



State of Play 2022

The report of the Play Sufficiency Assessments
and Play Action Plans 2022

Introduction

Play Wales has undertaken an analysis of the local authority Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSAs) and Play Action Plans submitted to the Welsh Government in June 2022.

This is the ninth national review Play Wales has undertaken. It builds on the State of Play report commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2000, subsequently updated by Play Wales in 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2011. Since the commencement of the Play Sufficiency Duty, Play Wales has reviewed the PSAs submitted in 2013, 2016 and 2019. It has also reviewed various Progress Reports in interim years.

This review was undertaken between August and October 2022. Play Wales has been asked to provide an overview of:

- the achievements and challenges under the required processes and each Matter required in the PSAs
- key messages and the main themes emerging from the PSAs for 2022
- the effectiveness of the processes, approaches and templates that are used for undertaking the PSAs
- recommendations for the future.

The Welsh Government has also asked for specific information about opportunities to play for disabled children regarding accessibility to outdoor play spaces, such as play areas and playgrounds. This is reported later in Appendix: Accessibility of play spaces for disabled children.

As well as reviewing all PSAs and Action Plans, this analysis has been supplemented by discussions with play sufficiency lead officers.

Policy background

The Welsh Government has been committed to children's play since devolution, publishing the world's first play policy in 2002. As part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, the Welsh Government legislated in support of children's play. A statutory duty was placed on local authorities to assess and, as far as is reasonably practicable, secure sufficient opportunities for children to play. This has become known as the 'Play Sufficiency Duty'.

Play Sufficiency Assessments are undertaken and submitted every three years. The first of these triennial PSAs were submitted in March 2013. Local authorities also produce and submit annual Play Action Plans and report on these through annual Progress Reports.

In November 2019, the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services decided to take forward a Ministerial Review of Play. The aim of the review was to assess Welsh Government work with respect to play policy and to inform how the Welsh Government develops and progresses the play agenda.

The review was managed by the Play Policy Team within the Early Years, Childcare and Play Division of the Welsh Government. An internal project board of cross-policy Welsh Government officials was established to provide overall scrutiny throughout the life of the project. A cross-professional steering group of play and playwork specialists and policy officials from across the Welsh Government was set up to support the review.

The review was stalled in March 2020 due to the pressures and uncertainties that the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic brought. It was restarted in winter 2021 and Play Wales was asked to co-ordinate the drafting of the review report. The report and a background paper were submitted to the Welsh Government in September 2022.

The State of Play 2022 is a discussion paper to inform future actions and activity. It should be read alongside the Ministerial Review of Play report, which includes sections on play sufficiency and funding and cross policy working.

Play Sufficiency Duty guidance and tools

Wales – a Play Friendly Country is statutory guidance to local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas. It supports local authorities in complying with the duty under section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

It lists the Matters that need to be considered:

- Matter A: Population
- Matter B: Providing for diverse needs
- Matter C: Space available for children to play
- Matter D: Supervised provision
- Matter E: Charges for play provision
- Matter F: Access to space/provision
- Matter G: Securing & developing the play workforce
- Matter H: Community engagement and participation
- Matter I: Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas.

The *Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit* was developed in 2012 to provide support to all local authorities in fulfilling their duties, as set out in the Play Sufficiency Assessment (Wales) Regulations 2012. The toolkit was prepared by Play Wales and the Welsh Government in conjunction with play providers across Wales as a means of supporting the implementation of the duty.

The toolkit includes a standardised Play Sufficiency Assessment template with over 100 criteria across the nine Matters. This template has been reviewed and updated for subsequent assessment cycles to ensure that changes in policy, legislation and funding programmes are up to date and included.

In our State of Play 2019 report, we recommended that Play Wales work with the Welsh Government and the network of play sufficiency leads to consider a refinement of the template to support better data collection and presentation. It was agreed not to progress this recommendation as play sufficiency was a theme that the planned Ministerial Review of Play would explore.

The 2022 Play Sufficiency Assessment review

Required processes – summary of progress

Each local authority's PSA contains a Principle Statement, which articulates the value of play. The context section describes the methodology used to undertake and approve the PSA and Action Plan.

Wales – a Play Friendly Country sets out several underpinning principles which the Welsh Government expects local authorities to work to when responding to their duties to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities.

There are also required processes for each local authority to complete:

- Partnership Working
- Consultation and Participation
- Maximising Resources
- Links to the Well-being Plan
- Monitoring Play Sufficiency.

Partnership working

The findings of the review indicate that uncertainties and changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted on partnership working and collaboration in preparing the PSAs and Action Plans. Despite these challenges, as in previous reviews, there are some examples of good collaboration interdepartmentally within local authorities. This is most evident in those areas with a designated play sufficiency lead officer.

In those areas where they are present and actively involved in supporting play, town and community councils continue to feature as important partners. In addition to directly providing services in a few cases, there are many examples of match-funding for holiday playschemes and equipped play areas. Third sector partners also continue to be mentioned across all PSAs as important service providers, particularly for children who may benefit from targeted support or specialist services. Although third sector organisations deliver direct services or projects in communities, there is no evidence to suggest that local authorities support them financially to meet core infrastructure costs. Therefore, sustainability for these organisations continues to be an issue.

Maximising resources

There is currently no national dedicated funding stream to local authorities for play or for play sufficiency functions. However, the Welsh Government has frequently made capital and revenue funding available to local authorities for play sufficiency via the All Wales Play Opportunities Grant (AWPOG). The most recent allocations have focused on supporting local authorities to secure more opportunities to play as part of COVID-19 recovery.

During the summer of 2019, the Welsh Government piloted a £100,000 Holiday Hunger Playworks Project, which tested the feasibility of tackling holiday hunger through play and community-based settings. Following the success of the pilot, a £1,000,000 grant was allocated to this scheme in 2020-21. Because of the pandemic,

the Holiday Hunger Playworks Project funding was subsequently repurposed, along with £600,000 Education funding, to support provision for vulnerable children during the school summer holidays.

In 2020-21 the inclusion of £3,000,000 COVID-19 capital funding (and £500,000 revenue funding for a project linked to staffed playwork provision) is noted as having contributed to enhanced facilities, particularly supporting local authorities to consider accessibility issues. The funding also helped increase access to outdoor play facilities in line with Play Sufficiency Assessments.

In 2021, the Welsh Government provided further COVID-19 funding via two programmes to support children and young people to recover from the pandemic:

- Summer of Fun – £5,000,000 revenue funding
- Winter of Wellbeing – £6,000,000 revenue funding, £5,000,000 capital funding.

In March 2022, Cost of Living funding was allocated for a further Summer of Fun programme which was delivered from 1 July until 30 September, after the PSAs were submitted.

The 2022 PSAs report particularly on the Summer of Fun 2021 and Winter of Wellbeing, with all PSAs welcoming both programmes. Many note that they were awarded much larger grants than expected or that had been received previously. Despite the welcome investment, there were some difficulties with the tight timescale for both programmes. Most PSAs mention that having more time for planning and programme set up would have been beneficial. This is notable particularly in those areas that do not have a dedicated play development officer or team.

The PSA review indicates that the administration and delivery of these programmes restricted the progress of higher level and strategic actions. However, there is recognition that there have been some opportunities that wouldn't have been progressed, enhanced or developed without this additional funding from the Welsh Government.

The PSAs also mention that the impact of COVID-19 and associated restrictions on children has raised the profile of play locally and nationally. This seems to have contributed to more interest, increased awareness and recognition of the value and benefits of play across local authorities. The role of the playwork workforce in supporting children in the recovery from the pandemic is also commonly referred to. The programmes seem to have supported partnership working as allocating large sums of money was reliant on a range of service and delivery providers.

The PSAs recognise that the Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing programmes have been welcomed by families. However, there is concern that this level of service becomes an expectation, and this is challenging to sustain without the certainty of funding. Through these programmes, children may have experienced new opportunities that families are unable to sustain in the longer term due to cost and availability. Despite these concerns, the programmes are seen as helping local authorities and partners to provide an essential aid to recovery from the physical and emotional impacts of the pandemic and associated lockdowns.

In the Welsh Government 2021-22 final budget, £1,000,000 was approved for the renamed Playworks Holiday Project (holiday hunger) which focused on supporting access to increased play opportunities for children and young people during the school holidays. Most PSAs note the positive impact this fund is having on the ability to work more strategically and sustainably.

A particular feature across PSAs is the impact that the Playworks Project has had in supporting growth in the infrastructure to support local delivery and work more strategically. The Playworks Project grant has supported both the development and strengthening of provision. It also enabled sustainability of staff so training and knowledge is being built upon and developed.

Consultation, participation and engagement

It is important to acknowledge that it was particularly challenging for local authorities to engage with partners, children and communities during the preparation of 2022 PSAs. All PSAs mention that time, resources, capacity and priorities have shifted in response to the pandemic. The resulting lockdown restrictions and limitations of COVID-19 have also impacted on the ability to undertake engagement activities. Several PSAs report that play consultation had to compete with a variety of consultations taking place, including the preparation of the wellbeing needs assessment and other survey work.

Despite these pressures, there appears to be a continued commitment to ensuring that the underpinning principles of consultation, participation and engagement are adhered to. All the assessments indicate some level of engagement with children and parents.

A standard Play Satisfaction Survey for children is included in the PSA toolkit. A small number of revisions and improvements have been made over time. While most local authorities have used the survey in the standard form, others have adapted it or developed their own version. While each local authority must approach the PSA in a

way that best meets its local needs and situation, the use of non-standard surveys across Wales means that opportunities to consider an all-Wales picture of children's views of play sufficiency is not possible.

Through the survey, children tell us what's good about the play opportunities in their local area and tell us how satisfied they are about when, how and where they can play. Play Wales is also analysing the surveys completed by nearly 7,000 children across 15 local authority areas in Wales as part of their PSAs in 2022. Our report on this will be published in Winter 2022.

Several action plans mention the commitment to undertake more in-depth consultation with children and communities. This is both as action research at neighbourhood level or with particular focus groups of children. This commitment is more common where there is play development capacity either within a local authority or a partner organisation.

The play sufficiency Matters

As previously mentioned, there are nine Matters that need to be considered in assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities. This section identifies common strengths, shortcomings through a SWOT analysis of each Matter as part of the review of 2022 Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSA).

Matter A – Population			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
Continued improvement in the way that data is gathered and used	Limited data for some groups of children	2021 Census data will provide up to date information	Limited resources to use data and to plan effectively
Better understanding of the range of data that is available	Varying LA capacity to collate and analyse data	Identify other data sources that can be used, such as information from health boards	Limited support from local specialists
The sharing of data between officers and organisations is showing improvement	Reliant on dated Census data	Offer training to local authority staff to understand and undertake data collection and analysis	

Matter B – Providing for diverse needs			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Increased provision for specific groups</p> <p>Partnership working when funds are available</p> <p>Good examples of inclusive services which are staffed</p> <p>Comprehensive reporting on Matter B</p>	<p>Continued shortfalls for some groups such as Gypsy and Traveller children, older children and Welsh language provision</p> <p>Specialist services tend to be located in more populated areas</p> <p>Providing for diversity can be complex and is not a 'one size fits all' solution</p>	<p>Access audits for indoor provision</p> <p>Use of Play Wales' <i>Creating accessible play spaces toolkit</i> locally</p> <p>Appreciation of inclusive provision by children and families</p> <p>Build on good partnership working supported by Welsh Government programmes</p>	<p>Families are seeking individualised provision, this is not always practicable</p> <p>Specialist services are difficult to design, fund and sustain</p> <p>Competition for funding, which is limited</p> <p>Targeted funding may cause some groups to feel disengaged and under served</p> <p>Providing for diversity can be complex and is not a 'one size fits all' solution</p>

Matter C – Space available for children to play			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ open spaces ○ outdoor unstaffed designated play spaces 			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Some PSAs refer to Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)</p> <p>Good use of capital funding to improve facilities and access issues</p> <p>There are complementary policies which protect and improve open space</p> <p>Good examples of provision for outdoor play which can be developed</p> <p>Good use of Welsh Government funding to support outdoor play</p>	<p>Reduction in maintenance budgets</p> <p>Limited resources generally</p> <p>Limited skills of staff</p> <p>Some Open Space Assessments are dated</p> <p>There is some confusion in the terms used within the criteria which means the interpretation varies</p> <p>Some areas are too reliant on active partnerships with community groups and town and community councils</p> <p>Families and children do not recognise open spaces that can be used for play</p>	<p>Replacement Local Development Plans across all areas</p> <p>Commitment to undertake access audits</p> <p>Commitment to undertake play value assessments</p> <p>Better promotion of the value of informal open space (links to Matter F)</p> <p>Increased recognition of the importance of outdoor play</p>	<p>Reliant on funding</p> <p>Changing mindsets regarding design and provision changes is challenging</p> <p>Play officers are stretched to fully engage with matters regarding play space location and design</p> <p>Areas without town and community councils or community groups are disadvantaged</p> <p>Duplication in PSA template is causing confusion</p> <p>Financial pressures on maintenance budgets also impact on the level and quality of provision – with the bottom-line being safety rather than quality</p>

Matter D – Supervised provision			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ playwork provision ○ structured recreational activities 			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Dewis Cymru seems well used in most areas</p> <p>Reasonable understanding of structured recreational activities provision locally</p> <p>Range of partner involvement, particularly in provision for recreational activities</p> <p>Good use of Welsh Government funding</p>	<p>Assessing quality in playwork settings</p> <p>Provision can be challenging to reach for marginalised groups, children living in rural areas</p>	<p>Quality Assurance scheme (<i>Chwarae o Safon</i>) for playwork provision, developed by Play Wales and partners will be available soon</p> <p>Better use of Dewis Cymru</p> <p>Build on partnership working which featured in the delivery of Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing</p>	<p>Supervised provision is heavily reliant on continued funding</p> <p>Expectation that recent activity programmes will continue</p>

Matter E – Charges for play provision			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>There is good data across the criteria which needs to be considered</p> <p>Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing programmes provided and extended a range of opportunities for children and families</p> <p>Where there is capacity, ideas of home-based low-cost play ideas are shared via social media and in settings</p>	<p>Impact of raising bills makes subsidies difficult</p> <p>Shortfall in the provision of subsidised travel</p>	<p>Good use of Welsh Government funding provides examples of good practice for the future</p>	<p>Availability of free provision relies on grant funding/continued funding</p> <p>Cost of living crisis will impact on the ability of children to access some opportunities, particularly those with a charge attached to them, or where equipment is required to take part</p>

Matter F – Access			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ to space/provision ○ to Information, publicity, events 			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Where there is capacity, many local authorities are making good use of social media</p> <p>There is an increase in interest in supporting play streets in a number of areas</p>	<p>Traffic continues to be identified as a barrier to play, despite investment in road safety initiatives</p> <p>In some areas, there is a misunderstanding about the processes needed to support play streets</p>	<p>Better use of Dewis Cymru</p> <p>Address misunderstandings related to play street provision, using examples of good practice from other areas</p> <p>20mph default speed limit supports discussions and helps address road safety concerns</p> <p>Family Information Services can advocate for play</p>	<p>Parents are concerned about safety which limits children making the most of neighbourhood play</p> <p>Some providers do not share current information with Dewis Cymru</p>

Matter G – Securing & developing the play workforce			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Many areas make good use of the training and professional development opportunities</p> <p>There are examples of childcare, sport and youth workers being trained in playwork</p> <p>Qualifications are available via Adult Learning Wales and others</p> <p>Playwork features in some Childcare Workforce Development Plans</p> <p>Good use of Playworks Project funding</p>	<p>There is confusion between the terms <i>playwork workforce</i> and <i>play workforce</i>, despite the inclusion of the definitions in the PSA template</p> <p>Misunderstandings about the level of qualification needed in staffed playwork settings</p> <p>There are some restrictions to some of the training on offer</p>	<p>Undertake workforce audits</p> <p>Include playwork in workforce development plans</p> <p>Develop and deliver short seminars or workshops for other council departments</p> <p>Work in partnership with Play Wales, to deliver Understanding Play Sufficiency workshops developed by Play Wales</p>	<p>Funding can be limited and difficult to access</p> <p>Recruitment and retention issues have been negatively impacted by COVID-19</p>

Matter H – Community engagement and participation			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>There is increased recognition amongst families and communities about the importance of play</p> <p>There has been good support from partner organisations to support play survey work for 2022</p> <p>Good examples of informal engagement with communities through outreach work and family play days</p> <p>Good examples of neighbourhood engagement emerging</p>	<p>There was an abundance of consultation about a range of issues during COVID-19</p> <p>COVID-19 restrictions made engagement difficult</p>	<p>Develop a clear strategy for engaging children, parents and communities using examples from practice</p> <p>Ensure consistent review and use of engagement methods and tools</p> <p>Work with partners such as town and community councils, housing associations and others to upskill them</p>	<p>Consultation can be seen as a one-off exercise that doesn't result in improvements or changes</p> <p>Capacity and skills to undertake engagement activity varies</p>

Matter I – Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Most PSAs can name a lead member and officer for play</p> <p>Many refer to how the PSA may inform the Well-being Plans</p> <p>Play sufficiency research has made the links between play and wellbeing</p> <p>The profile of the importance of play has been raised</p>	<p>Play monitoring groups are difficult to sustain</p> <p>Officers who have understood and supported play sufficiency have left over time – capacity and knowledge has been lost in some policy areas</p> <p>Officers across all policy areas are stretched</p> <p>New elected members since the last Play Sufficiency Assessment in 2019 has resulted in a loss of experience</p> <p>Some sections of the template are completed in isolation, leading to misunderstanding of some of the criteria</p>	<p>Make links between play and wellbeing locally</p> <p>Promote play sufficiency to new officers and elected members, using the Understanding Play Sufficiency training package (soon to be available from Play Wales)</p>	<p>Threats to funding and support if play is not valued across the local authority area</p> <p>A disjointed approach to play sufficiency across the area</p> <p>A lack of collaborative response to future PSAs</p>

The Play Sufficiency Assessment tools

The content of the PSAs reflects the infrastructure, capacity and play sufficiency knowledge locally. In several instances, particular Matters receive more in-depth attention. This is likely to reflect the work plan or knowledge of the officer completing the overall assessment.

There continues to be variation in the use of the PSA template – this is understandable as it relates to local issues and capacity. This review has highlighted these issues:

- The level of detail for each criteria varies across all returns.
- As a result of reduced capacity, many of the sections are shared with local authority colleagues to complete. This results in some of the criteria being misunderstood or not completed.
- It appears that sections of the PSA have been completed by departments in isolation from one another. Whilst this is not new, it should be noted that change of officers during the lifetime of the PSA process may be impacting on knowledge and understanding of play and the play sufficiency process, thus influencing the assessment and RAG status.
- There is inconsistent use of the RAG status.
- Where sections have been completed in isolation it appears that the analysis is subjective, rather than an agreed corporate assessment.
- There is repetition in the current PSA template.
- The current template does not follow the Welsh Government's considerations regarding document accessibility (in line with The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018).
- It is challenging for local authorities to facilitate Play Monitoring Groups, particularly in areas without a dedicated play sufficiency officer.

Play Action Plan Template

Many of the Play Action Plans are quite detailed and, in some cases, read as a work plan, rather than an action plan. It appears that many would benefit from a prioritisation exercise. The depth of detail across many action plans makes it difficult to ascertain how actions will be progressed in entirety. All areas consider actions across the scope of the Matters; however, the absence of functioning Play Monitoring Groups at local level may make achieving some of the actions challenging.

Summary

Analysis of the PSAs indicates that the Play Sufficiency Duty has served as a national driver for the planning of play provision locally. The review suggests that local authorities and their partners feel that COVID-19 has raised the profile of play locally and nationally.

The PSAs indicate that COVID-19 lockdown measures impacted negatively on local authority ability to secure sufficiency of provision in terms of some of the Matters. The impact on the provision of staffed playwork, designated play areas and community engagement in the various lockdown periods are discussed.

Although the pandemic brought unexpected and unprecedented restrictions and uncertainties, this has also been a time of innovation and experimenting. Local authorities and their partners repurposed themselves to come together to offer help and support. From online engagement and providing children with play resources, play and children's organisations across Wales worked hard to make sure play remained high on everyone's agendas. There are also examples of play teams and organisations across Wales ensuring that children had a playful presence and opportunities to play in their neighbourhoods through offering outside ideas and play provision. Despite the challenges brought specifically by the pandemic, the PSAs show continued evidence of the benefits of cross department working to contribute towards securing sufficiency.

The Welsh Government highlighted the importance of play for health and wellbeing in guidance and by providing funding to support local authorities to address play sufficiency actions as part of the Covid-19 Reconstruction – Challenges and Priorities funding package. A focus on playwork provision for vulnerable children during the summer of 2020 resulted in enhanced partnerships between play sufficiency officers and other children's services. Several play teams reported better collaboration and a sense of increased recognition.

Despite the challenges of recent years, all PSAs demonstrate a commitment to delivering positive change, with a recognition that it is necessary to be mindful of existing capacity and resources. There is no doubt that the support and range of funding from the Welsh Government has resulted in increased activity to secure play opportunities across Wales.

Recommendations

Consider and respond to the recommendations relating to play sufficiency contained within the report of the Ministerial Review of Play steering group.

Work with Play Wales, and the Play Sufficiency Officer Network it facilitates, to review and update the *Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit*.

The PSA template should also be reviewed and updated. This should be kept under review for every PSA cycle.

Work with Play Wales, and the Play Sufficiency Officer Network it facilitates, to review and refine the Play Sufficiency Assessment Template and the Play Action Plan Template.

Pay attention to the impact that the Cost-of-Living Crisis has on the provision and realisation of the right to play, covered by the Play Sufficiency Duty.



Appendix 1:

Accessibility of play spaces for disabled children

Background

Some disabled children report facing isolation, exclusion and loneliness. This may be due to an environment that is poorly designed, attitudes which reinforce differences or the effects of conditions and impairments which limit self-independence and participation. When we design spaces that get it right for disabled children, more children can play alongside one another, developing a better understanding of the full range of abilities. These early experiences are important to shape tolerance and understanding of difference.

In 2017, the Welsh Government funded Play Wales to develop the *Creating accessible play spaces* toolkit. The aim of the toolkit is to support local authorities, town and community councils, politicians at all levels, open space planners, housing associations and other playground managers to assist them in meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 when providing opportunities for play.

In 2022, the UK Children's Play Policy Forum and Play Safety Forum published *Including Disabled Children in Play Provision*. This joint statement provides useful definitions for Welsh Government, local authorities and partners to consider:

'An Accessible Play Space is a space which is barrier-free, allows users access to move around the space and offers participation opportunities for a range of differing abilities. Not every child of every ability will be able to actively use everything within an accessible play space.

An Inclusive Play Space provides a barrier-free environment, with supporting infrastructure, which meets the wide and varying play needs of every child. Disabled children and non-disabled children will enjoy high levels of participation opportunities, equally rich in play value'.

The Play Sufficiency Assessment and access to outdoor play space

The *Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit* contains various resources and templates to support local authorities. This includes an access audit which can be implemented and adapted at local level. All the tools provided in the toolkit are informed by the social model of disability, as is the *Wales – a Play Friendly Country* statutory guidance.

The statutory guidance sets out nine Matters local authorities need to consider. Four specific Matters relate to inclusive play:

- **Matter B – Providing for Diverse Needs:** directs local authorities and partners to aim to offer play opportunities that are inclusive and encourage all children to play and socialise. This includes carrying out access audits for

all play provision and ensuring there is a well-known and agreed mechanism which is used to identify the need for separate provision for disabled children.

- **Matter C – Space available for children to play:** directs local authorities to undertake access audits at all designated play spaces and implement proposals to improve access and safety.
- **Matter F – Access to space and information:** asks local authorities to report on activity to improve the access to space and the information it provides to children and their families.
- **Matter H – Community engagement and participation:** directs local authorities to consult widely with children, their families, and other stakeholders on their views on play provision. In addition, the Play Sufficiency Assessment Template criteria requires local authorities to promote initiatives to engage relevant groups in enhancing play opportunities for children in its area. Local authorities seek the views of disabled children and young people as part of this process.

The Play Sufficiency Assessment 2022 Review and access to outdoor play space – achievements

Meeting the play needs of all children through the provision of accessible outdoor play space continues to be a priority for local authorities and their partners in Wales. In the main, there appears to be a greater consideration to the general principles of inclusivity. Where capital investment programmes have been available, issues of inclusivity have been well considered and provided for. All local authorities report some action to create accessible play space when refurbishing or developing new playgrounds. Most notably, many acknowledge that Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance is required when contracting developers.

Particular examples of good practice include:

- The local authority requires any contractor tendering for play space development to design for accessibility and include an accessibility statement within any bid. This has been assisted via consultation exercises involving the local community and interested parties on what they feel sites should contain to ensure that proposals / briefs are as accurate as possible from the commencement of project planning. The range of accessible and sensory equipped play has increased because of detailed consultation with users.
- Inclusive items are incorporated into the play area, wherever possible.
- Gate widths, path surfaces and access are considered within the design.

- A 'key considerations' document which acts as guidance on both the enhancement of existing play spaces and the introduction of new spaces.
- When refurbishing or developing new playgrounds, the Council puts together a brief which sets out guidance and parameters for contractors. The brief will include several requirements. These include a requirement for the contractor to explain their approach to design, including how it will ensure suitable access for disabled people. The play area provider is also required to provide a Disabled Access Statement. This is clearly outlined within the brief.
- All relevant guidance (for example that provided by RoSPA) is used when refurbishing or developing new play areas – for example siting, design, equipment and surfacing.
- Ensuring all new developments and refurbishments incorporate sensory and inclusive play elements within the design.

Other activity includes:

- Consultation undertaken with local children, community councils and residents
- Play development teams undertaking access audits in outdoor play spaces
- Consideration of the wider needs (i.e. changing toilets) in larger facilities.

The review demonstrates that the capital funding provided to local authorities through All Wales Play Opportunities Grant (AWPOG) has been used throughout Wales to support local authorities to address accessibility issues with regards to outdoor play spaces. Funding has enabled:

- Purchase and installation of accessible basket swings, harness swings, roundabouts
- Purchase and installation of wheelchair accessible picnic tables, hard surfaces and linking pathways
- Purchase and installation of hydraulic self-closing gates
- Purchase of sensory equipment that can be used in a variety of settings through loan schemes
- Installation of outdoor sensory areas
- Improvements to surfacing and paths in play areas
- Improvements to signposting, interpretation panels and footbridges in public open spaces to allow access to disabled users
- Several areas to consider accessibility for the widest groups of children with some mentioning gender-neutral equipment as well as equipment that meets the play needs of teenagers
- Improved information to parents, including where facilities are located.

The Play Sufficiency Assessment 2022 Review and access to outdoor play space – challenges

Most of the PSAs undertaken in 2022 show a decrease in play area maintenance budgets and lack of dedicated financial resource to invest, update and refurbish older sites. The review has also identified several challenges:

- Development of most play areas precedes the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and many were developed with surfacing and equipment that doesn't support accessibility or inclusive play.
- There is an understandable, but sometimes unrealistic, expectation from residents that all fixed play areas and spaces are fully accessible.
- Many areas have a large stock of fixed play areas that need updating with limited financial resource available.
- Some local authorities have transferred responsibility for play areas to town and community councils or community groups. These can be transient groups who need support to consider issues of accessibility and inclusion.
- Accessibility usually requires physical work to be undertaken from lowering kerbs to creating pathways to play spaces. This often requires expertise from different service areas.
- Accessible equipment, such as a roundabout or swing that can be used by wheelchair users, are substantially more expensive than a standard item.
- Ageing stock that is functional but offers little play value or opportunities for inclusion.

Conclusion

Several PSAs indicate that local authorities have committed additional funding for designated play areas. Improving accessibility appears to have been a fundamental part of this work. PSAs report that providing accessible opportunities within play spaces itself has been relatively achievable. However, there is challenge in making improvements to the old infrastructure, such as access paths and routes.

Overall, there is a recognition that all children should have access to opportunities to play and there is now greater use of the phrases: 'accessibility' and 'inclusive play'. The concept of inclusion has been, in the main, embraced by providers. However, there is still some confusion about terminology, and this has led to an expectation that all play equipment should be adapted for certain users. Local providers report that it has sometimes been difficult to relay a message that emphasises the importance of providing spaces that enable children – no matter what their ability – to play together.



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