



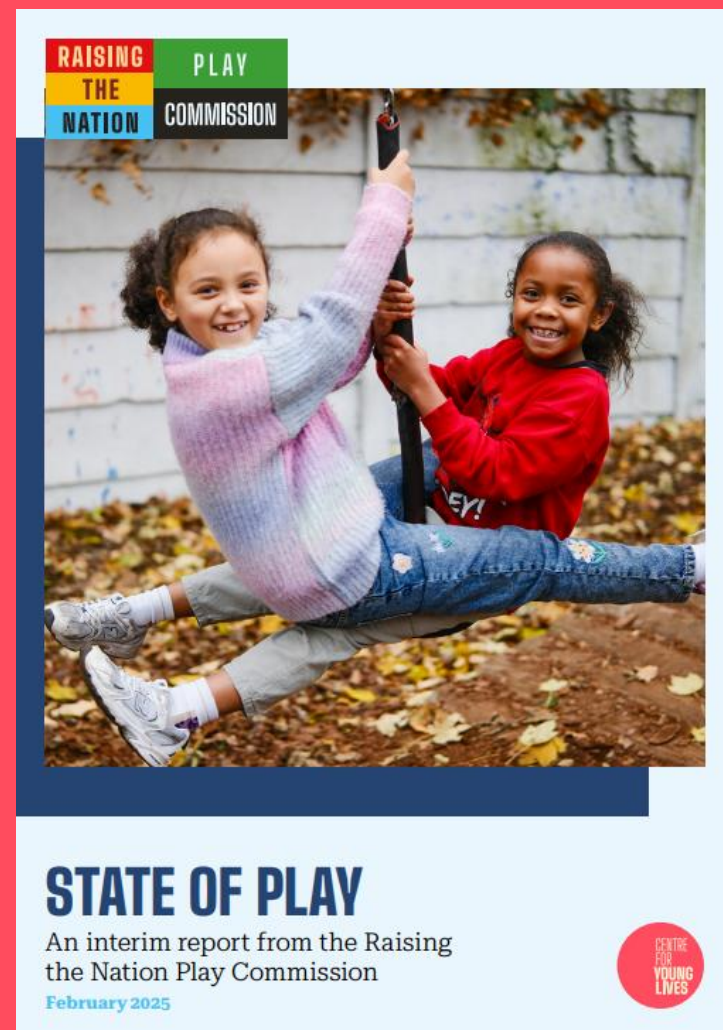
Exploring Play Sufficiency

Welcome Cllr Jon Hubbard, Vice Chair, LGA children and young people board
Raising the Nation Play Commission Ben Firth, Policy researcher, Centre for Young lives
The need for a play sufficiency duty Tim Gill, author, independent consultant, and Play Commissioner
Exploring the approach in Wales Nathania Minard, Senior Play Development Officer, Conwy County Borough Council
The importance of play to childhood Julika Niehaus, Portfolio Manager, Impact on Urban Health
Growing a play-centred council Chris Duncan, Policy, Strategy and Funding Manager, Bristol City Council
Q&A

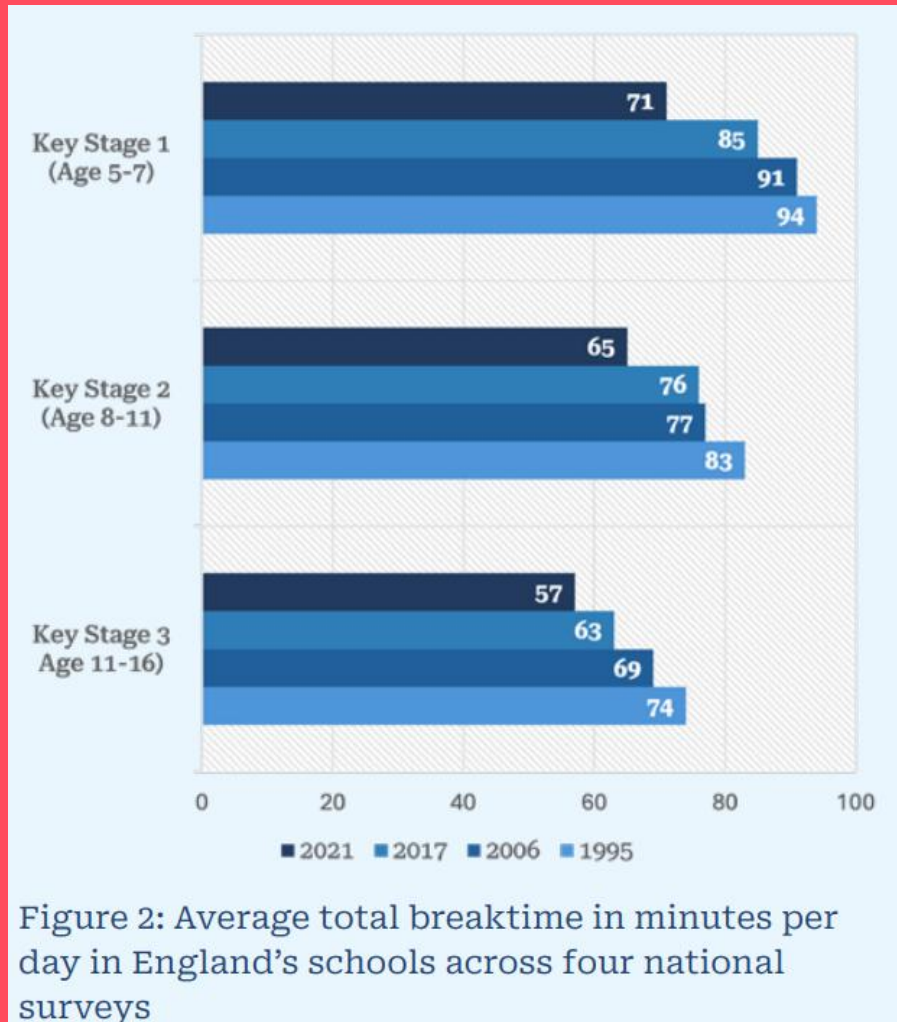
About the Play Commission



- Led by Paul Lindley OBE, in partnership with the Centre for Young Lives.
- A year-long campaign to spark a national conversation about the barriers to play and how to overcome them.
- Bringing together experts and a wealth of pre-existing evidence and ideas. Our [interim report](#) was published last month.



Our findings (so far)



- **Learning through play:** Play is foundation for life. Children develop essential cognitive, social, and emotional skills. This happens everywhere – at school, at home, and in public.
- **Time to play:** Time to play across children's lives is being lost. In schools, breaktimes are being eroded. At home, children are often dependent on time-poor adults to take them to play space.

Our findings (so far)

- **Places to play:** Space in public is being lost to a variety of factors.
 - Feelings of unsafety due to crime and traffic
 - Physical loss of space to vehicles
 - Closure or poor-maintenance of playgrounds
- We know there are significant funding challenges facing local authorities. The collective annual park budgets for England fell by more than £350 million in real terms between 2011 and 2023.
- There has also been a shift in attitudes towards play. Driven by an absence of any policy on a national level, play has been de-prioritised.

Emerging recommendations

- **A cross-departmental National Play Strategy for England.** Led by DCMS, building on the seminal Play Strategy of 2008. This should include a long-term vision, backed by funding, to ensure children have the time, space, and permission to play.
- **A play sufficiency duty, bringing England in line with Scotland and Wales.**



Next steps for the Play Commission

- Our **final report** will be published on June 11th, the next International Day of Play. It will add to the findings in our interim report, as well as covering the Commission's remaining four themes:
 - Right to play, digital play, parents and play, health and play.
- The Commission will continue to **gather evidence** through evidence sessions, visits, and through an ongoing programme of youth engagement.
- The Commission will continue to **make the case for play to Government**

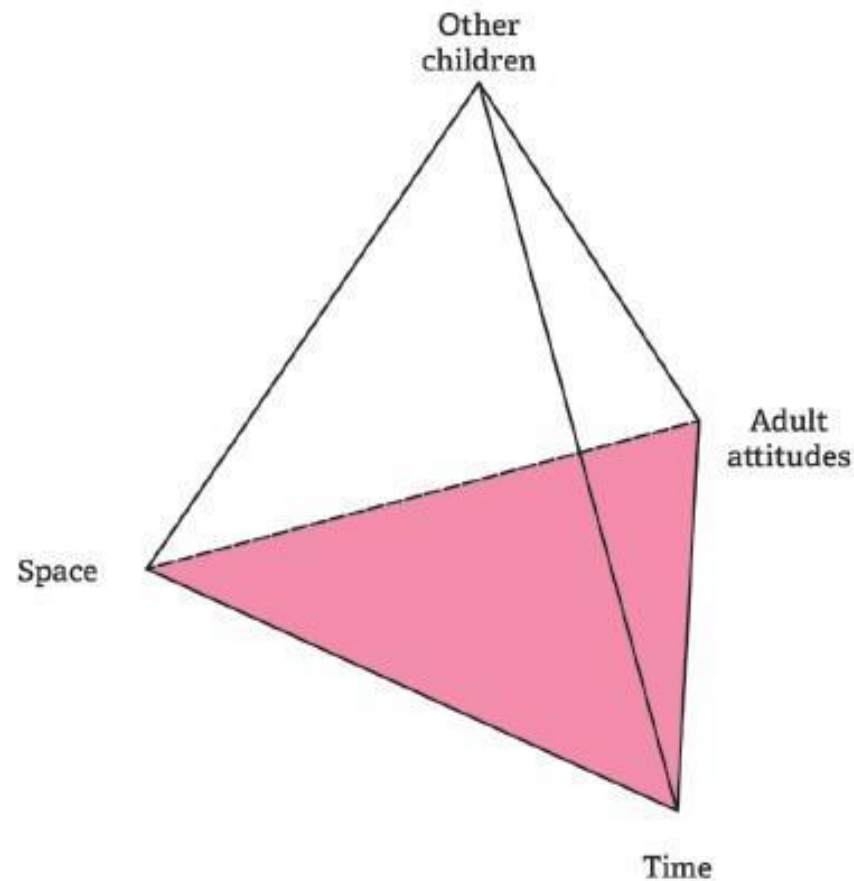
Getting Serious About Play (Again)



Play Sufficiency as a tool for change

1. Play is being squeezed out of children's lives
2. What is Play Sufficiency?
3. Making it happen

1. Play being squeezed out of children's lives



*“We need to create **time** and **space** for children to engage in spontaneous play, recreation and creativity, and to promote **societal attitudes** that support and encourage such activity.”*

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,
General Comment 17 (2013)

Space

- Fewer playgrounds

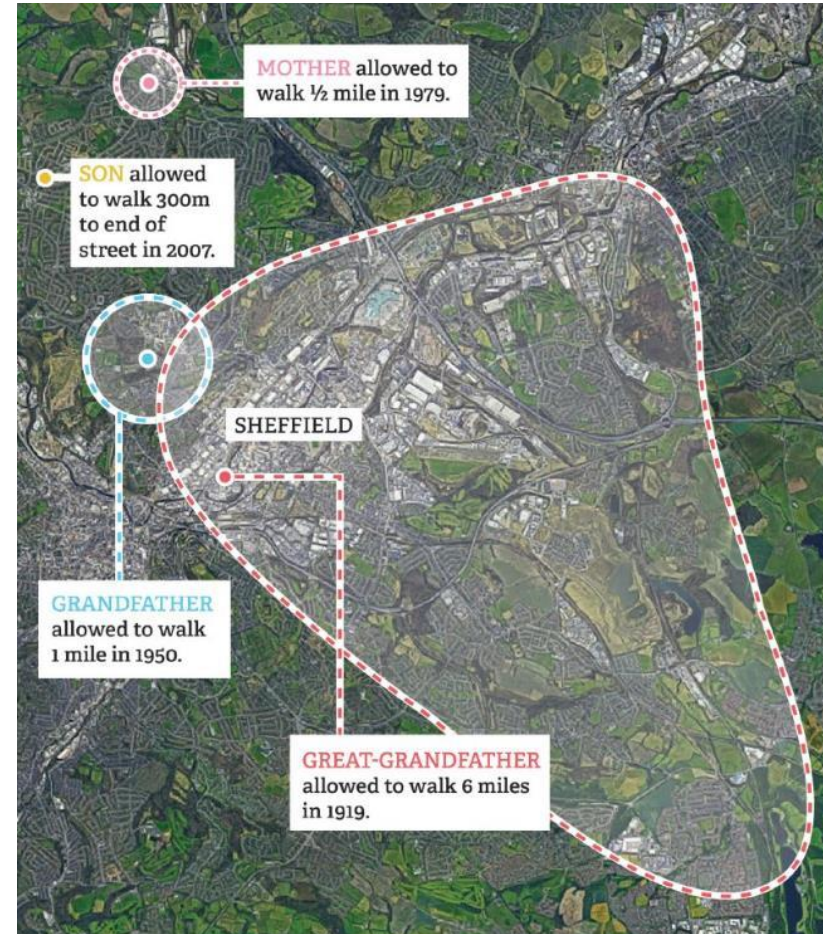
2 million+ children in England (32%) aged up to 9 do not live within 10-mins walk of a playground.

- Less 'playing out'

27% of children said they play out on the street, compared with 81% of adults aged 55-64 when they were children

- Less mobility

In 1980 over 80% of 7-8 year olds travelled actively to school; in 2010 under 10% did

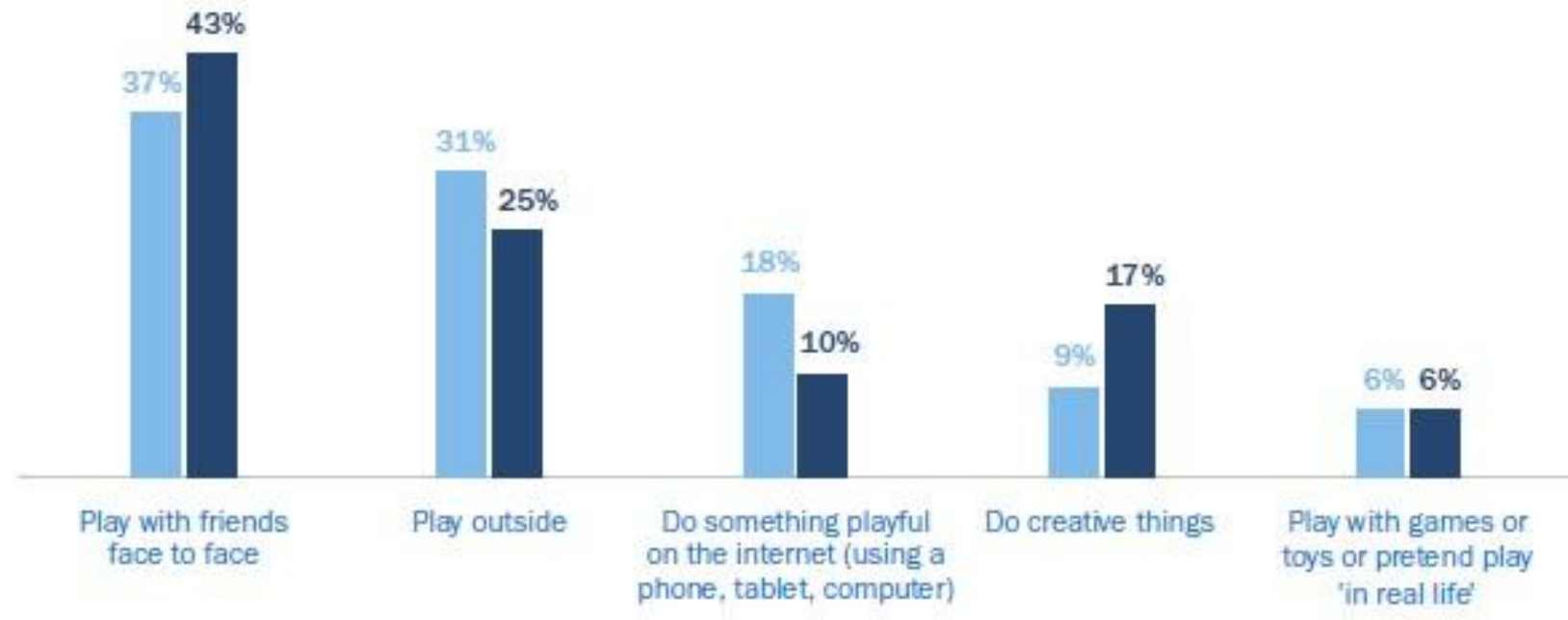


Busting the myth about children & tech

Figure 16: Which one of these activities would you like to do more often?

(Base: 1033 6 to 17-year-olds)

Boys
Girls





2. What is Play Sufficiency?

- Assessment & improvement
- Strategic, long-term, child-centred approach
- Working across silos

Play Sufficiency in Leeds

Leeds is leading the way in England by becoming the first city to complete a Play Sufficiency Assessment.

This is about much more than thinking about play in playgrounds. It is about the time, space and permissions needed for children's play to flourish in their homes, doorsteps, streets, community spaces. It's also about play flourishing as a priority in the local authority policy and practice.

Put simply, it's about more children playing in Leeds, more of the time.

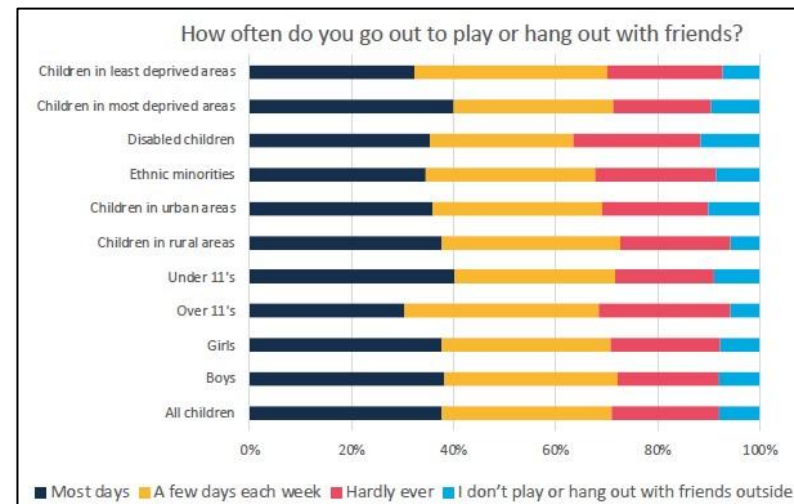
National policy: Wales

- Statutory duty on LAs
- Guidance & toolkit
- Support from Play Wales
- Space/Time/Permission
- Key indicator: satisfaction
- Good data from 2019 & 2022



Wales: overall picture

- Most children satisfied, but...
 - Rise in % who never/rarely play out from 2019-2022
 - Fall in satisfaction (COVID?)
- Age differences in space for play
 - Young children -> Formal spaces more important
 - Teens -> informal spaces more important
- Lower satisfaction in some key groups
 - Disabled children
 - Ethnic minority children



Case Study: Wrexham

- Trend data from 2012

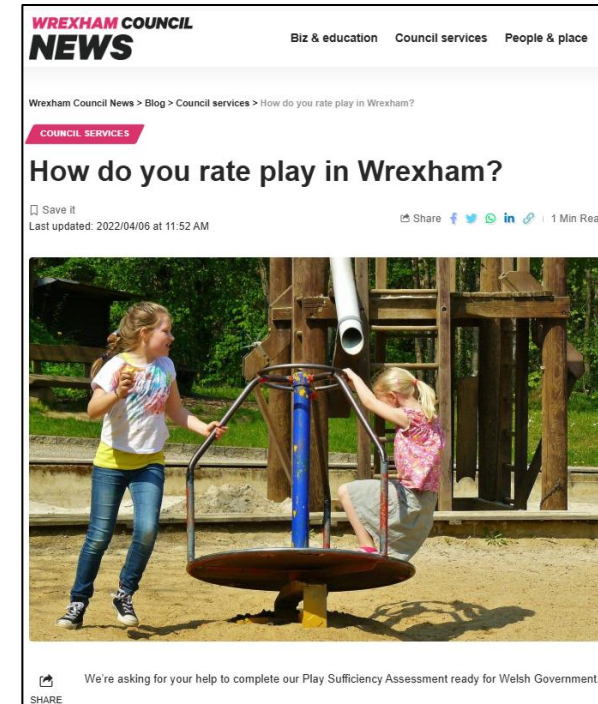
Surveys 2012, 2015, 2018, 2021 (2025 planned)

~1,000 year 5s (aged 9 or 10) for most years

Same time of year (April/May)

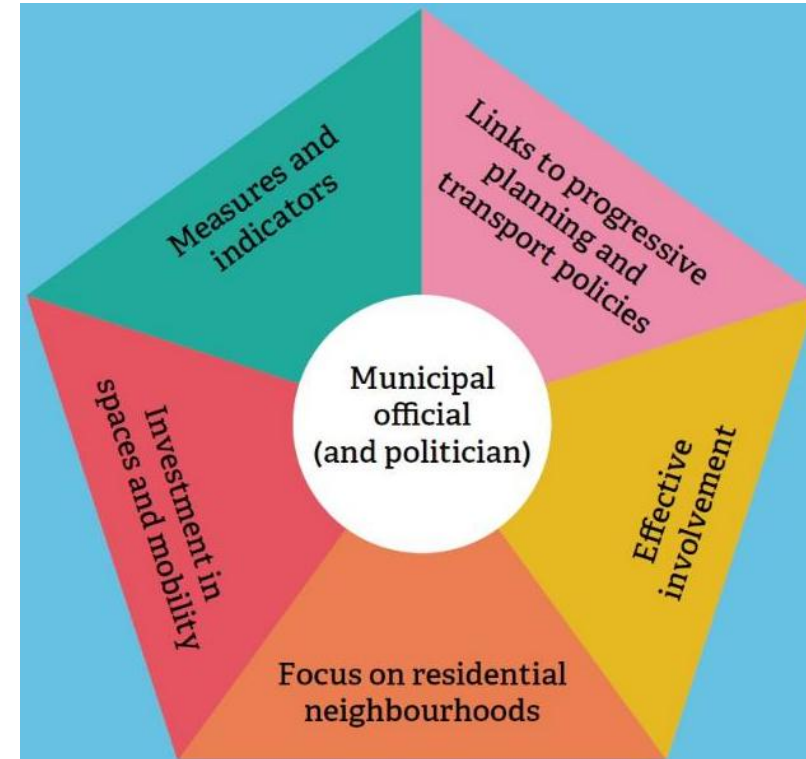
- 2012 -> 2018: 10% increase

- 7% drop in 2021 (likely due to lockdown conditions)



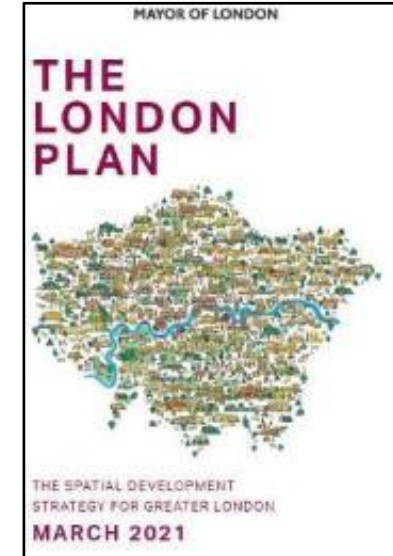
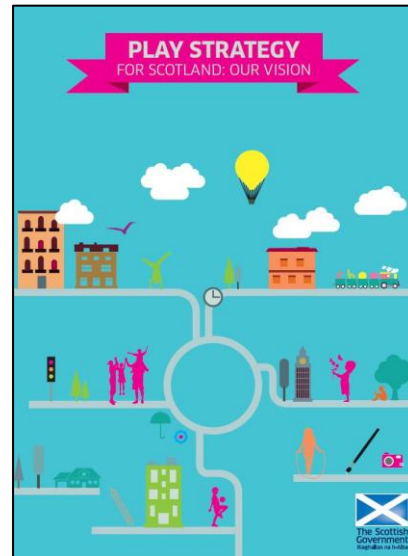
3. Making it happen

- Find a catalyst/champion
- Learn from experience
- Exploit policy win-wins
- Keep children at the centre

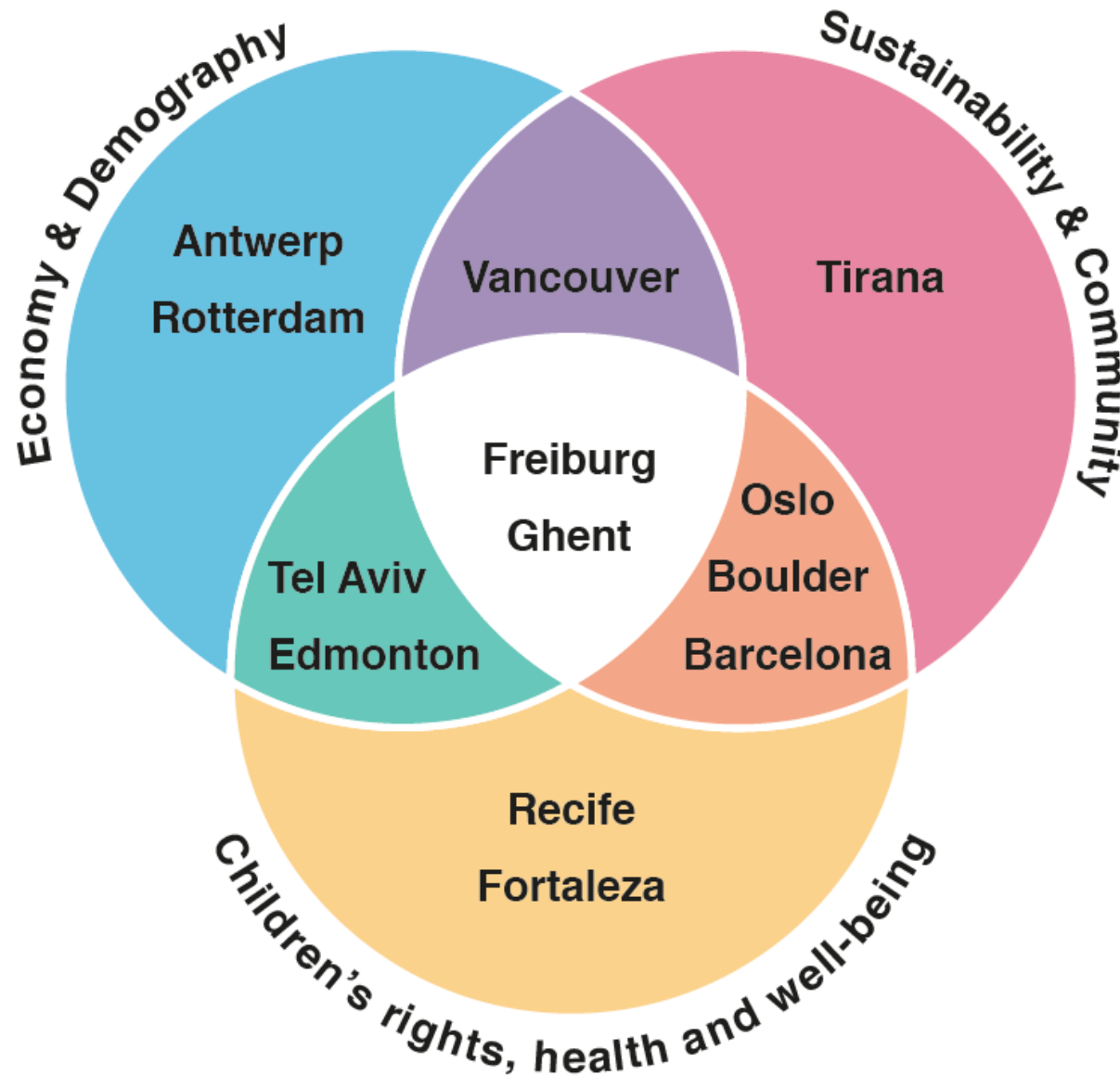


Learn from experience

- English National Play Strategy (2008-2010)
- Wales & Scotland
- London Planning Policy
- International case studies: Canada, Flanders, Barcelona...



Exploit policy win-wins



Keep children at the centre



“Children are the emotional link for all of us. If they’re part of the messaging it starts to emotionally connect with people.”

Chris Boardman,
Head of Active Travel England &
Sport England

Exploring the Approach in Wales

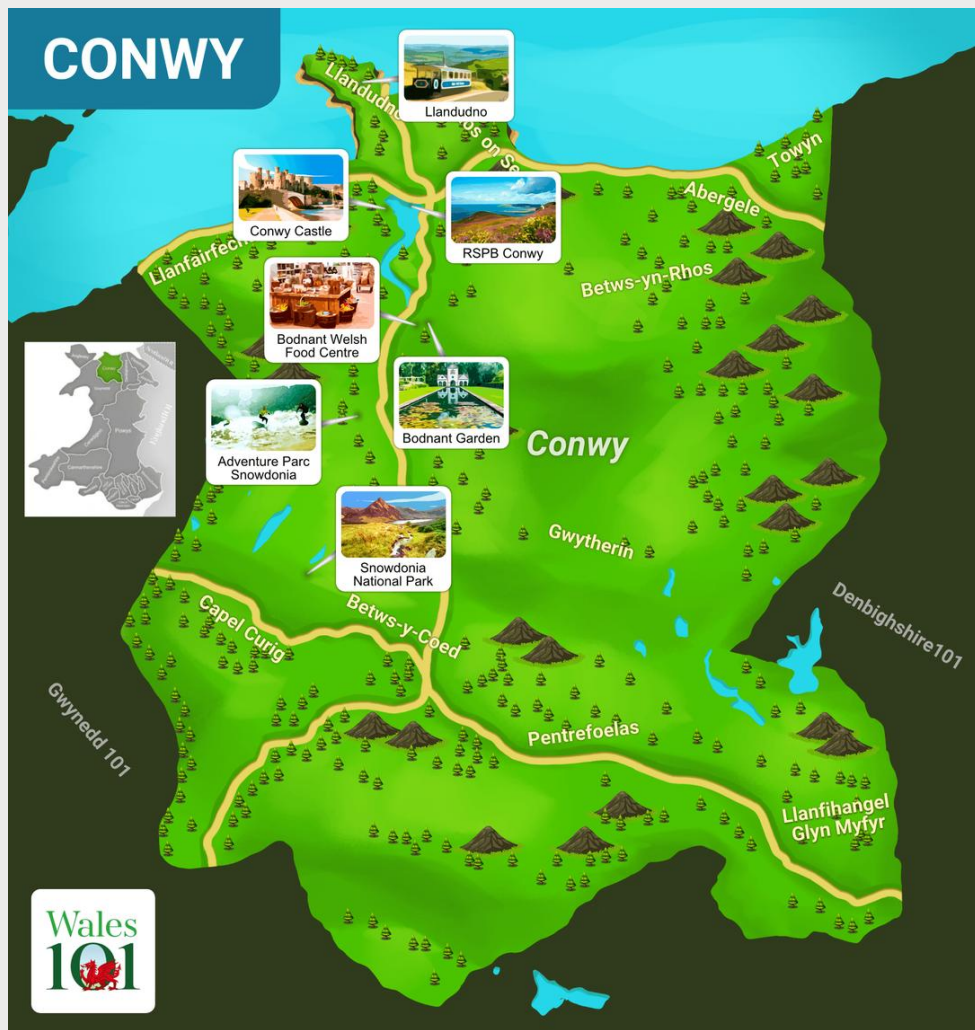


Conwy A Play Friendly County



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government





Nat Minard - Senior Play Officer

What is the UNCRC?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an important, legally binding agreement signed by 196 countries (as of 12 July 2022) which outlines the fundamental rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities.

The Convention has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life and set out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The convention is universal—these rights apply to every child and the convention entitles every child to claim them. It also explains how adults and governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy all their rights.



**Ratified by United Kingdom
on 16th December 1991**

The Right to Play

- All children have the right to play as enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. (UNCRC, 1989)
- General Comment No 17 raises the importance and increases accountability

What does a general comment mean?

General Comments clarify the content of the rights set out in the treaty in question, sometimes outline potential violations of those rights and offer advice to states parties on how best to comply with their obligations under the human rights treaty. **In 2013 general comment 17 on article 31 was published.**



General Comment no. 17

(a) Legislation and planning

‘The Committee strongly encourages States to consider introducing legislation to ensure the rights under article 31 for every child.’

‘Such legislation should address the principle of sufficiency – all children should be given sufficient time and space to exercise these rights.’





Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010

2010 nawm 1

CONTENTS

PART 1

CHILD POVERTY, PLAY AND PARTICIPATION

CHAPTER 1

ERADICATING CHILD POVERTY

A bit of context



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

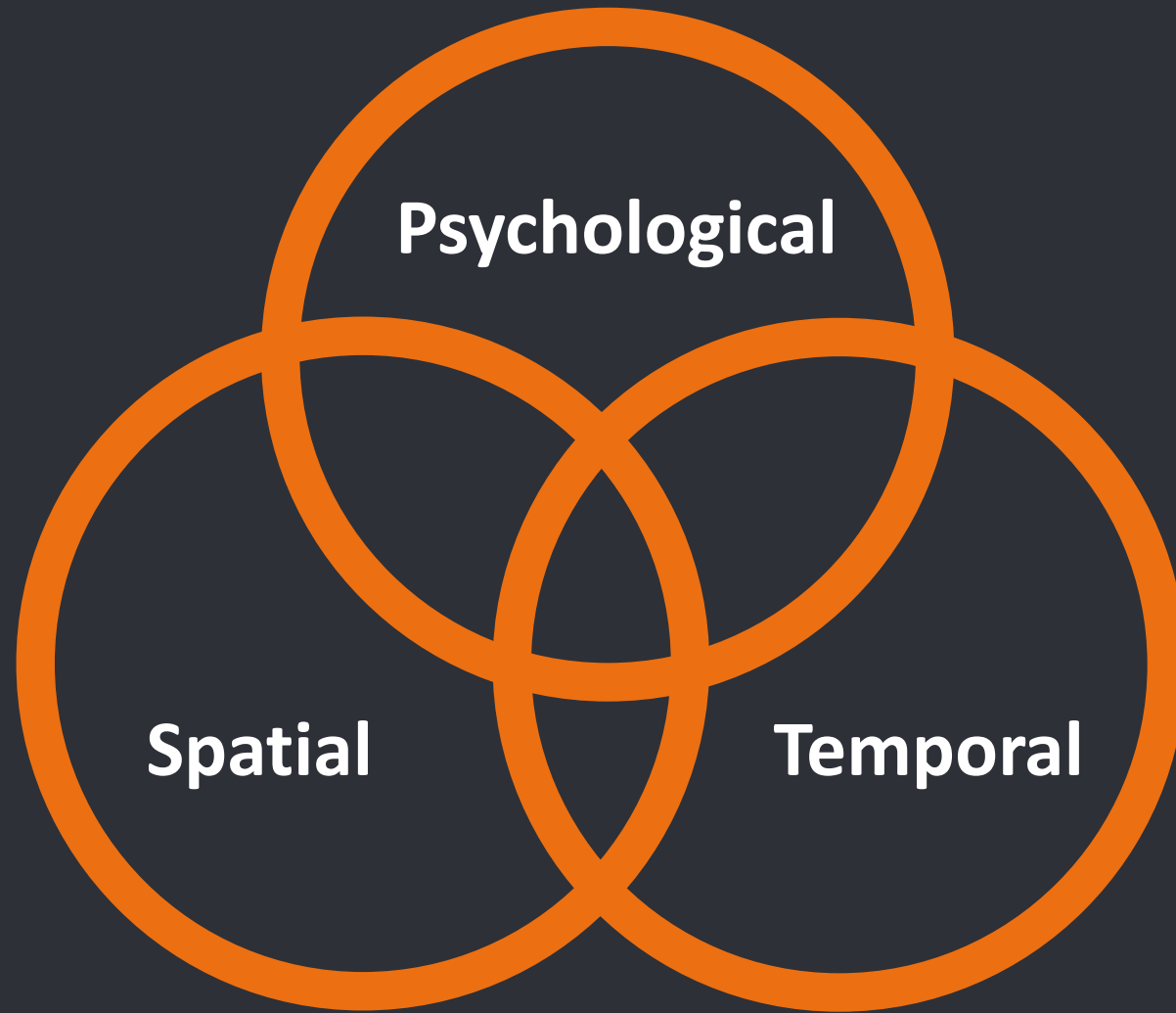
www.cymru.gov.uk

Wales – a Play Friendly Country

Statutory Guidance

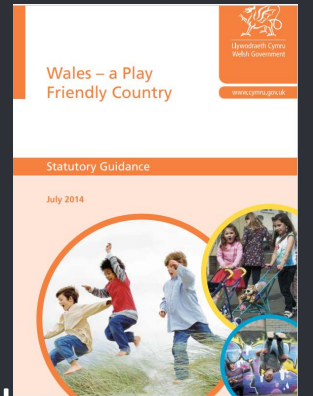
July 2014

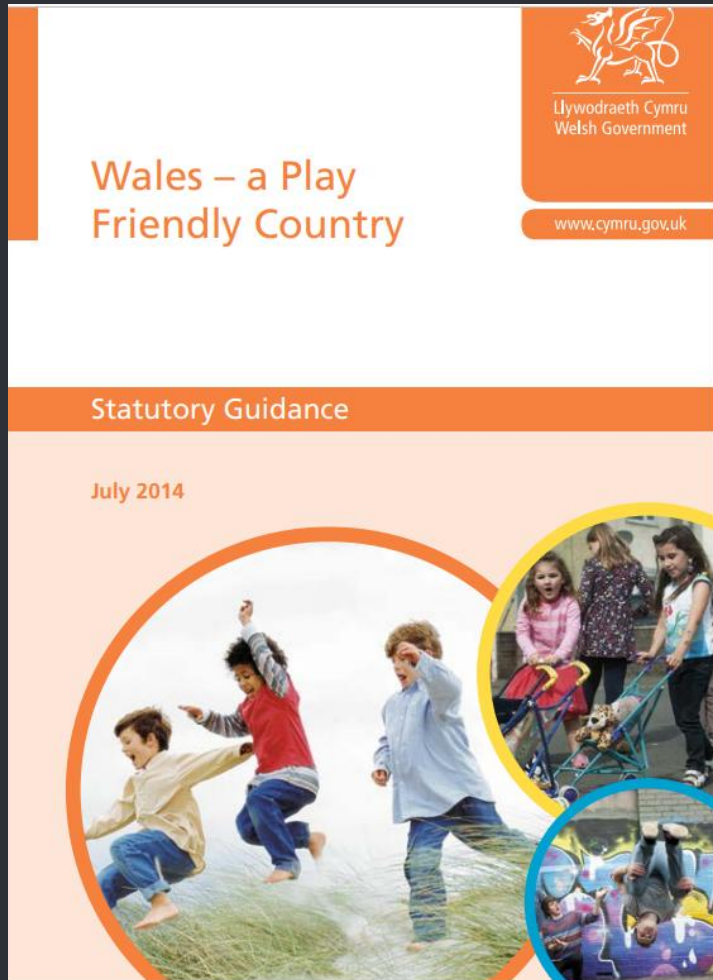




For children to have sufficient opportunities to play, they need time to play, space to play and the recognition by adults that this is every child's right.

This recognition is crucial to ensure that all children are allowed time and space to play.





A: Population

B: Providing for diverse needs

D: Supervised provision

C: Space available for play

E: Charges for play provision

F: Access to space/provision

G: Securing and developing the play workforce

H: Community engagement and participation

I: Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas

Play Sufficiency Assessments are submitted every three years



**The documents
required to be
submitted to Welsh
Government-
by June 2025**



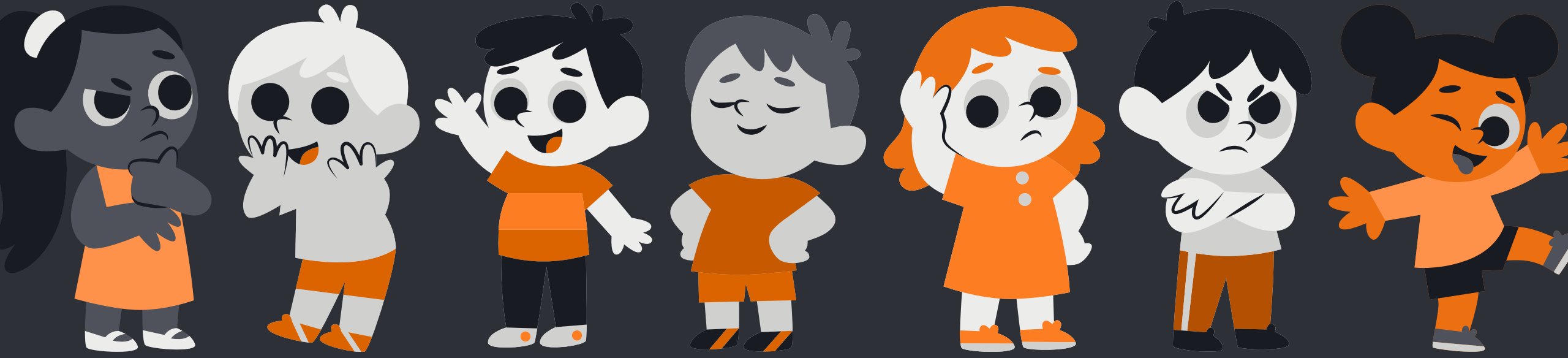
1. The Play Sufficiency Assessment – This must be a full assessment of the play opportunities in the Local Authority area, set out on the Play Sufficiency Assessment template provided under the Welsh Government toolkit

2. An Executive Summary of the Play Sufficiency Assessment which must include a summary of the main outcomes from the Play Sufficiency Assessment and highlight the actions that the Local Authority proposes to take to achieve sufficiency. This summary must be published on the Local Authority web site.

3. An Annual Play Action Plan detailing the actions, priorities and milestones to maintain strengths and address shortcomings identified in the Play Sufficiency Assessment. An updated Play Action Plan is required each year.

4. Annual Progress Reports

Does it work?



Examples from Conwy:

Service- Specific play implementation plan (Social Services)

Domain:

Policy, advocacy, knowledge exchange

Description:

Co-Production of a service-specific play policy implementation plan and play and risk management guidance for Social Services' Looked After Children Team and foster carers.

Policy instigators and drivers:

- Play Sufficiency Duty
- Conwy Play Policy Implementation Plan
- Wrexham and Conwy Risk Management Policy
- Play Wales' capacity to support through their Workforce Development Officer

People instigators and drivers:

- Play Sufficiency Lead (funded by Families First) capitalising on chance meetings to improve opportunities to play.
- Looked After Children Team staff advocating to Senior management for improved approach to children's play
- Willingness of senior management to engage with change

Chance:

- Feedback from children and foster carers on playschemes saying they couldn't usually engage in 'this sort of play'
- Play-aware social worker at the same playscheme echoing similar concerns
- During delivery of an introductory playwork training to foster carers, realising that policy and guidance for Social Services and foster carers needed to be addressed.



Examples from Conwy:

Process:

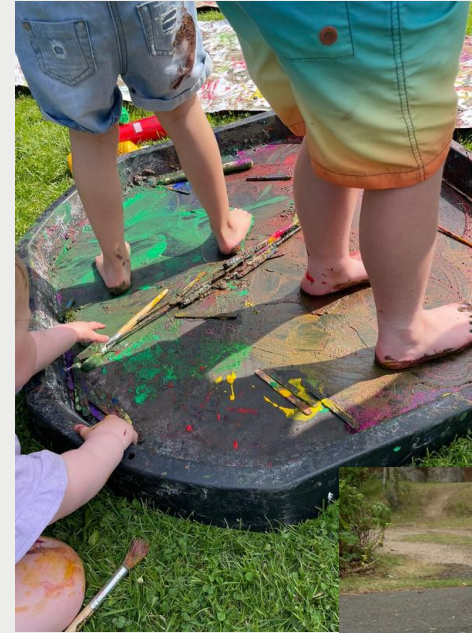
- Play Policy Implementation Plan and risk management guidance developed in partnership with social services senior management and foster carer advisory group
- Submitted to Scrutiny Committee for approval and Insurance Department to test fitness for purpose
- Training provided for management and departmental staff
- Annual delivery of combined training to both foster carers and Looked After Children staff, ensuring shared knowledge and understanding and reducing barriers

Challenges:

- Supporting Looked After Children Team to embed the policy and guidance in their practice
- Ongoing mapping with other departmental plans to avoid conflicting messages
- The process of development must include all key players and such is slow

Outcomes:

- Improved understanding of play by foster carers, Social Services/ Looked After Children Team
- Much less uncertainty about what playing children can do
- An excellent example of how service-specific play implementation plans and guidance can be developed and improve children's opportunities for play



Examples from Conwy:

Rich Play Awards

Domain:

Children and community Services

Description:

A project working with early years childcare and school settings to improve opportunities for children's play through implementation of loose parts play and playwork training

Policy instigators and drivers:

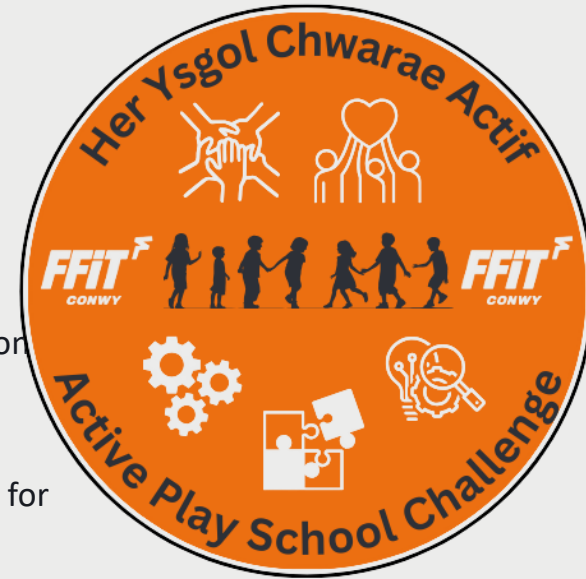
- Play Sufficiency Duty: findings from Play Sufficiency Assessments identified a need to improve quality of existing opportunities for play in early years childcare and school settings
- Programme developed from Big Lottery funded Play Rangers – Dewis Chwarae project
- Council's Education Department funded development of an early years childcare and child minders version
- Delivery of the Rich Play Award funded by Families First

People instigators and drivers:

- Play Sufficiency Lead with knowledge and ability to deliver both the training and the awards scheme
- Support from cross-departmental Play Sufficiency Task and Finish Group
- Heads of schools and childcare settings' willingness to adopt the scheme and change existing practices
- Early adopters used as advocates for the awards scheme ensuring a constant flow of new, willing settings

Process:

- Settings engage in a professional development opportunity to better appreciate the place of play in the setting's offer
- Children develop the play policy and carry out workshops on children's rights
- Management and staff are supported to develop risk assessment practices
- Changes in practice are supported through delivery of loose parts play provision, modelling practice, training and peer support



Examples from Conwy:

Rich Play Awards

Challenges:

- Working in a timely enough way for settings to engage through their existing plans and timetables
- Revisiting institutions to provide continued support in response to staff turnover and other issues

Outputs/outcomes:

- Improved quality of playtimes
- Improvements in children's behaviour or perceptions of their behaviour
- Broader changes in practice following reflection on the value of play and children's ability to make use of opportunities for play
- Very positive feedback from inspectors at both early years childcare settings and schools

Next Steps:

- Establish a robust evaluation to persuade more settings to come on board
- Develop a regional approach to work with schools in line with GwE (north Wales school improvement programme)



Examples from Conwy:

Play in Housing Developments

Domain:

The built and natural environment

Description:

Partnership working between the Play Sufficiency Lead and Cartrefi Conwy's (social landlord) Environmental Development Officer

Policy instigators and drivers:

- Play Sufficiency Duty
- Historic and ongoing importance of housing standards guidance and ministerial statements on environmental improvement

People instigators and enablers:

- Cartrefi Conwy Environmental Development Officer, with a background in landscape architecture, was powerfully affected by a play memories activity as part of a 'Park Life' conference; has a personal interest in making the public realm more playable
- Play Sufficiency Lead with knowledge of children's play, the ability to conduct small scale research into play with children, and the leadership skills and motivation to maintain contacts between developments
- Cartrefi Conwy has a progressive organisational culture embracing social responsibility/social justice, risk-taking, innovation and creativity

Working with North Wales Housing and Gwynt y Mor on an old playground to meet the young people's desires

What's Happening To The Playground?

If you have children or grandchildren, then chances are you'll be familiar with the play area at Ffordd Elisabeth in Tre Cwm. As part of the improvement works taking place across the estate, Cartrefi Conwy would like to improve the playground on Ffordd Elisabeth. Currently the playground has three old and tired, pieces of metal equipment. We think this is a real shame as there are over 200 children growing up in Tre Cwm, and they deserve to have somewhere cool to exercise and play.

Natural Play Features explained...

So what are these "natural play features"? And how can they be used for play?

Well, children are *really* good at finding their own play opportunities... Remember how much fun a cardboard box can be? Well that's the kind of play that is really good for kids development, and that's the kind of play we are trying to create.



Sensory Path



Human Sundial



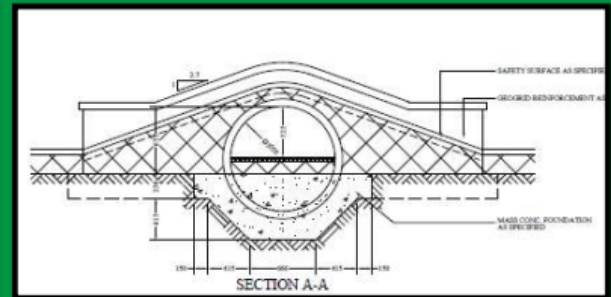
Slate Bench



Billy Goat Gruff Bridge



Window Stones



Examples from Conwy:

Play in Housing Developments

Process:

- Environmental Development Officer contacts Play Sufficiency Lead during early planning stages of new developments
- Play Sufficiency Lead carries out small scale research with children exploring their current use of space and play preferences
- Findings from research are developed into a design brief
- Environmental Development Officer interprets the brief, creating design for designated play spaces and playful interventions/affordances across the public realm

Challenges:

- Working with planners and insurers to move away from the perceived constraints of European safety standards

Outputs / Outcomes:

- Research with children is used to inform landscape design
- Children's contribution to collective wisdom helps challenge communities' ideas on play spaces (adults tend to want traditional playgrounds, but research with children shows otherwise)

Next Steps:

- Adaptations and amendments to job descriptions that capture the emergent collective wisdom



In Summary... YES!



Collaboration



Legislation synergy



Accountability



Innovation



Creativity



Children's Mental Health

*Exploring Play
Sufficiency in
England*

March 2025

Impact
on **Urban
Health**

Children's mental health programme

Poverty and racism are traumatic for children and can have a profound impact on their physical and mental health. They also prevent children from getting the mental health support they need.

So, why is play important to us?

- Fix the environment, not the child
- Play is essential for children's development, mental and physical health, and overall wellbeing.
- Opportunities to play are shrinking, e.g.:
 - On average, KS1 children now have 23 minutes less playtime at school than in 1995.
 - Our built environment is changing, leaving fewer safe spaces for children to play - particularly impacting children from low-income communities, and racialised backgrounds.
 - Funding for play provision has been dwindling, and the workforce has been overlooked.

What have we learned?

[Ethnographic research by Renaisi](#) with 18 families in Lambeth & Southwark:

- Lack of sufficient space for safe play at home, or ability to host play dates
- Lack of access to safe public outdoor places to play



Research by Centre for Mental Health

“We need safe, free, well-resourced places to go, secure green spaces, youth clubs, trips away and enrichment opportunities”.
(Parent)

“As well as not having access to basic outdoor spaces, lack of any disposable income also means not all children get access to the same fun or developmental activities. [The] economic aspect of it is really important because sometimes [...] we don't have the money or the means to give them good holidays. We don't have the means to take them to the cinema etc. Then you see other kids that they do that and that affects you as well.”
(Parent/carer)

Class 13

'Access to play is already compromised by the time children enter the classroom, and academic pressures often diminish play further. Many schools, especially when focused on attainment goals, reduce playtime to help certain groups "catch up", limiting others' playtime in the process. This approach inadvertently protects the right to play for some groups over others.'

Investments in good practice

Loughborough Community Centre at Max Roach:

- Offers space for local children to develop through play and has been designed in collaboration with local children

Oval Learning:

- Facilitating funding for and access to city farms, adventure playgrounds, OPAL provision; shared facility use; and parental engagement incl. SEND stay & plays
- Facilitating school peer support around whole school approaches to mental health and restorative approaches to behaviour management

Healthy Schools Fund:

- £2m, 77 schools – flexible use
- Majority invested in school gardens and playgrounds alongside creative and play therapy

Surrey Square Primary School's Old Kent Road Family Zone:

- [Saturday Marketplace](#): a safe place to socialise and play – builds & celebrates community

"It has been a great way to socialise with the community!"

"I enjoyed the food a lot. It was very delicious. The kids enjoyed all the outdoor activities, especially the football. You guys should keep up the good work."

"I am very happy to come here. My kids are happy that they can play and meet new friends."



The monthly community event for everyone



**Come and join us at The Old Kent Road Family Zone
on the last Saturday of every month***



**New and preloved
clothing, shoes
and homeware**



**Free books, groceries
and provisions**



Multi-sports



**Access visiting
local community
services**



**Games, raffles
and prizes**



**Morning Cafe and Lunch
served for all
@ 12pm**



**Arts and Crafts
Activities**

Location

**Surrey Square Primary School
Surrey Square
London, SE17 2JY**

Time

10am-1pm



oldkentroadfamilyzone.org.uk

*check our website for scheduled dates



A young child with dark skin and short hair, wearing a bright red hoodie, black pants, and blue shoes with red laces, stands on a concrete path in a garden. To the left, a blue bicycle with a colorful frame and a yellow bell is partially visible. The background shows a dark wooden fence and green foliage. The image is framed by a white border on the left and top, and a teal border on the right.

Children's Mental Health Programme

We need to fix the environment not the child



Growing a play-centred council

Chris Duncan – Corporate Policy,
Strategy and Funding Manager –
on behalf of BCC



The role of local authorities

Education Act 1996

- a sufficient quantity of educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being and sufficient facilities for such activities and
- a sufficient quantity of recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities

Challenges:

- Entrenched inequality and inequitable access to play/creative learning
- Increasing demand for statutory services & diversion/reduction of funding from 'upstream' projects and programs
- Diminishing influence in MAT school system
- Intensifying social challenges (e.g. mental health crisis)

Bristol City Council

- **Insight and understanding of the needs of the city** – JSNAs and Quality of Life
- **A ‘non-competitive environment’ through the Bristol Youth & Play Alliance** – Embedding play offer into Family Hubs, inclusion standards into Holiday Activity and Food Programme, working alongside Bristol’s funders network
- **Bristol Youth and Play Support Programme** – Pivoted three commissioned contracts from one youth organisation to grant funding for 23 diverse youth organisations across the city/communities
- **Parks and Green Spaces Strategy** – Specific quantity and distance standards for play which direct investment, a focus on working with communities and focussing on areas of deprivation
- **Playing Out Policy** – 287 streets in Bristol (approx. 8,000 children) benefiting from longer-term permissions to close streets for play
- **Belonging II and an Education Vision for Bristol**

National government

- The introduction of statutory minimum standards for play in schools and education settings
- Funding and mandating play qualifications for early years workforce; ensuring quality of provision is protected alongside drive to increase sufficiency
- A commitment to developing a longer-term play strategy, meeting the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendation for 'ensuring children's right to rest, leisure and recreation, including free outdoor play'
- Additional protected funding to enable local authorities to work with VCSE to retrofit existing spaces for play and improve accessibility of play spaces



Questions?