

## OXFORDSHIRE PLAY POLICY

### Summary of Key Issues:

- The final draft of the Oxfordshire Play Policy is presented following wide consultation with partners since the discussion at the CYP Trust in September 2008.
- CYPT members are asked to read the summary below, the attached draft Play Policy and Guidance notes.
- Members are asked to support the adoption of the Policy, particularly noting the implications highlighted in point 4 below.
- The policy is a long-term position statement about values and approaches, which will have implications for development and practice. A Play Strategy and Action Plan for 2009/2011 have been created to guide short-term delivery.

### Context and Background

The Government published the national Play Strategy in 2008 following its commitment made to play in the Children's Plan. It is underpinned by Article 31 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, which recognises children's rights to play. The refreshed Oxfordshire Play Strategy 2009-11 shares the vision for play set out in the national Play Strategy. The proposed Play Policy sets out a framework for all play site development including play spaces in Children's Centres, school grounds and young people's centres and thus provides a core element of the Oxfordshire Play Strategy.

Both the national and county play strategies point to the need to establish a commonsense approach to the development and maintenance of play spaces, which is based on an understanding of the meaning and value of play. A fundamental first step towards this is the development and wide endorsement of a Play Policy.

Oxfordshire is one of 3 LA's in the South East to be awarded Play Pathfinder status, and this includes an allocation of £2.5 million for the development of 28 new play sites across the county (through the Playbuilder element), and £800k for a new adventure 'Play Park' development which will be based across the Barton estate in the City. Successful

implementation of this major Government initiative relies heavily on the adoption of a shared philosophy to play space development. The Guidance for Play Pathfinders emphasises an expectation that LA's ensure endorsement at the highest levels by Children's Trusts to support the newly developed principles of play.

In September 2008, a draft Play Policy was discussed by the CYP Trust and it was agreed that this should be consulted on widely with colleagues across the Trust, before returning for final endorsement.

### **Consultation and Adoption of the Policy**

The draft Policy has been widely consulted on, through 4 workshops run through the Oxfordshire Play Partnership (OPP) and facilitated by the national organisation, PLAYLINK. 63 colleagues attended, including County, City, District, Town and Parish councillors and officers, police, health and voluntary sector colleagues. Others have contributed to amendment and discussion through individual discussions and through OPP.

To date, Oxford City Council and some District, Town and Parish Councils have adopted the Policy, tailoring and developing it for local use. The policy can be adapted and developed further by individual authorities and organisations.

### **Oxfordshire's Play Policy**

An Oxfordshire Play Policy will:

- establish the long-term **principles and values** for play development
- establish a framework for **risk mitigation**, demonstrating that commissioners/providers have acted within the Policy's risk/benefit assessment, if negligence becomes an issue
- establish a rationale for the sustained allocation of **resources**
- establish an approach to **play design** which is environmentally sensitive and inspiring
- ensure the **engagement** of children, young people, parents/carers and communities, and the underlying importance of creating opportunities for **child-led** play

## Implications of endorsement of the Oxfordshire Play Policy

A number of key implications flow for all CYP Trust organisations, from the adoption of the Play Policy. These include:

- There will be a growing emphasis on play within all **strategic developments**, given the demonstrable contribution of play to improving health outcomes, community safety, educational outcomes, social inclusion, enriching cultural life and supporting community cohesion.
- Attitudes to **risk** will change and authorities will take a **risk/benefit** approach (in line with HSE and RoSPA recommendations) that will require a review of health and safety checklists and training. Public messages will need to be altered to explain that allowing risk into playspaces, if properly assessed and managed, will improve safeguarding and children and young people's ability to identify and manage risk for themselves. Arrangements with insurers and the handling of negligence claims may be affected.
- **Procurement** guidelines will change to ensure that external space design contributes to the Trust's vision. This will be particularly true of school building and grounds capital development programmes.
- **Planning** documents may need to put greater emphasis on the 'playability' of public space and the development of the public realm will need to take more account of facilitating shared intergenerational use of space. Creating safe routes to play has implications for transport planning.
- **Consultation** and engagement with children and young people about public space including school grounds and play spaces will be required and may affect budgets.
- Ensuring that sites are **inclusive** and welcoming of all groups may have resource implications, e.g. provision of accessible toilets for children and disabled parents.
- As the design and use of playable space changes, so will **maintenance** requirements. This may produce extra costs or savings.

- There will be an increased emphasis on **training** of staff who traditionally would not regard play as central to their remit, e.g. park officers, community police officers, health and safety officers, playground supervisors and teaching assistants.

**Alison Partridge**  
**Strategic Lead, Participation and Play**  
**01865 256657**  
[alison.partridge@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:alison.partridge@oxfordshire.gov.uk)