

A Play Policy for the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Area

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This policy has been developed with funding from the Children and Youth Partnership and the support of the Neath Port Talbot Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, The Children's Partnership, and through consultation with private, statutory and voluntary sector play providers across the county.

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“Play is an essential part of children’s development...Participation in, and appreciation of, music, visual arts and literature can all add to understanding of the world. But, more importantly, these activities bring joy and richness to life. They should be offered as an entitlement to all children and young people.” (*Children and Young People: A Framework for Partnership*)

“Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child.” (Bob Hughes, *Best Play* March 2000)

“Usually, when you’re playing, you’re enjoying yourself.” (Joshua, aged 11)

This document has been endorsed by:

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Chief Executive Neath Port Talbot
County Borough Council

Paul Williams
Chief Executive
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Katie Norton
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Introduction

In spring 2000 the National Assembly for Wales launched the Play 2000 grant scheme, with the intention of providing additional funds for open access play. The funding was intended to be a one-off grant, to be allocated and spent before April 2001. Although the extra funding was a welcome acknowledgment of the importance of play, the one-year timescale meant that the local authority did not have the opportunity to develop a strategic and planned approach to play. Another difficulty was that local authorities were given extremely short notice in which to respond, and this, in turn, hampered effective consultation.

In order to make the most of this opportunity it was necessary to put in place structures that would ensure consultation and the sharing of information between the various parties interested in children's play.

In recognition of the need to develop a strategic approach to play to enable the best possible use of future resources, the Children and Youth Partnership in conjunction with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership requested the Children's Partnership to move forward the development of a play policy for Neath Port Talbot. An inter-agency task group consisting of representatives with an interest in children's play was established in November 2000. This group, now known as the Play Working Group has actually been involved in this progressing a play policy with Play Right taking a lead role.

It was felt by all concerned that it was important that the policy should not be imposed from on high, but should arise out of consultation, discussion and co-operation. Almost three hundred consultation packs were sent to play providers and policy makers across the county. Each pack contained a questionnaire and an invitation to a one-day conference to discuss the development of the play policy.

Arising out of that day, and as a second stage in the process, A consultation document was produced and distributed. Comments about the content were invited from all those with an interest in children's play. This final document draws together all of the input received from all stages of the consultation process.

Since the decision was made that a Play Policy was required, The National Assembly for Wales has made a commitment to provide financial assistance to Play for a further three years.

Why have a play policy?

The Neath Port Talbot Play Working Group agrees that having a coherent play policy will bring many advantages.

- It will help to raise awareness of the value of children's play and play's integral role in all children's development.
- It will provide a framework of agreed beliefs and principles.
- By facilitating a consensus about definitions of play and playwork, it can be used to encourage values that are consistent across the county.
- It will highlight the issue of quality in both play and play provision.
- This in turn will lead to the development of local standards for playwork training.
- It will set a standard for good practice in play and playwork.
- It will help focus on the play needs of children and the communities in which they live.
- It will provide a clear outline for the development of a play strategy which will help in the targeting of scarce resources.
- It is anticipated that a Play Policy will be a requirement from The National Assembly for Wales.

Who is the policy intended for?

The Play Policy can be adopted by any organisation in Neath Port Talbot concerned with, interested in, and/or able to initiate or influence the development of children's play and play opportunities in any context. It is especially relevant to those organisations working with children up to the age of fourteen, as these children have the greatest need for play and for access to the highest quality play opportunities. However, we recognise that play does not necessarily stop at any particular age.

It is hoped that any organisation or individual providing play opportunities, whether as its primary purpose or as part of its general work, will share the principles, beliefs and values set out in the policy.

Any organisation or individual wishing to adopt this policy should:

- Photocopy the policy (pages 15 -17) and complete the blank sections with their own details.
- Contact Play Right so that we can maintain a record of play providers who have adopted the policy. The address is: Block H, Unit 22, Upper Forest Way, Llansamlet, Swansea, SA6 8QR

The values that inform the policy

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, parties who ratify the convention agree to:

Article 3.3

“ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.”

We agree that: Children are entitled to a safe, secure and healthy environment. Children must be able to trust their play environment and the adults involved.

Article 12.1.

“assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

We agree that: Children should be consulted on matters concerning them, and their views should be taken into account when making decisions that affect them.

Article 23.1

“recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.”

We agree that: All children should be respected for their own unique qualities. Play provision should be suitable and available for all.

Article 24.1

“recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health...”

We agree that: Play is essential to the maintenance of children's health and well-being.

Article 31.1

“recognize the right of the child 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.”

We agree that: Children have the right to play and to expect appropriate play facilities.

Play Policy

Play Policy.

Definition of *Play*

Play is a fundamental right. It is a process and is freely chosen. It is the means by which children explore their world, their roles and their relationships. It can be co-operative, competitive or solitary, destructive or creative. It can be escapist, imaginative, therapeutic, adventurous, quiet, messy, challenging, structured or spontaneous. Play empowers children, affirms and supports their right to make choices and discover their own solutions. It encourages healthy emotional and physical development. It is a natural instinct that needs to be nurtured. Play has both educational and social benefits in that, through it, children learn about complex relationships and more importantly, about themselves. It also provides a basis of conceptual understanding that allows them to succeed in formal education. However, play is also important for its own sake, it shouldn't have to have a reason or an end. Play includes, but is more than, recreation. It is not an additional aspect of a child's life – it "is a child's life". (Susan Isaacs, psychologist 1993)

Definition of *Play Provision and Types of Provision*

Play provision is any facility for which the primary aim is providing and promoting children's play. Play provision can be open or closed access, and staffed or unstaffed. Open Access provision allows children to come and go freely. In a closed access provision children may only leave at a specified time or when signed out by an adult. It is possible to have open access provision that is staffed.

Definition of *Play Opportunities*

Given the opportunity (and sometimes necessary encouragement) children will play anywhere. We recognise, therefore, that play opportunities can arise and can be created in a wide range of settings with or without facilities.

Play opportunities are any activities that enable children to develop through play.

Definition of *Play Work*

"Work with playing children" (from *The First Claim* by Play Wales)

Mission Statement

The Neath Port Talbot Children and Youth Partnership and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership are committed to working towards fulfilling the basic right of every child to play, and to have access to appropriate play provision. This will be achieved in consultation with children, and by working with local communities public agencies, voluntary and private organisations to enable the play needs of children and young people to be met within prescribed boundaries and legislative requirements.

Play Objectives

Play providers should aim to:

a) extend

- the choice and control that children have over their play.
- the freedom and satisfaction children gain from play
- access to, and the range of, play opportunities available to all children,
- children's exploration and understanding of the wider world in physical, social and cultural settings beyond their immediate experience if possible.

b) nurture

- children's independence and self-esteem.
- children's respect for others and offer opportunities for social interaction.
- children's well being, health and development
- children's knowledge, understanding, creativity and capacity to learn

c) recognise

- that children of all abilities have the right of equal access to free play
- children's need to test boundaries and respond positively to that need They should also manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.(see Standards and Safety p.10)
- the importance of the legislative framework relevant to children's rights, health, safety and well-being, and work within those laws.

d) respect

- the individuality and diversity of all children. There is no place in any play provision for prejudice against children with disabilities, or against those who suffer from economic or social disadvantage, nor any place for racism or sexism. Adults involved in play should always seek to promote equality and anti-discriminatory practice.
- the views and opinions of children. They should be at the centre of decisions made about provision. They should be consulted and their needs, opinions and reactions must be taken into account (as far as possible, consistent with respect for others and attention to health and safety).
- each other and work together to achieve clear and consistent adult values.

All of these objectives can be achieved within a play environment that contains a broad range of play opportunities.

Standards and Safety

Play providers must differentiate between acceptable risk and unacceptable risk. People learn by taking risks and by pushing at the boundaries of their abilities. This is true of children in particular. They need to be allowed the space and freedom to face challenges in a safe and stimulating environment. If this need is frustrated it is possible that they will explore their limits in unsafe, unsupervised environments beyond the play provision. It is also possible that denied the opportunity as children to learn about assessing risk they may grow up without those abilities.

However, acknowledging this does not absolve adults from any responsibility for children's safety. All play facilities need to be safe and to meet legislative requirements. Adults are responsible for ensuring that there are no unacceptable risks.

Legislation and Quality

Play providers should make themselves conversant with the legislation relevant to children's welfare and safety, and work within the legislative requirements.

You are encouraged to establish a quality assurance framework to allay any concerns about the quality of playwork within the service you provide. You may, for example, wish playworkers to use a self assessment process. Play Wales, the national organisation for play in Wales, has recently published *The First Claim*, a document that provides a framework for playwork self-assessment. They say that they have tried to encapsulate, "what we do and why, but possibly more importantly what we don't do and why we don't."

Commitments

In adopting this policy The Neath Port Talbot Children and Youth Partnership and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership make a number of commitments.

- To promote increased access to quality play opportunities.
- To review the policy.
- To use the values and objectives set out in the policy to inform services.
- To strive to find ways of improving all aspects of children's play.

Policy Proofing

The National Assembly for Wales is currently developing a mechanism for ensuring that the needs of children, young people and their families are taken into account when policies are developed across the range of its responsibilities. Their consultation document *Children and Young People – A Framework for Partnership* has recently been published. In it the Assembly proposes to introduce a requirement for “policy proofing” all new policies to their potential impact on children and young people. At this stage we do not know whether the policy proofing will be confined to National Assembly matters only, or whether it will also be made a requirement for Local Authorities. We welcome this recognition that children, who have no political voice, are affected by policy decisions. Consequently, we have decided to use the Assembly’s proposal and have assessed this policy document in the light of the following questions suggested by the *Framework for Partnership*.

Does the proposal have direct implications for children or young people and, if so, what are they? How can it improve their lives?

The development of the play policy is part of a multi-agency, on-going process to provide better coordination and planning of services. The policy is only the first stage of this process and will indicate the direction of any future play strategy. The direct impact of this upon children and young people in the area will depend ultimately upon the organisations and individuals who adopt the policy. The policy has potential for raising awareness and the standards of play provided which will, in turn, directly improve the quality of children’s lives.

Does the proposal have a significant, indirect effect on children or young people, for example the construction of a road which might affect their access to a school or leisure facility?

It is intended that this policy will have positive indirect effects upon the lives of all children within Neath Port Talbot.

Will the proposal affect one group of children and young people more than others, or will there be competing interests between different groups?

This policy is aimed at all play providers in the Neath Port Talbot area. It should, therefore, be of benefit to all children in the county. It is to be hoped that, in laying the foundation for a play strategy, it will, ultimately, be of more value to those presently deprived of adequate and appropriate play opportunities

Will the proposal affect other policy areas or bodies involved in working with children and young people, and is there scope for integrating the new proposal with other measures in train or prospect?

“The benefits to be obtained from promoting play cut across the responsibilities of many different Assembly departments ... However, although play has a place in many departments’ responsibilities, it appears to have a home in none.” (1.9 and 1.10 *The State of Play*). Children’s play is not the responsibility of one person or one department. It is, instead, the responsibility of all.

Appendix 1 – The Conference

The one-day conference was held at The Princess Royal Theatre, Port Talbot on 30th January 2001. Maggie Dawson (Lifelong learning Service), Liz Cole (Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership), Gaynor Richards (Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service), Darren Bird (Play Right), Sarah Phillips (Interplay Integrated play and Leisure) and Paul Hinder (Leisure Services) were the guest speakers. There were workshop sessions that struggled with definitions of play and play provision, and some preparatory work on issues facing Neath Port Talbot that will feed into the strategy. The workshop definitions permeate and inform the policy. In considering play and play provision these are the issues facing Neath Port Talbot.

- *Audit* – across all play – where are we now and what’s already out there?
- *Communication and co-ordination* between services and departments. Increased communication needed between Local Authority, Community Council, Voluntary Sector, etc. How will this happen? Who takes main responsibility for play? What is that responsibility? Head organisation needs to have cross sector representation. How are priorities decided upon? Should there be a Play Officer for Neath & Port Talbot? Raising awareness of the importance of play at all levels and linking it in with other strategies.
- *Consultation* with children and young people. Also with local communities.
- *Resources*. There is a lack of money leading to difficulties with sustainability
- *Qualified* staff – responsible & safe Training implications – accredited/unaccredited,
- Legacy of *playgrounds* etc – appropriateness of time scale/strategies in place – what is the best thing to put in its place? Upkeep of parks, maintenance of existing provision or new provision. Staffed adventure playgrounds – should they return?
- *More* play schemes – not just for the summer
More after school clubs, particularly subsidised after school clubs
More playgroups
Criteria/priorities of current play provision. Building up/improving the range and quality of existing provision
- *Minority groups* – travellers, refugees, ethnic, cultural and linguistic minority,
Special Educational Needs/Bilingual Special needs – access, support & resources
- *Geography* of NPT – how do you cover rural areas and outlying communities?

Appendix 2 – The Play Working Group

The Play Working Group is made up of the following members:

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Claire O'Flynn
NCH
N P T F S C
Sandfields Family Centre
Severn Crescent
Sandfields
Port Talbot
SA12 6TA

Cerys Williams and Kath Jones
Start Well Project
Sure Start project
C/o Baglan Clinic
Fairwood Drive
Baglan
Port Talbot

Dept. of Ed, Leisure and Lifelong
Learning
Neath Port Talbot CBC:
Maggie Dawson (Co-ordinator Lifelong
Learning)
Paul Hinder (Leisure Services)
Eryl Davies-Jones (Special Educational
Needs)
Virginia Jones (Library Service)
Carwyn Young (Community
Playschemes)

Mike Greenaway
Play Wales
Baltic House
Mount Stuart Square
Cardiff
CF105FH

Appendix 3 – Further Reading

BEST PLAY: What play provision should do for children, National Playing Fields Association, 2000

Children and Young People: A Framework for partnership – consultation document, The National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff, November 2000

Neath Port Talbot EYDCP Childcare Plan 2000-2003, Neath Port Talbot, June 2000

THE FIRST CLAIM ... A framework for playwork quality assessment, Play Wales Chwarae Cymru, Cardiff, March 2001

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