

Policy summary

The Play Strategy

Fun and exciting opportunities to play are at the heart of a happy, healthy and enjoyable childhood. Better outdoor play opportunities are good for children, good for families and good for communities.

The Play Strategy

Introduction

This briefing paper summarises the main commitments announced in the government's Play Strategy¹ for England, published in December 2008.

This first document of its kind sets out the government's vision and commitments for better play opportunities for children in England. The strategy focus is not just on the places where children play, including parks and green spaces, schools and children's centres, but it also considers how communities and neighbourhoods can become more child-friendly. The strategy has been built on the responses to *Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy*² and reflects the views of the children, families and professionals that responded.

*Statutory Guidance to Children's Trusts*³ published just before the Play Strategy states that the neighbourhoods in which children live should provide a range of high-quality opportunities for play and recreation, requiring a strategic approach to play across the local area, with the full involvement of children, local communities and the third sector in decision-making.

The government's vision

The strategy sets out a vision for play, which sees:

- supervised and unsupervised places for play areas in every residential area, free of charge
- local neighbourhoods that are safe, interesting places to play
- routes to children's play space that are safe and accessible for all
- parks and open spaces that are attractive, well maintained and well used
- children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours
- children and young people play in a way that respects other people and property
- children and young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces
- play spaces are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children.

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

The Play Strategy

The Play Strategy sets out five overarching areas of action to improve play opportunities for all children, these are:

- more places to play,
- supporting play throughout childhood,
- playing safely,
- child-friendly communities and
- embedding play in local priorities.

A summary of the government's main activities to improve play provision

The strategy commits the government to spending £235 million to create more and safer places to play through:

- the delivery of over 3,500 new or refurbished play areas through the play pathfinder and playbuilder programmes
- 30 play pathfinder local authorities to develop adventure playgrounds or playparks
- £1.5 million to be made available to help refurbish all existing third sector adventure playgrounds
- guidance to support the delivery of the Play Strategy, including:
 - *Implementing the Play Strategy* - strategic planning guidance to local authorities / Children's Trusts (forthcoming)
 - *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play space*
 - *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*
 - New web-based guidance (in partnership with CLG) that will bring together best practice for planning officers on supporting children play and recreation
- Children's Centres and schools offering good quality play provision
- exploring models and good practice in joint working between neighbourhood police and the play sector
- £1 million in a selection of pathfinder pilot schemes to develop models of volunteering from 2008 to 2011
- In response to feedback from the *Staying Safe Action Plan*, a communications plan aimed at building public understanding of child safety will be launched
- local authorities implementing properly planned 20mph zones around places and spaces where children play
- a £3.2 million cross-professional training programme for professionals who have a role in making neighbourhoods more child-friendly
- a new performance indicator, in the National Indicator Set, measuring children's satisfaction with parks and play space
- updating statutory guidance for Children's Trusts which sets out roles of directors of children's services in relation to play
- the development of a national system for collecting local information on play space
- funding 4,000 playworkers to achieve a Level 3 playwork qualification
- the continuous professional development of leaders and managers in the play workforce.

This briefing summarises, under each of the five areas for action, the government's steps to improve play provision throughout England over the next 10 years.

More places to play

The government is investing £235 million in rolling out the Play Strategy and supporting its vision for play. This will fund 3,500 new or refurbished play areas across the country, located across all top-tier authorities. The government is also supporting the development of 30 play pathfinder local authorities. Play pathfinders will receive £2m capital and £500,000 revenue funding and will be expected to develop at least 28 public play spaces and one adventure playground.

Playbuilder local authorities will receive £1.1 million capital and £45,000 revenue funding to develop at least 22 public play spaces. Both play pathfinder and playbuilder authorities need to demonstrate, how their plans will provide innovative and stimulating play areas which are accessible, safe – both at the site and in terms of travel to and from the area, and sustainable. Funding of £1.5 million will be made available from April 2009 to help refurbish existing adventure playgrounds run by the community and voluntary sectors. To ensure that disabled children benefit from new and refurbished play provision, capital investment must be used to make facilities fully inclusive.

To drive forward improvements in the quality of public play spaces, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has published, with Play England, *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play space*⁴ and *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*⁵. In addition, DCSF has asked Play England to update the *Neighbourhood Play Tool Kit*⁶, which will support the involvement of community-led projects.

Supporting play throughout childhood

To ensure that children's centres offer good quality play provision the government has announced that Together for Children, the government's national delivery partner, will

- ensure that local authorities link the roll-out of Children Centres to other capital programmes, including the play capital programme
- ensure that during the planning stage consideration is given to providing good quality indoor and outdoor play space in all children's centres.

DCSF has also announced a range of support mechanisms to improve the play provision offered by schools. This includes drawing together relevant materials and examples of good playground design to support school leaders and encourage them to further develop their play facilities.

The Building Schools for the Future (BSF) capital investment programme will have clear requirements about play space in schools. Links will be made between BSF and play capital to develop high-quality play provision and promote out-of hours and community use of school play facilities. Further work will be carried out on how play can be further integrated into the primary curriculum and to what extent breaks in the school day are providing a sufficient amount of time for play. The DCSF and Ofsted plan to integrate play into school inspections.

Playing safely

Pathfinder local authorities, in conjunction with partners, will be asked to explore local solutions to supervising play, balancing safety with the need to allow children to lead their

own play activities. This evidence will be used to support future guidance on play provision. Government will explore models and good practice in joint working between neighbourhood police and the play sector. Trials running until 2010 with selected play pathfinders will inform guidance for local authorities, police teams and others on how to support children's play. DCSF is also investing £1 million between 2008 and 2011 in play pathfinder pilot schemes to develop models of volunteering to support children's play.

The strategy outlines a number of ways in which the safety of children travelling to and from play areas can be improved. Government has written to all local Directors of Transport about the importance of child-friendly local areas, road safety and planning measures. The government is encouraging local authorities to implement properly planned 20mph zones around places and spaces where children play.

The government will also be launching a new communications campaign aimed at building public understanding of child safety and addressing parents' perceptions and understanding of risk and play.

Child-friendly communities

The Play Strategy recognises that communities must become more child-friendly, and that children and young people want to make decisions about how local areas are designed and developed. To make this a reality, action will be taken to ensure children's play needs are reflected in the current national review of planning policy and web based guidance for planning officers to support children's play will be produced.

The government has also launched Play Shaper, a new £3.2 million cross-professional training programme aimed at professionals who have a role in designing and managing neighbourhoods, to increase their understanding of the importance of play and their role and responsibility in supporting children's play and safe, active travel. The government is also working with the social housing sector to ensure that play is supported in the design and delivery of social housing and expects Registered Social Landlords to participate in the development and delivery of Children and Young People's Plans (CYPPs).

Embedding play in local priorities

To embed play in local priorities, a new performance indicator will be introduced into the National Indicator Set from April 2009. The indicator measures children's satisfaction with local parks and play areas.

Children's Trusts will play a part in bringing partners together to improve play opportunities in their local area. To support this, the government has produced updated statutory guidance for Children's Trusts⁷ setting out the roles and responsibilities of Directors of Children's Services in relation to play. This new statutory guidance also describes how health professionals can work together to support active outdoor play.

Play England is also producing guidance on *Implementing the Play Strategy* - strategic planning guidance to local authorities and Children's Trusts. In addition, Play England has been commissioned by the Department of Health to conduct a three-year play and health research project. This project will investigate parental and child concerns about active play and how to encourage families to get children playing.

To support workforce development, the government is funding 4,000 playworkers to achieve a Level 3 playwork qualification by 2011. Government is also supporting the continuous professional development of leaders and managers in the play workforce by developing a new playwork management qualification.

Further information

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)

For further information and to access a copy of The Play Strategy and supporting documents, please visit the DCSF website.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/play

Play England

As the national delivery partners, Play England supports the delivery of the play strategy by provides advice, support and promoting good practice in play provision.

www.playengland.org.uk

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¹ DCSF (2008) *The Play Strategy*: London. Department for Children, Schools and Families and Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

² DCSF (2008) *Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families and Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

³ DCSF (2008) *Statutory Guidance to Children's Trusts: Statutory guidance on inter-agency cooperation to improve well-being of children, young people and their families*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

⁴ Shackell, A, Butler, N Doyle, P, and Ball D (2008) *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play space*. London. Department for Children Schools and Families, Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Play England.

⁵ Ball, D, Gill, T and Spiegel, B (2008) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide*. London: DCMS, DCSF and Play England.

⁶ Children's Play Council (2006) *Neighbourhood Play Tool Kit*. London: NCB.

⁷ DCSF (2008) *Statutory Guidance to Children's Trusts: Statutory guidance on inter-agency cooperation to improve well-being of children, young people and their families* London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.



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