

Play Sufficiency Executive Summary 2022

June 2022



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Contents

Page 3	Background
Page 5	How far have we come?
Page 7	What did we do?
Page 8	What did you tell us?
Page 13	Impact of the coronavirus on children's play
Page 15	What did the assessment tell us?
Page 20	What are we going to do?
Page 21	Our Action Plan priorities for 2022

Background

The Welsh Government is the first Government in the World to legislate for children's play – they acknowledge that children have a right to be able to play and therefore they are committed to improving opportunities for all children and young people to play in safety. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council also acknowledges and supports this right.

To demonstrate their commitment, in November 2012 the Welsh Government placed a duty on all Local Authorities to assess the level of play opportunities in their area and produce an accompanying action plan to improve play opportunities available. Blaenau Gwent's Play Sufficiency Assessment and action plan was initially completed in March 2013, with a second assessment process completed in 2016 and third in 2019. This Executive Summary provides an overview of the 2022 assessment.

The definition of play used for the purpose of the Play Sufficiency Duty is the one that had been developed by the play sector and is recognised internationally. This states that:

'Play encompasses children's behaviour which 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'.¹

The Local Authority recognises and acknowledges that every child has the right to play, with an aim to encourage and support communities to create and develop environments where children and young people have the opportunities to play where adults recognise and support the importance of play. Play is central to children's physical, mental, social, emotional health and well-being and is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Following the recent coronavirus pandemic, we recognise that children and young people's lack of or restricted play opportunities has had a detrimental impact, affecting their mental and physical health. Through play, children develop resilience and flexibility, contributing to physical and emotional well-being. For children themselves playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives. Children and young people need and are entitled to quality places and time for play.

We have an amazing environment in Blaenau Gwent that is a valuable resource to support children's play. The Local Authority values the importance of play for children, young people, their families and the benefits this brings to local communities. We advocate that every child should have the freedom to regularly play out, actively and independently, close to where they live. There are many barriers to enabling children's play so to allow this to happen we all need to work together.

Our aim is for Blaenau Gwent to be a County where children and young people are increasingly seen outside enjoying the benefits of play. This requires parents, families and professionals to recognise that play is of great importance to children's lives, and that we all have a role. The Play Sufficiency Duty ensures the Local Authority has mechanisms in place to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities to meet the needs of children, young people and their families. This requires parents, families and professionals to recognise that play is of great importance to children's lives, and that we all have a role.

The assessment process identifies key stakeholders and works with those stakeholders to consider 101 criteria across 9 matter areas to provide an overview of how play is viewed, planned for and delivered in the area.

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

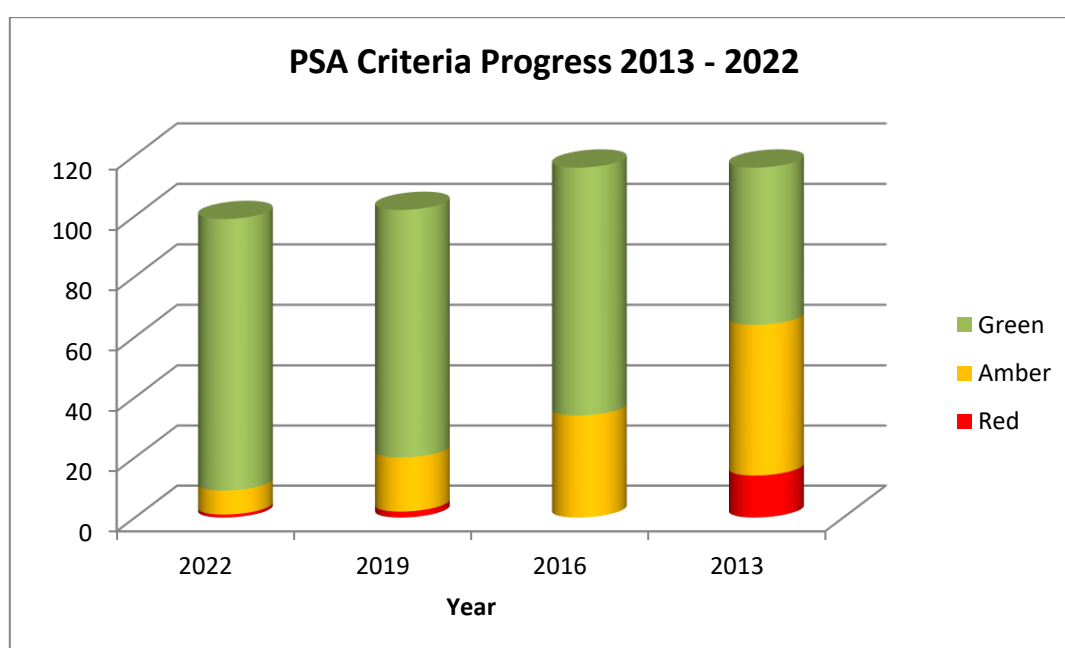


¹ Wales a Play Friendly Country: Statutory Guidance July 2014

How far have we come?

As part of the assessment process the Local Authority has to consider a large number of criteria relating to play and indicate whether they would assess the current position in Blaenau Gwent as red, amber or green (RAG status) in relation to each. A green RAG rating means that the criteria is met, an amber rating demonstrates progress has been made whilst a red rating indicates a criterion that we have been unable to progress.

The chart below illustrates the progress made over the last 4 assessments, with the largest proportion of criteria continuing to be RAG rated green in 2022.



NB: 2013 & 2016 – 112 criteria, 2019 - 102 criteria and 2022 – 101 criteria

While the majority of criteria having been given a green rag status, the Local Authority recognises that these need to be maintained and there is still room for development and improvement.

Progress of Action Plans 2016 – 2022

The Local Authority produces annual action plans, the following table shows how many actions were identified in each year and the progress of those;

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Number of actions	16	10	13	12	21	26
Fully met	11	10	9	9	13	17
Progressed	4	0	4	2	7	9
On hold/delayed	1	0	0	1	1	0

Some notable successes have included;

- To improve access, safety and play value of play areas across Blaenau Gwent.
- Working with Town and Community Councils to fund 'Buy a day for play' sessions – to date 6 sessions delivered.
- To celebrate the playwork workforce – awards ceremony held in July 2019.
- Recruitment of Community Play Volunteers to support holiday provision.
- 4 Play Volunteers completing their Level 3 playwork in August 2019.
- 2 Play Volunteers gaining Level 2 Playwork in August 2019.
- Piloting of 'stay and play' sessions for AN children/young people
- Development of service for Children with disabilities through Sparkle
- Play Friendly Communities – 3 engaged with programme, unfortunately delayed due to the pandemic.
- Development of open access play provision during school holidays.
- Pilot Wild Camps project for children in crisis (2021)
- Sustain Wild Camps project
- Launch of 2nd Wild Tots group in Ebbw Vale
- Sustain and continue to deliver Wild Tots Bedwellty
- Recruitment of 2 level 3 Play leaders (1 in Jan 2021 and the other Jan 2022)
- Support children during the pandemic
- Delivered a programme of activities for 0-25 year olds through Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing 2021 engaging with over 12000 children and young people.




Gaeaf llawn Lles
Winter of Wellbeing



What did we do?

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

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 in their areas of expertise and offer solutions to gaps in data. 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, 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 Playteam 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 Playteam, FIS and Blaenau Gwent's Engagement strategy.

Matter I – This section is based on key policy and strategic documents working with colleagues across different areas including; transport; education, partnerships, planning, Early Years and Flying Start, Families First and Health & Safety.

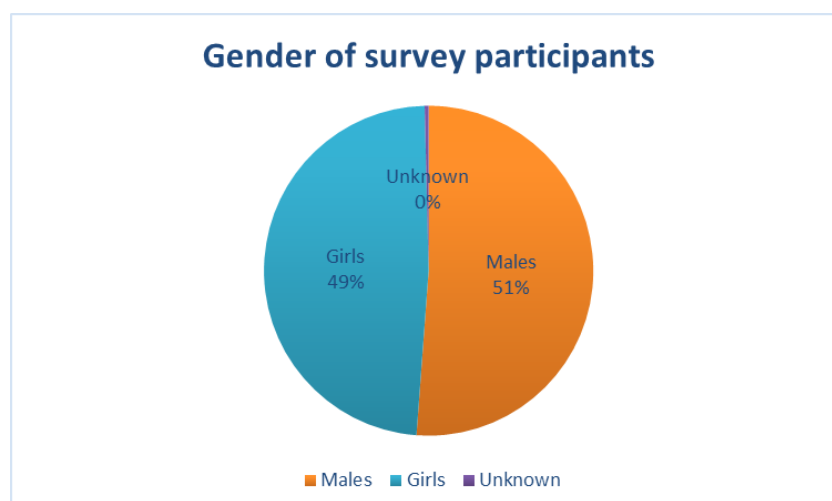
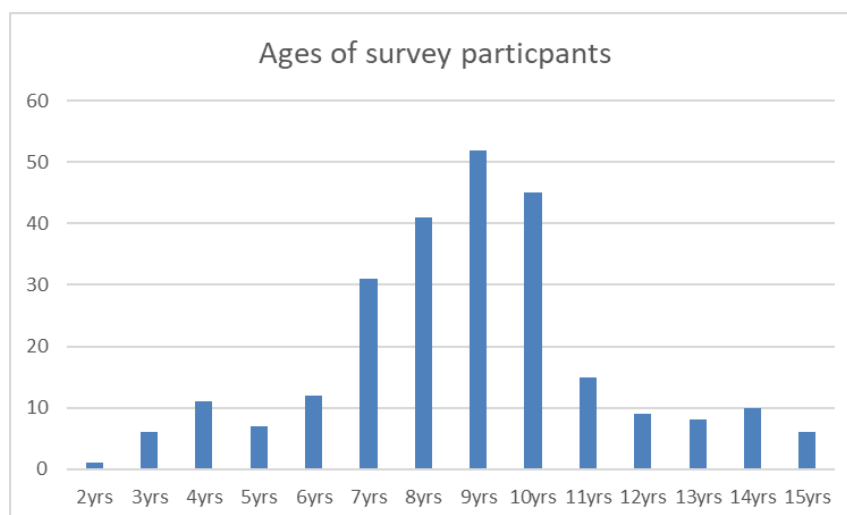
What did you tell us?

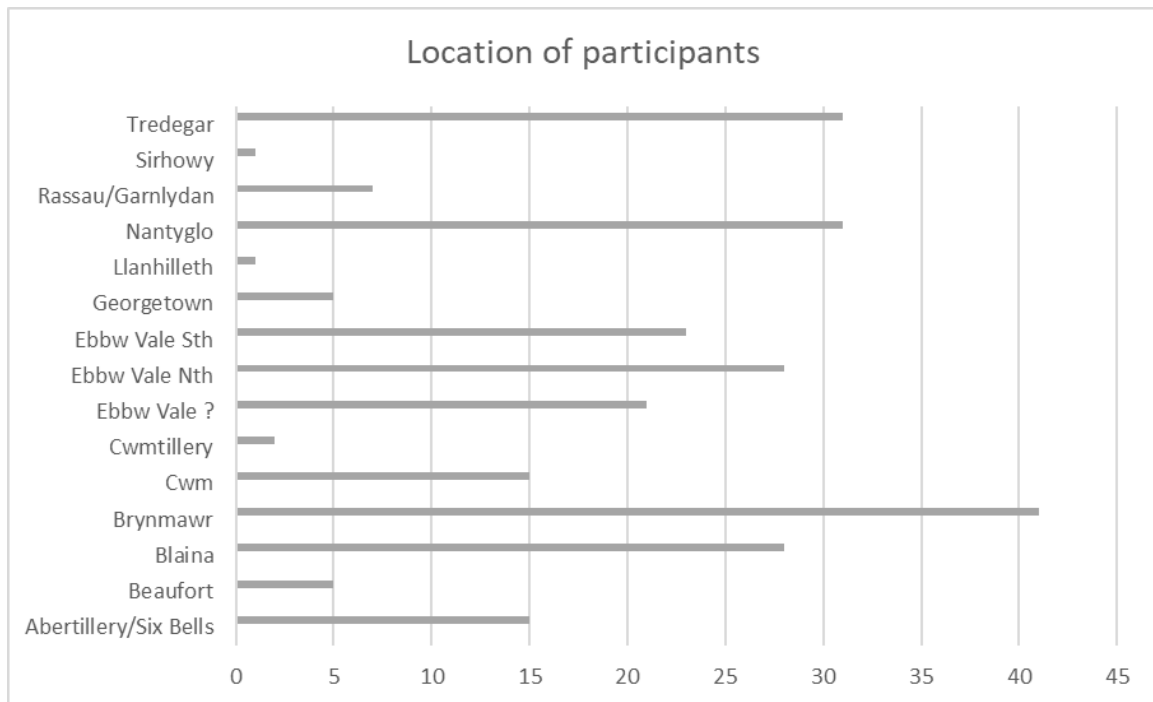
Using guidance from Play Wales and Welsh Government, the Local Authority created a survey for children and young people. Questions were developed to gauge children's play experiences relating to; temporal – how children spend their 'free time', spatial – how space supports or constrains children's play and access to space and psychological – permission to play. In this year's survey there were also question relating to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

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 children participated in the survey...





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.

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.

Children and young people were asked... (please refer to photos below)

Why is play/hanging out important?

Where/what they play when they are not in school? - yellow

What's good about them? - green

What's bad about them? – pink/red

What are the barriers? - bricks

What can we do to minimise the barriers? and who is it? Children? Adults? - stars



120 were consulted through our focus groups, including children with disabilities, gypsy/traveller children, children looked after and Welsh language children. 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'.

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 glass, litter and vandalism everywhere'

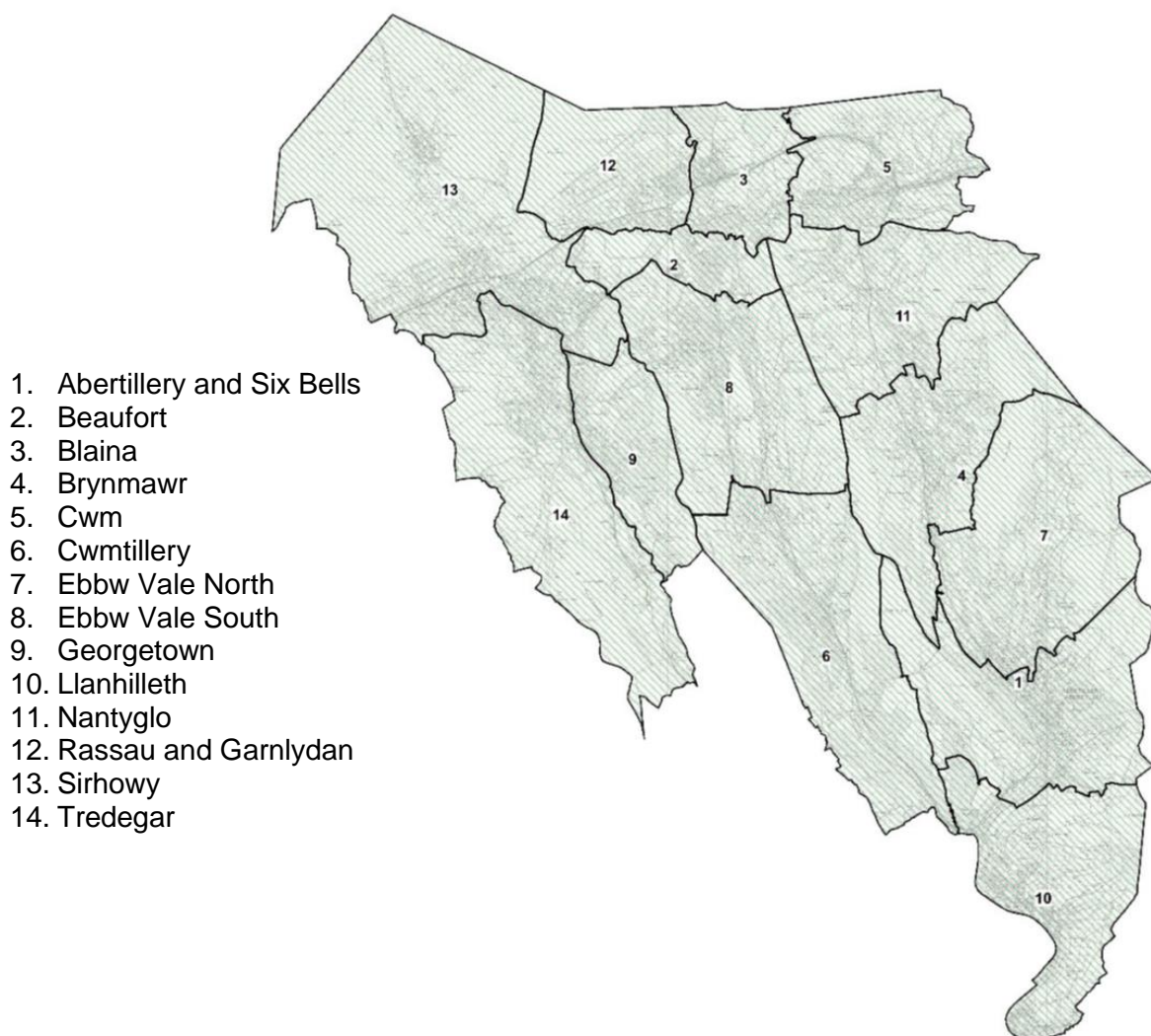
'Hardly anything for older children to play on, and the younger ones get bored'.

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.

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

Challenges were faced and our consultation for this assessment was impacted by the pandemic with limited access for face to face consultation in settings, schools and limited public events.

Data captured has been analysed and helps to inform our ward 'play' profiles.



Where limited data is available the Local Authority will concentrate engagement to ensure an accurate picture for play is established for each area. The Local Authority and their partners will quantify and rank the level of opportunity and utilise the data to inform future development of services, ensuring gaps in play opportunities are prioritised.

The impact of the coronavirus on children's play

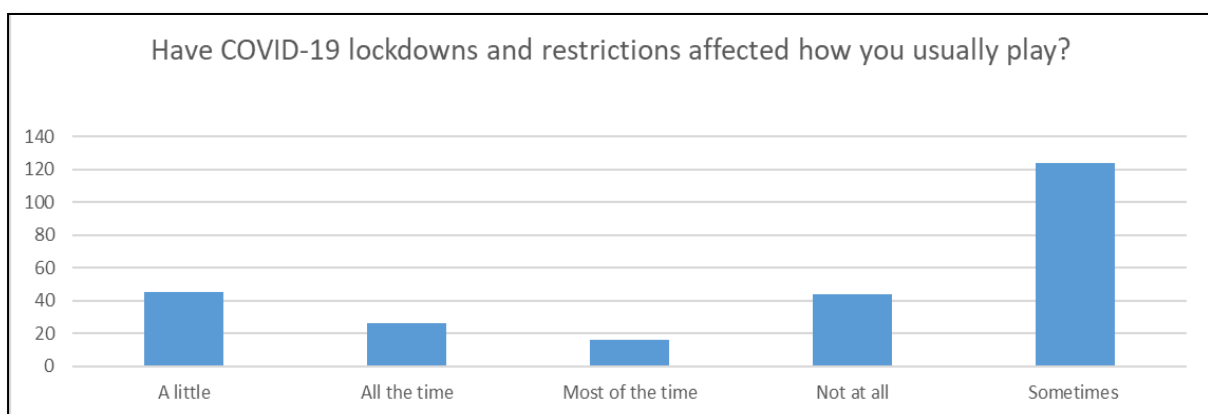
Despite some impact restricting the progress of higher level actions to support the Play Sufficiency Duty, there have been some opportunities that wouldn't have been progressed/developed without additional funding from Welsh Government issued to respond to the effects of the pandemic and the raised profile of play locally and nationally.

Evidence suggests (<https://senedd.wales/media/ixzpwqr5/cr-id14286-e.pdf> and https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FINAL_formattedCVRep_EN.pdf) that restrictions on space and permission to play during the recent pandemic has had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people - physically, mentally and socially.

School closures and the restrictions placed on childcare and play settings and leisure providers have undoubtedly had a huge impact of children's ability to access play opportunities. The pandemic placed severe limits on opportunities for children to socialise outside of their immediate family and school classes for at least some of the time.

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 Governments commitment to help re build confidence for children, young people and their families to integrate back into the community with Summer of Fun and Winter Wellbeing funding.

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. Although there may be some potential disparities across the survey responses as 18 of these when asked to expand stated '*I had to stay in*' or '*not allowed out*'.

Not being able to see friends was the highest themed response when asking how coronavirus had affected them followed by not going out, closures of services and facilities.



Recognising the impact on the wellbeing of children and young people the Local Authority Play team developed a new project 'Wild Camps' building on the success of our Wild Tots groups. 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 have intensified children and families' fears of being outdoors, of dirt and disease and of contact with other people. However reasonable this may be, it has 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.

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. One parent came along with a 9month old asking '*what do I do?*' the reply '*sit your child down (in the mud) and take 2 steps back!*'



What did the assessment tell us?

With this fourth PSA, it has been possible to identify where progress has been made against the last PSA completed in 2019, by comparing the RAG ratings under each matter area. There has been progress in every single matter area and this is illustrative of the amount of work undertaken in the intervening years to raise the profile of play and of a high level of partnership working across departments and organisations. Some of the key findings in the assessment include;

Matter A: Population

A ward profile of population of 0-18 year olds has been collated to assist the Local Authority in identifying where play opportunities may be most needed. Data will be used to develop future consultation programmes ensuring we continue to increase our contact with children and young people and to promote engagement in future development of play provision. The information is available to all partners, organisations and stakeholders across Blaenau Gwent to minimise duplication, maximise resources and ensure play opportunities meet the greatest need.

Matter B: Providing for Diverse Needs

The Local Authority has made significant progress in providing provision for children with disabilities, there is still further work to be done to undertake access audits of all play provision to give us a good understanding of what is available in Blaenau Gwent. The Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing 2021 Welsh Government programmes has enabled the Local Authority to work more with children with disabilities and gypsy/traveller children.

Matter C: Space available for children to play

Blaenau Gwent has a large number of open spaces and designated play areas. However, it is evident through the Play Sufficiency process and Local Authority review that static play areas are in desperate need of significant investment. There is much evidence to show that there is a high level of dissatisfaction with fixed play areas in Blaenau Gwent. Adults and children commented on litter, broken equipment, traffic and vandalism as barriers to accessing play areas. The poor state of the play areas is something that the Local Authority has recognised in its review of play areas conducted in 2018. The Local Authority has been fortunate to have received AWPOG capital funding for the last few years which has been used to undertake refurbishment and replacement of some items of fixed play equipment but as funding is limited this goes just a little way in addressing this big issue.

Evidence also shows that there is a lack of variety for children (particular older children) this is often vocalised on social media, reflected in focus groups and consultation for this assessment. There is also a growing concern across Blaenau Gwent in relation to the increase of anti-social behaviour due to lack of facilities and services.

There is a need to:

- Consider more non-prescriptive equipment, which can be used flexibly to meets the needs of large numbers of children with different needs and abilities.

- Promote the use of open and green spaces for play, which can offer children sometimes better opportunities to play creatively.
- Create more variety for children and young people's play options (as vocalised by parents who were consulted) by attracting external investments and companies.
- Pilot the Play Friendly Communities programme to identify local open and green spaces that can be used to promote creative, active and adventurous play.
- Develop initiatives to raise awareness of children's play

Matter D: Supervised Provision

Supervised play provision in Blaenau Gwent can be categorised as follows:

- Play provision (After School/Holiday Clubs/Open Access provision)
- Youth activities (Streetgames/clubs)
- Recreational activities (sports/arts/cultural/uniformed groups)



There are six staffed CIW registered play settings in Blaenau Gwent providing After School and Holiday Clubs and a varied landscape of providers, groups and organisation who offer play activities after the school day and during school holidays. There is a strong commitment to ensure that children receive rich play opportunities, however this is often met with the challenge of offering a childcare service to parents. Four after-school clubs in Blaenau Gwent have closed since 2020 following the pandemic there are a number of reasons; sustainability concerns through lack of service users with more parents working from home and working flexible hours and less reliant on after school care, financial sustainability following the pandemic and staff recruitment.

There is a need to:

- Seek ways to develop community led open access play provisions.

- Review further opportunities to increase play and recreational activities for children and young people.

Matter E: Charges for play provision

Support is offered to children with additional needs who have been referred through the Additional Needs Panel, Assisted Places are also offered to children from workless households that meet the criteria. No cost provisions are offered across the Local Authority by means of open access play sessions, community events, sessions delivered by Flying Start and Families First programmes. Barnardos offer a comprehensive programme of play activities for children with disabilities with some low cost activities organised by Aneurin Leisure Trust. Welsh Governments Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing 2021 has helped the LA to respond to feedback received from children, young people and parents, that there is a need for more no/low cost activity.

Matter F: Access to space/provision and information, publicity and events

Play is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development, not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live. The Local Authority and partners recognise that play is essential to the health and well-being of children. In the past children's play has been considered facility-based provision whereas it is now being accepted as an environmental issue, i.e. creating the type of environment where children are able to get out and play with their friends. Creating a more child-friendly environment has the potential to create many more opportunities for play than facility provision could do alone. However, facility-based provision is valued by children and adults, providing a service to working parents (breakfast/after school/holiday clubs) and dedicated space for play (static play areas/playing fields).



Family Information Service (FIS) social media and online search facility, as well as email, and telephone options currently provides information on play provision, activities and events but this is not complete and relies on Officers, individual clubs and organisations providing information about specific services, events and activities.

There is a need to:

- Regularly update 'play' information on the designated section of the corporate website.
- Share case studies of community led initiatives in supporting children's play.
- Provide Family Information Service (FIS) with information linking to the full range of play opportunities for children and families.
- Promote positive attitudes to play when engaging with local communities and the media.
- Improve the way that we engage with the public and use the Family Information Service and Press Office to communicate effectively.

Matter G: Securing and developing the play workforce

The Local Authority is fortunate to have a Play Sufficiency Officer and Business Development Officer who support the sector and develop the Play and playwork workforce, including sessional workers and volunteers. There are a number of key staff in specific service areas (e.g. Education, Social Services, Leisure, Youth Service, Environment, Regeneration, Planning) whose work contributes to children's play.

There is a need to:

- Commission/offer training awareness sessions about play for professionals and key decision makers
- Consider a joint approach with other Local Authorities to provide training and support to the play workforce.

Matter H: Community engagement and participation

The Local Authority has a strong commitment in making Blaenau Gwent a place where all citizens are treated as valued members of the community, whose voices are heard and needs considered across the range of policy making areas. The cost of interacting with individual communities can be extremely high, the Local Authority need to continue to work with partners to ensure a robust mechanism is implemented to minimise duplication and maximise outcomes. The Local Authority recognise that Children's participation is most effective when the issues for consideration have a direct relevance to them within their communities and they can see their input has made a difference.

There is a need to:

- Develop links with partners to ensure play is a regular theme for engagement
- Continue to work with partners to ensure a robust mechanism is implemented to minimise duplication and maximise outcomes.

Matter I: Play within relevant policy and implementation agendas

Play is embedded in Local Authority policy and implementation agendas for Health and Well-being, Child Poverty, Early Years/Childcare initiatives and intergenerational initiatives.

In Education, many schools have developed interesting and stimulating play environments. Schools encourage children to cycle to school where it is practical for them to do so and play is actively promoted during morning, afternoon and lunchtime breaks supported and promoted via the Early Years, Childcare and Play Teams 'Play Friendly Schools' award programme. This needs to be continued to be rolled out to schools across Blaenau Gwent following the pandemic.

Planning: There are significant housing developments across Blaenau Gwent however there continues to be a challenge in consideration for the play needs of children and their families. Any conditions around Section 52 are prioritised for schools and there are concerns that to build in funding for play would jeopardise site sales.

There is a need to:

- Develop links with planners to ensure children's play needs are considered in all housing developments.
- Develop a 5-year plan to attract larger scale investment to provide opportunities for children and young people to play and hang out in their local communities.
- The Local Authority will continue to examine all of its policy agendas for their potential impact on children's opportunities to play and assess what targets and actions are required to enhance children's play opportunities.



What are we going to do?

The Local Authority and its' partners, continue their commitment to further develop children's play facilities and play spaces, extending the range of open access play provision and ensuring that opportunities continue to support and promote the play needs and interests of children across Blaenau Gwent. The Local Authorities' Play Sufficiency Action Plan has been developed to maintain the strengths and address the shortcomings identified in the assessment.

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?

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 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.

Our Action Plan priorities for 2022

1. Support local communities to develop play opportunities
2. Deliver workshops for Year 11 and community groups on childcare and play as a career.
3. Continue to talk and listen to you
4. Identify local communities to pilot the launch of the Play Friendly Communities programme
5. Support schools to provide and develop opportunities for play
6. To roll out a programme of free activities for 0-25 year olds through Welsh Government's 'Summer of Fun'
7. Recruit Community Play Volunteers to support the delivery of play opportunities
8. Co-ordinate Blaenau Gwent's celebrations for National Playday on the 3rd August 2022 with the theme 'All to play for – building play opportunities for all children'

