

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **14th September 2022**

Report Subject: **Play Sufficiency Assessment 2022-2025**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Haydn Trollope - Executive Member for Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Ceri Bird – Service Manager, Children’s Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
28.06.22	14.07.22					14.09.22		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1 To approve the Blaenau Gwent Play Sufficiency Assessment 2022 – 2025, the Executive Summary and the Action Plan prior to submission to Welsh Government.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 The Welsh Government places great value on play and its importance in the lives of children in our society. They believe that children have a fundamental right to be able to play, and that play is central to their enjoyment of life and contributes to their well-being. They also believe that play is essential for the growth in children’s cognitive; physical; social and emotional development.

2.1.1 Children’s right to play is enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Welsh Government formally adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2004 and is committed to making the principles of the UNCRC a reality for all children and young people. There are three articles which particularly relate to this duty:

- Article 31 (Leisure, play and culture): Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.
- Article 15 (Freedom of association): Children have the right to meet together and to join groups and organisations.
- Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child): When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

2.1.2 The Welsh Government also believes that high quality play opportunities for all children may contribute to mitigating the negative effects of poverty on children’s lives and help to build their resilience.

- 2.1.3 Play can also be a means of reducing inequalities between children living in families that can afford costly recreational provision and those that cannot so reducing poverty of experience for all children.
- 2.1.4 To achieve this the Welsh Government placed a statutory duty on Local Authorities under section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, Play Opportunities for Children. The duty requires Local Authorities to assess the sufficiency of play opportunities for children in their areas every 5 years.
- 2.1.5 This report covers the Blaenau Gwent Play Sufficiency Assessment 2022 - 2025, the Executive Summary and the 3-year Action Plan.

2.2 **The Assessment Process**

The Local Authority has a dedicated Play Sufficiency Officer who is responsible for monitoring, reviewing, planning and drafting the Local Authority's Play Sufficiency Assessment; with a reporting process to the Early Years, Childcare and Play Manager and the Service Manager, Children's Services forming the 'Play Sufficiency Implementation Group'.

- 2.2.1 Desktop research, face-to-face meetings, focus groups, surveys, phone calls and emails ensured we offered a flexible, varied approach for lead officers and our partners in the collection of data. Colleagues were able to contribute to their areas of expertise and offer solutions to gaps in data.
- 2.2.2 The following outlines data used for each matter;

Matter A - Population: This section presents socio-economic and demographic data supplied by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council - Policy Officer, Research and Analysis and web based sources.

Matter B – Providing for diverse needs: Underpinned by the responses from our BIG play survey for children/young people and targeted focus groups.

Matter C – Space available for children to play: The following data assisted with the review including the LA's Annual inspection report of outdoor unstaffed fixed play provision, open space assessments, Local Development Plan, GIS mapping, local community knowledge, parks department, Play Sufficiency Officer and survey/focus group findings.

Matter D – Supervised provision: Information from DEWIS (FIS) from providers that have been identified as providing supervised play provision along with information on Early Years services, Parent and Toddler groups and After School Clubs that participate in our Quality Assurance scheme, the LA's Play and Youth Service and Leisure Trust.

Matter E – Charges for play provision: Information held by FIS and services offered by the Play team and LA. Welsh Governments AWPOG funding for Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing.

Matter F – Access to space/provision: Data and information held by colleagues from Traffic Management, Active Travel and Road Safety Team.

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

Matter H – Community engagement and participation: Data held by the Local Authorities Play team, FIS and Blaenau Gwent's Engagement strategy.

Matter I – This section is based on key policy and strategic documents working with colleagues across different directorates including; Transport; Education, Partnerships, Planning, Early Years and Flying Start, Families First and Health & Safety.

2.2.3 Using guidance from Play Wales and Welsh Government, the Local Authority created a survey for children and young people. Questions were 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 and psychological – permission to play. In this year's survey there were also questions relating to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

2.3 **Assessment Findings**

2.3.1 Play survey:

Surveys were circulated to children and young people via partners, schools, local events, play sessions, afterschool clubs and an online version promoted on social media, 254 were returned.

To enrich data from the survey responses, focus groups were held with 6 school councils, 4 after-school clubs and 1 youth group. To ensure that minority groups of children had an opportunity to participate our focus groups ensured we had representation from children from Welsh language schools, children with disabilities, children looked after and gypsy/traveller children. 120 children participated in an activity-based workshops with a further 221 children, young people and parent/carers consulted during play sessions.

Survey findings:

- 90% of surveys were completed by children aged between 5 & 14yrs, with the average being 8 years.
- 15 children identified themselves as disabled with 60% of children satisfied with opportunities for playing and hanging out.
- 77% felt they had more than enough or plenty of time for playing or hanging out with friends
- 20% of children said they can play in all the places they would like to
- 95% said they always or usually felt safe when playing out, and it was considered that adults were supportive. The findings showed that 10-14yr olds were more likely to not feel safe.

- 96 children said they weren't allowed to play out on their own or with friends, with 43 between the ages of 8 & 15yrs
- Children were able to name lots of things that were good in their area, lots commented on playing in areas close to their homes, playing with friends who lived close by, leisure facilities, enjoying natural features like fields, woods and mountains too.

In terms of what was not so good about playing in their own area, comments tended to fall into themes; traffic, litter/cleanliness, local parks and play areas, older children (hanging about/bullying), nothing to do. The poor state of play areas and fixed play equipment continues to be one of the top themes of dis-satisfaction when consulting children, young people and their families. With 40% of children reflecting parks as 'what was bad in their area'.

2.3.2 Focus Groups:

To enrich data from the survey responses, focus groups were held with 6 school councils, 4 after-school clubs and 1 youth group. To ensure that minority groups of children had an opportunity to participate our focus groups ensured we had representation from children from Welsh language schools, children with disabilities, children looked after and gypsy/traveller children. 120 children participated in an activity-based workshop with a further 221 children, young people and parent/carers consulted during play sessions.

Focus group findings – what did children tell us?

- Why is play/hanging out important? Responses included: improving mental health, socialising, exercise, fun, being out in nature, our right to play, being happy, fresh air,
- Where/what they play when they are not in school? Children identified places they played including: parks, play areas, sports centres, woodland, streets, at home, relatives and friend's house, mountain, skate park, after school clubs, fields.
- What's good about them? Many gave examples of what they did; playing sports, cycling, playing games, skateboarding, tree climbing, fishing, running, jumping, climbing, walking, tag games, getting messy, lots of space, feel safe.
- What's bad about them? Bullies, older children, other adults, random people, dog poop, broken glass, litter, nothing to do.
- What are the barriers? Examples included; weather, traffic, other children, adults, access, park in disrepair. These were categorised into 3 main themes; temporal – how children spend their 'free time', spatial – how supports or constrains children's play and access to space, psychological – permission to play.
- What can we do to minimise the barriers? Participants identified what they could do themselves 'wear suitable clothing', 'carry a mobile phone', 'learn green cross code', 'go with friends'. 'walk away', 'tell an adult', 'call the police', 'pick up litter'.

2.3.3 What did Adults tell us?

When asked what was good or bad about the area for playing out there was a mix of responses with lots of parents noting the positives of living close to play areas or natural features like grassy areas/fields, lakes, woodlands etc and being close to areas that are good for playing.

Negatives included the poor maintenance of play areas and limited facilities for children of all ages to enjoy, dog mess, anti-social behaviour/vandalism and traffic.

When asked why they might travel outside of the area for play parents regularly noted the poor condition of our local play areas. Comments included;

'No decent clean parks in the area'

'The equipment in our local park needs updating'

'It's always overgrown with grass, litter and vandalism everywhere'

'Hardly anything for older children to play on, and the younger ones get bored'.

Throughout the pandemic when children couldn't leave their towns and travel was prohibited it emphasised how little we have in Blaenau Gwent. As children get older (into their teens) the lack of facilities like bike parks, bowling, tennis courts, assault courses, ninja warrior courses, woodland adventure play courses, laser tag, gaming/amusement arcades, splash parks, cinema and food complexes, limit opportunities for play and for hanging out. The lack of opportunities for children and young people are frequently a focus on social media.

2.4 Impact of Covid

2.4.1 It is widely recognised that children's play is vital to aide recovery following the pandemic, with increased awareness and recognition of the value and benefits of play. Welsh Government's commitment to help re-build confidence for children, young people and their families to integrate back into the community was delivered through Summer of Fun and Winter Wellbeing funding.

2.4.2 Surveys asked 2 specific questions exploring the impact of the pandemic on children's opportunities to play; *'Has Covid 19 affected how you usually play'* and if yes *'how'*.

16.5 % of replies stated that the coronavirus restrictions and lockdowns hadn't had an impact on how they usually played.

2.4.3 Recognising the impact on the wellbeing of children and young people the Local Authority Play team developed a new project during Covid, 'Wild Camps', building on the success of our Wild Tots groups.

2.4.4 The Play team supported Families First during the Summer of 2020 to offer some play sessions during the school summer holiday in local communities. Attendances reflected the reluctance of families feeling confident to use services at this time. The coronavirus and lockdown had intensified children and families' fears of being outdoors, of dirt and disease and of contact with other people. However reasonable that was at that time it had to be balanced against the risks to children's physical and mental health and well-being from being indoors and away from their friends for prolonged periods of time. By encouraging and supporting children to play in the natural environment and working with adults to explain the benefits of play for children's health and wellbeing, learning and resilience we are able to take a balanced approach and encourage participation as the pandemic moved on.

2.4.5 Our Wild Tots Parent and Toddler group saw a significant increase in registered families (400+) following the closure during the pandemic. The demand was so high that rather than turn families away the Local Authority offered an additional session to meet demand. Furthermore, sessions were offered free of charge to recognise the challenges many families had faced during the pandemic and the emphasis for opportunities to be outdoors based. Families expressed how their children had missed opportunities to play and to socialise with other children, for new parents who felt alone and isolated - the opportunity to play, to be outdoors, to meet others, to have a conversation about their new baby was greatly appreciated.

2.5 **The Action Plan**

Our 2022 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?

2.5.1 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?

2.5.2 The accountability of delivering the actions in the plan are not the responsibility of any one department and are 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.

2.5.3 Action Plan Summary

Actions reflect work to fill gaps in data for future assessments as well as actions to secure and develop sufficient play opportunities in Blaenau Gwent.

- Update population data as becomes accessible following Census 2021
- Undertake an audit of what provision is available across Blaenau Gwent for children with disabilities to include accessibility to parks and fixed play equipment to identify gaps and look at options for further development
- Identify local communities to pilot the launch of the Play Friendly Communities programme
- Deliver Summer of Fun 2022 programme of activities for 0-25yrs with partners
- Deliver workshops for Year 11 and community groups on childcare and play as careers.
- Deliver 'Understanding Play Sufficiency' workshop to all PSA lead officer/contacts
- Deliver Community Family Fun day to celebrate National Playday
- Contribute to discussions with the Regeneration to attract larger scale investment to provide opportunities for children and young people to play and hang out in their local communities.
- Reintroduce 'Play Friendly Schools'

The full action plan can be read in the attached document.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1:

That Members note the Play Sufficiency Assessment report and associated documents and agree the key priorities/actions.

3.2 Option 2:

That Members suggest amendments / include other recommendations to the Assessment, prior to submission to Welsh Government.

4. Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

4.1 Links to Council Priorities within the Corporate Plan - Social Services:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater.
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities.
- To develop a partnership approach to reducing and alleviating the impacts of the Covid pandemic

4.2 **Education:**

- To improve outcomes, progress and wellbeing, particularly for our most vulnerable children and young people.
- Children learn through their play and develop cognitive skills, physical abilities, new vocabulary, social skills, literacy etc.
- Unstructured free play not only offers benefits that protect against the harmful effects of stress, but play also gives children unlimited opportunities to discover their own interests and competencies. Play allows them to use their creativity while developing imagination, dexterity, and physical and emotional strength

4.3 **Links to priorities within the Gwent Wellbeing Plan:**

1.2 Health inequalities and well-being: Play is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child. Wales is the first country to legislate for children's play. Play is an important part of child development, as it builds confidence, creativity, communication, physical development and problem solving.

4.3.1 The impact of the pandemic and the restrictions is felt differently across different age groups and development stages, which means a range of interventions are needed to support the recovery of children and young people.

4.3.2 Play, sport and recreational activity is crucial to children's healthy development and happiness. Play is a child's first exercise and evidence demonstrates that it is one of the best ways for children to stay both physically and mentally healthy. However, a survey commissioned by Play England (2007) revealed how under threat opportunities for playing freely outdoors are. Among those polled, 71 percent of adults said they had played outside in the street or area close to their homes every day when they were children, whereas only 21 percent of children do so today, having an effect on children's mental health, welfare and contributing to obesity rates. It was recognised that while some children will respond well to support in structured settings such as school or childcare, others will need more space and freedom, unstructured child led play, physical or creative activities to frame their recovery.

4.3.3 **1.3 – Community Cohesion:** Play brings communities together. It puts children and families at the heart making them safer and more attractive places to live. People socialise together, make friends and help regenerate their areas.

4.3.4 **1.4 – Environment:** The Play Sufficiency Duty fits into a much larger plan for the area which features largely around the environment and protecting and enhancing green space for all the community to enjoy.

2.3.5 **1.5 – Economy & Infrastructure:** The Play duty provides further opportunities for volunteers and promotes play and play work as a career.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The Local Authority is allocated All Wales Play Opportunity Grant (revenue funding), now on an annual basis which allows us to fund Play staff and offer play opportunities in the community. Additionally, most years we are allocated capital funding and in recent years this funding has been allocated mainly to the Play Area improvement programme, with a smaller amount reserved for improvements to the Play facilities in Blaina ICC and Beaufort Road. Welsh Government has also allocated further play funding during 2021/22 to Local Authorities to enable the Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing programmes to be delivered as part of the Covid recovery strategy.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is a concern that capital allocations from Welsh Government may be reduced in coming years, which would impact on the progress of the Play Area Improvement programme. The Local Authority could consider whether it should use its own capital programme to continue with/accelerate this programme. Surveys undertaken as part of the PSA process, consistently demonstrate the high level of community dissatisfaction with the state of local play areas.

The Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing programmes have been extremely well received by families in Blaenau Gwent but current indications are that this funding won't be extended beyond this Summer holiday period. There is a concern that expectations have been raised about the provision of free activities that will be impossible to maintain in future years. The Early Years Childcare and Play team have established a task and finish group with a range of partners and this group will be retained to work on a co-ordinated approach to future delivery, aiming to deliver the broadest offer of low cost/no cost activities possible within the budget constraints of each partner agency.

5.3 ***Legal***

No considerations.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

No considerations.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Progress against actions within the PSA Action Plan are reported annually to the Early Years Development Childcare and Play Partnership, Departmental Management Team and Corporate Leadership team. An annual update is provided to Welsh Government.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

To raise awareness of the importance of play for all children and to offer the broadest range of play opportunities possible.

- 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
Consultation work with children, young people, parents and a range of other stakeholders has been undertaken as part of the PSA process. Ongoing engagement is provided through direct delivery of play opportunities, with evaluations undertaken of those opportunities at regular intervals.
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
This latest PSA process runs until 2025, when the next full assessment is undertaken.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
As highlighted in section 4.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
Delivery of play opportunities in Blaenau Gwent has necessitated strong partnership working due to the size of the team and budget constraints. Excellent links have been forged with a range of departments and organisations, made stronger through the recent Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing programmes, with a collaborative approach taken to the provision of play.
- 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
The Play Sufficiency duty and subsequent action plans brings together and works across several service areas.
- 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
We aim to offer as many local community opportunities as possible to reduce the need for vehicle travel.
- 6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***
Not undertaken.
- 6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***
Not undertaken.
7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
- 7.1 The Early Years, Childcare and Play team provide quarterly reports to the Early Years Development, Childcare and Play Partnership/SMT.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 - Play Sufficiency Assessment
- Appendix 2 – Play Sufficiency Action plan
- Appendix 3 - Play Sufficiency Executive Summary.