating child and play friendly neighbourhoods, particularly in consultation with private and social housing providers. The Leeds Play Partnership will promote the latest in play friendly design, landscaping and traffic management techniques, to support the creation of clearly designated, good quality places for children to play. In doing this, Leeds will aim to become regarded as a leading European city and an innovator in child and play friendly design.

5.1.2: Promote high quality places for freely chosen play. We will influence the quality of spaces provided for children and young peoples freely chosen play in such places as their local neighbourhood, parks and playgrounds, childcare settings, play settings, schools, recreational and leisure facilities through, for example, the adoption of minimum standards requirement and the creation of a 'good playspace award'.

5.2: Parks, Open Spaces and Playgrounds

Improving the range, quality and accessibility of parks, open spaces and playgrounds is a vital element of the Play Friendly City. To achieve this we will:

5.2.1: Develop small neighbourhood play spaces. We will establish a network of small, easily accessible neighbourhood playspaces aimed at middle years and younger children in particular, that will provide flexible environmental and physical play opportunities in places that have 'informal oversight', are close to their own homes, and which do not require the crossing of busy roads to reach them.

5.2.2: Develop small neighbourhood youth zones. We will establish a network of small, easily accessible neighbourhood 'youth zones' that are aimed at older children and young people in particular. These declared youth zones will provide a sheltered and communal place to sit and talk, and physical play opportunities that are designed for their needs in well lit areas places that have 'informal oversight' and are not isolated from their local neighbourhood.

5.2.3: Develop Community Playgrounds We will establish a network of larger playgrounds that cater for children and young people of all ages in separate 'zoned' spaces, which support the smaller neighbourhood playspaces and youth zones. These declared playgrounds will provide a wide range of environmental and physical play opportunities including space for ball games, wheeled play, landscaping and planting to play in and with, and sheltered communal seating places to sit and talk in.

5.2.4: Make Parks and open spaces child and play friendly. We will ensure that public parks, wildlife areas and open spaces are child and play friendly, and provide an

environment and a community resource in which children and young people feel welcomed and wanted.

5.3 Adventure Playgrounds

Adventure playgrounds offer a range of wider and more adventurous opportunities for play in a supervised but accessible setting. At present there is limited provision for this sort of play in Leeds. To address this we will:

5.3.1: Develop Community Adventure playgrounds We will provide a network of accessible, staffed, open access neighbourhood Adventure Playgrounds that provide a range of environmental, physical and adventurous play opportunities in locations that are linked to a definable community.

5.4: Playschemes

Playschemes are an often valuable opportunity for play and learning for children and young people and a vital support for families outside school hours. However, at present, many playschemes may provide only limited opportunities for free play. To change this we will:

5.4.1: Support the development of open access playschemes. We will support a program of accessible, pre-booked and open access playschemes and mobile playschemes in rural and urban parts of the city during the school holidays, particularly during the summer holidays.

5.5: Play at School and Hospitals

Improving opportunities for play in school and hospital are important for delivering the strategy. Children and young people spend much time in schools and better play has been shown to help them learn better and feel better. In addition the schools estate is a significant, if sometimes underused, resource and space for play, particularly in the context of the current multimillion-pound investment in schools. Lastly improving play provision in hospitals and other healthcare settings has been raised as an important issue by both children and professionals as an important element of improving the well-being of children.

To improve play in schools and hospitals we will:

5.5.1: Support schools in improving the range and quality of play opportunities in school We will work with schools to try to ensure that all schools provide time, a supportive physical environment and a school ethos that allows children and young people to be able to make the best use of their playtimes, breaktimes and lunchtime for play, to be physically active and to meet their friends and engage in social activities. The Leeds Play Partnership will engage with partners to work towards the adoption of a series of quality indicators for freely chosen play at school within the current Education Leeds Quality Standards Framework.

5.5.2: Improve access to quality outdoor play environments in school. We will ensure that the design of new schools and the re-development of existing schools take the outdoor freely chosen play and recreation needs of children and young people into account. Spaces and facilities will be provided for children and young people to be able to be

physically active, to be able to sit communally and in shelter, and to play at playtimes, break times and at lunchtime.

5.5.3: Extend community use of school grounds We will explore methods of allowing greater community access to school grounds after school hours, especially for children and young people as a place for freely chosen play, while still protecting school buildings from abuse through physical security measures and stewardship schemes.

5.5.4: Support hospitals and other medical settings We will engage with the local health authorities, hospitals and clinics to provide support and an appropriate indoor and outdoor play environment for children of all ages who are attending hospital and other medical settings as an aid to their health, happiness and recovery from injury or illness.”

5.6: Supporting Playworkers

Playworkers are vital to delivering this strategy. Despite their role the sector at present faces significant challenges due to common problems of limited support, professional development as well as casual and/or low pay. We are determined to address this through our common strategy. Our main objectives in support playworkers are:

5.6.1: Improving Continuous Professional Development We will support a programme of play specific seminars, training days, and short courses to provide continuous professional development for adults who work both directly and indirectly with children and young people. This is in addition to supporting longer, accredited training courses that are supported by the National Play Endorsement System.

5.6.2: Providing Training on Safety and Challenge in Play We will support the establishment of a specific training module for adults who work both directly and indirectly with children and young people that raises the importance of ‘challenge’ in freely chosen play, and seeks to define the concepts of ‘hazard’ and ‘risk’ in a play context.

5.6.3: Improving Information and Support We will support a central advice and support point that provides parents, individual workers, organisations, and settings with a source of information, specialist advice and research evidence, and access to training information and resources which are aimed particularly at those working with school age children.

5.6.4: Develop Support Networks We will provide support to networks of professionals involved in providing and supporting children and young people’s freely chosen play, particularly playworkers, childminders and childcare workers.

5.6.5: Set up citywide quality assurance systems We will encourage all settings that cater for children and young people, particularly schools, care settings, play settings, youth settings, community and leisure centres, to examine their own work practice and physical environment through the adoption and working through of an appropriate Quality Assurance System.

5.6.6: Improve the use of research and evidence We will support the commissioning of relevant local and regional research on the lives of children and young people, and assist in transmitting the results and conclusions of research in support of developing evidence based and innovative practice.

5.6.7: Support National Play Day We will continue to act as host to National Play Day and other special events, using the day as an opportunity to promote positive images of

children and young people, the value and importance of freely chosen play for children and young people of all ages, and the role of adults in supporting play.

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

This section of the strategy deals with how we will make sure that the Strategy is delivered effectively through new arrangements for the leadership, governance and management of play in Leeds.

6: Implementation and Monitoring

6.1: Implementation – a Partnership for Play Leeds City Council and Children Leeds will establish a new partnership for play – a cross-departmental, cross sector, and cross agency group that will co-ordinate the delivery of the Play Strategy, identify and actively seek resources, and provide a strategic overview for developing new opportunities for children and young people's access to freely chosen play.

6.2: Implementation – Appointment of a senior Children's Play Officer We will appoint a senior Children's Play Officer who will support and administer the Leeds Play Partnership and provide a single point of focus for freely chosen play issues, including providing specialist advice and up-to-date best practice.

6.3: Implementation – A Champion for Play We will appoint an independent 'Champion for Play' who will act as an independent advocate for children, young people and their freely chosen play. The Champion for Play will also independently monitor the work of the Leeds Play Partnership and the progress of the Play Strategy.

6.4: Implementation – Action, Resources and Commissioning plans We will develop regular plans that will clearly set out the actions, resources and commissioning required to deliver the Play Strategy.

6.5: Implementation – State of play review We will complete a regular 'State of Play Review' that audits local play provision and infrastructure, assesses attendance and usage, audits opportunities for play specific training and education, and evaluates the Play Strategy and Action Plans.

6.6: Implementation – Monitoring and Evaluation We will establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the partnership, the progress and the achievement of outcomes in the Play Strategy that involves children and young people.

6.7: Implementation – Performance measures and targets

The Leeds Play Partnership will establish clear measures and targets to assess progress and impact.

ANNEX 1: DISCUSSION AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

This annex provides additional material that supports and explains the rationale for each section of the strategy.

1: The Child friendly and Play friendly City

1: The Child and Play Friendly City

The Leeds Play Partnership will create a Child friendly and Play friendly city in which children and young people feel valued, considered, catered for, involved, included, and safe.

Supporting material:

“Children are seen and heard in a child friendly city.” Greater London Authority 2004ⁱ

www.leedsinitiative.org/

Cities are places where people live, work and play, and many organisations and agencies are involved in ensuring that the way a city works and develops meets the needs of the people who live there and who visit it. The United Kingdom has come a long way in recent years in developing methods of doing this in co-operation with residents and in a way that is more responsive to people’s needs – but generally speaking, cities and neighbourhoods are still designed by adults with adult needs in mind.

Working towards developing Leeds as a *Child Friendly* city is a broad aspiration that many organisations and agencies are actively involved with. But to be truly *Child Friendly* a city must also become *Play Friendly* as what children and young people do for the majority of their freely chosen time is *play*.

The *Play Friendly* city is one that ensures that its children and young people have opportunities to engage in supervised indoor and outdoor play as well access to the broader context of recreation, social activities, sport and cultural activities. But we should remember that *“Some of the most character forming childhood experiences occur in peer group situations, free from adult supervision.”ⁱⁱ* And so the *Play Friendly* city also ensures that children have access to unsupervised opportunities for freely chosen play in settings of their own choosing.

Working together – children, adults, young people, parents, individuals, agencies and organisations – to create the *Play Friendly* city will result in a place to live, work and play that meets the needs of the more than one-quarter of the cities population who are under the age of eighteen. The *Play Friendly* city will also significantly contribute to *Leeds Initiatives Vision for Leeds* as a dynamic, vibrant city *“... where everyone can enjoy a high quality of life.”ⁱⁱⁱ*

1.1: The Child and Play Friendly City – positive images

The Leeds Play Partnership will promote positive images of children and young people, celebrate their achievements and encourage the view that children and young people are a vital element in the life of the city, and are valuable members of their local communities, both in the future and in the present.

Supporting material:

“We know that social behaviour is not built in, because it varies so much from one group to another. It has to be learned.” Judith Rich Harris 1998^{iv}

The recent national review of children’s play provision chaired by Frank Dobson, concluded that young people, particularly teenagers, do not receive the same level of available resources for their freely chosen time as other age groups possibly do. This is despite the fact that the *Audit Commission* reported recently that providing facilities for teenagers are the most often requested improvement to local services raised in local community consultations.^v

Children and young people are the future citizens of our villages, towns and cities – but they are also members of their local communities now. Promoting a positive ethos towards them is an important step in providing an environment in which they feel that this is the case. The *Leeds Play Partnership* recognises the important contribution that young people can make to their communities and will actively promote positive images of them and encourage greater communication between the generations.

1.2: The Child and Play Friendly City – Importance of freely chosen, self directed play

The Leeds Play Partnership will promote the value and importance of freely chosen, self directed play in the lives of children and young people of all ages as an essential element in the way in which they learn, grow, develop healthily and come to make sense of the world in which they live - physically, socially and culturally.

Supporting material:

“Play is of huge value to children. Good play opportunities are essential to children’s development. Play provides enriching experiences that can help to develop children’s emotional and social skills and may even reduce the risk of them developing mental health problems in later life.”

Tessa Jowell MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 2005^{vi}

The benefit and value of play for young children, particularly in terms of learning and human development, is widely recognised and well provided for in supervised settings such as school, childcare settings and other organised activities. The value of play for older children is not generally seen in the same light. However, there is a substantial body of evidence that shows that play benefits *all* children and young people by contributing to their happiness, their mental and physical health, fitness, growth, learning, and in their understanding of the social and cultural world and their place in it.

Play is a complex process, one that adult professionals sometimes struggle to define but children and young people, on the other hand, are very clear about what play is: they say, ‘it’s what we do when no one else is telling us what to do’. The *Dobson Review* supports this and defines play as, “... *what children and young people do when they when they follow their own ideas, in their own way and for their own reasons.*”^{vii} The *Dobson Review* also concludes that although there is a great deal of very good quality play provision available for children of all ages, the opportunities that children have to ‘freely choose’ their play can sometimes be limited. The *Play Strategy* for Leeds, therefore, places a priority on providing ‘freely chosen play’ opportunities in supervised and especially unsupervised settings.

1.3: The Child and Play Friendly City – the built environment

The Leeds Play Partnership will provide a city in which the built environment meets the needs of children and young people in general and their freely chosen play needs in particular: at home, in their local neighbourhood, institutional settings, recreational and leisure facilities.

Supporting material:

“I play in a big field near my street” Edwin (aged 10) from Leeds

“I play in the street and behind the garages” Jessica (aged 12) from Leeds

“We play in our back street” Rheima (aged 10) & Ali (aged 8) from Leeds

“Where children are is where they play.”

Peter & Iona Opie 1969^{viii}

The spaces in which we live, work and play affect us all in ways that we are not always conscious of. This is true of outdoor spaces as well as indoor. But, as Pia Björklid professor of education at Stockholm University points out, we spend a great deal of effort in designing positive messages into indoor environments, such as schools and day care settings, but less effort is given to designing-in positive messages for children at home and in the outdoors.^{ix}

Children and young people spend a significant amount of their freely chosen time outdoors, much more than many adults possibly realise and probably more than most adults do themselves.^x As a result children and young people may be more significantly affected by their local physical environment than adults are, particularly changes resulting from urban development that removes what was previously popular open space that adults have assumed is ‘waste’ and is therefore not in use. As the *Leeds Unitary Plan* points out once such space is, “... *lost to development it may well be lost to the community for ever.*”^{xi}

The *Leeds Play Partnership* will identify local, national and international best practice in design and sustainability of play friendly indoor and outdoor environments and promote ‘best practice’ in good quality indoor and outdoor spaces for children and young people.

2: Involvement and Participation of Children and Young people

2: Involvement and Participation

The Leeds Play Partnership will actively seek, listen to and act upon the views and opinions of children and young people; provide them with an opportunity to influence the development of Leeds as a Child friendly and Play friendly city; and shape solutions to issues that affect them, particularly regarding the built environment and service provision.

Supporting material:

“Who should provide you with more places to play?”

“The council and young people themselves. Because if you want something you’ve got to do something to get it!” Katie (aged 14) from Leeds.

Involving children and young people in making decisions about their provision is not just about their participation – it runs much deeper. On the surface, it is about promoting an awareness of children’s views and interests amongst policy makers, and that is in itself an important aim, but this is not enough, says Jaap Doek, chair of the *United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*: involving children and young people in decision making is also an expression of the value placed on children’s rights.^{xii} There are also sound value for money reasons in involving end users too, as the countless examples of poor, underused facilities provided for children and young people testify to.

To be effective, the involvement of children and young people cannot be tokenistic or held with adult agendas in mind; involvement must be about partnerships between the provider and the user. As Katie says above, it involves both ‘the council’ and young people but the power of initiating that involvement rests mainly with adults who must make the first move.

2.1: Involvement and Participation – decision making, evaluation and monitoring

The Leeds Play Partnership will ensure that children and young people are involved in the decision making and planning processes, the evaluation and the monitoring of projects, initiatives and service provision where issues are involved that affect them on both a city wide and local basis.

Supporting material:

“... play needs to be properly represented on all forums and groups where children are the focus ... expert representation is not enough – children need to be involved.” PlayLink, 2002

There is a considerable amount of work in process in the involvement and participation of children and young people in Leeds, particularly that being carried out by the *Participation sub-group* on the *Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership (Children Leeds)*, and through the development of a *Participation Strategy*. Each administrative wedge now has a *Child Involvement Advocate* appointed which is a starting point for developing mechanisms of children’s involvement and which will build on the work of the *Area Committees*.

It is important that the area committees and advocates place play issues on their agendas as a significant and separate agenda item. However, there is also a requirement for the establishment of specific focus groups and working groups that should involve children and young people when specific or city wide developments, projects and initiatives are being planned that may affect them. The *Leeds Play Partnership* and the *Children’s Play Officer* will actively promote the need for such involvement and encourage others to establish mechanisms that involve children and young people in decision making and evaluation.

3: Inclusion and Equality

3: Inclusion and Equality

The Leeds Play Partnership will promote strategies of social inclusion and equality of access that ensure that Leeds is a Child friendly and Play friendly city for all children and young people who live here permanently, temporarily, and those who are visiting the city.

Supporting material:

“Every child, irrespective of gender, background, cultural or racial origin, or individual ability, should have equal access to good play opportunities.” Best Play, 2000^{xiii}

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, adopted by the *United Nations General Assembly* in 1989, contains a number of Articles that specifically address issues of inclusion and equality for children and young people. The United Kingdom government is a signatory to the Convention, which is regarded as a benchmark in the provision of rights in this context. Article 2, for example, requires that all children and young people are treated without any form of discrimination; and Article 12 requires children to be consulted on issues that affect them.

The *Leeds Play Partnership* recognises the importance of inclusion and equality of children and young people, and calls on all those involved in planning and providing play opportunities to live up to the expectations of the UN Convention by developing strategies for social inclusion of disadvantaged groups and preventing the discrimination of those groups in the provision of freely chosen play opportunities. This includes providing for children who live in the city permanently, temporarily, and not forgetting the many children and young people for whom Leeds is a regional centre and therefore travel from outside the city to make use of its retail and leisure facilities.

3.1: Inclusion and Equality – access to participation in making decisions

The Leeds Play Partnership will ensure the involvement of hard to reach and under represented groups of children and young people in initiatives that are aimed at promoting the participation of children and young people in decision making, planning, and the evaluation and monitoring of play projects, initiatives and service provision.

Supporting material:

“Although concerns about social exclusion have become more prominent, there is some evidence to suggest that certain groups of children routinely have difficulty in accessing play.”

Ready, steady, play! A national play policy for Ireland 2003^{xiv}

For participation and involvement in decision making to be at its most effective, all groups with an interest must be able to become involved. There are, however, groups of children and young people that have either been under-represented in the past or who have faced practical difficulties in participating. Active steps need to be taken to counter this by identifying those groups and actively seeking contact and involvement.

Doing so can lead to significant improvements in service provision. The *Dobson Review*, for example, concludes that dialog and communication with disabled children at the planning stage goes a long way to opening up facilities for their use and improving their access to play opportunities in general.^{xv} Other groups, such as the children of traveller families and asylum seekers in particular, are groups that have at times faced significant obstacles in becoming involved.

3.2: Inclusion and Equality – provision close to home and accessible

The Leeds Play Partnership will ensure that all children and young people have access to opportunities for freely chosen play in their own neighbourhoods; and that facilities such as local parks, open spaces, playgrounds and the wider outdoor environment are accessible to all children and young people, particularly those who are disabled.

Supporting material:

“Within each local authority area there should be a balance in favour of projects whose catchment area covers a neighbourhood or village rather than trying to cover a whole town or district.”

Frank Dobson MP, 2004^{xvi}

When given the choice, children and young people tend to spend most of their free time in places that are close to their own homes. It makes sense, therefore, that facilities provided for their use should also be close to home. Doing so results in an environment that is safer for children and young people: first, because the less distance they have to travel to use a popular play space the less likely they are to come into contact with traffic; and secondly, because playgrounds and youth zones that are built on the very edge of housing areas, often in poorly lit spaces and in areas which adults can rarely be seen, tend to result in fears over bullying and vandalism to equipment and green spaces.^{xvii} Children and young people report that they often find isolated spaces threatening and parents are understandably reluctant to allow them to play there.

Facilities that are close to home will receive greater usage on a more regular basis than those that are not, and be subjected to less deliberate damage. Therefore, a policy of provision close to home also makes sense on a value for money basis. This is recognised in the *Dodson Review* which concluded that a priority should be given to local projects because these are the kind that are likely to have the greatest impact on children and young peoples lives. This is particularly true for some specific groups of children and young people, such as those living in emergency accommodation, for example, or those who are disabled and who thus may be restricted in their ability to travel outside of their immediate area.

3.3: Inclusion and Equality – targeting resources

The Leeds Play Partnership will target resources and establish specific strategies to prioritise the development of new service provision and facilities in those communities and for those groups of children and young people that currently have the poorest access to freely chosen play opportunities. An emphasis will be placed on children living in densely built areas, disabled children, teenagers, children in emergency accommodation, the children of refugees and asylum seekers, and of gipsy and traveller children.

Supporting material:

“... priority will be given to [the] needs of those groups in the community which are relatively disadvantaged in their access to facilities”

Leeds City Council Unitary Plan

www.cabe.org.uk

Community regeneration is rightly seen as an important part of wider city regeneration as well as an important form of social justice. *CABE, the Council for Architecture and the Built Environment*, is just one major national organisation that places a high value on the role that developing opportunities for freely chosen play within the local neighbourhood can have in that process.^{xviii} They point out that creating new places to play does not just contribute to physical regeneration of a neighbourhood but it can also be the starting point of continuing community participation, contributing to the development of sustainable communities.

The *Dobson Review* states that resources should be targeted at, “... areas and groups with the poorest access to good quality play opportunities”^{xix} as method of promoting social inclusion and equality and also as a contribution to social cohesion and community regeneration. There are a number of communities in Leeds where this is particularly relevant: there are, for example, some densely built areas close to the city centre where open space provision and facilities for freely chosen play are limited and which should be considered a priority.

The same is also true of a number of specific groups of children who, due to their living circumstances, are under significant stress. This would include children in emergency accommodation, for example, as well as the children of refugees and asylum seekers, gipsy and travel children, and disabled children and young people. Although some children and young people from these groups live in a neighbourhood area there are a significant number of others that live in special accommodation and/or special sites. Access to play opportunities at these locations is often poor or non-existent.

4: Being Healthy, Being Safe and Feeling Safe

4: Health, Safety and Feelings of safety

The Leeds Play Partnership will provide a Child friendly and Play friendly city that contributes to children and young people's health and happiness; ensures that their places for freely chosen play and the wider environment that they use are free from unacceptable hazards and free from the threat of bullying.

Supporting material:

"I want somewhere to play. Somewhere to actually go instead of being scared." Paddy (aged 12) from Leeds

Safety, particularly in the places that children and young people play, is an often quoted concern of parents and is given as a reason why they place restrictions on where their children are allowed to play. Children and young people themselves often express concerns over safety in research and consultation, but their main concerns tend to be worries about bullying and intimidation from other children and unsympathetic adults. Such fears create unhappy children and unhappy children are at greater risk of becoming unhappy adults.

Providing for safety in a play context, however, is not as straightforward as it might first seem. Children and young people not only need to be safe in the places that they play, but they also to feel safe, and be able to easily get to their favourite play places from where they live. This takes the issue of children and young peoples safety in a play context outside of places such as the playground and the play centre and into the wider neighbourhood environment. Not being able to safely move around the places where they live on foot or by bicycle has a direct impact on children and young people's health and fitness. A study by *Professor Roger Mackett of the University College of London*, for example, concluded that, *"walking and playing provide children with more physical activity than most other events."* This included structured PE lessons at school and organised out of school sporting activities.^{xx} Access to free play opportunities, therefore, are important in tackling the concerns of childhood obesity and promoting healthy lifestyles as well as mental health and happiness.

However, ensuring safety should not mean that play becomes a bland and overprotected activity. Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury. In Leeds we endorse the position statement on risk and play made by the Play Safety Forum attached at appendix 1.

4:1: Health, Safety and Feelings of safety – feelings of safety

The Leeds Play Partnership will actively engage with local communities to provide neighbourhoods and particularly places for freely chosen play that are not only safe but FEEL safe, through such things as street play initiatives, awareness raising, stewardship

schemes and greater 'on the street contact' between professionals such as park rangers, youth workers, and playworkers with local residents and children and young people in their own communities.

Supporting material:

"It is no good feeling safe if you're not safe, and it's no good being safe but feeling unsafe because the two have to be combined." Un-named child, National Children's Bureau 2003

"If children do not have opportunities for play outside the adult domain, their sense of identity will be more difficult to establish, self-esteem harder to build up, and social adjustment – finding out how to live in and belong to a wider society – less likely to occur." Roger Adams, 1995

It is important that children and young people and their parents and carers must be safe when engaging in freely chosen play; but in addition they must all also *feel* safe. *Best Play* points out that good play provision, "... fosters independence and self esteem ..." but that *"Children cannot play freely when they feel insecure."*^{*xi}

The *Play Safety Forum*, an organisation that includes membership of such bodies as the *Health and Safety Executive*, the *Child Accident Prevention Trust*, and the *National Children's Bureau*, point out that although there are genuine fears over children's safety at play it is important to place safety into context. The forum states that, *"Of the two million or so childhood accident cases treated by hospitals each year, less than two per cent involve playground equipment. Participation in sports such as soccer, widely acknowledged as 'good for a child's development, involves a greater risk of injury than a playground ..."*^{*xii} Concerns expressed over such things as child abduction and molestation by strangers is another often quoted concern of parents where, again, the fears of this happening are greatly disproportionate to the actual risk.

It cannot be denied, however, that adults, particularly parents, perceive dangers to their children when playing outside; and that a feeling of safety for both them and their children, is important in gaining the most from our experiences of the outdoors. Greater engagement between professionals, such as park rangers and street playworkers and children and young people is one possible solution to this, but initiatives that foster greater community involvement and a neighbourhood responsibility for safety is equally important.

4.2: Health, Safety and Feelings of safety – safe from harm

The Leeds Play Partnership will work towards providing neighbourhood areas in which children and young people are protected while at play from the dangers of traffic by such initiatives as homezones, traffic calming, and safe routes schemes – but principally by providing parks, open spaces and playgrounds close to children’s homes and within their own neighbourhoods in such a way that children and young people can get to them without the need to cross busy roads.

Supporting material:

“Children’s competencies in almost every area of their lives develop because they take risks.”

Children’s Play Council 2004^{xxiii}

“Children are not responsible for traffic, and can only go some way towards reducing its dangers.”

Katy Green 1995^{xxiv}

Although children and young people take risks when playing, the risks that they face in their everyday lives must be placed into context. As *Best Play* points out, *“Risk is a natural and desirable aspect of children’s play that they will seek out for themselves.”*^{xxv} The main thing that is likely to cause them serious harm, and possibly death, is not the places that they choose to play, or what they play on, or how they play. It is traffic.

In Leeds, 80% of the 44 killed or seriously injured children and young people in 2001 were pedestrians, almost all of whom were travelling from one place to another.^{xxvi} Nationally in the same period the number of child pedestrian deaths due to traffic related accidents was around 100.^{xxvii} In the same period the number of similar deaths in Sweden was zero.^{xxviii} One of the principal reasons for this difference is simply that Sweden places play opportunities such as playgrounds very close to home which removes the necessity of crossing busy roads to reach them.

4.3: Health, Safety and Feelings of safety – stewardship and community involvement

The Leeds Play Partnership will promote a greater involvement of the local community in the planning, establishment and stewardship of local parks, open spaces, playgrounds, school grounds and the wider neighbourhood environment as a contribution towards protecting the physical environment from unacceptable damage, and ensuring the safety and feeling of safety of local children, young people and their parents and carers and greater contact with professionals.

Supporting material:

“If we make the outdoor environment safe and attractive for children ... it is the children themselves, as the most important social actors in the community, the community catalysts, that will inevitably reverse the trend of the dissolution of the community.”
Chris Snell, Play Development Officer Leeds Play Network, 1996

The *Children’s Play Councils’ Manifesto for Play* calls on local authorities to invest in the development of play ranger services. Specifically it recommends, “... *appropriately trained, child-friendly teams of play rangers in every town and city in the country who would actively engage with children in addition to safeguarding the parks and playgrounds.*”^{xxix} Street Play schemes, where trained playworkers operate outside of established play settings are also encouraged.

A number of local authorities already have such schemes in place, including the small scale *Street Play Initiative* run by *Leeds Play Network* and they are proving very popular with local children and young people. Not only do such schemes contribute to a feeling of safety when using the outdoors but they can also act as a first contact in encouraging greater community involvement in such things as stewardship schemes that operate much as neighbourhood watch schemes do, promoting community involvement in solving local problems such as damage to playgrounds and the threat of bullying.

5: Providing the Play friendly city

The first broad, aspirational Action Points in the Play Strategy call for the creation of a Play Friendly City as a direct contribution to Leeds becoming a broader Child Friendly City. The following Action Points in this section relate directly to that aim and are more practical in nature.

5.1: The local neighbourhood and Places for Freely Chosen Play

5.1.1: The local neighbourhood

The Leeds Play Partnership will work towards creating child and play friendly neighbourhoods, particularly in consultation with private and social housing providers. The Leeds Play Partnership will promote the latest in play friendly design, landscaping and traffic management techniques, to support the creation of clearly designated, good quality places for children to play. In doing this, Leeds will aim to become regarded as a leading European city and an innovator in child and play friendly design.

Supporting material:

“Many studies have shown that children play everywhere, regardless of whether the space in question has been designed for play or not. Yet when playgrounds are laid out, children are expected to play there and nowhere else.” Pia Björklid 1982^{xxx}

“There is a poverty of play opportunities in the general environment, and it is the responsibility of the community to ensure that all children have access to rich, stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable risk, and thereby offer children the opportunity to explore both themselves and the world, through their freely chosen play.” Best Play^{xxxi}

www.ncb.org.uk/resources/bestplay.pdf
www.homezones.org.uk

A recent study into children’s use of their free time in Leeds concluded that *“Despite significant increases in childcare places for pre-school and school age children, a majority of children still spend a majority of their time outside of structured, adult organised settings.”^{xxxii}* The study further concluded that most of this time was being spent outside, in the local neighbourhood where children and young people live. In some places this includes the street – a place to play that will be remembered with fondness by many adults. As 12 year old Claire said during one consultation event, *“The streets ok, but sometimes the cars come and mess up the games”.*

New playgrounds should be built and existing playgrounds re-developed and kept safe – but the ideal local neighbourhood is one where the general design and layout enables children and young people to spend more time out of doors and close to home.

The Leeds Play Partnership will engage in regional, national and international initiatives that aim to provide child friendly and play friendly neighbourhoods where opportunities to play are deliberately *designed-in* to the built environment rather than being *designed-out*. Leeds has already started this process through the creation of the United Kingdom’s first *Homezone*, and will take this further, becoming a leading European city and an innovator of play friendly neighbourhoods.

5.1.2: Places for freely chosen play

The Leeds Play Partnership will influence the quality of outdoor spaces provided for children and young peoples freely chosen play in such places as their local neighbourhood, parks and playgrounds, childcare settings, play settings, schools, recreational and leisure facilities through, for example, the adoption of minimum standards requirement and the creation of a 'good playspace award'.

Supporting material:

"Contrary to some popular myths about modern children, there is evidence that they themselves widely prefer physically active, outdoor play." Margaret Hodge MP, 2005

"Play Value – a means of measuring the quality of play experiences that a playspace provides."

There has been much work done in the United Kingdom to improve the safety of our public playgrounds. But as the *US Consumer Safety Commission* points out, "... 'safe' play design does not necessarily mean 'good' design. The equipment and activities on playgrounds should have positive play value, supporting the types of play engaged in by children."^{xxxiii} Failure to do so results in places being provided for children's play that are simply not used. Research shows that a playground that is designed on a 'play value'^{xxxiv} basis, however, receives much more use than one which is not. These playgrounds also tend to receive much less vandalism and damage.^{xxxv}

The *Leeds Play Partnership* will establish good quality outdoor spaces for the children and young people of Leeds, furthering existing minimum space requirements by adding an element of play value measurement – wherever such spaces exist, and develop this further by creating a 'good playspace award scheme'.

The *Leeds Play Partnership* will establish good quality outdoor spaces for the children and young people of Leeds, furthering existing minimum space requirements by adding an element of play value measurement – wherever such spaces exist, and develop this further by creating a 'good playspace award scheme'. Such a scheme will cover the following criteria:

Criteria for an enriched play environment

adapted from those given in Hughes (1996a) *Play Environments: A Question of Quality*

Play provision should provide opportunities for:

A varied and interesting physical environment

Examples: Things at different levels, spaces of different sizes, places to hide, trees and bushes as well as things that have been made, places to inspire mystery and imagination.

Challenge in relation to the physical environment

Examples: activities which test the limits of capabilities, rough and tumble, sports and games, chase.

Playing with the natural elements - earth, water, fire, air

Examples: campfires, digging, playing snowballs, flying kites.

Movement - e.g. running, jumping, rolling, climbing, balancing

Examples: beams and ropes, soft mats, bike riding, juggling equipment, ladders, space.

Manipulating natural and fabricated materials

Examples: materials for art, cooking, making and mending of all kinds; building dens; making concoctions; using tools; access to bits and pieces of all kinds.

Stimulation of the five senses

Examples: music making, places where shouting is fine, quiet places, different colours and shapes, dark and bright spaces, cooking on a campfire, rotting leaves, a range of food and drink, objects that are soft, prickly, flexible, large and small.

Experiencing change in the natural and built environment

Examples: experiencing the seasons through access to the outdoor environment; opportunities to take part in building, demolishing, or transforming the environment.

Social interactions

Examples: being able to choose whether and when to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, compete and resolve conflicts. Being able to interact with individuals and groups of different ages, abilities, interests, gender, ethnicity and culture.

Playing with identity

Examples: dressing up, role play, performing, taking on different kinds of responsibility.

Experiencing a range of emotions

Examples: opportunities to be powerful/powerless, scared/confident, liked/disliked, in/out of control, brave/cowardly.

5.1.3: Children and Young Peoples Impact Analysis and Audits

“The Leeds Play Partnership recognises that children and young people are sometimes unintentionally affected in negative ways by changes to services, physical developments and building projects that may have been avoidable if a prior analysis of impact had been made. The Leeds Play Partnership will work closely with planning authorities to ensure that adopting a Children and Young People’s Impact Analysis is considered when changes to services and physical developments are at the planning stage.

Supporting material:

“We have no business making policy and spending money on facilities for children until we have an understanding about what parts of the environment children actually use, and why.” Robin Moore, 1986^{xxxvi}

The completion of a Children and Young People’s Impact Analysis is becoming normal practice for departments of central and local government in a number of European countries, such as Sweden for example.^{xxxvii} These analyses, which are made in recognition of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, are aimed at preventing children and young people being unfairly affected by changes to service provision and physical developments, such as building projects for example. Quite what effect such changes may have are often overlooked leading to difficulties arising that may have been preventable and also a possible waste of resources and poor value for money.

In terms of changes to the physical environment, it is becoming increasingly recognised that as children and young people tend to spend more time outside and in their own neighbourhoods than do most local adults, then any changes to the physical environment are likely to affect them more. Children and young people should be involved in auditing how existing spaces are being used before detailed planning on new developments begin and this should be incorporated into a broader analysis of community impact.

5.2: Parks, Open Spaces and Playgrounds

5.2.1: Playgrounds - Small neighbourhood play spaces

The Leeds Play Partnership will establish a network of small, easily accessible neighbourhood playspaces aimed at middle years and younger children in particular, that will provide flexible environmental and physical play opportunities in places that have 'informal oversight', are close to their own homes, and which do not require the crossing of busy roads to reach them.

Supporting material:

"The popularity of play areas [is] not related to their cost" Department of the Environment, 1973^{xxxviii}

"Poor playgrounds that are located close to home will be used [by children] in preference to good playgrounds that are not." Marc Armitage 2003^{xxxix}

Parks, playgrounds and green spaces have been provided for children and young people as a place to meet up with friends and to play for many years and a good quality playground is something that local communities often identify as a need for their neighbourhood. However, despite the fact that many children and young people say they like playgrounds and the kind of traditional play equipment that can be found there many existing playgrounds are not actually used very much by local children.

There seem to be two main reasons for this. The first is that a playground which provides a mix of play equipment and natural features to play in and with, such as landscaping, trees, flowers and bushes, etc. will receive more use than one which has only fixed play equipment. Many of the playgrounds that we design and build tend not to provide access to natural features for play. The second and more important reason is linked to location – simply put, when a playground is built in the 'right place' it will receive lots of use – when built in the 'wrong place' it will not be well used, and is more likely to be vandalised and damaged.^{xi}

The right place for many children is close to home and within sight of regularly used footpaths and housing. The play friendly city is one which provides a network of such small spaces for children and young people of all ages supported by a number of larger playgrounds that offer a more complex range of flexible opportunities. These small spaces in particular must be seen and declared to be a part of the neighbourhoods that they support.

5.2.2: Playgrounds - Small neighbourhood youth zones

The Leeds Play Partnership will establish a network of small, easily accessible neighbourhood 'youth zones' that are aimed at older children and young people in particular. These declared youth zones will provide a sheltered and communal place to sit and talk, and physical play opportunities that are designed for their needs in well lit areas places that have 'informal oversight' and are not isolated from their local neighbourhood.

Supporting material:

"In the absence of many facilities designed for or intended for them, teenagers will continue to engage in behaviours that are natural to them and that may be innocuous in themselves. But as long as these activities remain visible, they are likely to be labelled 'trouble', and the source of the trouble is likely to be identified as people rather than a non-supportive environment." F D Becker, 1976^{xli}

www.thamesvalley.police.uk/reduction/designoutcrime/shelters.htm

Adult residents sometimes express concern when teenagers 'hang around' the local neighbourhood appearing not to do anything. But teenagers say that they wish to spend more time outdoors just like younger children do. The kinds of spaces that we make available for younger children, though, are often not very popular with teenagers because they do not cater for their needs. Providing neighbourhood 'youth zone' type provision, with places to sit, ball play spaces, and challenging physical equipment, proves very popular with older children – particularly teenagers.

But these can be difficult to establish principally because of complaints made by local adult residents who fear a rise in anti-social behaviour. However, creating such settings not only provides young people with somewhere to go and something to do but they can also provide a reduction in reported nuisance crime and anti social behaviour.^{xlii} The establishment of small skateboard areas, bmx tracks and especially 'youth shelters' as a place to meet up with friends was found by *Thames Valley Police* as having a significant reduction effect on local crime.^{xliii}

As with small spaces for younger children, however, 'youth zones' when located in the wrong place are not well used. For most children, including teenagers, the 'right place' is also close to their own home and in their own neighbourhood. Even teenagers say they feel safer when the places they can 'hang out' in are well lit and are not too far away from friendly adults.

5.2.3: Community Playgrounds

The Leeds Play Partnership will establish a network of larger playgrounds that cater for children and young people of all ages in separate 'zoned' spaces, which support the smaller neighbourhood playspaces and youth zones. These declared playgrounds will provide a wide range of environmental and physical play opportunities including space for ball games, wheeled play, landscaping and planting to play in and with, and sheltered communal seating places to sit and talk in.

Supporting material:

"A hierarchy of spaces is the optimum solution." Frank Dobson MP, 2004^{xliv}

Leeds City Council, through the *Leeds Unitary Plan* and the city's *Parks and Countryside Service* with their new playgrounds strategy, are already working towards creating a "... *hierarchy of greenspaces [and playgrounds] accessible to residential areas*"^{xlv}. The Play Strategy will build on this further by coordinating the provision of a number of larger community playgrounds supporting the network of smaller playspaces and youth zones.

These larger community playgrounds will be linked to 'safe routes' to and from the playground, provide a greater range of play opportunities including play equipment, landscaping and planting to play in and with, ball play spaces, and places to sit and talk for a wider age range than the smaller spaces. Younger children and older children/teenagers should have some space between them as consultations with younger children often report they are intimidated by the presence of older children, even where they are not presenting a nuisance but these larger playgrounds should be seen as a whole community resource and part of an established network of declared spaces for play.

5.2.4: Parks and open spaces

The Leeds Play Partnership will ensure that public parks, wildlife areas and open spaces are child and play friendly, and provide an environment and a community resource in which children and young people feel welcomed and wanted.

Supporting material:

“Provision for play in parks and open green spaces can facilitate a child’s needs for free play experiences that are essential in order for children to gain autonomy. The physical space and size of parks accommodates opportunity for social interaction, physical activity and adventurous play, all of which are difficult in an indoor environment.”

Natalie Baxter, Leeds Metropolitan University Playwork Degree, 2005

Parks and other green spaces prove popular places with children and young people, particularly during the summer months.^{xlvi} However, children, young people, and their parents express concern about a lack of adult supervision in our parks – something which has declined markedly in recent years.^{xlvii} As a result, the opportunity to mediate conflict that sometimes occurs between younger users and adult users in parks and green spaces may have been lost. Both the *Dobson Review* and *Best Play* call for an increase in ‘low level supervision’ in our parks to counter this.^{xlviii}

Sympathetic, low level supervision in our parks contributes to creating an environment in which younger and older children feel safe and a place where they feel welcome and wanted.

5.3: Adventure Playgrounds

5.3.1: Community Adventure playgrounds

The Leeds Play Partnership will provide a network of accessible, staffed, open access neighbourhood Adventure Playgrounds that provide a range of environmental, physical and adventurous play opportunities in locations that are linked to a definable community.

Supporting material:

“Open access staffed play provision, like adventure playgrounds, offer all local children and young people both security and challenge in a space that is uniquely theirs.” Tessa Jowell MP, 2005

www.playlink.org.uk

The children and young people’s consultation conducted during the preparation of the *Dobson Review* concluded that although children and young people like un-staffed public playgrounds and youth zone type facilities they still value settings with adult staff present. However, there are some forms of play that are very difficult to provide for in many supervised settings: the opportunity to build dens, for example, to cook around an open fire, to play in wooded areas, long grass, bushes and water, and to experience ‘deep play’ – big, adventurous climbing and swinging experiences.

An adventure playground is a very specific form of play provision that provides access to just such experiences with specially trained staff working in an open-access setting. *PLAYLINK* define open access as being, “provision where children may come and go freely; that is where there is no requirement for children to be either brought to or collected from the provision by an adult.”^{xlix} In many respects, adventure playgrounds provide access to the types of play that we adults may remember from our own childhoods but which now seem to be difficult for some of our children to experience.

Such a setting can cater for large numbers of children of varying ages, but are particularly popular with middle years and older children. They work best when located in an easily definable community area. And, although they take time to become fully established as a part of the local community, once they have done so they tend to become involved in wider community issues outside of their physical boundaries and can provide an influence and supporting role in wider issues of community regeneration.ⁱ In the area of *The Venture*, for example, an adventure playground based in Wrexham, local crime figures for juvenile and nuisance crime fell by 20% in the first year of the adventure playground opening; and over a five period fell by a total of 56%. Local youth crime figures have remained relatively low ever since.ⁱⁱ

The Leeds Play Partnership will establish a network of community based, staffed and open access adventure playgrounds for children and young people in Leeds.

5.4: Playschemes

5.4.1: Playschemes

The Leeds Play Partnership will support a program of accessible, pre-booked and open access playschemes and mobile playschemes in rural and urban parts of the city during the school holidays, particularly during the summer holidays.

Supporting material:

“How was the playscheme, Sam?” “It was really, really, REALLY good!” Sam (aged 8) from Leeds

Holiday playschemes have a long history of partnership between local authorities and the voluntary and private sectors. They also prove to be one of the best attended and most popular forms of supervised play provision amongst the thousands of children and young people who attend them every year. What seems to make them most popular with users is the freedom to play that children and young people associate with them.

However, there is evidence that playschemes can become simply an extension of ‘institutional order’ in children’s lives,^{liii} especially if the local authority only funds pre-booked schemes and not open access provision too. In an open access playschemes, children are not only free to choose what they do when there but they are also free to choose when to leave and the playscheme is held close enough to home to allow them to leave without being collected by adult. As 11 year old Miriam says, *“I would like to spend more time playing. I want children to do whatever they want in playschemes.”*

5.5: Play at School and Hospital

5.5.1: Play at School – access to playtimes, breaktimes and lunchtime

The Leeds Play Partnership will work towards ensuring that all schools provide time, a supportive physical environment and a school ethos that allows children and young people to be able to make the best use of their playtimes, breaktimes and lunchtime for play, to be physically active and to meet their friends and engage in social activities. The Leeds Play Partnership will engage with partners to work towards the adoption of a series of quality indicators for freely chosen play at school within the current Education Leeds Quality Standards Framework.

Supporting material:

“Even if we adults are not sure what playtime is for, children have a very clear idea: it is to them, simply, the most important time of their school day.” Marc Armitage 2005^{liii}

“Lunchtime is a time to catch up with people and talk” Karen (aged 14) from Leeds

The important role of play in education has long been recognised and incorporated into learning schemes such as the *Foundation Stage* for three & four olds for example, which stresses the importance of play and good quality play environments in a learning context.^{liv} Less well understood, however, is the value of non-adult directed free-play at school, or the value of play for older children. The educational psychologists *Tony Pellegrini* in the United States and *Peter Blatchford* in the United Kingdom make a strong case for considering children’s access to free-play while at school as being an important element in their ability to learn by boosting their attention span and allowing them to practice and develop new concepts and skills. They also point out the important role it has in the development of social relations and the transfer of cultural norms.^{lv}

Children and young people’s access to playtimes and breaktimes during the school day is also important in terms of children’s happiness, and their health and fitness. Recent research into children’s activity levels found that at primary school age in particular children are more physically active during playtime and lunchtime periods than they are during structured PE lessons. They also burn off more calories through play than through any other form of activity.^{lvi} So, as the *Children’s Play Council* states, “Any attempt to reduce the length of play/break times in school is [therefore] likely to have a significant effect in reducing children’s activity levels.”^{lvii}

5.5.2: Play at School – access to quality outdoor environment

The Leeds Play Partnership will ensure that the design of new schools and the re-development of existing schools take the outdoor freely chosen play and recreation needs of children and young people into account. Spaces and facilities will be provided for children and young people to be able to be physically active, to be able to sit communally and in shelter, and to play at playtimes, break times and at lunchtime.

Supporting material:

“The school playground is in many ways an unnatural environment – crowded and barren of interest and apparatus. The behaviour that takes place there is not ‘natural’ play ...”
Peter Blatchford 1989^{lviii}

The quality of the outdoor environment in most UK schools, and consequently what children and young people can do outside of class time, does not compare well with schools in other European Union countries. The outdoor environment at a typical British primary and secondary school is more often than not barren, bland, and boring.^{lix} Such an environment can also be stressful as well as non-supportive to their learning.^{lx}

Reasons given for this include concerns over cost, insurance, litigation and the risk of vandalism to play equipment and seating areas after school hours. All of these potential problems are, however, solvable and many schools do manage to overcome them. What might be a bigger barrier is simply that in the United Kingdom we have become used to what school grounds look like, and it is proving hard to break that picture.

The *Dobson Review* makes the point that the provision of play opportunities should be considered “... *most especially when schools are being built or refurbished.*”^{lxi} Making such changes need not be expensive. What is important, however, is that children and young people should be involved in any new developments and a thorough audit of what is already happening and where should be made as part of any development process.

5.5.3: Play at School – community use of school grounds

The Leeds Play Partnership will explore methods of allowing greater community access to school grounds after school hours, especially for children and young people as a place for freely chosen play, while still protecting school buildings from abuse through physical security measures and stewardship schemes.

Supporting material:

“In some areas, particularly densely built areas, the school grounds may be the only open space available to the local community.” Marc Armitage, 2002^{lxii}

The *Dobson Review* concludes that, “*Out of hours use of school grounds and buildings should be promoted ...*”^{lxiii}, pointing out that only a small proportion of school grounds are actually made available for community use. This is not only questionable on grounds of value for money but in some areas, notably densely built up areas or rural communities in intensively farmed areas, the school grounds can offer the *only* open space suitable for freely chosen play after school. It should also be remembered that school grounds that are in use after school hours and during holiday periods as venues for playschemes may suffer less damage than those that do not.

One significant reason for schools not allowing more use of their grounds after school hours, especially unsupervised use, is a concern about graffiti and vandalism to school buildings. This was certainly true among headteachers in Leeds when asked about this issue in local research carried out in 2002.^{lxiv} These are genuine concerns that present a barrier to providing greater community access to school grounds for which solutions must be found. One possible solution may be to consider the protection of school buildings as a different issue to protecting the wider school grounds; another may be to establish stewardship schemes within the local community.

5.5.4: Play at Hospital and other medical settings

“The Leeds Play Partnership will engage with the local health authorities, hospitals and clinics to provide support and an appropriate indoor and outdoor play environment for children of all ages who are attending hospital and other medical settings as an aid to their health, happiness and recovery from injury or illness.”

Supporting material:

“[Play can help by] ... normalising a sometimes boring, and at other times traumatic hospital stay.” Ready Steady Play: A National Play Policy for Ireland, 2003.^{lxv}

A long term stay in hospital or a visit to an accident and emergency department can be a particularly difficult experience for children. However, access to play opportunities in medical settings can help children and young people cope with illness and injury as well as reducing their level of stress and anxiety.^{lxvi}

Play specialist staff are often on hand to provide play opportunities for children in long term stays at hospital, but the provision of well designed play space – especially outdoor space – at hospitals, accident & emergency departments, out patient clinics and general practitioners surgeries is less well provided for.

5.6: Supporting Playworkers

5.6.1: Supporting Playworkers – Continuous Professional Development

The Leeds Play Partnership will support a programme of play specific seminars, training days, and short courses to provide continuous professional development for adults who work both directly and indirectly with children and young people. This is in addition to supporting longer, accredited training courses that are supported by the National Play Endorsement System.

Supporting material:

“Play education, training and qualifications should be based upon reflective practice and continuous learning.” Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork, 2002

Skills Active Playwork Unit: www.playwork.org.uk

Leeds Metropolitan University: www.lmu.ac.uk

Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork: www.jnctp.org.uk

The number of people working in the playwork and childcare sectors has increased dramatically since the introduction of the first *National Child Care Strategy* in 1998.^{lxvii} This has also led to an increased need for play specific training, education and qualifications. Leeds can boast a significant national involvement in this field of work as *Leeds Metropolitan University* is one of very few in the United Kingdom that offers a bachelors degree (BA) and a Foundation Degree in Playwork. In addition, the Playwork Unit within SkillsActive^{lxviii}, the government sector skills council for active leisure and learning, operate a *National Play Endorsement System* of qualifications via a network of *Regional Centres for Playwork Education and Training*. The latest of these centres, which has broad cross-sector support, is based in the Yorkshire region.

Access to training and education leading to recognised qualifications in play and playwork with opportunities for continuous professional development are an important step in developing and supporting a professional workforce in play.

5.6.2: Supporting Playworkers – Training on Safety and Challenge in Play

The Leeds Play Partnership will support the establishment of a specific training module for adults who work both directly and indirectly with children and young people that raises the importance of ‘challenge’ in freely chosen play, and seeks to define the concepts of ‘hazard’ and ‘risk’ in a play context.

Supporting material:

“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.” Play Safety Forum, 2002

The *Children’s Play Council* state that children and young people not only take risks when they are playing, but that taking such risks is an important part of the play process.^{lxix} This is a view supported by the *Play Safety Forum*, a specialist body that includes representation from the *Health and Safety Executive* and the *Child Accident Prevention Trust*, which was established to advise on the question of risk in a play context.

A realistic assessment of risk in providing play opportunities in both supervised and un-supervised settings is essential if children, young people, their parents and carers, as well as professionals are to feel that existing provision is not only safe but still provides the necessarily challenge that children need. Objective 3 in *Best Play* states that provision should “*manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children free from harm.*”^{lxx} However, it is apparent that many professionals find that assessing this balance is difficult to achieve and there are numerous examples of play equipment and other forms of play provision that have been stopped or removed on questionable safety grounds.

5.6.3: Supporting Playworkers: Information and Support

The Leeds Play Partnership will support a central advice and support point that provides parents, individual workers, organisations, and settings with a source of information, specialist advice and research evidence, and access to training information and resources which are aimed particularly at those working with school age children.

Supporting material:

“Just knowing that I could pick up the phone or email for expert advice made setting up the project far less daunting.” Jan, Playscheme organiser in Leeds, 2004

www.leedsplaynetwork.org.uk

The existence of a local play organisation that can provide local advice, information and support, as well as inform and advise on national issues and developments can prove invaluable to those working with children and young people in their local area. In Leeds this role has for many years been provided by *Leeds Play Network* which provides just such a service, access to training and a scrapstore (a resource bank, equipment loan service and distributor of surplus materials from shops and businesses).

Such local authority wide umbrella organisations are usually, as in the case of *Leeds Play Network*, voluntary sector organisations that receive support from their local council. The *Leeds Play Partnership* will continue to support *Leeds Play Network* in providing and further developing this umbrella role.

5.6.4: Supporting Playworkers: Supporting Networks

The Leeds Play Partnership will provide support to networks of professionals involved in providing and supporting children and young people's freely chosen play, particularly playworkers, childminders and childcare workers.

Supporting material:

"Local authorities, partnerships, voluntary organisations and community groups all have a role in delivering projects." Frank Dobson MP, 2004

The *Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership* at *Leeds City Council*, and the *Leeds Children's Fund*, currently provides support to a number of networks of people working with children, including playworkers via the *Leeds Play Forum* and *SWOOP (Supporting Workers in out of School Provision)*. The supporting role that such networks provide can be invaluable in establishing new settings, but they also have a role to play in supporting existing settings and individual workers because such networks are made up of people working in similar situations to each other who provide mutual support from a basis of common experience.

The *Leeds Play Forum* is currently in the process of a re-generation, having suffered from a lack of co-ordination and support in recent years, and *Leeds Play Network* has recently taken on the role of re-establishing the forum and hosting the *SWOOP* network. The *Leeds Play Partnership* will continue to support networks aimed at play settings and individuals working with children, particularly by supporting *Leeds Play Network* in hosting, co-ordinating and developing the *Leeds Play Forum* and *SWOOP*.

5.6.5: Supporting Playworkers: Quality Assurance

The Leeds Play Partnership will encourage all settings that cater for children and young people, particularly schools, care settings, play settings, youth settings, community and leisure centres, to examine their own work practice and physical environment through the adoption and working through of an appropriate Quality Assurance System.

Supporting material:

Quality assurance should "... improve the quality of the play experience and play opportunities that are made available to children." Play Wales, 2001^{lxxi}

The adoption and process of working through an appropriate quality assurance system should be seen as a priority in developing the practice of workers in any setting that involves children. *Leeds City Council* currently offers financial support for such settings wishing to adopt its own scheme, which is in the early stages of adoption as a city wide standard.^{lxxii}

Completing such a system should also be seen as part of a continuous process of reflection and development, with workers being introduced to national play specific policy positions, such as *Best Play*, and the *New Charter for Play*, of which the *Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership* in Leeds is a signatory.^{lxxiii} Such local quality assurance can also form an important element in a broader, play specific quality framework such as that provided by *The First Claim and Quality in Play*, for example.^{lxxiv}

5.6.6: Supporting Playworkers –Research

The Leeds Play Partnership will support the commissioning of relevant local and regional research on the lives of children and young people, and assist in transmitting the results and conclusions of research in support of developing evidence based and innovative practice.

Supporting material:

“Research on children as subjects has a long history but only recently, in the decade following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, have those researching children’s lives come to question the research relationship and have moved towards a position of research with children”.

Cathy Burke, University of Leeds 2002

Active research into play and the wider social world of children and young people has made important contributions at a national level in influencing policy, provision and good practice, and has helped to place the position of ‘play’ into a wider social, economic and environmental context. On a more local level, the design of outcomes and services are likely to be more effective when research evidence is used to plan such provision and provide a mechanism for measuring success.

Dr Cathy Burke of the University of Leeds makes the point that the relationship between researcher and children as the subjects of research has become a more positive and cooperative relationship.^{lxxv} However, many aspects of children’s play are significantly under researched: the role of happiness in children’s lives, for example; and particularly the effects of play deprivation and the long term effect of good quality play opportunities for children of all ages.^{lxxvi}

The *Leeds Play Partnership* will support the commissioning of research on play related issues, particularly where that research cooperates with children, and promote the role that national and local research plays in supporting good practice. *Leeds Play Partnership* will also support the dissemination of research results through supporting networks, information and support systems, and other mechanisms engaging with Leeds Metropolitan University and the University of Leeds in furthering this aim.

5.6.7: Supporting Playworkers –National Play Day

The Leeds Play Partnership will continue to act as host to National Play Day and other special events, using the day as an opportunity to promote positive images of children and young people, the value and importance of freely chosen play for children and young people of all ages, and the role of adults in supporting play.

Supporting material:

“Investing in a major celebration of play on Playday has produced enormous benefits in terms of the publicity and debate it has stimulated around the issues facing quality play provision. It’s also a chance to say very publicly to children and young people that we are trying to improve things.” Frank O’Malley, Leeds Play Network, 2005

www.playday.org.uk

National Play Day is an annual themed event co-ordinated by the *Children’s Play Council* that aims to raise awareness of play related issues at events specially organised around the country. Play Day takes place in August each year with a theme set by the organising committee in consultation with other play organisations. Previous themes have included raising the issue of traffic and traffic safety, parental involvement in children’s play, and also the role of play in health and fitness.

Leeds has a respected history of involvement in *Play Day* with the Millennium Square and Temple Newsham Park being the setting for some impressive and very well attended events – including turning Millennium Square into an artificial beach complete with sea and sand.

6: Implementation and Monitoring

“Local partners will need to work closely together to access local needs, set priority for action, identify and pool relevant resources, plan services and decide how best to commission and provide them. These arrangements will reaffirm local authorities’ traditional role in local leadership.”

Tessa Jowell MP, 2005
Introduction

Implementing the Action Points in the Play Strategy calls for a significant investment to be made in both time and money over a ten year period. However, it is not anticipated that the responsibility for putting these Action Points into practice should rest purely with the local authority alone. Nor is it anticipated that the financial responsibility rests solely with the local authority.

The local authority does have an important part to play, though. In line with the *Every Child Matters* framework Leeds City Council will take a leadership role in establishing a partnership body – *the Leeds Play Partnership* – which will be tasked with detailed action planning, prioritising, identifying and securing resources, monitoring, and evaluation of the Play Strategy. This partnership will be a broad, play-specific body bringing together departments from Leeds City Council, other statutory agencies, the non-statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

The Leeds Play Partnership will be established within the local children’s trust arrangements as a sub-group of Children Leeds.

6.1: Implementation – The Leeds Play Partnership

Leeds City Council and other agencies will establish the Leeds Play Partnership – a cross-departmental, cross sector, and cross agency group that will co-ordinate the delivery of the Play Strategy, identify and actively seek resources, and provide a strategic overview for developing new opportunities for children and young people’s access to freely chosen play.

Significant resources for play have become increasingly available over the last decade, and this seems set to continue with, for example, the introduction of the *BIG Lottery Fund*. However, applications for new funding are more likely to be successful if the applicant can demonstrate that the bid has been made as part of a strategic approach to improving access to play provision for children and young people. In Leeds, as elsewhere, the provision of such services involves most of the departments within the local authority as well as many outside agencies in the non-statutory, voluntary and private sectors. A successful approach to securing a share of these significant new resources, therefore, will require partnership working and a strategic approach.

The governments programme, *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, calls on local authorities to provide the leadership required to bring potential partners together^{lxxvii} as well as to develop strategic ‘joint commissioning and budget pooling’ initiatives.^{lxxviii} Leeds City Council will take up this challenge by establishing a city wide, strategic partnership body for children’s play and freely chosen recreation – the *Leeds Play Partnership*.

The Leeds Play Partnership will formally commence work in April 2007. The Partnership will be a subgroup of the Children Leeds Partnership, a central element of Leeds’ children’s trust arrangements. The Play Partnership’s main responsibility will be to improve play in Leeds through delivery of the Play Strategy and through championing the importance of play across the city. The membership of the Partnership will include:

[To be added]

6.2: Implementation – Appointment of a senior Children’s Play Officer

The Leeds Play Partnership will appoint a senior Children’s Play Officer who will support and administer the Leeds Play Partnership and provide a single point of focus for freely chosen play issues, including providing specialist advice and up-to-date best practice.

A senior *Children’s Play Officer* will be appointed to support the implementation, development and monitoring of the Play Strategy and the work of the *Leeds Play Partnership*. This officer will have a clear strategic role and be appointed at a sufficient level to enable them to cross departmental boundaries and to liaise and cooperate with other officers and organisations from the voluntary and private sectors, local communities and planning authorities.

The *Children’s Play Officer* will work closely with the area committees and provide a point of focus for freely chosen play issues in general and the Play Strategy in particular.

6.3: Implementation – A Champion for Play

The Leeds Play Partnership will appoint an independent ‘Champion for Play’ who will act as an independent advocate for children, young people and their freely chosen play. The Champion for Play will also independently monitor the work of the Leeds Play Partnership and the progress of the Play Strategy.

The *Dobson Review* calls for the adoption of a ‘Champion for Play’ in each local authority area, a point strongly endorsed during consultations held as part of the *National Play Review*.^{lxxix} The *Dobson Review*, however, makes no recommendation as to what form this position should take. The *Leeds Play Partnership* will enter into further discussion on the organisation of this position and appoint a local ‘Champion for play’ at their first formal meeting in April 2007.

6.4: Implementation – Action, Resources and Commissioning plans

The Leeds Play Partnership will develop regular plans that will clearly set out the actions, resources and commissioning required to deliver the Play Strategy.

[to be added]

6.5: Implementation – State of play review

The Leeds Play Partnership will complete a regular 'State of Play Review' that audits local play provision and infrastructure, assesses attendance and usage, audits opportunities for play specific training and education, and evaluates the Play Strategy and Action Plans.

The fact that so many different departments, agencies and organisations have an involvement in children's play can make the coordination of these efforts complicated. However, a review of what provision and infrastructure is available, to what extent provision is being used, and what training and education is available to support provision will provide an essential information to assess the progress and impact of the *Leeds Play Strategy*. Such an audit will provide valuable baselines to inform future planning, target setting and evaluation.

The *Leeds Play Partnership*, therefore will make an initial 'State of Play' audit and will develop this further by completing a regular annual review, that will contribute to the broader annual assessment of children's services in Leeds through the review of the Children and Young People's Plan.

This audit will link with and inform the needs assessment required by PPG 17 – "Planning for open space, sport and recreation" and form part of setting local standards as required by the guidance.

6.6: Implementation – Monitoring and Evaluation

The Leeds Play Partnership will establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the partnership, the progress and the achievement of outcomes in the Play Strategy that involves children and young people.

Within the *Every Child Matters Framework for Inspection of Children's Services*, play does not currently figure highly^{lxxx}. However, the framework does allow scope for local targets to be established and provides an opportunity for the *Play Strategy* and the *Leeds Play Partnership* to influence the *Every Child Matters* inspection process at a local level. The *Leeds Play Partnership*, therefore, will develop a series of local play specific outcomes and inspection criteria within each of the five core themes of the *Every Child Matters* process.

In keeping with the *Play Strategy Core Action Point 2* (Involvement and Participation), a form of scrutiny panel or panels involving children and young people will be established to monitor and evaluate the progress of the *Play Strategy* and the working of the *Leeds Play Partnership*. The partnership will also ensure that information about the *Play Strategy* and its progress is disseminated to children and young people throughout the city. This could be done as part of *National Play Day* events, at occasional children and young people's play conference events, and through the creation of a child friendly website.

6.7: Implementation – Performance measures and targets

The Leeds Play Partnership will establish clear measures and targets to assess progress and impact.

Play lacks a clear framework for establishing and evidencing need, outcomes and progress due to an absence of the metrics and measures in use in other sectors. Clear information is vital if we are to better understand and target greatest need, to monitor the implementation of the strategy and to evaluate how we have made an impact in improving the lives and outcomes of children and young people.

Leeds will adopt the measures currently being piloted by the National Children's Bureau, once these have been finalised. These are summarised below:

Participation – the proportion of children and young people aged 0-16 who play out for more than four hours per week

Access – the proportion of children and young people aged 0-16 who have easy walking or cycling access to three different types of play space or facility

Quality – the proportion of facilities and spaces rated as 'good' or 'excellent' against agreed quality criteria

Satisfaction – the proportion of children and young people aged 0-16 who rate the range and quality of play provision in their neighbourhood as 'good' or 'very good' (this indicator is already included in the Leeds CYPP)

ANNEX 2: PLAY AND RISK POLICY

Leeds City Council and the Children Leeds Partnership fully endorse the Children's Play Council's statement on risk in play. The Council and its partners have adopted this statement as their own.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

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

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 judgements 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 a 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.

Annex 3: 'The State of Play' – an audit of play in Leeds

[To be added]

Notes and links

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- v. Department of Culture, Media and Sport *Getting serious about play: a review of children's play*. London: DCMS. p11. [referred to in the rest of the Play Strategy as 'The Dobson Review'].
- vi. Responding to the National Review of Children's Play in, *PlayToday* issue 48 May/June 2005, p4, published by the Children's Play Council.
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- xi. Leeds Unitary Plan, p440.
- xii. 'The right thing for children', *Children Now* 8 December 2004 – 4 January 2005, p15.
- xiii. Best Play, p3.
- xiv. National Children's Office (Republic of Ireland government) (2004) *Ready, Steady, Play! A National Play Policy*. p28
- xv. *Dobson Review*, p16.
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- xvii. Rob Whewey & Alison Millward (1997) *Child's Play: facilitating play on housing estates*. Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing. See also Marc Armitage (1998) *Play Value: an assessment of the play sites owned and operated by the East Riding of Yorkshire Council*. ERYC.
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- xxii. *Managing risk in play provision: a position statement*. Play Safety Forum, August 2002.
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- xxiv. Katy Green (1995) Children and traffic calming p76, in Paul Henderson (ed) *Children and communities*. London: Pluto Press.
- xxv. *Best Play*, p7.
- xxvi. *Leeds Metropolitan District Road Injuries* (2001), Leeds City Council, Highways and Transportation Dept.
- xxvii. Play Safety Forum (2002).
- xxviii. International Road Traffic Accident Statistic database.
http://www.oecd.org/document/53/0,2340,en_2649_34351_2002165_1_1_1_1,00.html
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