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State of play in Blaenau Gwent

Executive Summary



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An Executive Summary of the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) 2025: The state of play in Blaenau Gwent.

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Local Authority Summary Statement

The local authority continues to commit to supporting Play Sufficiency and have made significant progress in supporting Welsh Government's vision to create a 'Wales a Play Friendly Country' ¹. This being the Local Authorities 5th assessment we continue to secure opportunities for children and young people to have the time, space, and permission to play. Recognising that every child has the right to play, the local authority acknowledges that play is essential for children's physical, mental, social, and emotional health and well-being, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

For the Play Sufficiency Duty, the definition of play adopted is one developed by the play sector and recognised internationally. It states that:

"Play encompasses children's behaviour that is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development—not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live." ²

Blaenau Gwent acknowledges every child's right to play and the vital role it plays in their lives. The local authority, along with its partners, are dedicated to providing children with opportunities to play, ensuring they have fun and lead happy, healthy lives.

Our goal is for every child and young person in Blaenau Gwent to have the time, space and permission to play that offers them opportunities that are challenging, flexible, and that encourage creativity. These opportunities support their social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual development, allowing them to enjoy the benefits of play.

The Play Sufficiency Duty ensures that the local authority has the necessary mechanisms to assess and secure adequate play opportunities to meet the needs of children, young people, and their families. This vision requires parents, families, and professionals to recognise the importance of play in children's lives and understand that we all have a role to play.

The local authority aims to build on existing foundations, working collaboratively to meet community needs. The assessment emphasises the importance of play for children's development and outlines a comprehensive plan to enhance play opportunities in Blaenau Gwent.

The main outcomes and key points from the assessment:

- Population: Broaden engagement with children to understand their play needs.
- Play Spaces: Improve parks, refurbish playgrounds, create accessible play spaces, and promote community spaces.
- Supervised Provision: Promote playwork as a profession, secure sustainability of existing programmes, and explore resource opportunities to expand and develop.
- Policy and Engagement: Update information on websites, support community initiatives, and integrate play into strategic plans.

¹ Wales a Play Friendly Country: Statutory Guidance January 2025

² Wales a Play Friendly Country: Statutory Guidance January 2025



Our Proposed Play Action Plan

The local authority and its' partners, continue their commitment to further develop opportunities for children's play. The Local Authorities' Play Action Plan has been developed to maintain the strengths and address the shortcomings identified in the assessment. While some criteria are met, there are generic actions that will support the theme to ensure progress continues to be made to secure sufficient opportunities for play. Specific actions are outlined to address identified gaps and enhance play opportunities.

Our 2025 Action Plan has been developed through discussions with stakeholders and partners considering.

- Is this a pressing need?
- Is it very likely that we can make a big difference addressing this action?
- Does the action address the play needs of a vulnerable group?
- Do we have capacity to work on this action?
- Can we start working on this straight away?

The local authority also considers;

- Are any of our partners working on this already that we could work with or support?
- What are the cost implications of this action?
- What are the benefits of this action?
- Do we have the skills and expertise locally to address the action?

The accountability of delivering the actions in the plan is not the responsibility of any one department and is very reliant on effective partnership working. Some aspects are also reliant on external sources of grant funding that are short term in nature and may impact on the sustainability of some of the actions.

To support the monitoring and implementation of actions we;

- Define Objectives: Clearly outline the goals we aim to achieve.
- Identify Actions: List the specific tasks or activities required to meet these objectives.
- Assign Responsibilities: Determine who will be the lead responsible for each action.
- Set Deadlines: Establish timelines for the completion of each task.
- Allocate Resources: Ensure that necessary resources (time, money, materials) are available.
- Monitor Progress: Regularly check the status of each action to ensure everything is on track through the Supporting Play Sufficiency monitoring group.
- Adjust Plans: Be prepared to make changes as needed based on progress and any new information.

The following are broad actions that have been proposed to take forward in 2025:

Population

1. To broaden engagement with children and young people to ascertain their play needs and interests to support future PSA's.

Places where children play

2. To gather local information of what services and provision are available in local communities for children and young people that supports play sufficiency.
3. Increase awareness of green and neighbourhood spaces that provide opportunities for children's play and undertake an assessment of space.
4. To support children moving around and accessing opportunities for play, there are actions relating to Active Travel, Cycle training and navigating local communities safely.
5. To improve the quality of play spaces, refurbish playgrounds and support the creation of accessible play spaces and opportunities for children. While empowering local communities to play their part in supporting children's play.
6. Review Play Friendly Schools and engage with schools to promote the importance of providing a rich play environment during the school day and whether there are opportunities for the use of school grounds as a community asset for play.

Supervised provision

7. To promote playwork as a profession through a play pathway.
8. To deliver a joint training week prior to the summer holiday for Aneurin Leisure Trusts Sports Development Team and Community Play Volunteers to support inclusion and provide quality provision.
9. Secure the future sustainability of Wild Tots.
10. Look at options to build on the sports equipment loan scheme offered in local libraries, with resources to promote play.
11. Identify whether there are opportunities for resources to be available for play through recycling and waste teams and groups.

Policy, engagement, advocacy and information

12. Review and update information on corporate & FIS website to make pages more vibrant and inviting.
13. Consider potential avenues for larger scale investment to support children's play.
14. Provide information to the Public Service Board to ensure the Play Sufficiency assessment and findings are integrated into the planning, implementation and review of strategic plans.
15. To ensure play is promoted in relevant policy and information agendas and that a partnership approach is taken.

Methodology



'Wales a Play Friendly Country' provides the Statutory guidance to Local Authorities on implementation of the assessment process.

1. A local authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children and young people in accordance with the regulations.
2. Secure sufficient play opportunities for children and young people, so far as reasonably practical.
3. Publish information about play opportunities within its area for children and young people.
4. Keep the information published up to date.

Whilst carrying out these duties, the local authority must consult children, parent/carers and individuals and organisations with an interest in play. To shape and inform the assessment findings, consideration has been given to disabled children, Welsh as a first language and those educated through the medium of Welsh, children for whom English or Welsh is not their first language, other recorded cultural factors, including race (including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, refugees and asylum seekers).

The guidance outlines the 9 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 and Developing the play workforce
- Matter H: Community engagement and participation
- Matter I: Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas

The Play Sufficiency Toolkit has been updated in conjunction with Play Wales, to assist local authorities in preparing for the completion of their Play Sufficiency Assessments and to develop Play Action Plans. Following the update to the toolkit the assessment document reflects 'themes' for assessing opportunities for play linking to each of the legislative matter areas.

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|--|---------------------|
| • Population | Matters A, B, E |
| • Places where children play | Matters C, F, I |
| • Supervised provision | Matters D, G |
| • Policy, engagement, advocacy and information | Matters F, G, H, I. |

The local authority is the strategic lead for play with the Play Sufficiency Officer responsible for monitoring, reviewing, planning, and drafting the Play Sufficiency Assessment and Play Action Plans. The assessment process is supported by the Childcare and Play Manager, and

the Service Manager, Children's Services, forming the 'Play Sufficiency Implementation Group'.

A timeline was established to research, gather, and review data for drafting the Play Sufficiency Assessment. The following outlines the data used for each theme:

Population

Matter A - Population: Socio-economic and demographic data from Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council - Policy Officer, Research and Analysis, and web-based sources.

Matter B - Providing for diverse needs: Responses from our play survey for children/young people, information from Families First, Children with Disabilities team, focus groups and face to face engagement.

Matter E - Charges for play provision: Information from FIS, services offered by the Play team and LA, and local authority partners.

Places where children play

Matter C - Space available for children to play: Data from the LA's Annual inspection report of outdoor unstaffed fixed play provision, open space assessments, access and play audits, Local Development Plan, GIS mapping, local community knowledge, parks department, Play Sufficiency Officer, and survey/focus group findings.

Matter F - Access to space/provision: Data from Traffic Management, Active Travel, and Road Safety Team. Play Space assessments were also conducted.

Matter I - Play within all relevant policy and information agendas: Key policy and strategic documents from colleagues in Transport, Education, Partnerships, Planning, Early Years, Flying Start, Families First, and Health & Safety.

Supervised provision

Matter D - Supervised provision: Information from providers of supervised play provision, Early Years, Parent and Toddler groups, After School Clubs in our Quality Assurance scheme, the LA's Play team, Youth Service, and Leisure Trust.

Matter G - Securing and developing the play workforce: Spreadsheet of sector qualifications held by the LA's Childcare Business Development Officer, EYDCPP annual training programme.

Policy, engagement, advocacy and information

Matter F - Access to space/provision: Data from Traffic Management, Active Travel, and Road Safety Team. Play Space assessments were also conducted.

Matter G - Securing and developing the play workforce: Spreadsheet of sector qualifications held by the LA's Childcare Business Development Officer, EYDCPP annual training programme.



Matter H - Community engagement and participation: Data from the Local Authorities Playteam, FIS, and Blaenau Gwent's Engagement strategy.

Matter I - Play within all relevant policy and information agendas: Key policy and strategic documents from colleagues in Transport, Education, Partnerships, Planning, Early Years and Flying Start, Families First, and Health & Safety.

Actions following the Play Sufficiency Assessment are specific, realistic, and achievable within budgets and resources. The Play Sufficiency Action Plans are developed and reviewed annually to record progress and set actions for the following year.

The Play Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan are approved by the Early Years, Development, Childcare and Play Partnership, the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee before a consultation period with partners and lead officers, and final approval by the Executive Committee.

Which local authority departments/policy areas were involved and how

We employed a flexible approach, including desktop research of policy areas, face-to-face meetings, consultations, focus groups, surveys, phone calls, and emails, to collect data from local authority lead officers. Colleagues contributed their expertise, identified strengths and shortfalls and provided solutions to data gaps.

- Children's Services
 - Childcare & Play
 - Children Looked After
 - Children with Disabilities
 - Family Information Service
 - Flying Start
 - Families First
- Education
- Youth Service
- Planning
- Community Services – Neighbourhood Services
- Regeneration – Traffic, Natural Environment, Built Environment
- Housing & Environmental Health

Which external partners were involved and how

In addition to local authority department and policy areas, representation from external partners has also been welcomed on to the Supporting Play Sufficiency group.

- Local Housing Associations; Melin Homes, Tai Calon, United Welsh and Linc Cymru
- Aneurin Leisure Trust – Sports Development Team
- Clybiau Plant
- Barnardos

Further engagement has been conducted through face-to-face meetings, emails and desk top research.



*Photos courtesy of our entrants to
our Play in nature photo competition – Feb 2025*



How engagement with children and families has informed the Play Sufficiency Assessment

Engagement with children and families is pivotal in informing the Play Sufficiency Assessment. Engagement was led by the Childcare and Play team considering the Children & Young People's National Participation standards.

Surveys and Consultations: The local authority conducted surveys and consultations with children and families to gather their views on existing play opportunities and to identify gaps. This feedback helps in understanding the real needs of local communities.

The local authority used the child play satisfaction survey template circulated by Play Wales', this ensured that data was consistent with previous assessments to generate a more accurate view of the play needs of children and young people living in Blaenau Gwent over a period of time.

Questions have been developed to gauge children's play experiences relating to;

- Temporal – how children spend their 'free time',
- Spatial – how space supports or constrains children's play and access to space
- Psychological – permission to play.

In addition to the play satisfaction survey a series of smaller localised surveys were circulated with varying degrees of success.

Our 'where children play' survey was aimed at gathering more information about where children play in their local communities. The local authority recognise that play is more than a fixed play space and survey findings enabled us to find those hidden play space gems.

The 'Clubs and Groups' survey was aimed to assist with gathering more details about unregistered provision – while the local authority has a good record it is evident that there are clubs and groups that we aren't aware of that contribute to the provision of sufficient opportunities for play.

The collection and analysis of data from surveys presented several challenges to the team with low levels of responses (163 completed our Play Satisfaction survey). This affected the timeline for the collation of data despite a great deal of promotion being undertaken and recirculation several times to promote engagement.

Findings from our play surveys can be found in the theme analysis section starting on page 22 of this report.

Focus Groups: Focus groups were arranged with local schools and after-school clubs to meet with groups of children to discuss opportunities for play and to gather detailed insight into the needs of children and young people. Focus groups ensured we had representation from Welsh language speakers, children with disabilities, young carers, children looked after, gypsy/traveller children, LGBTQ+, asylum seekers, ethnic minority groups and children living in more rural areas.

Between January and March 2025, 87 children participated in an activity-based focus group, delivered by the Play team.

An overview of what we were hoping to achieve was given and why it was important for children themselves to have their say and what their feedback, thoughts and comments would help with.

In small groups, either representing the school council, school play leaders, or children from targeted groups they were asked...

- Why is play/hanging out important?
- Where/what they play when they are not in school?
- What's good about them?
- What's bad about them?
- What are the barriers?
- What can we do to minimise the barriers? and who is it? Children? Adults?
- What would be your wish to support opportunities for play?



Focus group findings:

1. *Why is play/hanging out important?*
Play is fun, stops boredom, making/spending time with friends, taking risk, 'healthy body, healthy mind', makes you happy, it's exciting, cures depression, can try new things, happy, making memories, burns off energy, risky me challenges me pushing boundaries, fresh air.
2. *Where/what they play when they are not in school?*
Park, sports centre, field by my house, at my friend's house, garden, playing field by my house, up the quarry, down the river, afterschool club, in the street, ASDA, McDonalds, skate park, my bedroom, around the site, community cabin, clubs and groups, ball court.



3. *What's good about them?*

Lots of open space to run around, good place to have a picnic, no parents, being with my friends, trees to climb, get to be myself, made a den - our own special place in the forest, we all live close to each other, safe from traffic, there are no parents to tell us where or what to play, getting exercise, being outside, lots to do, it's fun, makes me feel calm, being allowed to play there, playing with my friends.

4. *What's bad about them?*

Old rusty equipment, lots of traffic, bad people, rubbish everywhere, not safe, people that don't understand teenagers need to hang out, older children swearing, nothing to do, dog mess, not much space, other children being mean, get bullied, fighting, smoking/vaping, bad language, vandalism, litter, get bored

5. *What are the barriers?*

Temporal – how children spend their 'free time'

Too many after-school activities, chores, babysitting, always busy, too much to do going to nans or out for dinner,

Spatial – how space supports or constrains children's play and access to space

Traffic, weather not allowed out if it's raining, don't feel safe, live quite away from my friends, nowhere to play other than round site, broken equipment so we can't use it.

Psychological – permission to play

Parents ground me from playing out, time to play, Mam always says no, culture of not mixing with community outside own site, Mam says I am too young to play out, grown-ups organise lots of things for me to do.

6. *What can we do to minimise the barriers?*

Behave – don't get grounded, wear bright clothes, make time for play, go out with a friend, ask parents to join in, need a bigger space to play, bigger community hub, punish the people that damage stuff.

7. *What would be your wish to support opportunities for play?*

To be able to have an option to play outside for golden time (school), more parks, better equipment, better weather 😊 more time to play, more places to play with my friends.

Following the focus group activity, schools and after-school clubs were given the opportunity to apply for a small grant to purchase resources to enhance and develop opportunities for play.

Mapping and Auditing: Children and families contributed to the mapping and auditing of existing play spaces during the Play teams visits. Their input helped to identify where opportunities for play are well-served and which areas need improvement.

Observations: Play diaries, case studies and observations during play sessions have also given insight to the play interests and needs of children and young people.

Face to face: The Play team also used the opportunity during school holiday open access play sessions to engage with children and families. A further 134 children, young people and parent/carers were consulted.

Continuous Feedback: Ongoing engagement with children and families ensures that the PSA remains relevant and responsive to changing needs.

How information has been used to assess against each Matter within the themes analysis

Data captured informs our local authority Community play profiles for each of the 14 wards. Where limited data is available the local authority will concentrate engagement to ensure an accurate picture for play continues to be established and developed.

Matter A: Population - A community profile of the population aged 0–18 years is compiled to help the local authority identify areas where opportunities for play are most needed. This profile also serves as a foundation for consulting and engaging with children and young people. The data supports the design of future consultation programmes, ensuring we continue to develop our interactions with children and young people and encourage their engagement in the development of opportunities for play.

Matter B: Providing for Diverse Needs – The data allows for the specific needs of different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and abilities to be assessed, where data lacks, the local authority can continue to build on existing evidence to ensure that the play needs and interests of specific groups of children are considered. Through consultation findings the local authority can better understand the unique needs and preferences of various groups, leading to more effective and inclusive opportunities for play to cater to the diverse needs of the community.

Matter C: Space available for children to play – All areas used for children's play are mapped to provide an overview of each area in Blaenau Gwent at ward level. Specific detail of informal play spaces can be added to play profiles through information gathered during the assessment process. The demographic information and community profiles guides the planning and development of new play spaces. It helps in prioritising areas for development and ensuring that future opportunities for play are aligned with the needs of the community.

Matter D: Supervised provision – Information allows for an evaluation of current supervised play provision evaluating what is available, type and accessibility for local communities. This includes assessing the quality, accessibility, and utilisation of provision to ensure they meet the standards and expectations of the community while addressing solutions to shortfalls. The information collected on provision and opportunities for play, has highlighted there are some gaps in knowledge on wider organisations/businesses/groups providing recreational opportunities, it is also recognised that there may be a lack of awareness of how they support opportunities for play and their role in supporting play sufficiency in Blaenau Gwent.

Matter E: Charges for play provision – The information helps to determine current charges for provision and the effects and challenges this may have on families to access. In addition, it highlights disparities in access to opportunities for play especially in deprived areas.

Matter F: Access to space/provision – Findings have enabled the local authority to evaluate physical space, safety and accessibility. Helping to identify underserved areas and prioritise investment.



Matter G: Securing and Developing the play workforce - The annual workforce development survey conducted by the Local Authorities Childcare Business Development Officer provides qualification levels and training needs for the sector. This provides evidence and data which informs actions for Play Sufficiency while also informing the EYDCPP annual training programme for qualifications and professional development to secure and develop the play workforce.

Matter H: Community engagement and participation – information is assessed to highlight local initiatives, gaps in communication, maximise service delivery and minimise duplication and how we may need to adjust priorities to promote community engagement and participation. The lack of responses to our play satisfaction survey has helped us to determine the need to undertake some further on the ground consultation on a ward basis with children and young people and will be taken forward as an action to support future assessments.

Matter I: Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas –Information has been used to assess Play Sufficiency across all policy agendas for their potential impact on children's opportunities to play. Enabling more focused pieces of work where there is a need to develop play as a cross-cutting theme. The collection of data and information has given fresh impetus to engagement with colleagues and partners promoting services to work together to ensure the value of play is recognised and included in plans and across policy areas.

The local authority and their partners will use the data to inform future development of services, ensuring gaps in opportunities for play are prioritised.

How it has been used to inform the Play Action Plan

The insights and feedback collected from children and families have been instrumental in shaping our play action plans. These plans are designed to address the identified gaps in play provision and enhance opportunities for play, ensuring that they are responsive to the specific needs of local communities.

Community Engagement: Through focus groups, surveys, and consultations, we have gathered valuable information from diverse groups, including children from various age ranges, backgrounds, and circumstances. This engagement has provided a helpful insight while recognising we need to continue to do more work to capture the view of children and young people in understanding play needs and preferences within our community.

Identified Gaps: The assessment has highlighted several areas where play provision is lacking or could be improved. These include the need for more inclusive play spaces, better access to play areas, and enhanced safety measures.

Tailored Solutions: Our play action plans are tailored to address these gaps, with specific actions aimed at improving play environments, increasing accessibility, and fostering community involvement.

Maximising resources

How the local authority and partners use existing budgets to support opportunities to play

There is a statutory responsibility placed on the local authority to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for local children under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

Childcare & Play:

The Childcare and Play (C&P) team supports the local authority in fulfilling the statutory responsibilities and delivering Welsh Governments the vision of 'A Play Friendly Country'.

The team and services are funded through a combination of Revenue Support Grant, Childcare and Play and Playworks Holiday Programme grants (part of the Children and Communities grant).

The play element of the team currently consists of the Play Sufficiency Officer and 1 part-time playworker. A Play Co-ordinator post is due to go out for recruitment imminently. The team are further supported by Community Play Volunteers who support the delivery of both term time and school holiday provision. An element of funding is used to undertake recruitment checks, to provide training and uniform for the play volunteers.

Term-time provision offers staffed after-school Wild Camps sessions for older children with identified vulnerabilities. Wild Camps offered opportunities to play in a safe, stimulating environment where the team support:

- Creation and protection of space and time for play
- Providing and making available resources to support and stimulate play
- Active facilitation of play
- Modelling positive attitudes to play and playing
- Bringing a playful and creative approach.

School holiday provision is funded through the Playworks Holiday Programme element of the Children & Communities Grant enabling the team to deliver a programme of Open Access play provision delivered in parks/open spaces and community venues across Blaenau Gwent. Sessions are offered across all school holidays (with the exception of Christmas), delivering on average 6-7 sessions per week across a minimum of 6 locations led by the local authority Playworker and community play volunteers. The sessions all offer healthy food and drink options to support addressing holiday hunger.

The Play Sufficiency Officer co-ordinates National Playday celebrations and annual Christmas events for vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Flying Start:

The Flying Start programme sits within Children's Services and fully compliments the Play agenda. Flying Starts delivery plans and services recognise the importance of play and contributes to the provision of rich play opportunities through each of the 4 core elements: Free high-quality Childcare, Enhanced Health Visiting Service, Parenting and Speech, Language and Communication.

Flying Start childcare settings are supported by the Flying Start Advisory Teacher and Quality Assurance Officer who advise and offer guidance to ensure key opportunities for children to play, independently, alongside and with their peers are provided.



The team offer opportunities that actively promote the value of play from birth including parenting and skills development programmes, ante-natal support, Baby Massage, Elklan – Let's Talk with your baby, Play and Development, Small Steps, Interparental relationships, Healthy Eating, Cooking and Weaning on a Budget and use the ACES toolkit – exploring adverse childhood experiences.

Flying Start also support a number of other groups; Dads Creative Music Group which aims to promotes good health and wellbeing for fathers and their children through music and creative activities. Walking groups and parent network initiatives provide opportunities for parents and children to engage in social and leisure activities, promoting mental health and social inclusion. Flying Start's Little Explorers programme supports children with developmental needs through targeted strategies and activities, promoting participation in cultural and leisure activities.

Parent and Toddler groups are offered weekly at each of the Flying Start hubs – these have recently become parent led where parents design/plan and deliver sessions themselves. Flying Start provided training on safeguarding, healthy eating, fire safety to enable them to access the space and deliver sessions.

Families First:

The Families First programme also sits within Children's Services and is based in the Integrated Children's Centre. This provides co-location of teams and a close working relationship including integrated management systems. The Families First team are represented on the Early Years Development, Childcare and Play Partnership and the Childcare and Play Manager sits on the Families First Steering Group; this helps to ensure a sustained focus on play within Blaenau Gwent.

The Young Carers element of Families First, provides support to children and young people who provide a caring role to parents and their siblings. This service provides the children and young people with free, recreational opportunities within the Borough and supports them to access play and leisure activities.

The disability element of the programme supports children and young people who are affected by disability and their families. Needs for disabled children in relation to play are identified at point of referral, the team offer an Integrated Youth Club who meet on a weekly basis and have a breadth of knowledge and links to local services and providers of play and leisure opportunities for disabled children.

Food and Fun:

The Food and Fun programme was introduced in Blaenau Gwent in 2017, initially involving two schools: Willowtown and Abertillery Learning Community (Roseheyworth School). Up to 80 children participated in the scheme, which ran for 12 days during the summer holidays. The initiative is funded through a grant from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and is coordinated locally by a designated officer within the local authority. This

coordinator is responsible for engaging schools, overseeing project implementation, and ensuring effective planning and delivery across all participating sites.

This year, the programme has expanded to include six schools, Abertillery Learning Community, All Saints RC, Ebbw Fawr, Glanhowy, Pen y Cwm Special School and Willowtown. Participants will receive a nutritious breakfast, lunch and snacks each day, alongside a comprehensive programme of activities delivered in partnership with the Aneurin Leisure Trust Sports Development Team. The expansion to six schools and the provision of 420 places in 2025 reflects the growing recognition of the scheme's value to children, families and communities.

Regeneration Team:

As part of the regeneration team, the local authority's Town Centre Business Development Officer plans events in the main town centres across Blaenau Gwent. Opportunities in recent years have included Dinomania and superhero days providing experiences and opportunities for play. A significant portion of funding is provided through the UK Government (Shared Prosperity Fund), contributions are also received from local Town and Community Councils and community organisations. Prior to receiving UK Government funding the local authority has previously contributed towards the delivery of town events. Occasionally elected members have supported events through allocations from their half penny rate funds.

Community Services:

Existing budgets are used to support the maintenance of play areas across Blaenau Gwent, with a Team Leader covering Street Scene – grounds maintenance, bereavement services and street cleansing, an Assistant team Leader covering Grounds Maintenance (including play areas) and Bereavement Services and 1 full time staff member dedicated to play areas. The team have successfully accessed funding through Shared Prosperity Fund and Section106 to refurbish/build play areas as well as one off local authority capital funding to improve safety surfaces across Blaenau Gwent's play areas.

Town and Community Councils:

With three Town and Community Councils across Blaenau Gwent, opportunities for play are supported with funding being allocated to improve play areas; provide additional provision; support community events; or through providing access to community spaces. Through the 'Buy a Day for Play' scheme, Brynmawr Town Council funded the Blaenau Gwent Play team to deliver additional open access play sessions during the summer school holiday 2024.

Aneurin Leisure Trust:

Aneurin Leisure Trust is a community-driven organisation focused on improving the lives of individuals by providing a wide variety of services and facilities. The team receive annual core funding via Sport Wales covering three full-time officers, with another post from various funding sources and project costs, the wider team consists of 10 relief (0-hour) Sports Instructors and volunteers.

The Aneurin Leisure Trust Sports Development Team recognises its role as a strategic partner in supporting the objectives of the Council and Sport Wales's Vision. The team leverages its extensive local, regional, and national networks to add value to the community. This support extends to broader local authority goals, contributing to economic and social initiatives and outcomes.

Recreational play is a cornerstone of the Sports Development Team's approach. All practical sessions are built around this principle, with sessions facilitated by a qualified workforce and delivered across a multitude of settings. These sessions are tailored to meet the interests and needs of participants, focusing on sports and games that align with individual preferences.

**Youth Service:**

Open Access Youth Clubs are available to all young people aged 11-25 years. While most provisions primarily attract Young People between the ages of 11 and 18, they also have a dedicated provision aimed specifically at those aged 16 to 25. Open Access Youth Clubs operate across the three main valleys of Blaenau Gwent.

In addition to two retained Youth Centre Buildings in Cwm and Abertillery, funding has been used to expand their reach by delivering additional provision in various community locations. These include: Abertillery, Cwm, Stockton Pavilion, Kids R US, Rassau, Newtown, Tabor Brynmawr, Welfare Wednesday and Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone 16+ provision.

The Youth Service provide a comprehensive summer programme spanning the 6 weeks school holiday, providing activities while keeping evening youth club provisions open throughout. This ensures that young people have a safe space to meet and have access to youth workers.

What has changed since the last Play Sufficiency Assessment in terms of resources

Consistent funding through the Playworks Holiday Programme from Welsh Government has been most welcomed. With this funding now coming under the Children and Communities Grant, this has allowed for more flexibility for the local authority to allocate further funding to Play which has aided to secure more opportunities for play across the local authority and has helped to raise awareness of the play agenda. Further funding from Welsh Government to support Play Sufficiency has been greatly appreciated and has enabled actions with a cost implication to be met. Further detail on Welsh Government programmes is set out in the next section below.

The UK Governments Shared Prosperity Fund has enabled the local authority to access funding to support and develop opportunities for play. Through this funding route the local authority has been able to enhance, refurbish and create fixed play areas and supports events in each of the town centres.

'Friends of' groups have successfully accessed funding from various routes including National Lottery, Community Voice and Awards for All, Postcode Community grants, Solar Farm grants and Lawn Tennis Association. This has enabled new equipment to be introduced to enhance existing equipment or to refurbish areas that are used to support children's play.

The local authority's Play Sufficiency Officer post was moved from a fixed term basis to permanent in April 2022, demonstrating a commitment from the local authority to continue to support Play Sufficiency.

There continues to be a reliance on Community Play Volunteers to support delivery of Open Access play and events and the team continues to develop its team of Play volunteers, with 22 currently on the database. The availability of volunteers to support during school holidays varies which makes the planning and delivery of provision difficult. There is also a

dependency on the Play Sufficiency Officer clearing other work commitments to cover sessions in the event of sickness/annual leave or non-arrival of volunteers. Consequently, this has a significant impact on the capacity of the Play Sufficiency Officer.

How Welsh Government programmes have been used locally

Playworks Holiday Project:

The Playworks Holiday Project revenue funding has enabled the local authority to support gaps in play provision through the recruitment of playworkers. The local authority was able to establish 2 x part-time posts to support the delivery of school holiday provision. The posts were established for 28hrs for 10 weeks per year to cover the school holiday periods.

In 2024, 66 Open Access play sessions were delivered during school holiday periods engaging with 2,700 children and young people.

In addition, funding has enabled the team to collaborate with the Community Options team to provide healthy snacks at all provision. This has very welcomed by children and families, with some children coming along to sessions purely for a snack. Through the Food Resilience Partnership, partners and activity providers who offer food/snack over the school summer holiday came together and mapped all provision, this was promoted through social media and will be replicated going forward.

Overheard conversation between 2 girls aged approx 10yrs (Easter 2025)

*The food people are here!
We can grab a sandwich before we
got to netball!*

An element of the funding is also used to fund DBS checks, training and uniform for our team of community Play Volunteers.

AWPOG:

The additional All Wales Play Opportunities Grants allocated from Welsh Government over the last few years have been gratefully received in Blaenau Gwent and has helped to address priorities from our 2022-2025 play action plans, including;

- Supporting refurbishment of fixed play areas.
- Working with Town Centre Manager to support town centre events over the school summer holiday.
- To bring together colleagues and partners to celebrate National Playday
- Promotion of play friendly communities



Monitoring

Who takes lead strategic responsibility for play in the local authority

The lead for the PSA is the Director of Children, Young People and Families supported by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. Since the duty commenced responsibility for the assessment process and the subsequent monitoring of Play Sufficiency sits with the Childcare and Play team through the Service Manager, Childcare and Play Manager and Play Sufficiency Officer.

How PSA links to the Public Service Boards, Regional Partnership Boards and Local Development Plan



Play sufficiency assessments are crucial for ensuring that children have adequate opportunities for play, the assessment links to various strategic frameworks and boards.

Public Service Boards: Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership is our non-statutory Local Delivery Group of the Gwent Public Service Board. Play sufficiency assessments provide valuable data that is used to inform planning and decision-making processes. By understanding the gaps and needs in play provision, actions can be prioritised that enhance play opportunities, contributing to broader well-being goals.

Regional Partnership Boards: The local authority's Play Sufficiency Assessment highlights the importance of play in promoting physical and mental health among children and helps to develop integrated services that support children's health through improved opportunities for play.



Local Development Plans: Play Sufficiency Assessments provide evidence on the need for play spaces, which are incorporated into Local Development Plans and Open Space Assessments to ensure that new developments include

adequate play facilities and that the local authority recognise spaces where children play.

These assessments are a collaborative effort, involving various stakeholders to ensure that play opportunities are considered in broader planning and development strategies. This integrated approach helps create a more play-friendly environment for children.

How the Play Action Plan is monitored:

The local authority formed a subgroup of the Early Years Development Childcare and Play Partnership - 'Supporting Play Sufficiency' group to encourage representation from all partners in bringing this Play Sufficiency Assessment together.

Supporting Play Sufficiency group outputs:

- The Play Sufficiency Assessment will inform/identify actions for securing sufficient play opportunities within the local authority.
- Provide information to the Public Service Board to ensure the Play Sufficiency Assessment is integrated into the planning, implementation and review of strategic plans.
- The Play Sufficiency Assessment Executive Summary: State of Play Report will be published on the local authority website, to inform the public on how the local authority will ensure sufficient play opportunities.

The group, who include representatives from a range of internal service areas and external partners, are committed to ensuring sufficient opportunities for play are available across Blaenau Gwent and will take forward play related themes across the local authority as agreed in the annual Play Action Plans.

The group feeds back progress/challenges to the Early Years Development Childcare and Play Partnership on a quarterly basis, via the Play Sufficiency Officer.

Membership

Invites were sent to request representation from local authority departments/policy areas;

- Children's Services – Service Manager, Childcare and Play Manager, Play Sufficiency Officer, Childcare Business Development Officer, Children Looked After team, Disability team, Family Information Service, Flying Start, Families First
- Community Services – Neighbourhood Services
- Planning – Team Manager Development Plans, Planning Assistant
- Regeneration – Town Centre Business Development Officer, Traffic Safety Officer, Team Manager Natural Environment, Team Manager Built Environment
- Youth Service
- Housing & Environmental Health – Housing Support Officer (Gypsy & Travellers)
- Clybiau Plant Cymru
- Aneurin Leisure Trust
- Local Housing Associations – Tai Calon, Linc Cymru, Melin Homes
- Barnardos
- Sparkle

How facilitated / terms of reference

The group is facilitated by the Play Sufficiency Officer, with meetings held bi-monthly during the assessment process, thereafter, quarterly to implement, monitor and review the priorities of the Play Action Plan.



The Supporting Play Sufficiency group agreed terms of reference using Welsh Governments Statutory guidance and toolkit 3.

Strengths and weaknesses of the group

The group brings together a wealth of expertise and helps to raise awareness of the importance of play and how both internal individuals, departmental roles and partners have an influence and impact on providing play opportunities for children's play.

This group is essential due to the scope and cross cutting nature of play across the authority and effectively means that there are nominated Play advocates established in relevant directorates and departments. The group will continue to build momentum with gaps in representation from education and health identified which will be addressed following this assessment.

Conclusion

The local authority remains committed to providing high-quality, efficient and effective opportunities for play, cultural, leisure, and sporting activities for all children and young people.

We will ensure that both the local authority and its partners continue to build upon the foundations already in place; by working collaboratively, we aim to develop, plan, and coordinate the delivery of services that effectively meet the needs of local communities across Blaenau Gwent.

Key messages on outcomes and key points from the assessment:

- Children increasingly 'find' places to play – these may not necessarily be a formally identified play space. These spaces need to be protected where practical.
- Play areas are often the 'go to' when engaging with children, young people, and families about opportunities for play. The key area of dissatisfaction among children and families continues to be the condition of play areas across Blaenau Gwent. The local authority needs to update the fixed play strategy to support and prioritise the refurbishment/development and maintenance of play areas.
- Younger children tended to prefer fixed play areas, with older children (10 years and above) choosing leisure centres, community spaces, playing fields, local shops and forest/wooded areas. Children and young people want spaces that are close to home, interesting and varied and include nature. They want to feel that they are safe and welcome in those spaces and that the space is valued and maintained.
- The assessment process establishes a baseline of play provision which has broadened since its commencement in 2013.
- The assessment highlights there is a reduction in after school club and holiday provision – however there is no evidence to suggest that there is unmet demand for these services currently. This will continue to be monitored.

- There is a lack of sufficient public or subsidised transport to support accessibility to opportunities for play.
- Through the assessment process it has become clear there is a need for further engagement with parents/carers around the importance of play and for communities to value and invest in children and young people.
- The assessment identified that information about opportunities for play needs to be clearer, to support children and families to know what is available in their local communities. This would help to identify gaps in information, provision, service delivery, and policy implementation.
- Awareness and advocacy: The Supporting Play Sufficiency group will contribute to partnership opportunities and improving communication between professionals and ensuring collaboration across policy areas to improve opportunities for play.
- Improving play spaces: With a clear rationalisation and fixed play strategy the local authority will refurbish, enhance and create accessible play areas using funding allocated for play areas and seeking further investment opportunities for further work to be undertaken.
- Supporting community engagement: To pilot initiatives like temporary road closures for street play and promoting play-friendly communities.
- Enhancing school play environments: Encourage schools to provide rich play environments during breaks and out of teaching hours through Play Friendly Schools.
- Policy integration: Ensuring play is considered in local development plans, health and safety policies, and public health initiatives.
- Local communities welcome and provide positive feedback for local community initiatives and events that support opportunities for play.

Proposed actions for way forward

Our proposed actions aim to create a comprehensive and supportive environment for children's play, addressing both physical spaces and community engagement, while integrating play into broader policy agendas.

The action plan addresses those criteria that have been assessed as 'red' or 'amber' within the assessment document, where appropriate and a priority for play in Blaenau Gwent. This does not mean that the assessment criteria rated as 'green' will not be further supported, but that they will continue to be developed as part of the ongoing work of local authority services and partners.

The following broad actions are proposed to be progressed in 2025, with more detailed actions within these fully laid out in the Play Action Plan.

Population

1. To broaden engagement with children and young people to ascertain their play needs and interests to support future PSA's.

Places where children play

2. To gather local information of what services and provision is available in local communities for children and young people that supports play sufficiency.
3. Increase awareness of green and neighbourhood spaces that provide opportunities for children's play and undertake an assessment of space.
4. To support children moving around and accessing opportunities for play, there are actions relating to Active Travel, cycle training and navigating local communities safely.

5. To improve the quality of play spaces, refurbish playgrounds and support the creation of accessible play spaces and opportunities for children. While empowering local communities to play their part in supporting children's play.
6. Review Play Friendly Schools and engage with schools to promote the importance of providing a rich play environment during the school day and ascertain the opportunities for the use of school grounds as a community asset for play.

Supervised provision

7. To promote playwork as a profession through a 'Play Pathway'.
8. To deliver a joint training week prior to the summer holiday for Aneurin Leisure Trusts Sports Development Team and Community Play Volunteers to support inclusion and promote quality provision.
9. Secure the future sustainability of Wild Tots.
10. Look at options to build on the sports equipment loan scheme offered in local libraries, with resources to promote play.
11. Identify whether there are opportunities for resources to be available for play through recycling and waste teams and groups.

Policy, engagement, advocacy and information

12. Review and update information on corporate & FIS website to make pages more vibrant and inviting.
13. Consider potential avenues for larger scale investment to support children's play.
14. Provide information to the Public Service Board to ensure the Play Sufficiency Assessment and its findings are integrated into the planning, implementation, and review of strategic plans.
15. To ensure play is promoted in relevant policy and information agendas and that a partnership approach is embedded in the consideration and development of new and existing strategies.



Photos courtesy of Marie Bradley
Winners of our Play in nature photo competition

7. Theme analysis

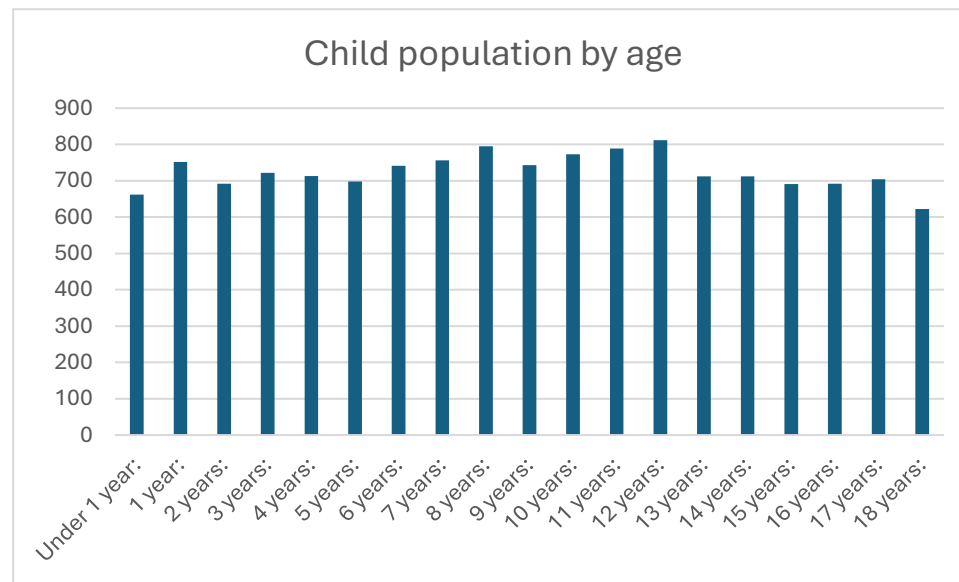
Population:

Matter A: The number of children in respect of each age range within its area

Matter B: The needs of children from different cultures and backgrounds within its area

Matter E: Whether there is a charge for play provision and where there is a charge

0-18 population – 20.5% of the population in Blaenau Gwent are children aged between 0 and 18 years.



Population data can also provide the local authority with figures at ward level.

0-18yrs population data

Ward Name	All Ages	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Abertillery & Six Bells	1,237	64	67	60	65	81	69	60	71	63	65	77	60	78	68	56	71	59	55	48
Beaufort	1,128	49	43	63	66	56	55	58	61	48	80	65	92	59	52	60	70	54	54	43
Blaina	931	42	56	50	43	47	62	52	49	57	50	51	45	59	47	45	42	48	44	42
Brynmawr	1,057	46	72	52	49	51	50	60	63	57	59	61	53	76	60	53	55	45	52	43
Cwm	726	29	39	33	44	27	32	38	40	49	37	47	46	52	34	42	32	42	27	36
Cwmillery	956	54	50	47	55	41	37	64	49	62	51	64	58	48	50	39	54	48	45	40
Ebbw Vale North	1,043	84	53	52	51	53	48	55	54	57	57	54	49	50	50	55	54	51	47	69
Ebbw Vale South	939	38	45	44	36	60	50	50	55	55	52	56	49	54	48	44	39	42	70	52
Georgetown	820	39	44	44	39	41	45	40	48	57	34	34	44	59	38	43	44	52	45	30
Llanhilleth	876	31	48	36	43	46	50	55	41	46	45	57	56	62	57	36	44	35	56	32
Nantyglo	1,026	46	57	63	55	49	47	46	50	71	47	54	54	60	64	58	55	56	55	39
Rassau & Garnlydan	827	39	59	38	42	47	35	49	46	45	46	52	56	35	44	45	33	43	29	44
Sirhowy	1,039	39	59	58	55	58	50	58	63	57	53	59	63	43	48	60	54	55	53	54
Tredegarr Central and West	1,171	61	60	56	79	54	66	53	65	71	68	43	64	74	54	77	44	59	72	51
	13,776																			

Disabled children: Using data available from Stats Wales to inform this assessment there are 370 disabled children aged between 0 & 15yrs living in Blaenau Gwent. (<https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/children-receiving-care-and-support/childrenreceivingcareandsupport-by-localauthority-agegroup>)

Welsh Language: Blaenau Gwent has a low percentage of Welsh speakers, with 6.2% of the population able to speak Welsh (Census, 2021), the area is the second lowest of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales, well under the national average of 19%. PLASC data (2023/24) shows there are currently 197 children who speak Welsh as their first language.

Ethnic Minority Groups: There are small numbers (2.2%) of specific ethnic groups in the County Borough.

Gypsy and Travellers: The local authority runs one dedicated Gypsy Traveller site at Cwmcrachen in Nantyglo, the site has 19 pitches and operates a waiting list. There are currently 37 children/young people aged between 0-18 years (with a further 4 visiting every fortnight), this fluctuates throughout the year with moves, relatives visiting etc. Data by age is not available however 135 of the Blaenau Gwent population equating to less than 1% identify as White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller (Census 2021)

Children living in rural areas: Only four areas are classified as rural in Blaenau Gwent; they are Bedwellty Pits, Trefil, Pochin and Cwm. Trefil has a small child population of approximately ten, with similar numbers in Bedwellty Pits and Pochin, Cwm is the largest area with 726 children and young people aged 0-18years.

Children living in areas of deprivation and low-income families: Blaenau Gwent has one of the highest rates of income deprivation among children in Wales, indicating significant economic challenges in the area, with 37% of children living in income deprivation (WIMD 2019).

Strengths

Consultation:

- Engagement was undertaken with different groups of children and their families to understand their needs.
- Various approaches and opportunities were available to engage children and families.

Inclusive Approach:

- The local authority promotes inclusivity, ensuring children with disabilities can participate in existing play settings.

Provision:

- Some provision for disabled children is already available through Families First, Flying Start, Sparkle and Barnardos.

Access:

- Local authority owned open spaces are provided free of charge to play provision that has been commissioned/or is being delivered by the local authority.

Welsh Language:

- Mudiad Meithrin run regular weekly groups for the 0-3 age group during term time; 3 Ti A fi's in Abertillery, Brynmawr and Rassau and Cymraeg I Blant groups in Tredegar Library and Ebbw Vale leisure centre promoting the Welsh Language.

Weaknesses

Consultation:

- Some communities engaged less, which limits available data and evidence for the play sufficiency assessment.
- Engagement with the Play Satisfaction survey was lower in comparison to previous assessments which limited available data and evidence.

Access:

- Charges for rental of premises has resulted in some services having to reduce their offer.

Geographical Coverage:

- Provision is varied and not uniformly available across all areas.

Specific Needs:

- Certain groups may have particular requirements that are not fully met by existing services.

Fixed Play areas:

- Insufficient inclusive play equipment in play areas.

Opportunities

Community Engagement:

- Further consultation with children and parents to identify demand for increased or specific facilities.

Expansion of Services:

- Encouraging the establishment of new facilities where there is demonstrable need.
- Utilising consultation findings to improve and expand inclusive play facilities.
- Collaborating and developing effective partnerships with organisations to enhance provision and accessibility.
- Designing inclusive play spaces to ensure that children of all abilities can participate, promoting equality and social integration.

Funding:

- Seeking additional funding to support the development and refurbishment of inclusive play areas.

Welsh Language:

- Invite Mudiad Meithrin to join the Supporting Play Sufficiency group to further explore opportunities for Welsh Language play provision for children aged 0-3years.

Threats

Resource Constraints:

- Potential limitations in funding and resources to expand services.
- Ensuring that inclusive equipment and facilities are well-maintained and safe.

Varying Demand:

- Uneven demand across different areas might complicate the planning and implementation of new services.

Places where children play:

Matter C: The space where children can play, including open space, and any other space

Matter F: Traffic measures that are used to promote access to play

Matter I: The extent to which education and local development planning policies take into account the need to enhance play opportunities for children

What children have told us:

Children and young people want spaces that are close to home, interesting and varied and include nature. They want to feel that they are safe and welcome in those spaces and that the space is valued and maintained.

Specific groups of children – focus groups and survey findings

Disabled children:

The local authority's approach to play is to promote inclusivity for all and therefore those with a specific need by virtue of a disability, culture, language, sexual orientation or any other reason will be supported to participate within existing play settings as much as possible, rather than being segregated through different provision. However, it is recognised that specific groups may have requirements for which specific provision is needed. The assessment has therefore considered the location of provision specifically for disabled children and it is evident that, whilst provision is available, the geographical coverage of provision is varied.

Discussions specifically with disabled children and their families told stories of lack of provision, children want parks to be accessible and inclusive, asking for 'safer and more accessible places for play'. Children wanted inclusive places for playing with their friends and siblings of all abilities. Consultation findings suggest there is a need for more equipment that promotes inclusivity in play areas across Blaenau Gwent.

Groups ran by Families First, Sparkle and Barnardos are valued by children and their families, offering opportunities for play and socialisation in safe, welcoming environments.

The Play Satisfaction Survey 2025 along with focus group findings for children with disabilities in Blaenau Gwent provides further insight into play experiences and satisfaction levels.

Frequency of Play

- 74% of children with disabilities play outside a few days each week or most days.
- 36% of children with disabilities aged 7-12 years hardly ever play outside.

Play Locations

- In their house or a friend's house
- In their garden or a friend's garden
- Local grassy areas
- Play areas with swings, slides, and other equipment
- School playgrounds
- Community or leisure centres
- After school clubs/groups

Safety and Supervision

- 68% of children with disabilities usually or always feel safe when playing out.
- There was a mixed review on how they perceive adults in supporting children playing outside.
- Transportation to opportunities for play for children with disabilities provided by adults, either by car or walking with them. There are disparities in the data as many answered this despite previously saying they don't play out.

Satisfaction with Play Areas – there were mixed reviews on the quality of play areas:

- Majority of children with disabilities find them okay but feel they could be improved.
- Others describe them as rubbish and in need of significant improvement.

Barriers to Play - Common issues include:

- Broken or outdated equipment
- Litter and broken glass
- Presence of older children or teenagers causing disturbances
- Traffic and safety concerns

Suggestions for Improvement

- More and better-maintained play areas
- Increased safety measures such as better lighting and traffic control
- More inclusive equipment for children with disabilities
- Regular cleaning and maintenance to address litter and broken glass

Overall Satisfaction

- Varied levels of satisfaction with opportunities for play, with many children expressing a desire for more and better opportunities for play.

These findings highlight the need for improved play facilities and safer environments to enhance children's play experiences in Blaenau Gwent.

Welsh Language: With regards to Welsh language, an assessment of provision across Blaenau Gwent indicates that provision links to Welsh Medium schools. Supervised provision that provides opportunities for play promote the Welsh language through elements of Welsh.

The group didn't feel the need for specific Welsh provision but reflected that elements of Welsh should be included. This view was further supported through the attendance at a Welsh Medium event in January 2025 and through our clubs and groups survey where families were asked whether there was a need or interest for Welsh medium provision.

The local authority will therefore continue to work with Welsh language groups such as Menter Iaith and Mudiad Meithrin to determine need through further consultation with children and parents where there would be a demand for increased facilities and to encourage the provision of these facilities where appropriate.

Ethnic Minority Groups: There are small numbers of specific ethnic groups living in Blaenau Gwent. For ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) families the challenge was not knowing what is available in the community, when there are events, with language being the principal barrier. While no specific demand has been identified for culturally specific play provision and the lack of culturally specific provision has not been identified as a barrier to play, links have been made to raise awareness of what is going on in local communities.

Gypsy and Travellers:

Nine children engaged with the focus group who expressed that due to their culture of not mixing with community outside of the site that opportunities for play were limited due to no designated space for play. Children seek alternative spaces including waste ground, roads around the site, in the lane leading to the site, or in the community cabin (a small shipping container converted into a community space and very limiting). Play activity includes den building, riding bikes, making tree swings, climbing trees, hide and seek around the site, or in each other's homes. Children considered that having no dedicated space, no gardens, traffic coming in and out of the site, rubbish and dog mess limited their opportunities for play. Ball games are restricted due to the close proximity of parked vehicles and homes.

Children living in rural areas: Only four areas are classified as rural in Blaenau Gwent; Bedwellty Pits, Trefil, Pochin and Cwm. Children spoke about opportunities to play in surrounding forests, fields, parks, sports pitches, a lagoon and quarry in Trefil, with lots of open space, places to explore and to meet friends. Children were very mindful of risky play activities, comments including 'Be mindful on slippery rocks' and to 'be careful around water'. Children living in Cwm felt that the play area in William Street; 'is super now' and provided lots of equipment and plenty to do, although litter and broken glass were raised by several children.

LGBTQ+: Focus group findings told us that LGBTQ+ children felt that the only real opportunity that the group had to hang out together (as they live a distance from each other) is during lunchtimes at school however it's not for long (10mins) and they can't really express themselves as the only space to go is the library. Children felt they would like to be able to create their own space outside of the school day to meet up.

Young Carers: Focus group held with 14 Young Carers aged between 5 and 14 years, highlighting play spaces they enjoyed and some of the things they loved to do. They enjoyed hanging out with their friends after school and visiting local play areas although being busy with other things, glass, rubbish and other teenagers were a barrier.

'The climber is really scary took me a long time to be able to climb the climber as it was difficult at first cos I'm so small but I'm bigger now and guess.. what I did it!'

Children living in areas of deprivation and low-income families: Focus groups and survey findings tell us that the greatest barrier is cost and accessibility. Due to the nature of Blaenau Gwent, it can be a challenge using public transport to travel across the valleys. For example, from Abertillery to Tredegar a 10 mile (20min car journey) would take 1 hour 10 mins with two bus changes. This discourages a lot of families from accessing provision outside of their local communities and reflected in survey findings when asked 'how good are your opportunities for playing and hanging out?' with 38% saying they were either rubbish or not good.

Where children play – what engagement & consultation tell us

Average age: The average age of children completing our Play Satisfaction Survey was 10 years with a similar age of engagement with our focus group activities.

Playing out:

- Frequency: The majority of children completing our play satisfaction survey said they played out a few days each week however, 16% of primary school aged children stated they don't play or hang out with friends and mostly play at home or at designated play areas. For those children aged between 4 and 11yrs that do play out, they enjoy more freedom - playing in their streets, parks, local shops and around their immediate local community. Older children have the greatest freedom of movement meeting up with friends at leisure centres, parks, local shopping centres and local areas.

Play Locations:

- Common places: Children play in various locations such as their house or a friend's house, gardens, local grassy areas, play areas with swings and slides, woods, football fields, and school playgrounds.
- Preferred Locations: Younger children tended to prefer fixed play areas with older children (10 years and above) leisure centres, community spaces, playing fields, local shops and forest/wooded areas.

Safety and Quality of Play Areas:

- Safety: 73% of children usually feel safe when playing, 18% never feel safe with 9% saying they don't play out. There are some disparities between the frequency and safety findings as some children have answered these 2 questions differently.
- Quality: The quality of space for play is mixed, with 62% finding opportunities for play either great or ok. It is difficult to ascertain satisfaction at lower levels of the local authority as areas had varying degrees of engagement through the surveys and focus group activity.

Adult Supervision and Transportation:

- Supervision: 63% of children over 9 years expressed they are allowed to play out on their own or with friends, children have access to mobile phones to keep in touch with parents and set times to be home which reflected the time of year/day of week.
- Transportation: Children usually get to play areas by walking or cycling with friends or being taken by an adult in a car.

Overall Play Opportunities

- Satisfaction: Overall satisfaction with play opportunities varies and are not consistent among children living in the same local community with some children finding them great, while others think they need to be made much better.

Positive Aspects of Play Areas

- Socialisation: Children appreciate the opportunity to socialise with friends as an important aspect of playing and hanging out.
- Variety: Across Blaenau Gwent there are a variety of places to hang out, such as play areas, parks, fields, access to forestry with children demonstrating that they will find playable spaces in their local communities.

Negative Aspects and Areas for Improvement

- Traffic and Safety: Concerns about traffic, lack of safe crossings, and speeding cars.
- Cleanliness: Issues with litter, broken glass, dog mess, and vandalism in play areas.
- Facilities: Need for more and better play equipment, updated parks, and facilities for older children and teenagers.
- Accessibility: From the survey findings two 9-year-olds mentioned the lack of wheelchair-accessible equipment and restricted access to play areas.

We have to watch for cars. A grown up shouts up the street and we all go to the pavement.

Additional Feedback

- Community Events: Appreciation for community events and activities organised by the local authority and partners.
- Suggestions: More Youth Clubs, better lighting, cleaner parks, and more activities for different age groups.

Strengths

Space:

- Play space assessment of Blaenau Gwent's formal outdoor play spaces took place over a period of five weeks in February and March 2025. All Council owned or managed formal outdoor play spaces in Blaenau Gwent were assessed. In total 53 formal outdoor play spaces owned or managed by Blaenau Gwent Council were assessed by the Blaenau Gwent Play team.
- Places where children play are mapped on the Open Space Assessment; including fixed play areas, ball courts, wheeled sports areas, playing fields, amenity space, green spaces and local community spaces.
- The 'Where Children Play' survey findings has helped to build an overview of what neighbourhood spaces children use for play.
- Spaces encourage children to interact, collaborate, and resolve conflicts, fostering social skills.

- There is a process to arrange for a temporary road closure.
- The PSA findings continue to contribute to the LDP to ensure the plan recognises and addresses the outdoor play needs of children of various age groups and abilities.

Access:

- Walking Bus Schemes were introduced to all schools.
- Cycle Training level 1 and level 2 is offered to all schools across Blaenau Gwent.

Weaknesses

Space:

- While play value is assessed there are limited means to secure improvements due to limited funding.
- Not all spaces have been identified and assessed for play value.
- The rationalisation report for fixed play areas hasn't been revisited since the initial piece of work in 2018.
- Limited funding and resources impact the development and maintenance of play areas affecting the quality and accessibility of play spaces.
- Play areas are subject to vandalism or misuse, affecting their safety and usability.
- Some play areas are not easily accessible to all children, especially those with disabilities.
- Overall, there is a provision deficit across the equipped play area typology at County level, in terms of overall Equipped/designated Play Area provision, all 14 wards are shown to have below the 0.25ha per 1000 population benchmark standard. The highest level of provision was in Georgetown with 0.11 ha per 1000 population and the lowest level provision being in Cwmtillery with 0.02 ha per 1000 population. (OSA 2025)
- The quality of play areas with fixed play equipment across Blaenau Gwent continues to be a theme in the consultation and feedback from children and families for this Play Sufficiency Assessment. This is also highlighted in the local authority's annual play area inspection reports with equipment coming to end of life or in need of repair/maintenance.
- Temporary road closure requests are not made for children to play outside their homes.
- Some schools curtail school playtime as a consequence for bad behaviour.

Access:

- Walking bus schemes have been difficult to sustain.

Policy:

- Lack of awareness among policymakers about the importance of play hinders effective policy development.

Opportunities

WG funding:

- AWPOG capital funding 25/26 will support refurbishment of play areas, there is a need to use innovative approaches to enhance/develop play spaces.

Funding:

- Seek grants and funding to develop new play areas and upgrade existing ones.

Space:

- Play spaces that are not Council owned or managed were not included in the assessment, as there is a lack of data about these spaces, and the Council has no jurisdiction to influence their maintenance or to improve or make recommendations for change in these spaces. This is an area that might be considered for future PSA reports through the Supporting Play Sufficiency group.
- Identify and assess community spaces for play value.
- Revisit the play area rationalisation report conducted in 2018 to determine future funding priorities.
- Introduce new and engaging play equipment/features that stimulate opportunities for play.
- Use natural features to create more naturalistic play environments.
- Incorporating play into educational environments both during the school day and after can enhance learning outcomes, make education more engaging and provide safe places for children to play.
- Safe routes to school can promote walking and cycling, increasing children's access to play areas.
- Developing programmes that emphasise outdoor and nature-based play to enhance children's opportunities for play.
- Support local communities to set up 'friends of' groups to support local community spaces for play.
- Pilot road closures to support children's play in their local communities.

Engagement:

- Promoting active play can improve physical health, reduce childhood obesity, and encourage lifelong healthy habits
- Play areas can serve as hubs for social interaction, fostering a sense of community and belonging
- Involving communities in the design and maintenance of play spaces can improve their quality and accessibility
- Use insights from children and parents to enhance and expand play facilities.
- Raise awareness through Play Friendly Communities and support the setup of friends of groups.
- Reintroduce Play Friendly Schools to promote play during the school day and access after the school day.

Partnerships:

- Collaborate with local organisations and businesses to improve play area facilities and accessibility.

Policy Advocacy:

- Advocating for stronger play policies can lead to better integration of play.
- Incorporate the value of children being able to experience risk and challenge into local authority policies.

Threats

Access:

- Development and lack of green spaces can limit opportunities for outdoor play.

Resource constraints:

- Resource availability could impact the development and maintenance of play areas.
- Play areas may continue to be subject to vandalism or misuse, affecting their safety and usability.
- Economic downturns can limit funding for play-related initiatives.
- Creating safe and engaging play environments require significant resources.
- 'Helicopter in' individual pieces of fixed play equipment may not be the most effective use of funding.

Changing Demographics:

- Shifts in population demographics could alter the demand for play areas in certain communities.

Policy:

- Shifts in political priorities can affect the continuity and effectiveness of play policies.

Supervised provision:

Matter D: Supervised play provision

Matter G: Playwork training and workforce development

What children have told us:

Through focus groups, face to face conversations and survey findings along with local community research we were able to consider supervised provision and how various clubs/groups/provision meet the needs and interests of children and young people in providing opportunities for playing and hanging out.

Holiday Provision: School holiday play provision in Blaenau Gwent is provided by the local authority, childcare providers or through local authority partners.

School holiday childcare: Whilst the number of providers offering school holiday childcare is low, it is important to note that most providers registered to deliver full day care offer sessional, after-school and holiday places, with the availability, cost and age suitability depending on the nature of the setting. In addition, all childminders offer at least some holiday provision. In Blaenau Gwent the majority of school holiday childcare for working families is provided by immediate family or close friends, therefore many of our holiday clubs having vacancies.

Open access play provision: The Blaenau Gwent play team deliver open access play sessions across Blaenau Gwent generally over every school holiday period except Christmas, offering up to six 2hr sessions a week at varying locations. Sessions are aimed at children 4-14years and provide a variety of opportunities and activities to engage and promote children's play supported by a team of playworkers and community play volunteers.

Liked that there were things for my one-year-old and 7-year-old to do and was able to keep both entertained

Plenty of things to play with and can't believe he ate a tuna and sweetcorn sandwich!

There was a lot to do, and my children have had a super afternoon – thank you

In the summer the play team come up the park we get to do lots of stuff arts and crafts and play some games, we had a fun water slide there in the summer

Keep up the good work so lovely to see the children playing and enjoying them selves

Food and Fun: Food and Fun runs in six schools across two weeks during the school summer holiday. The provision targets children most in need identified by the schools so is not necessarily an option for working parents seeking holiday provision.

Sports playschemes: Aneurin Leisure Trusts Sports Development team offer leisure centre based playschemes across the three sites during school holidays. Playschemes are aimed at children aged 8-12 years, with a small charge and places are bookable. Children told us they loved the variety of games, and it was great to spend time with their friends.

Clwb Llan: Based at Llanhilleth Institute funded by The National Lottery, Awards for All programme offers school holiday provision for children aged 0-16 years and their families. A range of different activities/workshops are delivered throughout the school holidays; family bakery/cookery, family craft, family gardening, family film nights, youth bakery/cookery, craft workshops, baby sensory groups, gymnastic workshops, music workshops (drumming/beatbox), drama workshops and slime workshops. Clwb Llan also run a holiday hunger scheme throughout the school holidays providing free breakfasts and lunches for children aged 0-16.

'The staff are so friendly and organised. The activities provided are amazing, they have made the school holidays so enjoyable for all ages. Thanks everyone definitely appreciated.'

'Wouldn't it be lovely to have a play friendly community for the amazing children, both the ones on the autism spectrum and the family session - I have enjoyed being with them. It has made my life a whole lot better having activities to do and also seeing their friends and making new ones.'



'Incredible club aimed at children of all ages. Mine are aged 8 to 12 and all 4 children absolutely love attending and taking part'

Youth Service: Youth provision provides young people with safe spaces to hang out providing a safe space for young people to engage in diverse recreational and educational activities, that nurtures their physical, social and emotional development. The Youth Service provide a comprehensive summer programme of activities while keeping evening youth club provisions open throughout the holidays. The summer programme spans the six weeks of the school holiday period and focuses on activities aimed at supporting wellbeing and social interaction.

After-school activities and clubs:

After-schools clubs: As with school holiday childcare above, after-school clubs are generally used for childcare to support working parents. From our setting questionnaires we can ascertain that afterschool/holiday clubs are used more so with children aged 4-7years, up to a maximum of 12years. Children enjoy being able to spend time with their friends outside of school and enjoy the range of activities.

School clubs/activities: From those schools completing our survey, 40% said that the school provided after school clubs such as netball, football, rugby for their pupils.

One school commented:

There has been a change in the way pupils play. Some pupils do not like going outside, some find it hard to interact with others, and some do not know how to play in an outdoor environment. it is important from an early age that play is supported by adults.

Clwb Llan: Deliver afterschool clubs funded by the Big Lottery (Brighter Futures) for St Illtyds children aged 4-11 years and a youth club for Blaenau Gwent children aged 11-16 years. Currently 108 children are enrolled for afterschool clubs in Clwb Llan. During the afterschool clubs, children can learn skills in; cooking, arts and crafts, play, socialising, gardening, sports, ICT, and opportunities to be involved in the community including opportunities for volunteering with the youth club. Clwb Llan has gone from strength to strength since its launch in 2019, engaging with local children aged 3 to 16 years who are facing disadvantage, with an aim to raise aspiration, address specific needs, reduce isolation and enable children to become more involved in their community.

Flying Start: Families expressed that Flying Start hubs offered a rich and varied environment with plenty of opportunities that supported their child's play.

Families First: Consultation with young carers expressed that they enjoy meeting up with others, enjoyed the range of activities and opportunities that were available to them during school holiday breaks. They also felt that the team were supportive and looked forward to attending each week.

Indoor play centres: We have several commercial based indoor play centres in Blaenau Gwent that provide opportunities for play for children 0-14yrs and their families offering a range of different groups including baby groups, character weekends, playgroup and general play sessions. Indoor playcentres are popular venues with children of all ages providing safe places to play.

Clubs and groups

Age Groups: Children participating in clubs and groups range from 2 years to 18+ years.

Attendance: Children attend clubs and groups on multiple days of the week, including weekdays and weekends, although several parents felt more clubs and groups should be available at the weekend.

Types of Clubs/Groups: Common clubs and groups include uniformed groups (e.g., Scouts, Cubs), swimming, martial arts, dance (ballet), sports (football, rugby, cricket, gym), parent & toddler groups, performing arts (music, drama), and other parent/child groups.

Challenges and Barriers

- Cost: Club/group costs vary, with some being free and others charging over £10 per session.
- Accessibility: Challenges include restricted parking
- Accessibility: Lack of locations hosting baby groups
- Accessibility: Difficulties in booking sessions.
- Accessibility: Some parents are not aware of what clubs and groups are available in their local community or across Blaenau Gwent.
- Transport: Some parents face difficulties due to lack of transport or long travel distances.

Feedback on Clubs and Groups

Positive Aspects:

- Clubs and groups are appreciated for helping children socialise, build confidence, learn new skills, and engage in various activities.
- Qualified staff and registered providers are highly valued.

Areas for Improvement:

- Suggestions include more clubs for specific age groups,
- Better accessibility.

- More information about available clubs.

Important Factors for Parents

- Considerations: When choosing clubs/groups, parents prioritise cost, child interest, location, activities provided, qualified staff, and through recommendations.

Additional Feedback

- Suggestions: Parents suggest removing ticketing systems for some weekly groups as felt some families monopolise tickets which they may not use resulting in some families wishing to attend but no availability.
- Providing more clubs for toddlers particularly for under 2 years.

Strengths

Provision:

- Good understanding of what is available in local communities
- The local authority offers both school holiday and term time play provision delivered by a team of playworkers and volunteers.
- The Youth Service have expanded their reach by delivering additional provision in various community locations.
- Aneurin Leisure Sports Development Team continue to provide recreational activities for children and young people through health, leisure and wellbeing programmes.
- Families First support several children with additional needs, the children are offered play via the inclusive youth club.
- Staffed play provision that the local authority provides meets regulatory requirements and National Minimum Standards as good practice.
- Good partnership working across holiday provision providers to ensure wide reach, minimising duplication and maximising resources.
- Through the Food Reliance Network bringing together and mapping provision offering food and snack during the summer school holiday period.
- A range of parenting programmes are delivered across the Flying Start hubs enabling families to access communication-rich play environments to encourage and support parents to adopt a play-based approach to their child's communication and language development.

Workforce:

- Community Play Volunteers support delivery of opportunities for play.

- The local authority secured a part-time playworker post to support school holiday provision. A recent review of the team has resulted in the addition of a Play Co-ordinator post, however that necessitated losing the school holiday playworker post.

Quality:

- The local authority works closely with providers providing advice, guidance and training to promote the importance of providing quality of play opportunities.
- All registered settings offering playwork provision have signed up to the local authority's quality assurance (QA) programme.
- 'Quality Matters' was developed in 2022 and reviewed in 2024 through co-construction by practitioners, for practitioners. 'We Play' is the local authority's Quality Assurance programme for After-school and Holiday Clubs.
- The tool assesses 4 themes: Wellbeing, Care & Development, Environment and Leadership. Quality of play is assessed throughout the environment theme, indoor and outdoor space, risk and challenge, and how children are supported to develop confidence, independence and resilience. The tool is based on a scale of Green, Yellow, Amber and Red. Amber correlates to the National Minimum Standards for registered childcare and supports the development of an improvement plan.

Training and Continuous Professional Development:

- Annual training audit undertaken to ascertain training needs of the sector.
- The local authority produces an annual training programme for the sector enhancing the skills and knowledge of early years, childcare and playworkers, leading to better service quality.
- Practitioners are supported with a comprehensive training programme to ensure that settings continue to offer quality, safe spaces for children to play, the majority of which is fully funded through Welsh Government Training and Support Grant (under Children and Communities Grant).
- Playwork is promoted at all career opportunities, job fairs, open days and in our social media campaigns to support workforce recruitment and retention.
- The Play team work closely with Aneurin Leisure Trust Sports Development Team to maximise service delivery, minimise duplication and to promote play through a training programme for all staff and volunteers.

Weaknesses

Provision:

- Some gaps in knowledge and awareness of what is available in local communities.

Workforce:

- Reliance on volunteers to support delivery of provision of open access play.
- Recruitment and retention of the sector can affect service delivery/provision availability.

- Increasing awareness about the importance of playwork.

Flexibility:

- Structured environments may limit spontaneous play and creativity.

Cost:

- Some provision can be costly for families.

Opportunities

Provision:

- Research provision in local communities that support opportunities for play to expand records held.

Workforce:

- Look at options and secure funding to expand the Play team to support delivery.
- Recruit further volunteers to support service delivery.

Community Engagement:

- Potential to build strong community ties through local play initiatives.
- Development of new and engaging play programmes that cater to diverse needs.

Threats

Provision:

- Providers not recognising their role in supporting play sufficiency.

Economic factors:

- Training delivered on a full cost recovery basis which could limit some providers accessing training and CPD opportunities.
- Economic instability can affect the availability of jobs and training resources in the sector.
- Funding availability for local authority Play team would affect capacity to support delivery of play opportunities in local communities.

Changing Demands:

- Evolving needs and expectations from parents and children may require constant updates to training.

Policy synergy, engagement, advocacy and information:

Matter F: Measures used to promote access to play, including the provision of information, publicity and events

Matter G: Training opportunities for the play workforce

Matter H: The level of community engagement and participation

Matter I: The extent to which other policies of a local authority take into account the need to enhance play opportunities for children

What children have told us:

Access to play: Provision/events organised by the local authority and their partners are valued by children, their families and local communities. From the survey findings and focus group activities children welcome the range of opportunities during school holiday periods. Events such as Open Access play sessions in parks have become increasingly popular with great feedback and continue to see a growth in attendance.

- 'A lovely day and right on the doorstep'
- 'Thank you so much'
- 'Lovely afternoon – thank you'
- 'Fab job everyone'
- 'So lovely to see children playing and enjoying themselves'

Community engagement: A range of community engagement activities take place across the local authority; from formal consultations to user satisfaction. The Engagement and Participation Strategy outlines how the local authority plans to engage effectively and encourage participation to inform and improve our decision making with four high-level objectives that set out how the local authority aims to achieve effective engagement and participation.

Objective 1: To mainstream effective engagement and participation approaches across the Council

Objective 2: To ensure that we engage with the people of Blaenau Gwent in the most effective, collaborative way
Objective 3: To actively encourage our communities and future generations to participate in council decision-making activity
Objective 4: To maintain best practice in engagement and participation and keep up to date with the latest innovations to help support our communities

It gives local communities the opportunity to share views, thoughts and ideas making sure that we make informed decisions that improve the access, quality, and delivery of services.

Community engagement: Levels of community engagement varies across the local authority however it is evident that there is more awareness in opportunities for play which has led to more participation. Wild Tots, Open Access play sessions, sports centre playschemes, Playday and town centre events have all seen an increase in engagement and participation and continue to grow.

Publicity & information: Family Information Service provides free, confidential and impartial information and guidance on a range of services available to children, young people and their families. They offer information in relation to play provision, childcare, play spaces, health issues, career choices, benefits, sports and recreational activities. Information is provided via a telephone helpline, online search facility on the Family Information Service website, via email, and through social media sites.

Publicity and Information: Effective communication strategies, including social media campaigns, flyers, and community meetings, raise awareness about the importance of play and promotes opportunities available for play. The play team are often told 'I didn't know this was on today', 'didn't see it advertised anywhere'. With a movement to primarily use social media for publicity there is a need to be mindful that not all families access social media, and it continues to need to be promoted visually across and within local communities.

Professional Development: Providing training and development opportunities for those working in play settings ensures staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to facilitate high-quality play experiences. Parents recognise the importance of suitably qualified staff when they consider clubs and groups their children attend.

Policy synergy: Play contributes across many different strategic priorities relating to children's education, development and well-being and community cohesion. The local authority recognise that every aspect of children's lives is influenced by their need and desire to play, and that play opportunities can help to mitigate the negative effects of poverty on children's lives, ensuring every child has the 'best start in life'.

This Play Sufficiency Assessment recognises that weaker areas may not necessarily be down to poor policy or practice but down to lack of information at the time of gathering data as well as limitations on officer capacity.

Strengths

Engagement:

- The LA shares play related opportunities and demonstrates good engagement through social media and website.

- The LA revised their Play Friendly Community guidance in 2024 to promote, encourage and support community engagement in making space available and suitable for play.

Training:

- The Childcare Business Development Officer carries out an annual workforce training needs analysis.
- The Childcare Business Development Officer ensures there is a variety of learning and development opportunities available for staff through the EYCP annual training programme.

Policy:

- Play Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan contribute to and are incorporated within the Well-being Plan under the focus of 'Giving every child the best start in life'.

Weaknesses

Supporting Play Sufficiency:

- Lack of representation from Education or Health on the Supporting Play Sufficiency group.
- Some colleagues do not recognise that their work impacts children's opportunities to play.

Opportunities

Supporting Play Sufficiency:

- Continue to promote and engage with directorates and individuals to increase awareness.
- To engage more groups in local communities to support play sufficiency.
- To invite colleagues from Education and Health to be represented in the Supporting Play Sufficiency group.
- To continue to explore all policy agendas for their potential impact on children's play opportunities and develop play as a cross-cutting theme.
- Ensure that services collaborate to recognise and incorporate the value of play in their plans.
- To raise awareness of the Play Sufficiency duty and how it supports policy areas.
- Create banners to put up in local communities to promote play sessions.

Threats

Resources:

- In order to take forward and to explore the low or no cost options within the Play Action Plan it is required that officer time is allocated to continue to facilitate the 'Supporting Play Sufficiency' Group to implement, monitor and report on progress of play to the Council.