

EMBEDDING THE PLAY STRATEGY DCSF DRAFT GUIDELINES

1. Purpose

Oxfordshire's C&YP Trust endorsed a Play Policy, Strategy and Action Plan in May 2009. This paper sets out ways to embed the recent developments in play opportunities in Oxfordshire and:

- informs Children's Trust partners about the new *Embedding the Play Strategy*¹ guidance from DCSF
- reviews current performance in Oxfordshire in relation to the guidance
- requests members to discuss and agree the proposals under 5 below

2. Background

The aim of the new *Embedding the Play Strategy* non-statutory guidance produced by the DCSF in October 2009, is to advise C&YP Trusts and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) on embedding the national Play Strategy².

The national Play Strategy and new guidance spell out the expectations on CYP Trusts, particularly those which enjoy Pathfinder status to:

- ensure C&YP enjoy a range of safe, exciting, local, accessible and inclusive places to play and have a 'clear stake in public space'
- develop a 'strategic approach to play across the local area' with the full involvement of children, local communities and the third sector'
- embed and sustain recent changes and improvements in the local play offer
- improve performance under NI 199, (measured as part of CAA)
- guide Children's Trust boards in applying a planning and commissioning process to developing and adopting an effective area wide play strategy as a part of the Children and Young People's Plan
- guide Chief Planning Officers in relation to their contribution to the local Play Strategy as a key element of the Open Space Strategy that informs the Local Development Framework for spatial planning. This is the recommended vehicle for ensuring the Sustainable Communities Strategy takes account of play as a core element in creating child-friendly public space
- advise senior decision-makers in transport, housing, parks, highways, leisure and public health on fulfilling their role in creating child-friendly public spaces to improve outcomes for C&YP.

¹ Play England/DCSF *Embedding the Play Strategy* October 2009

² DCSF & DCMS (2008) *The Play Strategy* www.dcsf.gov.uk/play

The national Play Strategy allocated £235m to improve the play offer between 2008-11 and Oxfordshire was successful in securing £2.5m over 3 years and is one of three Pathfinder authorities in the South East region.

Following the Royal Assent of the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act SCL Bill³, the guidance recommends that planning and commissioning processes for Children's Trusts should include play. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) are expected to work together in developing Sustainable Community Strategies and spatial plans within the area-wide Local Area Agreement that includes an extended play offer.

The current Government investment is viewed as the first stage in a 10 year strategy to transform C&YP's access to play and informal recreation. Embedding these improvements and building on new commitments should be the purpose of the strategic planning that Local Authorities and Trust partners undertake.

The local Play Strategy should be the bridge between the CYP Plan and the open Space Strategy and Local Development Framework – **a collaboration between spatial planning and children's services**. It should aim to create more child-friendly public space as well as more and better play areas and play services. It is also a commissioning strategy for play and sits alongside other commissioning strategies for the Children's Trust.

The Government's 2020 Vision for Play⁴

- *In every residential area there are a variety of supervised and unsupervised places for play, free of charge;*
- *Local neighbourhoods are, and feel, safe, interesting places to play;*
- *Routes to children's play space are safe and accessible for all C&YP;*
- *Parks/open spaces are attractive, welcoming, well maintained & well used;*
- *C&YP have a clear stake in public space; play is accepted by neighbours;*
- *C&YP play in a way that respects other people and property;*
- *C&YP and families are fully involved in the development of play spaces;*
- *Play spaces are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local C&YP, including disabled children, and children from minority groups*

2.1 What is Play?

We define play as '*what children do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons*'. The aim of having '3-frees' in every area is a core part of the vision nationally and locally (free access, freely available and free from charge).

2.2 Why is Play important?

The Trust values play for its own sake as well as recognising it as a right for children under Article 31 of the UNCRC⁵. Evidence demonstrates the contribution play makes to meeting National Indicators and ECM outcomes, e.g. health, obesity, building resilience, emotional well-being and mental health, making relationships, gaining core social skills, developing learning and problem-solving skills, building

³ Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009

⁴ DCSF & DCMS (2008) *The Play Strategy* www.dcsf.gov.uk/play

⁵ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

communities and supporting community safety.

The consequences of children being deprived of the space to play can be serious, with childhood obesity, anti-social behaviour and a range of emotional and mental health difficulties being attributable, at least in part, to a lack of free play opportunities. The Government expects LSP's and Children's Trusts to ensure their strategies for reducing child poverty and extending and improving provision and space for C&YP's play and informal recreation are aligned. Guidance from CLG and Dept of Transport emphasise⁶ the importance of taking account of the needs of C&YP in planning for large developments to include access routes to play spaces.

Small investments in play development alongside shifts in attitudes towards play could produce significant savings by preventing ill health, poor attainment and unacceptable behaviour and by improving overall outcomes for C&YP.

See Appendix 1 for *Play contribution to meeting national targets*

3. Where are we in Oxfordshire? Achievements and plans to date:

- Endorsed Play Policy, Strategy and Action Plan in May 2009 by the CYP Trust. Adopted by 3 of the 5 City/District Councils and endorsed or being considered by many Town/Parish Councils
- Strong county-wide Oxfordshire Play Partnership, with engagement of all DC's, PCT, and voluntary sector partners; jointly chaired by OCC and Oxfordshire Play Association
- Successful implementation underway of the Play Pathfinder programme, which includes 28 new outdoor community led/owned play areas in the county and a major new adventure Play Park in Barton – 'Play Barton'
- Contracts focused on targeted groups and areas, funded to March 2011
- Use of annual national Play Day to raise profile, support changing attitudes to play and develop local Play Partnerships
- Play Pot, supporting innovation and involving C&YP in participatory budgeting
- Improved use of school grounds and outdoor space at Children's Centres for outdoor play as well as outdoor learning through Oxfordshire Outside⁷ initiatives
- Inspiring Play Newsletter – jointly funded and edited (OCC/OPA)
- Workforce development plans, including play within core induction training
- Playshaper training planned (March 2010)
- C&YP Survey 2009 providing baseline to complement TellUs3/4 (NI 199)

⁶ *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities* CLG 2008

⁷ *School Grounds Matter* and *Without Walls* 2009 OCC

- Well-developed links with related programmes, e.g. Aiming High for Disabled Children, Building Schools for the Future, Oxfordshire Outside etc
- Local involvement of C&YP, parents, carers and communities including vulnerable groups
- Report on play impact against CYP Plan targets, National Indicators (March '10)

4. What do we need to do to implement the Embedding Play Guidance?

What?	How?
1. Raise profile & priority at strategic planning levels – especially in relation to 3-tier LA & cross cutting nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CYPP 2010-14 includes recognition of play value in meeting ECM/CYPP priorities ▪ Use NI 199 & <i>Your Voice</i> Survey 2009⁸ as lever ▪ Build links with Sustainable Communities, Local Strategic Partnerships etc ▪ Identify key issues we need to address in a 3-tier authority to 'embed play' ▪ Strengthen play focus at District, Town, Parish Council levels and with health partners ▪ Maximise benefits of Play Shaper training by ensuring attendance of 'top' people
2. Maintain and develop strong partnerships at 1st, 2nd & 3rd tier levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review and develop membership of OPP, particularly to include housing, transport, planning, playwork and C&YP ▪ Develop & formalise City and District level play partnerships, through Play Day groups, Play Rangers, Play Barton etc
3. Review take-up of Play Policy and re-invigorate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluate use, impact and change ▪ Action plan
4. Review, evaluate and revise Play Strategy for 2011-14 – as the commissioning strategy for play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluate outcomes and impact of existing contracts in targeting vulnerable groups and in supporting the activities necessary to achieve the Embedding process ▪ Re-shape play and commissioning strategies for 2011-15 in the light of the Embedding activities, the economic climate and priorities of OPP & CYPT ▪ Audit existing play opportunities, including access audit, using GIS, Play Space Audit tools etc ▪ Set local standards for quantity, quality and accessibility of provision ▪ Develop 2011/15 Play Strategy in the light of the new guidance, CYPP priorities and economic climate
5. Strengthen C&YP, parents/carers involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maximise opportunities through Play Barton, Playbuilder, Play Pot and play groups ▪ Strengthen the voice of C&YP/parents/carers at OPP
6. Strengthen focus on play in workforce development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inclusion of play within the integrated core training for all children's service staff ▪ Evaluate gaps in training locally and support providers to target appropriately

⁸ *Your Voice* Oxfordshire C&YP Survey 2009 OCC

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meet local targets for Level 3 qualifications
7. Raise political and media profile of play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify political Play Champions (Cllrs and MP's) ▪ Develop pro-active Communications Strategy with partners
8. Develop robust plans for LT legacy and sustainability of Pathfinder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluate and demonstrate outcomes across range of LAA indicators ▪ Long-term maintenance of Playbuilder/Play Barton sites ▪ Develop Social Enterprise model for Play Barton, incorporating Play Shop, ongoing staffing, volunteering and full community ownership
9. Increase interface with schools/BSF/ESS/ EY/Ch Centres/ AHDC/Ox Outside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengthen links ▪ Piggy-back on opportunities, e.g. BSF, early festival plans, school grounds development ▪ Joint commissioning approach to use of funding
10. Support & focus on inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluate and strengthen inclusion and accessibility of vulnerable groups ▪ Consider 'new' groups with least access to quality play opportunities
11. Use OPS as key Joint Commissioning plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use partnership, impact evaluations, revised strategy, assessment and audits to develop plan which reflects particular resource needs in a three tier county including third tier play space providers and VCS play and play infrastructure/support organisations ▪ Join-up/align budgets as appropriate ▪ Seek external funding

5. CYPT Discussion

To meet the requirements of the Embedding Play Guidance and maximise the opportunities offered through Oxfordshire's Play Pathfinder status, it is proposed that:

- Members recognise and support the contribution that play makes to meeting the CYPP and wider strategic targets, by championing play within member organisations. Specifically, members help to influence areas outside the 'play world' which are critical to embedding the work e.g. spatial planners, transport planners, community safety leads and school partnerships.
- Members commit to attending the upcoming Play Shaper training* run by Play England on 23rd March 2010
- Members endorse a joint commissioning approach to play development post 2011, actively starting in 2010, and involving City and all District Councils, health, community safety and police partners and schools partnerships
- Members actively 'open' links to the Oxfordshire Partnership, Local Strategic Partnerships and Sustainable Communities Strategy

* Play Shaper training is being offered free to Pathfinder authorities and will be delivered by national experts. It aims to help leaders with responsibility for planning, transport, community safety, workforce development and public sector strategic planning to appreciate the significance of play to meeting outcomes and targets as well as the crucial contribution they can make to the development of play opportunities across the county.

Appendix 1: Play contribution to meeting National Indicators

Outcome	National Indicators	Contribution of Play
Stronger Communities	NI 1-6 Community cohesion and satisfaction with local area	Play spaces are a high priority for families – the introduction of play spaces can engender community ownership and engagement, bring families together, and can help to reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour.
Safer Communities	NI 17, 22, 23 Perceptions of anti-social behaviour, parents' responsibility for children – respect NI 48 The number of children killed or seriously injured in traffic accidents	Good play provision and child-friendly public space can promote a sense of belonging, increasing mutual understanding and respect and changing perceptions of behaviour and responsibility. Reducing levels of car usage in the built environment, through 20 mph zones, home zones and other design, planning and engineering measures can calm traffic and reduce accidents to children. Involving children in the planning and design of routes and other measures can facilitate access to play and increase children's independence while also reducing accidents.
ECM: Be Healthy	NI 50, 54, 55, 56, 57 and 58 Children's physical, emotional and behavioural health NI 199 Children and young people's satisfaction with parks and play areas	Playing out increases physical activity and can promote mental well-being and resilience. Good play provision offers opportunities for children to have fun and enjoy life, to develop and maintain friendships, and increases their self-confidence.
Stay Safe	NI 69 Children who have experienced bullying NI 70 Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries to children and young people	Well-designed play spaces and supervised free play can reduce bullying and help children's self-confidence. Well designed play areas and staffed play provision like adventure playgrounds can enable children to develop the physical skills and confidence to manage risks at play; helping to improve their safety from accident in parks and green spaces, schools and children's centres. Safer routes to and from play spaces and street play schemes, and greater supervision of public space, should reduce accidents involving children.
Enjoy and Achieve	NI 72–78 Children and young people achieving minimum standards at each key stage NI 88, 109 Number of Extended Schools and children's centres NI 92–98, 106–108 Narrowing the gap	Good play opportunities promote informal learning, creativity and initiative, and can improve children's ability to concentrate. Play facilities can make schools more enjoyable and welcoming to children. Staffed play provision within the 'varied menu of activities' offered through extended services and children's centres make these more enjoyable and attractive to children. Children's enjoyment of their childhoods, including play and recreation – things to do and places to go – is a key to the Every Child Matters outcomes.
Make a positive contribution	NI 110 Young people's participation in positive activities	Facilities for play and informal recreation that are well designed through engaging with children and young people can enhance their sense of ownership and respect for their neighbourhood environment. Staffed play provision can offer volunteering opportunities for young people.
Economic Well-being	NI 116 Proportion of children in poverty NI 117 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)	Good play provision is at the heart of the safe, cohesive and prosperous communities where children can thrive and develop. Staffed play provision can offer training and employment opportunities for young people. Free, accessible play space helps children from poorer families to compensate for lack of other opportunities.
Tackling exclusion & promoting equality	NI 140 Fair treatment by local services	Play services and play spaces can, and should be, fully inclusive and accessible and all neighbourhoods should have access to playable areas.

Local economy	NI 151 Overall employment rate NI 155, 160, 170, 175, 179 Number of affordable homes, local authority tenants' satisfaction with landlord services, developing brownfield land, access to services, and value for money	Increased local play provision includes increased investment in the local workforce and generates business for suppliers. Good play space can increase residents' satisfaction with their local area and with local authority services.
Environmental sustainability	NI 195, 197 Improved street and environmental cleanliness, local biodiversity and positive conservation management NI 198 Mode of travel to school usually used by children	Well used and maintained children's play areas add to general use of, and pride in, community space. Natural play areas add to green space and engender environmental awareness in children. Where children and their families feel safe for them to play outside, they are more likely to walk or cycle to school.

Appendix 2: Supporting References

Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PSA 12 to improve the health and well-being of children and young people ▪ <i>Health Lives and Brighter Futures</i> DH & DCSF 2009 ▪ <i>Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives</i> DH & DCSF 2009 ▪ <i>Be Active, Be Healthy</i> DH 2009 ▪ <i>Play4Life/Change4Life</i> 2009
Staying Safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Safe from Bullying in Play & Leisure</i> DCSF 2009 ▪ <i>Working Together to Safeguard Children</i> HMG 2006 ▪ <i>Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities</i> CLG 2008
Enjoy & Achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Extended School: Building on Experience</i> DCSF 2007 ▪ <i>Aiming High for Disabled Children</i> ▪ Children's Centres and <i>Early Years Foundation Stage</i> DCSF 2007
Positive Contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>MyPlace & Aiming High for Young People</i> 2008 ▪ <i>Preventing Anti-Social Behavior in Public Places</i> CABE 2004 ▪ <i>Communities in Control: real people real power</i> CLG 2008 ▪ <i>Duty to Involve</i> Part 7, section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health (LGPIH) Act 2007
Economic Well-Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Ending Child Poverty</i> HMG 2009
Regeneration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning Policy Guidance/Statement Notes: PPG17 – open space & PPS3 – housing
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Places to go? A summary of research evidence</i> Sustrans & Play England 2008 ▪ <i>Local Transport Plan</i> Dept for Transport 2008 (recommending aligning transport plans with CYPP) ▪ School Travel plans ▪ Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategies

Appendix 3: Embedding play in 3-tier authorities

Area of activity	Points for a three tier county
<p><i>National Indicator NI 199 for play: To make the enjoyment of play a robust part of the outcome framework, since April 2009 the NIS has included NI 199, which measures children's satisfaction with their local play areas and park. As part of the annual CAA, Ofsted will assess every top-tier local authority against the full range of NI's, including NI 199. The Government expects progress against this indicator to be seen across every top-tier LA in the country.</i></p>	<p>Implies need to provide adequate support for TCs/PCs so that their local play space provision is good and supports the top tier authority to achieve highly in CAA.</p>
<p><i>The local play strategy should identify locations with the greatest need for more play provision or improvements. Play deprivation can result from a number of factors including traffic, badly planned, high-density housing, dearth of green space, low level crime and bullying, lack of supervision or oversight. These can affect whole communities, particularly those living with other forms of social disadvantage or discrimination. Therefore, although the local play strategy should aim to improve provision and environments for children across the whole area in question, it should prioritise improving outcomes for children in deprived neighbourhoods and particular groups.</i></p>	<p>The issue of rural isolation and deprivation and constraints on small community organisations who are the main play space providers in rural communities needs acknowledgement.</p>
<p><i>Statutory Guidance to Children's Trusts requires that the strategic approach to play across the local area should be with the full involvement of children, local communities and the third sector in decision making. One of the key aims of the national Play Strategy is to drive community ownership of play by engaging local people in decisions about its provision, and supporting their involvement in capital projects. Another aim is to increase the availability of supervised play by exploring volunteering initiatives and building the capacity of the voluntary sector to support local play spaces.</i></p>	<p>In three tier counties in the rural areas local community organisations are the commissioners and providers of play space, not just interested parties who should be consulted on provision. Their particular support and resource needs must be addressed in order to ensure good quality provision</p>
<p><i>The task of updating and completing the audit database will involve gathering information from a large number of other stakeholders including housing associations, local councils, and voluntary organizations.</i></p>	<p>Need to involve Districts and parishes in the audit and priority setting.</p>
<p><i>Planning the pattern of services and spaces for play to be commissioned, targeted at areas of greatest need.</i></p>	<p>Need to include TC/PC provision</p>
<p><i>The audit will also be helpful in the development of local standards for play space. Government policy on planning for open space, sport and recreation advocates strongly the production of standards for such provision based on an assessment of local need and provision. Local standards for play provision should therefore be an essential product of the play strategy process. Setting robust local standards based on assessments of need and audits of existing facilities will form the basis for redressing quantitative and qualitative deficiencies.</i></p>	<p>Need to ensure there is adequate advice for TCs/PCs on these issues</p>
<p><i>Design the local play strategy, identifying effective commissioning mechanisms where appropriate, and working through the Joint Commissioning Unit.</i></p>	<p>Need to resource 3rd tier providers and link up with TC/PC commissioners</p>

<p><i>The full realisation of neighbourhoods where all children can play will require some understanding of the principles and practice of play provision within those professions that have responsibility for planning, designing and managing public space.</i></p>	<p>Need to remember the training needs of TCs/PCs</p>
<p><i>The requirements of the playbuilder programme and its associated guidance represent something of a sea change in expectations, particularly for fixed equipment playgrounds. The equipment market will therefore need careful management to ensure best value, at the same time as delivering on the aspirations of the Play Strategy.</i></p>	<p>Need to ensure there is adequate advice for TCs/PCs on these issues</p>
<p><i>The Play Strategy recognises the issue of capacity and sustainability for the voluntary and community sectors and their concerns about attracting funding. Local authorities should consider how to build the capacity of local voluntary and community organisations as part of a strategy for shaping and developing the market to deliver play services for children, depending on the priorities of their local play strategy. Capacity building could include direct financial investment or support in kind, such as access to workforce development opportunities. It may also include funding for umbrella bodies (such as play associations or play networks) whose role includes representing their members in local play partnership arrangements.</i></p>	<p>Of particular importance in three tier counties</p>

Appendix 4: Glossary

AHDC	Aiming High for Disabled Children
BSF	Building Schools for the Future
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CLG	Communities and Local Government
CYPP	Children and Young People's Plan
CYPT	Children and Young People's Trust
DCSF	Dept Children, Schools and Families
DH	Dept of Health
LAA	Local Area Assessment
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NIS	National Indicator Set
OPP	Oxfordshire Play Partnership
OPS	Oxfordshire Play Strategy
PCT	Primary Care Trust