

Focus on play

Community and town councils

This briefing for community and town councils provides information about how to support better opportunities for children to play in their own communities. Children and teenagers need and are entitled to quality places and time for play as part of their everyday life within their own community.

Community and town councils, and therefore councillors, in Wales are well placed to be play champions for the communities in which they live and serve. Our community and town councillors have strong roots in the community. They are well known to residents and will often have strong links with useful and potential partners, such as local authorities, schools and business leaders.

There are some essential factors, which need to be in place to promote children's access to play opportunities. These are permission, time and space – local community councils are well placed to support all these factors.

Many community and town councils provide facilities or contribute toward play provision, such as recreation grounds, play areas, playing fields, and community halls that may be used for children's playschemes and other play sessions. Others have neither the funds nor the responsibility to provide traditional play opportunities. However, it is often community and town councillors who are key local advocates for play – working with others to draw in funding, promoting community involvement in play, and negotiating for better local play provision.

'Many community and town councils in Wales are becoming responsible for managing children's play facilities as a feature of the growing devolution of services from unitary authorities. The need for councils to be well informed about the responsibilities involved as well as the opportunities available for enhancing existing provision is acknowledged and One Voice Wales is very supportive of the role that Play Wales contributes to helping develop the understanding that is needed to manage such valuable local facilities.'

**Paul R. Egan, Deputy Chief Executive
and Resources Manager, One Voice Wales**

Playing contributes to children's wellbeing and resilience. Having welcoming places, enough time and the company of others to play with every day, is important to all children and teenagers – as adults we need to foster environments that support this.



National and international policy

All children have the right to play as protected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Welsh Government recognises that to achieve its aim of creating a play friendly Wales and to provide excellent opportunities for our children to play it is necessary for local authorities, their partners and other stakeholders to also work towards this purpose. Therefore, a section on Play Opportunities was included in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

The Play Sufficiency Duty comes as part of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty agenda which recognises that children can have a poverty of experience, opportunity and aspiration, and that this kind of poverty can affect children from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds across Wales.

The Welsh Government encourages local authorities to acknowledge the importance of play in children's lives and make a firm commitment to work strenuously across policies and departments, with partner organisations, and with children and their families and communities to ensure that children have access to the play opportunities that they want and have a right to expect. The relevant partnerships are likely to include community and town councils.

Play areas and open space

To support community and town councils, local play associations or residents groups to consider play space improvements or developments, Play Wales has developed two toolkits.

The *Developing and managing play spaces* community toolkit has been designed for anyone who takes responsibility for managing or developing a play space in a community.

www.play.wales/developing-and-managing-play-spaces/

The *Creating accessible play spaces* toolkit is designed to provide clear and concise information to help to create play spaces that enable all children to play, along with friends and family.

www.play.wales/creating-accessible-play-spaces/

The toolkits provide specific information intended to help understand a particular area of play space management or development. They also include practical, step-by-step tools, such as guides or templates for conducting work linked to managing and developing play spaces. These are designed to assist us to offer quality play provision that offers all children and teenagers the opportunity to freely interact with or experience the following:

- **other children and young people** – with a choice to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, fall out, and resolve conflict
- **the natural world** – weather, the seasons, bushes, trees, plants, insects, animals and mud
- **loose parts** – natural and manmade materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished
- **the natural elements** – earth, air, fire and water
- **challenge and risk taking** – both on a physical and emotional level
- **movement** – running, jumping, climbing, balancing and rolling
- **the senses** – sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights.





‘There were no negatives when we allowed children to play in the grounds after school ... my fears didn’t materialise at all. There wasn’t any vandalism and the children and the parents who took part absolutely loved it. It opened our school to the community ... Those who don’t normally join in other activities stayed after school and played. I feel it was a great success.’

School governor, following a project that piloted Play Wales’ schools toolkit

School grounds

Existing school facilities, in most cases, offer significant opportunities to satisfy not only the learning needs of all learners, but many of the social and recreational needs for the community. School buildings, their contents and grounds, often represent the largest single asset of most communities.

The *Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours* toolkit assists school communities and their partners to assess the possibility of making school grounds available for children’s play, out of teaching hours.

The toolkit was piloted as part of a research project. During the planning phase school staff expressed a range of concerns about the project, such as worries about fear of litigation, damage, vandalism and the possible impact of older children causing problems. During the project, these attitudes changed and it was noted in post-project interviews that many of initial fears had not been realised. School communities were able to see the immediate benefits, not only for children but for communities and families, as well.

www.play.wales/use-of-school-grounds-for-playing-out-of-teaching-hours/

Holiday playschemes

Some community and town councils work in partnership with the local authority to provide holiday playschemes for children in their community. This may be through the provision of a building or

space or through a funding arrangement. Others directly provide holiday playschemes for children in their community. These are often short term schemes for a few hours a day for a number of weeks during a school holiday period.

All childcare and play provision, including holiday playschemes and play provision for children under 12 years old, operating for two or more hours a day, are regulated and inspected by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). If a council is registered with CIW, there is a requirement to complete a Self Assessment of Service Statement (SASS), which includes an annual review of the quality of care at the service. This information tells CIW about the service and the system in place for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of care given to children and is used to inform the inspection of the service.

Play Wales has developed a range of qualifications to support the operation of holiday playschemes:

- The Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) is a perfect introduction to those new to playwork or those working in short term, holiday playschemes.
- The Level 3 Managing a Holiday Play Scheme Award (MAHPS) is aimed at those with existing Level 3 qualifications in other work with children and young people but who need a playwork qualification to be the person in charge of a holiday play scheme.

www.play.wales/playwork/training/



Street play sessions

In Wales, and across the UK, there are a number of projects and initiatives that are making streets and communities more play friendly places for children and teenagers.

One model is the Playing Out project, out of school street play sessions led by residents. The project was started by parents in Bristol and was designed to raise awareness and generate support and interest for street play in areas where it has receded or disappeared. It is intended as a jump-start to restore street play as a normal and healthy part of everyday life in our towns and cities.

Street play sessions are after-school or weekend play events led by neighbours and only publicised within the immediate streets. A residential road is closed to traffic to ensure safety and freedom of movement for participants, with volunteer stewards at each road closure point to redirect traffic and give parents peace of mind.

Parents and carers are responsible for their own children and the emphasis is on free, unstructured play. People usually bring out their own toys such as

skipping ropes, bikes and scooters. Children are simply given the space and permission to play in the street, whilst adults have the opportunity to meet and get to know their neighbours better and experience a car-free street.

Following successful pilot projects across Wales, Play Wales has produced resources to support street play:

How to organise playing out sessions on your street – A version of Playing Out’s manual for residents in Wales provides information about the consultation process, top tips and answers to common concerns.

www.play.wales/publication-library/toolkits/how-to-organise-playing-out-sessions-on-your-street/

Opening streets for play – A toolkit for local authorities and partners in Wales is a resource to help local authorities to develop policies and procedures to enable resident-led street play projects in their areas.

www.play.wales/opening-streets-for-play/

Both toolkits include templates for letters and other useful resources.

Advocating for play

Our *Playful Childhoods* website aims to help parents, carers and community groups give children plenty of good opportunities to play at home and in their local community.

It's also useful for local groups and town and community councils to provide play friendly neighbourhoods in their areas.

The website provides:

- Practical ideas about providing time, space and stuff to play with
- Top tips, 'how to' guides and ideas for children's play
- Information about raising awareness about the importance of play
- Guidance about planning a community play area
- Examples of playful communities and projects across Wales
- Links to information on play opportunities available in every local authority in Wales.

The website has been developed to support:

- Parents in giving their children opportunities to play
- Parents so they feel confident about letting their children play outside in the community
- The development of playful communities for children across Wales

Playful Childhoods

- A shared understanding of the importance of play for children and teenagers by all adults across Wales.

The website is full of practical information and guidance for making childhoods and communities across Wales more playful.

www.playfulchildhoods.wales

Playful Communities guide

It is important to make sure children have space, time and permission to play as part of their everyday lives – these are the conditions that support play.

This guide sets out what can be done to make communities more playful and includes examples of how it has been done in areas of Wales.

Guide developed in partnership with Wrexham's Youth & Play Service.

www.play.wales/publication-library/research/playful-communities/

Playday – the national day for play in the UK



As well as a celebration of children's right to play, Playday is a campaign that highlights the importance of play in children's lives. It takes place on the first Wednesday in August every year.

On Playday, thousands of children and their families go out to play at hundreds of community events across the UK. From small-scale community events to events organised in parks and open spaces – Playday is celebrated by each community in a way that suits them.

www.playday.org.uk

The role of community and town councils in promoting play

As adults we need to help children by raising play on the agenda at every appropriate opportunity – with parents and carers, with school management, with decision makers and planners. We need to support the provision of sufficient time and space for children to play every day within their communities.

To support children to play in their own communities, community and town councils can:

- Ensure that children's play needs are considered in a local plan or community profile
- Contact the local authority play development officer to find out what support they can offer or how you might work in partnership

- Organise an event or activity to celebrate Playday
- Work with the local school community to consider making grounds available to children and the community out of teaching hours
- Work with the local authority to arrange street closures for play
- Advocate for play whenever possible – when talking with residents, in community meetings and when making decisions that impact on children and teenagers
- Follow the Play Wales and *Playful Childhoods* Facebook pages.



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www.play.wales