

Worcestershire Play Strategy. Executive Summary December 2006

1. In developing this strategy a Countywide Play Partnership was developed consisting of representative from the key voluntary and public sector organisations in Worcestershire with a remit for play. In addition each of the district action plans which accompany the countywide strategy, have been developed with the key local stakeholders. That has ensured the Worcestershire Play Strategy is genuinely inclusive at all levels and has ownership from all sectors and communities right across the county.
2. The strategy looks at current play provision in formal, informal and casual play activities for children and young people aged 0-19 years across Worcestershire.
3. The method of establishing the key priorities for the strategy in Worcestershire have focused on consultation with stakeholders from statutory and voluntary sector at a county wide visioning event, District stakeholder events involving local voluntary and statutory sector, private providers and children and young people.
4. The Partnership has also drawn on the recent consultation material from the Children and Young Peoples Plan, Children's Fund, Liveability Project, Youthworcs, Extended Schools, And the Community Strategy
5. The definition of Play agreed upon by the key play providers within Worcestershire-

"Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child...Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter"

From Best Play – what play provision should do for children NPFA / PLAYLINK / Children's Play Council (2001)

6. The Strategy adopts :
 - Best Play seven key outcome objectives for play
 - Best play -What play provision should do for children*
 - Children's Play Council/NPFA March 2000 ISBN 094 6085 33,
 - The Play Charter
 - The New Charter for Children's Play,*
 - Children's Play Council -1998
7. The play strategy will inform other strategies such as the children and young peoples plan, childcare, workforce development, children and young peoples engagement, health, community, extended services, and shows how play can contribute to all of the outcomes of Every Child Matters
8. Consultation has informed four Strategy priority statements that will drive the strategy forward
9. Play Strategy Statements:

1. *Children and young people should have the opportunity to access and enjoy a variety of play*

Whilst the range and variety of play opportunities can be increased, poor quality provision will affect children's development and lead to disaffected children and young people.

A quality service can be delivered by;

- a trained and qualified workforce
- meeting national regulatory standards

-systems for monitoring and evaluating

2. Play opportunities should be available to all children and young people

All children have a right to good quality play opportunities. However, a minority of children will consistently lack these opportunities. These children include disabled children, children from Black and ethnic minority communities, young carers, traveller children and children from low income families.

3. Adults should understand what play is, and support it in the community

Consultations identified the lack of awareness of the importance of play as one of the biggest barriers to developing good quality play opportunities. As a result of this lack of awareness funding in play was limited, community buildings were not child-friendly, outdoor areas were perceived to be dominated by the needs of dogs and their owners, complaints took precedence, housing developments provide inappropriate and poorly located play areas, parks were unclean, playground equipment in poor condition and there a general lack of appreciation of children and their needs.

4. Children and young people are the experts and therefore should be involved in the design and delivery of play

Increasing reference is being made to the engagement of children and young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of services for them. Recent government guidance, such as Every Child Matters: Change for Children and Youth Matters: Next Steps, have highlighted the importance of engaging children and young people and introduced an expectation that this is done.

10. Outcomes

Play:

- increased opportunities to enjoy freedom, and exercise choice and control over their actions
- more opportunities for testing boundaries and exploring risk
- a wider range of physical, social and intellectual experiences for children

that develop over time

Play:

- increases children's independence and self-esteem
- develops children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction
- supports the child's well-being, healthy growth and development
- increases children's knowledge and understanding
- promotes children's creativity and capacity to learn for families and community:
- helps reduce the involvement of children and young people in antisocial behaviour, in the short term; and plays a part in promoting social cohesion in the longer term
- supports families and communities, by providing a focus for informal networks of family support, and by allowing children autonomy within an environment about which parents feel secure
- makes an important contribution, in parallel with education, in developing adults who are creative and effective in the social and economic sphere
- offers opportunities for exploring cultural identity and difference
- provides a focus for tackling social exclusion through community development

Dave Boucker , Children's Officer, WCVYS