



play today

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Editorial

The mood has darkened since last April, when the Fair Play consultation was launched by Ed Balls from an adventure playground swing. Some have commented that, in light of the worst recession for many decades, investing in children simply enjoying themselves is a luxury we can no longer afford. But while we are unlikely, in this climate, to see a repeat of that ministerial first, the Play Strategy, published in December, has re-stated that children's play and a more child-friendly public realm are a central part of the government's long-term ambition to make this the best place in the world to grow up.

The Play Strategy sets out an ambitious 10-year plan not just to expand and improve play areas but to make the public space where children live more responsive to their need to play. Wider government policy, like statutory guidance to Children's Trusts, and on Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities confirm the seriousness of the government's intent that children's well-being is now the responsibility of the whole local authority, not just children's services.

Of course the forthcoming squeeze on public finances, after the huge injection of funds to save the banks and jump-start the economy, makes optimism about the future for 'soft' policy areas, like play, difficult. We will need to make its case anew and hope that 'up-stream', quality-of-life policies are not sacrificed to the reduced budgets that children's and other services will undoubtedly face in the years ahead.

In the wider arena, the debates that are raging as politics tries to find an adequate response to the whirlwind that is sweeping the world, may well offer opportunities for play advocates. A re-evaluation of global economics may call some fundamental tenets into question. Is preparing children for their place in an economic world that is, itself, not working still justifiable? Or, in preparing children for the future we imagine for them, are we not perpetuating the problems they will inherit?

Through playing, the research suggests, children don't so much develop the skills they will need for the future as develop their qualities of resilience, creativity and adaptability, increasing their capacity to shape it. Playwork may yet be a lowly profession, but in a world badly in need of a new and better future, it has much to offer.

Far from being a luxury that we can no longer afford, the Play Strategy and the long-term role of playwork in how we raise children, contains a vision that we cannot afford to abandon.

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play
today



Government sets out 10-year vision for play

At Whitehorse Adventure Playground on a chilly morning in December, the children's minister, Baroness Delyth Morgan, unveiled the government's plans for making sure every child in England has access to world class play opportunities by 2020.

The Play Strategy details the action to be taken by government and others in achieving this vision for play by 2020 and identifies Play England as its national delivery partner (see pages 6 and 7 for more information on Play England's role).

In the short term (2008 to 2011), the priority is on increasing the availability of safe, exciting and inclusive play facilities, particularly in areas that need them most.

To accelerate the £235m funding announced last April, the government has brought forward funding for playbuilders so that every local authority will receive capital and revenue funding by April 2009. An additional 10 play pathfinder local authorities have been announced, so that now, a total of 30 local authorities have funding to develop a large, staffed adventure playground.

The evidence base on the benefits for play will also be strengthened along with good practice to help those tasked with delivering high-quality play spaces. Play England, in partnership with government, has published two good practice guides: *Design for Play* and *Managing Risk in Play Provision*. Further guidance on implementing the Play Strategy and a revised *Neighbourhood Play Toolkit* are to be published.

From April 2009, a new indicator, NI199, will be included in the National Indicator Set: this will enable children to show how satisfied they are with local parks and play areas. This will be measured by the annual TellUs survey of school-age children.

Medium term plans (2011 to 2014), include support for Children's Trusts to provide the local leadership

needed to establish communities that value and respond to children and young people's needs for safe, exciting and well-maintained play spaces. Other staff from across the wider local authority and health services will support this agenda.

To help meet this outcome 3,000 local authority staff will be offered the new Play Shaper training programme by 2011. Play Shaper will be delivered by a partnership of Play England, SkillsActive and Playwork Partnerships. The programme is designed to enable a wide group of professionals who have a role in making neighbourhoods more child-friendly, understand the importance of play, learn about play principles and develop their role in enabling more and better play opportunities in public space.

The play workforce is also being strengthened with investment in skills development. The government has set a target of 4,000 playworkers achieving a Level 3 playwork qualification by 2011. The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) is leading on this aspect of the strategy with partners including SkillsActive and the Learning and Skills Council.

The long term vision for play (2014 to 2020) is that children and young people have access to world class play and recreation spaces in neighbourhoods that are child-friendly. Local delivery will be led by the Children's Trust with children needs embedded in the planning of the wider Local Strategic Partnership.

🔗 **The Play Strategy is available online at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/play** 🔗



The 2020 vision for play

- Every residential area to have a variety of supervised and unsupervised places for play, free of charge.
- Local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play.
- Routes to play spaces are safe and accessible for all children and young people.
- Parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are 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 active roles in the development of local play spaces.
- Play spaces are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, and children from minority groups in the community.

Public health guidance urges planners to rethink the use of 'no ball games' signs

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has produced public health guidance on physical activity and active play for pre-school and school-age children up to the age of 18 years.

The report includes recommendations for those working to ensure that children and young people meet the Chief Medical Officer's target of at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity each day.

The report points to evidence that says many children are not reaching the levels of physical activity required to reduce the risk of chronic conditions such as obesity. The evidence indicates that girls' activity levels decrease once they reach the age of 10, and by the age of 15, only 47 per cent of girls are physically active for the required 60 minutes; for boys this figure is 66 per cent. Some ethnic differences have identified Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese children participating less in sports and exercise than other children.

The report looked at evidence relating to active play and how this can raise activity levels and

states that children's opportunities for physical activity can be delivered through play and other spontaneous activities, as well as through structured or organised programmes.

Amongst the report is one action point for planners of public spaces, urging them to reconsider the use of signage that restricts physical activity, such as 'no ball games' signs. They should also actively promote non-traditional spaces as places where children can be active, giving the example of car parks outside normal working hours.



【 PH17 - Promoting physical activity for children and young people is available online at: www.nice.org.uk 】

The guidance contains detailed recommendations aimed at national and local policy-makers, and those involved in delivering and planning services locally. These include:

- a long-term national campaign to promote physical activity
- action by local decision-makers to raise awareness of physical activity, so that local plans and strategies explicitly address the need for children to be physically active
- all local authorities developing physical activity plans
- local decision-makers planning and providing spaces and facilities for physical activity
- providers of activities being more responsive to children and young people's needs
- those responsible for opportunities for children to be physically active (such as early years providers, playgroups, and schools) providing environments that stimulate and challenge children.

Play priority areas campaign

London Play has launched a campaign aimed at managers of public spaces urging them to replace the familiar 'No ball games' signs with new notices that say 'Play Priority Area'.



The campaign's aim is to see more open spaces transformed into playable spaces that are child-friendly.

A London Play statement said: 'Many people promoting play in London have been complaining for a long time about the proliferation of 'No ball games' signs. Now there is an alternative, just in time for the many new natural play areas springing up all over parks and estates in London, where children can play on a fallen tree or a sandpit surrounded by boulders to climb on and hide behind.'

【 The signs can be ordered from London Play. Contact London Play for further information: www.londonplay.org.uk 】

SkillsActive's playwork unit funding cut

SkillsActive's annual grant from the Department for Children, Schools and Families' strategic grant aid programme has been reduced by a third.

The organisation had applied for an annual grant of £619,000 to support the playwork unit's work, but this sum was reduced by £219,000.

Paul Bonel, Head of Children and Young People at SkillsActive, responded to the news in a statement, saying: 'We were encouraged with the launch of the Children's Plan, and its commitment to upskill the workforce to Level 3, as this seemed a clear indication of government recognising the importance of highly skilled professionals in the sector. The reduction in funding will affect our ability to deliver on our priorities outlined within the UK Playwork Education and Training Strategy - *Quality Training, Quality Play*.

'However, we will continue to play a leading role in workforce development for the playwork sector at both a national and regional level and despite the funding cut remain focused and optimistic. We will use this opportunity to work closely with the government to re-evaluate our priorities.'

A DCSF spokesperson was quoted in *Children and Young People Now* magazine as saying: 'We receive bids for a large number of organisations, there is no guarantee that organisations successful in previous years will be awarded funding again.'

Street Design Awards 2009

The closing date for entries to this year's **Local Government News Street Design Awards** is on **30 April**. Entries can be made in seven categories, which include: Children's Play, Urban Green Space and Home Zones. All schemes must have been completed within five years of the closing date. Play England, Living Streets and Green Space are among this year's sponsors.

Find our more at: www.lgn.co.uk

Good Childhood Inquiry: 'ban building on open spaces where children play'

The Children's Society has published conclusions from its Good Childhood Inquiry into modern childhood. The inquiry panel made a number of key recommendations, one being: a 'ban all building on sports fields and open spaces where children play.'

The final report, *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age*, brings together the evidence used to inform the inquiry with recommendations and summaries of the themes discussed. According to The Children's Society, over 30,000 people contributed evidence: 20,000 of those being children themselves.

The panel, which included the children's commissioner for England, Sir Al Aynsley-Green, made recommendations to parents, teachers, government, the media and wider society in general. In addition to a ban on building on spaces where children play, the panel recommended that the media take a more balanced approach to the way that risks of strangers to children are reported, and reconsider the 'exaggerated picture they portray of young people threatening social stability'. The panel also urge society to take a more positive attitude to children; welcoming them to society and helping them.

The report says that excessive individualism is causing a range of problems for children including: high family break-up, teenage unkindness, commercial pressures towards premature sexualisation, unprincipled advertising, too much competition in education, and an acceptance of income inequality. The report says that although freedom and self-determination may have advantages, the balance has shifted too far towards individualism in today's Britain.

The full list of recommendations can be viewed at: www.childrenssociety.org.uk

Risk management guide for play providers launched

Play England, DCSF, DCMS and the Play Safety Forum have published new guidance for play providers and play space designers on how to manage risk in play provision.

The guide promotes a new approach to risk management that will help children experience adventure and challenge in their local play space.

Managing Risk in Play Provision:

Implementation guide by Tim Gill, David Ball and Bernard Spiegel, shows how play providers can replace current risk assessment practice with an approach to risk management that takes into account the benefits to children and young people of challenging play experiences, as well as the risks. The guide is a collaboration of practitioners, academics and

play providers fully endorsed by leading play safety specialists and the Health and Safety Executive.

Tim Gill introduces *Managing Risk in Play Provision* on Page 10.

The guide is available free from: www.teachernet.gov.uk and can be downloaded from the DCSF and Play England websites. »



Promoting excellent free play opportunities for all children and young people.

Play Strategy confirms key role for Play England in delivering government's vision for play

The government's Play Strategy has confirmed Play England's role as its national delivery partner. The Play Strategy outlines Play England's role in providing local authorities and the voluntary sector with access to expertise, planning advice and guidance: here is a quick overview of what that means.

Local authority support and challenge

To ensure that local authorities can deliver the £235m investment programme in public play spaces, Play England's support and challenge role to local authority play pathfinders and playbuilders has been confirmed (see *PlayToday* 63). Work has been underway with delivering this aspect of the Play Strategy since April 2008. This has seen Play England working with the Government Offices in the regions, supporting local authorities with their planning and delivery to ensure that the new play spaces are well-designed, meet local children's needs and are accessible to all. Play England will be working with the disabled children's charity KIDS to provide guidance and support to local authorities to ensure that the investment programme meets the needs of disabled children.

Play England has recruited additional staff in each of its regional offices to ensure that local authorities can benefit from this support. Work will also continue to build on the regional networks and good practice sharing, which has been a feature of Play England's work in delivering the Big Lottery Fund's Children's Play programme.

Adventure play support

Play pathfinders will have dedicated support to help them develop their adventure playgrounds or play parks. Play England is updating the initial briefing published in September 2008, using learning from Wave 1 play pathfinders and advice from an adventure play specialist group.

There will be a national event in March 2009 for play pathfinder adventure play leads and their delivery partners, where they can find out about successes and challenges in developing their sites and meet



up with people who are planning and delivering adventure play across the country.

Play England is also supporting development of a national adventure play network to bring third sector voluntary and community sector and local authority adventure playgrounds together to share what works well.

Funding for third sector-managed adventure playgrounds

Play England is also managing a £1.5 million funding programme for existing third sector adventure playgrounds. From April 2009, all third sector-managed adventure playgrounds will be able to apply for funding to update and modify what they currently offer to their users. Eligible playgrounds can apply for a grant of up to £19,000 that can be used for revenue and capital – or a mix of both. The deadline for applications is **Monday, 13 April**. For information about eligibility and the application process, visit the Play England website.

For further information about adventure play support and the third sector funding programme, contact Play England National Practice Manager, Mick Conway: mhconway@ncb.org.uk

Neighbourhood play support

All play pathfinders and playbuilders will be expected to involve voluntary and community groups in the planning and design of new play spaces. Play England has created a Neighbourhood Play programme to support the Play Strategy commitments to involving local communities and the third sector in the development and running of play projects.

As previously reported in *PlayToday*, Play England has commissioned Play Association Tower Hamlets to update the *Neighbourhood Play Toolkit*. The free online resource, to be published in summer 2009, will provide information, advice and resources to community groups wishing to develop play projects.

The government is investing £1m in play volunteering pilots from 2008 to 2011. Play England will support the volunteering pilots to ensure that community and voluntary groups are engaged with the wider delivery of the Play Strategy objectives at a local level. There will be five pilots covering a range of themes and settings, from urban and rural environments to different contexts such as adventure playgrounds, schools and street settings. The first two pilots, in Bristol and Rotherham, will focus on youth and intergenerational volunteering. The pilots will look in more depth at issues of volunteer recruitment, training, community ownership, sustainability and incentives for voluntary and community groups.

Play England have appointed Steven Chown as Neighbourhood Play Programme Manager to oversee the Neighbourhood Play programme. Find out more about the play volunteering pilots at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/play, or email: Steven Chown, Play England, Neighbourhood Play Programme Manager: schown@ncb.org.uk

Child-friendly communities: Play Shaper

The Play Strategy asserts that communities should give greater consideration to children's needs and interests. To help make local areas more child-friendly, Play England will be working in partnership with SkillsActive and Playwork Partnerships to deliver Play Shaper: a cross-professional training programme to every local authority by 2011.

Play Shaper aims to bring together all those professionals who have a role in the building, design and management of neighbourhoods, to raise their awareness and understanding of the importance of play and child-friendly spaces.

A pilot programme is being developed by Playwork Partnerships with participants being recruited from 10 local authorities who were Wave 1 pathfinders. Twenty participants from each local authority will be able to join the free one-day training programme.

Information on Play Shaper can be found at: www.playengland.org.uk/playshaper.

Guidance to support the Play Strategy

As delivery partner, Play England is producing guidance to support the delivery of the Play Strategy. Two major publications have already been made available: *Design for Play* to support the planning and design of play spaces, and the implementation guide to *Managing Risk in Play Provision* (see page 10) is aimed at those who manage the health and safety aspects of play provision. Both guides aim to help providers create exciting and challenging play spaces.

In addition, DCSF and Play England are producing draft guidance, for consultation, entitled *Implementing the Play Strategy*. This will aim to help Children's Trusts and Local Strategic Partnerships respond to children's play needs as they plan services and changes to neighbourhoods.

The Play England website features briefings, case studies and guidance to support the delivery of the Play Strategy. For the latest resources, visit: www.playengland.org.uk/pathfinder

The contact details for Play England's regional offices can be found at: www.playengland.org.uk/regions

Make time for Playday 2009!

Playday, the annual celebration of children's right to play, takes place on Wednesday, 5 August.

On Playday and throughout the summer, thousands of children, young people and communities come out to play at locally organised events across the UK.

The Playday 2009 campaign theme is *Make time!* The campaign organisers are calling for everyone to make time for play this Playday. The theme highlights that everyone – from parents, carers and teachers to policy-makers and planners – can make time to support children's right to play.

The campaign recognises that, in our busy and overscheduled lives, it's easy to prioritise other things over play and to think that play is something children just do. To ensure children experience the benefits that play has to offer, adults need to make time and space to enable children to play freely.



Whether you support Playday 2009 by organising a Playday event, coordinating a local *Make time!* campaign or offering support to a local Playday event on the day, getting involved is the first step towards improving play opportunities for children and young people in your local area.

To find out more, please visit www.playday.org.uk

Play England in the regions



A snapshot of Play England activities across the nine regions in England

Play pathfinder progress for Sunderland

The redevelopment of the play area at Keir Hardie is the first project to be completed as part of Sunderland's Wave 1 play pathfinder programme.

The play area was officially opened in December 2008 following extensive consultation with local people in the area; including children and young people, Dubmire Primary School, Barnardo's, the community police team and councillors.

Cllr Kath Rolph, portfolio holder for Neighbourhood and Street Services, who had been involved in the project, said: 'The redevelopment of Keir Hardie play area highlights the importance of improving play opportunities for children and young people. Play

not only has an essential role in helping children and young people to enjoy their childhood, but also helps to improve health, develop educational and social skills and provides fun opportunities for free.'

The new facility includes a basket swing set, a cone climber, a roundabout, mounds and spheres which aim to challenge older children and encourage more adventurous play. Older teenagers will also be able to enjoy a brand new zip-line that has been installed next to the play area.

Audrey Bewick, Deputy Children's Services Manager for Barnardo's Hive Project said: 'It was great to see children and young people getting involved in the project. The redevelopment of the play



area was truly needed in the local community to provide young people with a safe and enjoyable place to spend spare time with friends and help them to lead an active lifestyle.'

www.playengland.org.uk/northeast

South West: Child-friendly public spaces

In January, Play England – South West and Bristol City Council held a joint event called *Children – a share in public space*.

Over 160 delegates attended the conference at Ashton Court Mansion, Bristol which aimed



to increase awareness of the importance of child-friendly public spaces. The event featured workshops, case studies and plenty of networking opportunities.

Speakers included Rose Richards of Bristol City Council, Adrian Voce, Director of Play England, and George Ferguson from Acanthus Mann Architects. A range of workshops were offered with topics including DIY streets, funding, inclusion, and play design.

Julian Commons from the West Cornwall Anti-Social Behaviour Team provided an update on Operation Goodnight, the voluntary curfew on children which ran for six weeks in Redruth, Cornwall during 2008. This sparked an interesting debate about children

and perceptions of anti social behaviour.

In the afternoon there was time for delegates to be playful with Mscape and the Association of Play Industries (API) who both ran interactive sessions. Touchwood Enterprises had an outside stand that included den building, model making and outdoor cooking.

At the end of the day, delegates were invited to a question and answer session with workshop leaders and keynote speakers.

Exhibitors included Playwork Partnerships, the South West Centre for Playwork Education and Training, as well as the CAFE, API, SkillsActive and Sustrans.

www.playengland.org.uk/southwest

A positive difference across the East Midlands

Play England – East Midlands development officers, Claire Townsend and Catherine Lissaman, recently visited some of play areas in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, accompanied by Matthew Rowe, Regional Policy and Partnerships Officer for the Big Lottery Fund in the East Midlands. Matthew is new in post and wanted an introduction to play facilities in the region.

All were impressed by the examples of accessible, risky and inclusive play opportunities for children and young people, and those areas where the 10 design guide principles have been embraced. Even though it was a cold winter day the sites were in use, showing their popularity with the local community.

Matthew said: 'It was great to see how this lottery

funded play equipment has really made a positive difference to children across the East Midlands'.

Catherine said: 'This was my first real opportunity to see some of the play areas on offer in the East Midlands since starting with Play England. I'm really looking forward to sharing these examples of good practice at our regional meetings and hope they will inspire others'.

The East Midlands team are putting together a database of good practice and plan to visit many more sites across the region in the coming months as more projects are completed. If you know of a great play area that you think the team should visit, please contact play-em@ncb.org.uk.

www.playengland.org.uk/eastmidlands

South East: Exciting new play area

Following an office move on the first day back at work after the Christmas break (same building, bigger office), the South East team has been inundated with news about play areas opening around the region and new jobs being created.

Among the news, Medway Council and Groundwork Kent have transformed Hillyfields in Gillingham into a unique play area with the introduction of ditches, boulders, bridges and a mosaic of grass that offers an exciting adventure beyond the traditional equipped play area.

In other news, the play ranger concept has taken off in the South East and new schemes have been announced in the Isle of Wight and Reading, where the feedback has been extremely positive.

www.playengland.org.uk/southeast



Hillyfields play area

In brief

Yorkshire and The Humber: Kirklees Council complete playspace transformation

Kirklees Council have completed their first play area using DCSF funding and have extended existing facilities at Fernlea Recreation Ground to include adventurous and risky play opportunities.

Influence from Play England and inspiration from the newly produced design guide, *Design for Play*, has resulted in exciting and challenging play space designs. The play area at Fernlea Recreation Ground now has an adjacent forest and all existing fencing has been removed to create a natural and adventurous space. A cantilever pendulum swing, a perching post and a ride similar to a suspended skate-park have also been installed to encourage risky and challenging play opportunities.

www.playengland.org.uk/yorkshirehumber

North West: Imaginative play experiences

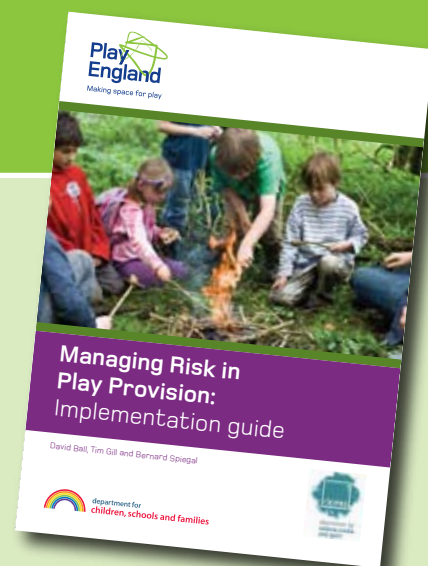
The Y.A.R.D (Youth and Recreation on Darnhill) is finally finished and has been given the seal of approval by local children.

The Y.A.R.D is a space designed for children and young people with the aim of supporting them to reach their full potential. Currently, a youth club runs from the building. However, for Rochdale to achieve their aim, they would like to see other services with similar aspirations using the building as a resource, where they could offer activities for children and young people. Play England North West team said: 'the site offers a wide range of imaginative play experiences for the children and young people of Rochdale'.

www.playengland.org.uk/northwest

Balancing the risks and benefits of play

Play England and government departments leading on play have published the Play Safety Forum's new guide to help play providers strike a balance between the risks and benefits of offering children challenging play opportunities. Here, Tim Gill (co-author along with David Ball and Bernard Spiegel), pulls out some of the key points in what could be a pivotal challenge to the 'health and safety culture'.



When it comes to play safety, the professional climate has improved dramatically over the last few years. The Play Safety Forum's (PSF) groundbreaking position statement: *Managing risk in play provision*, has had a key role in this, as PSF chair Robin Sutcliffe made clear in these pages a year or so ago (and if you are not familiar with the position statement, download it from the Play England website and read it before you do anything else).



Yet the PSF statement, as a 'hearts and minds' resource, could only take people so far. PSF and Play England recognised this when they decided to develop more detailed guidance: a decision roundly welcomed by both the government and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) who have published and formally endorsed the document respectively. Now that the publication – snappily entitled *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide* – is out, it should be obvious how it builds on the values and principles of the original PSF position statement.

At the heart of the guide is the move from risk assessment to risk-benefit assessment (RBA).

In simple terms, providers are advised to show how their judgements about risk and safety take into account the benefits to children. The name of the game is no longer risk reduction, but balancing risks and benefits, just as the PSF position statement said it should be.

This idea, while it sounds revolutionary, is not uncommon in health economics, and has cropped up in different forms within playwork. But the guide marks the first official endorsement of the concept in a broader health and safety context. The Health and Safety Executive, in giving the document its support, recognises that a properly undertaken RBA is a 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessment process, and hence is acceptable under health and safety law.

Just as important as RBA is the guide's message that risk management is a job for providers first and foremost – not a job for inspectors, or lawyers, or insurers, or anybody else. What is more, providers have to be clear about why they are providing play opportunities in the first place, and clear about the importance of challenging, adventurous play experiences as part of this; which means having a widely-understood and accepted statement about their approach to risk – perhaps as part of a play policy.

The PSF statement's three sentence summary statement (see page 11) aims to help with this, of course, and many local authorities and others have found it helpful to discuss and formally adopt it. The guide gives this process meaning and relevance, because such policies make explicit the underpinning values that have to be applied in real-life cases.

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.

Play Safety Forum, 2002

One of the merits of RBA is that it helps to place guidance and advice – for instance, industry standards for fixed play equipment, or guidance from safety agencies – in the right context. Such sources are no more or less than opinions, whose relevance to a given locality or situation need to be determined by the provider in the light of their objectives and their view of what constitutes a good play environment. Playworkers, play consultants and others steeped in play values rightly have a major role in contributing to these judgments. Of course the views of play equipment inspectors or child safety experts need to be taken into account, but they are not the last word. In real-life situations, local factors can mean that it is reasonable not to follow them.

Both RBA and an emphasis on values and policies fit well with the mind-set of many in the play sector. Nonetheless, some who read the guide will be disappointed. Their problem, I suspect, will not be with the overall approach, but with the lack of definitive answers to some practical questions. Anyone hoping for the 'right answers' about, say, impact attenuating surfacing, or fencing, will find that the guide raises more questions than answers.



This apparent fence sitting (pardon the pun) is quite deliberate. Co-authors David Ball, Bernard Spiegel and I, strongly believe that managing risk is a complex business, and rarely reducible to simple rules or procedures. We would go further: the search for mechanistic scoring systems and one-size-fits-all answers are part of the

problem, not part of the solution. We believe that we will do the job well only when we accept that managing risk in play is not rocket science. It is, to steal the words of risk guru Professor John Adams, more complicated than that.

About the authors

David Ball, Professor of Risk Management at Middlesex University and Director for its Centre for Decision Analysis and Risk Management, has over three decades of research experience focusing on how governments, organisations and individuals make decisions when faced with difficult choices, particularly those involved in risk.

Tim Gill is one of the UK's leading thinkers on childhood. His book *No Fear: Growing up in a risk-averse society*, published in 2007, argues that childhood is being undermined by the growth of risk aversion. Since leaving the former Children's Play Council (now Play England) in 2004, Tim has advised political parties and think tanks across the political spectrum.

Bernard Speigal is Principal of PLAYLINK, an independent play and informal leisure consultancy working in the areas of design, planning, strategy, local engagement and organisational development. A theme running through all Bernard's work is the need to understand and value risk: life is utterly dull without it.

About the guide

Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide has been jointly published by Department for Children, Schools and Families, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Play England and the Play Safety Forum.

In December 2008, the government published the Play Strategy for England. As the Government's national delivery partner, Play England is producing guidance documents to support the delivery of the Play Strategy, including this guide and its sister publication *Design for Play*, published in July 2008

The Play Safety Forum is an independent forum hosted by Play England as part of Play England's work to research, develop and advocate effective policies and good practice for play provision. The implementation guide builds on the Play Safety Forum's position statement, *Managing risk in play provision*, first published in 2002.

***Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide* is available free of charge from DCSF publications: www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications or it can be downloaded from the Play England website: www.playengland.org.uk/resources**

What's the story with play associations?

Play associations are voluntary organisations that are often a crucial piece of the play provider jigsaw puzzle. Usually based within a single geographic area or local authority borough, they have expert knowledge about the play opportunities in their neighbourhoods and play needs of local children. Nick Jackson, Director of Haringey Play Association, gives an overview of some of the challenges facing play associations in London.

Community action

Play associations in London first sprang up in the Seventies, along with many of the first adventure playgrounds, when there was a ground swell of community activism: many people wanted to get involved in making their communities a better place to live in.

Much of this effort was focused around children and young people, and a growing recognition that childhood and growing up in an urban environment – whilst having positive aspects – also presented particular problems in relation to the barriers that were put in the way of children having the wealth of free play opportunities of a previous generation.

Often the play associations played a crucial role in helping people set up and run numerous out-of-school activities. There was always lots to learn about setting up an organisation, employing staff, and making sure that what was provided actually met the needs of the children and young people it was designed to help, and complying with all the legislation that needed to be adhered to.

Of course, the play associations also had a major role in campaigning for relevant and appropriate provision, for example: child centred, personally directed play, for its own sake – and making sure staff were aware of their roles – playwork as a recognised profession – as well as promoting and

advocating for play within local government and beyond, to ensure the sustainability of projects.

Child-friendly communities

Now, thirty years later, it would seem that all these functions are just as relevant and perhaps even more important. Our urban society is ever less 'child-friendly', and there are increasing rafts of legislation around working with children, running an organisation, employment, and health and safety, to name but a few.

And people's ideas of what makes a healthy childhood are often mixed and confused by false fears perpetrated by the media, different backgrounds and cultures, and people's own varied experiences growing up themselves.

Some of these original play associations are still around and thriving. Some new ones have been set up over the last ten years, endeavouring to fulfil the same tasks, by and large, that prompted the first ones to develop.

The challenges

So what are the particular issues and problems that face play associations today? No prizes for guessing the first one: funding!

Financial sustainability is always top of the agenda when working in the voluntary sector. Getting adequate, long-term revenue funding, in order to recruit and retain quality staff is always a problem, and the recent changes in the third sector, particularly the move from grants to commissioning and contracts, has altered the way that organisations operate. Instead of deciding for ourselves what the issues are that we want to address, we are increasingly having the agendas set by local government and others, and having to try and fit these into the work that we think should be done.

Linked to this is governance. Good trustees are hard to come by these days. Why should someone give up their valuable time to sit on a management committee of an organisation that increasingly has





to look like and act like a business; chasing contracts wherever it can get them?

The infrastructure and capacity building support that play associations provide is hugely important, but often undervalued and frequently goes unrecognised. Usually done by over worked staff who have a regular job with the association – fulfilling a contract or managing a project – but they know that in order for the work to have any lasting effect and be meaningful they have to spend lots of extra unpaid time working with the people who matter in the local communities and on the ground. Otherwise, when the project finishes or the contract expires (as is always the case) it all comes to an end.

Dedicated, quality staff are at the heart of any good organisation. Some of those who work for play associations have enormous knowledge and information about the local areas that they work in, as well as tremendous respect from the people they work with. But who can blame them for looking for other jobs when they don't know whether they will be in work from one month to the next.

Local play experts

In the London boroughs that have currently got play associations, they are invariably the main drivers behind the local play strategies and developments around play. They act as advocates, support the professionalisation of playwork and provide many opportunities for those who may look towards playwork as a profession or want to improve their practice. They continually promote good practice and have been instrumental in implementing and supporting groups to attain Quality In Play (originally developed by Hackney Play Association)

- helping to set minimum standards for children's play experiences.

Managing to be influential at a national, regional and local level, 'Think global, act local' could be one of our defining phrases. Essentially, we make what everyone else talks about happen on the ground. We are also a critical friend – to our local authorities and organisations, regional, and national bodies representing our interests. This in itself can be a difficult role as no one wants to bite the hand that feeds it.

Support your play association

So what do we want? Well, for one thing, if you know of a play association in your area, give them a bit of support, and make sure that if you talk to anyone important that they are aware of the play associations' contribution – maybe even become a trustee. Perhaps just a little bit more recognition from the larger regional and national organisations of the important work that we do would be good. We are not going away, but it would be terrible if you never missed us until we're gone!

Find out more about Haringey Play Association at:
www.haringey-play.org.uk

Contact the Children's Play Information Service to find your nearest play association.
www.ncb.org.uk/cpis

The Play Strategy contains a commitment to involving local communities and the third sector in the running of play projects. Play England's **Neighbourhood Play programme** has been developed to support this. See Pages 6 and 7 for further information and contact details.

Play training

Review of the Playwork Education and Training Quality Assurance Systems

SkillsActive is pleased to announce a review of the quality assurance systems for playwork education and training and would like to invite employers, practitioners, training providers and other key stakeholders in the playwork sector the opportunity to get involved and give us their views.

The review started in December last year and will run until August 2009. The systems under review are: the Code of Practice for training providers, the endorsement system for training courses and approval process for qualifications (including higher education), the register of trainers, and the approval process for products such as books and training packs.

Play Wales has been appointed to undertake the review, which will culminate with a final report and new paperwork going to the Playwork Education and Training Council (PETC UK) in the autumn for sign-off.

This is a UK-wide review, and aims to streamline systems so that they can be accessed by other sectors in SkillsActive's remit. A short term steering group will be set up, to include members from each of the SkillsActive sub sectors, representatives from across the UK, key officers

from the Playwork Unit, members from the SkillsActive Standing Committees and employer representatives.

There will be wide consultation with users and non-users of the current quality systems in the sector. This will include open questionnaires and/or telephone interviews to get the views of trainers and providers in the playwork sector, both those who have already had involvement in one or more of the current processes and a selected number of those who expressed an interest but have not taken it forward.

There will also be consultation with relevant SkillsActive playwork committees via group discussions during meeting time and individual questionnaires or telephone interviews. In addition, we will be gathering the views of key people within SkillsActive's sub sectors such as sport and recreation, health and fitness, and the outdoors, as well as relevant groups in the four nations.

Regular briefings will be posted on the SkillsActive website to keep everyone informed of progress, so if you want to have your say on the future of our quality assurance systems, look out for announcements at www.skillsactive.com

Playwork People 4 research

Playwork People is SkillsActive's biennial survey of the playwork workforce. We survey employers and employees working in the sector to identify and understand the profile and characteristics of the workforce, including levels of qualification, recruitment and vacancy issues. We also aim to identify skills gaps in the current workforce. The aim is to collect enough responses to enable a regional analysis of results for the nine regions of England.

Our last survey, Playwork People 3, found that:

- just over half of those surveyed did not have a qualification specific to playwork
- only 4.7% of those surveyed had a playwork qualification at Level 4 or above
- eight out of ten businesses said that they found skills specific to playwork hard to find when recruiting for vacancies.

A good response to Playwork People 4 will help to monitor any change in findings such as these.

Playwork People 4 will be starting soon and we urge as many employers and employees working in the sector as possible to fill in a survey. Up-to-date and reliable research is of great importance to us as we continue to communicate the needs of the sector both to the government and our partners.

Access to Playwork People 3 can be found at:

www.skillsactive.com/resources/research

Let's Celebrate the Spirit of Play

Now running in its eighth year, *Spirit of Play* – to be held on 14 March at the Runnymede Centre in Surrey – will focus on workforce development within sport and active leisure.

Delivered by SkillsActive, the conference will unite employers, playworkers, local authorities, and education and training providers in the South East region. The event will offer a unique insight into new programmes, products and services designed to help them reach their potential.

The conference programme includes workshops ranging from discussions about the Playwork Principles and Quality in Play – the Play England quality assurance system – to playing with 'rubbish' to make art and firing huge catapults!

The conference will also provide information on the activepassport™ for Playwork, a unique web-based facility administered by SkillsActive, for recording skills, training, volunteering and qualifications to benefit both playwork employees and employers.

Activepassport™ for Playwork has an integral role in professionalising the playwork workforce and meeting the objectives set out in the Children's Plan.



Attendees will have the opportunity to hear from keynote speakers Stuart Lester, discussing key findings from *Play for a Change*; Doug Nicholls, National Secretary of the Children & Youth Workers Union/Unite on the work around pay and conditions for the sector; and Peter Dixon, children's poet and author of *Colour of My Dreams*.

By booking to attend *Spirit of Play*, your organisation will receive complimentary SkillsActive membership for 12 months (offer valid for current non members only).

The closing date for bookings is 6 March 2009.

For more information or to download a booking form, please visit: www.skillsactive.com/events

Leadership and management training for playworkers

To deliver the Children's Plan commitments to further professionalise the play workforce, the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) is leading on a range of developments with SkillsActive to support 200 people per year working in leadership and management roles across the play workforce.

These developments will enable those playworkers to benefit from high-quality, graduate level leadership and management training and development and equip them to lead and manage in the context of integrated children's services.

The programme will be offered in three phases with the first phase of training starting early in 2009. Further phases will start in 2009/10 and 2010/11.

For further information, contact CWDC: playwork@cwdcouncil.org.uk

Play Shaper pilot programme

Playwork Partnerships have started recruiting participants for the pilot programme for Play Shaper, the cross-professional training programme that supports the national Play Strategy.

SkillsActive, Playwork Partnerships and Play England are working in partnership to bring together professionals who build, design and manage local neighbourhoods to improve opportunities for children's play.

Participants are being recruited from 10 local authorities who were Wave 1 pathfinders. Twenty participants from each local authority will be able to join the free one-day training programme.

For further information, contact Claire Mills at Playwork Partnerships: cemills@glos.ac.uk

SkillsActive

Shaping Skills for the Future

This page has been compiled by Uzma Ahmad.
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**QUALITY
IN PLAY**
Quality assurance
for play providers

Quality in Play is a quality assurance scheme for school-age play and childcare provision. Delivered by Play England as a national programme, it sets standards that play providers should meet. The core values are that the play environment, organisational framework and the wider context are all in support of children's play.

Spreading the message

The national rollout of the revised Quality in Play programme featured in the national Play Strategy published in December. Quality in Play is cited in Chapter 7 alongside a range of policy frameworks and guidance on developing the play workforce and making better play opportunities a central part of improving children's well-being.

Over 100 copies of the new *Quality in Play* manual have been distributed since its launch at the Play England annual members meeting in November, and the team have been busy responding to enquiries from around the country. We've also been attending regional play network events around the country, handing out flyers and providing information on the programme.

Mentor training

The first training session for new Quality in Play mentors was completed in December. There are now 12 new mentors throughout the country, including Cornwall, Bristol, London, Worcestershire, Dorset, and Buckinghamshire. If you would like to find a mentor in your area to help you in completing the Quality in Play programme, please contact the team using the details below.

The two-day training course is for anyone who meets the person specification and would like to work as an independent mentor, or who is preparing to become a Quality in Play assessor. We particularly welcome applications from play and childcare staff working in support, development or training settings in local authorities, voluntary sector organisations or children's services, and from experienced practising playworkers.

The Quality in Play team is based at Play England's main office.

Quality in Play
8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE

Tel 020 7833 6838
Email qip@ncb.org.uk
www.playengland.org.uk/quality

More training sessions are planned for spring 2009:

- 2 - 3 April 2009 in Taunton

If you are interested in attending one of the sessions, application forms are available from the events page on the Play England website. We can also arrange for individually tailored training sessions for your group, please contact the team to find out more.

Accreditation under the previous programme

Play providers working to the earlier Quality in Play model (prior to the launch in November 2008) need to submit their applications for accreditation or re-accreditation by the end of March 2009, as after this date only applications under the revised system will be considered. Providers who have been accredited under the previous model should find that moving over to the new model should be a straightforward process as the core values remain the same and the system has been simplified.

The independent Quality in Play panel will also be meeting in February to review applications under the previous model.

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for a booking form please contact:
kate@playwales.org.uk or
phone 02920 486050

**spirit
of adventure play**
6/7 May 2009

joining us at this year's conference in Cardiff:
David Sobel - Antioch University New England,
Keith Towler - Children's Commissioner for
Wales, Jane Hutt A.M Minister for Children,
Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills,
Adrian Voce, Mick Conway - Play England,
Bob Hughes, Bernard Spiegel, Professor David
Ball, Ian MacIntyre, Ali Wood, Perry Else plus
many more...

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Resources and events

Book review

Foundations of Playwork

Edited by Fraser Brown and Chris Taylor

Open University Press 2008
ISBN-9780335222919



Foundations of Playwork is an eclectic collection of 56 essays, covering a variety of playwork topics from how to manage a play project, anecdotes of good practice, through values and ethics and good practice to cutting edge theoretical models, and the recent policy situation within each of the UK nations.

The style of short essays makes each of the topics very accessible

to the enquiring reader. At times the idiosyncratic nature of the chapters and the widely differing styles; Haki Kapasi's poem on racism, Ben Tawil's observations on The Venture and Play England's Mick Conway on the Playwork Principles, define this as a volume to be dipped into rather than following any real coherent narrative.

Brown and Taylor have included some old favourites from the field: well-known names such as Arthur Battram on madcap chaos theory and Tim Gill on natural play. However a voice has been given to some new writers that have brought some refreshing and sometimes challenging perspectives; most notably for me the work on feminist perspectives by Kilvington and

Wood. The fast-changing play policy scene is reflected in the fact that the two chapters by Adrian Voce - about national play policy and local play strategies - were evidently written before the government's Fair Play consultation.

As a practitioner, I felt that the format of short essays was barely enough to gain my interest and often wanted more depth and exploration of the issues. The book, however, is a comprehensive introduction to many of the fundamental concepts and current thinking in playwork and, if, after such brief tastings, the reader is left wanting more, then the book will have achieved its purpose.

By Chris Snell, Play England Regional Development Officer.

What's new at the Children's Play Information Service?

Compiled by Anna Kassman-McKerrell.

Abstracts of new arrivals are available for reference at the CPIS. These publications are not for sale from the CPIS.

Photocopies of journal articles may be provided at a cost of £4.00 per article, subject to copyright restrictions. Please contact the CPIS for further information.

Children's mobility

Gender differences in children's pathways to independent mobility

Brown, B and others

Article in *Children's Geographies*, vol.6, no.4 (Nov). pp385-402.

Presents empirical findings relating to the independent mobility of children aged 8- to 12-years old in a south London borough and in a suburban county north of London. In both locations, boys appear to enjoy greater mobility than girls, and become independent much earlier. However, closer analysis suggests that girls

manage to attain similar levels of independence from adults by travelling more in groups.

Games and activities

The Cally kids play inclusive games

Hocker, P

London: Islington Play Association, 2008.

A selection of inclusive games and activities, with ideas from children on how to adapt the games.

Available from Islington Play Association, tel: 020 7607 9637

Play - design

Boundaries and barriers

Parry, S

Article in *Spaces & Places*, no.4 (Dec). pp16-19.

Barriers, both physical, such as fences, and imagined, are often designed into parks and can prevent full use and enjoyment of user groups within the community. Drawing on visits to public and play spaces in a number of European countries, the author highlights the benefits of not having boundaries.

Public space lessons: designing and planning for play

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

London: CABE Space, 2008.

The £235m of government funding for play presents an opportunity to get the next generation of play spaces right. This briefing highlights best practice in play design and urges greater use of creative, natural play spaces.

Available from: www.cabe.org.uk

Play - general

Cats and portals: video games, learning and play

Gee, J.P

Article in *American Journal of Play*, vol.1, no.2, 2008, pp229-245.

The author builds on arguments he has made elsewhere that good commercial video games foster deep learning and problem solving and that such games promote mastery as a form of play. Argues that some good video games engage players with an important type of play - discovery play.

The nature of play: an overview

Henricks, T

Article in *American Journal of Play*, vol.1, no.2, 2008, pp157-180.

Describes a range of perspectives and concerns that inform scholarly understandings of play. Following Johan Huizinga, the author offers his own conclusions concerning the nature of play.

The state of play: disadvantage, play and children's well-being

Sutton, L

Article in *Social Policy and Society*, vol.7, no.4 (Oct). 2008, pp537-549.

Explores how play differs depending on children's social background. It highlights the importance of street play to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who engage in street play as a consequence of having fewer play alternatives. Calls for a change in attitude towards street play and greater recognition of its importance and value. Discusses children's play and well-being in relation to government policy.

The value of play: constructions of play in government policy in England

Powell, S

Article in *Children & Society*, vol.23, no.1, 2008, pp29-42.

Reports one aspect of the findings from an assessment of the impact of national policies on children's opportunities for play in England, which was commissioned by the former Children's Play Council in 2006. Systematic analysis of policy documents and interviews with participants from local authorities and the voluntary sector showed that the government did not promote a consistent conceptualisation of play in England. Concludes that this inconsistency has resulted in gaps in the mechanism for delivery of extensive, sustainable and equitable play opportunities across the country.

Perspectives on play: learning for life

Brock, A and others

London: Pearson Education, 2009.

Explores and debates the theory of play. Considers the psychological, educational and playwork perspectives on play, including social, cultural and gender perspectives. Focuses on play for different age groups, covering early years through to primary school age. Looks at how practitioners support play in early years setting, in primary schools, through playwork and through play and arts therapy.

Playwork**A playworker's guide to understanding children's behaviour: working with the 8-12 age group**

Clifford-Poston, A
London: Karnac, 2008.

Looks at how the way playworkers think about children's behaviour affects their way of reacting to it. Covers a variety of issues including worried children, self harm, boredom, antisocial children, lying, stealing, bullying, and problems related to the family.

Events**7th Birmingham Playwork Conference**

3-4 March 2009, Eastbourne

The conference will feature round table discussions and a number

of sessions on all aspects of playwork.

Contact: Meynell Games

Email: info@meynellgames.org

Spirit of Play 2009

14 March 2009, Chertsey, Surrey

SkillsActive Playwork South East's annual playworker conference, with speakers, exhibitors and a wide range of workshops.

Contact: Hanna Boyce

hanna.boyce@skillsactive.com

www.skillsactive.com/playwork/arounduk/southeast/playwork

ParkCity

24 March 2008, London

Organised by CABE and Natural England, the conference will look at the emerging role of green infrastructure in creating sustainable towns and cities and successful places.

Contact: ParkCity Conference

Office: www.parkcity.org.uk

Spirit of Adventure Play

6-7 May 2009, Cardiff

Play Wales annual conference

www.playwales.org.uk

LSA 2009: Leisure experiences: participating, planning, providing

7-9 July 2009, Canterbury

Call for abstracts. Hosted by Canterbury Christ Church University. Themes include: performing, learning, locating and risk, and papers on play are welcomed.

www.leisure-studies-association.info/LSAWEB/2009/Main.html

Children's Play Information Service

The **Children's Play Information Service** (CPIS) is the national library and information service on children's play. CPIS has a large reference collection of materials on children's play, and provides a number of services, including an enquiry service.

CPIS is part of NCB Library and Information Service, and is funded

by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Big Lottery Fund through Play England.

CPIS is open for enquiries and visitors, Monday to Friday from 10.00am to 5.00pm. Visits are by appointment only.

Children's Play Information Service

NCB, 8 Wakley Street,
London EC1V 7QE

Tel: 020 7843 6303/6026

Email: cpis@ncb.org.uk

Web: www.ncb.org.uk/cpis

What are you playing at!

Jack and Jessica on Blacon Adventure Playground

Play England's Laura McCumiskey, based at the North West regional office, decided to find out what 10-year-old brother and sister, Jack and Jessica, liked about their local adventure playground: Blacon (The Venny) in Chester.

Jack

I've been coming to The Venny for about two or three years, I live on the estate and it's only five minutes away. My favourite thing here is the different swings: we play games on them like borders. I also enjoy helping to look after the animals and playing in the mud when it's been raining! The Venny is better than other playgrounds because we learn and play more games, and we're allowed to do what we want. Last winter when there was snow, we had big snowball fights! Sometimes we have campfires too, we cook food on them like sausages and bacon, or we toast marshmallows. The only thing I would change about The Venny is to make it bigger!

Jessica

I've been coming to The Venny since I was seven with Jack, my brother. I love seeing Jenny and Kyle (staff) and playing with them. My favourite thing is doing arts and crafts, because I like drawing and painting. My favourite thing to play on outside is the big slide, it's really high: it would be good if we could have even bigger slides! I've got lots of different friends here, and it's nice because you see different people here everyday. I wouldn't change anything about The Venny, because I love it here. But I do want some bigger slides!

About Blacon Adventure Playground

Blacon opened in 1971. It is an open access, staffed site that features various fixed play structures, natural wooded areas, an indoor area, an outdoor sheltered activity area and a workshop.

The playground provides a wide range of play activities including various indoor and outdoor sports, arts and crafts, archery, and circus skills. The playground site is even home to some animals, including a wallaby! The children and young people help to clean, feed and generally look after the animals. New play equipment is often designed by the children and built by staff in the on site workshop.

The site is open between 10.00 am and 7.00 pm through the week, and 11.00 am and 6.00 pm at weekends. There is no charge, and it is open to children up to the age of 16 years.

During school hours, Blacon works alongside the local Youth Offending Team. Last year, the adventure playground was awarded £60,000 for continual development of the site over the next three years.

