

Wrexham Play Sufficiency Assessment 2013

(Abridged)

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1. Executive Summary

Context: Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess *and* secure sufficient play opportunities for children. The Welsh Government commenced the first part of the duty, to carry out an *assessment* of play opportunities, on 2nd November 2012 with local authorities submitting their play sufficiency assessments to the Welsh Government by 1st March 2013, together with action plans setting out how they intend to improve and/or protect opportunities for play in their area. The second part of the duty is expected to be commenced in spring 2014 and will require local authorities to *secure* sufficient play opportunities with regards to their PSA, so far as is reasonably practicable.

The statutory guidance is clear that, whilst valuing the important contribution made by services and facilities for play, sufficiency of play opportunities involves much more than designated play provision alone. The Welsh Government recognises that some of the impacts of modern society can restrict children's play and so the central aim of the duty is to create "an environment where children can freely play" and to "make communities more play friendly". As a consequence the statutory guidance required local authorities to take the following matters into consideration when carrying out their assessments: population statistics and trends; opportunities for disabled/marginalised children; the space available for children; availability of supervised provision; charges for play provision; access to spaces/provision; efforts made to secure and develop the play workforce; systems to support community engagement and participation; and recognition of play within local policy and implementation agendas.

In total more than 850 individuals were involved in Wrexham's play sufficiency assessment, including 583 children and 130 parents and carers. The WCBC Play Development Team led on the play sufficiency assessment in partnership with Glyndwr University, however, a wide range of other partners (across planning, environment, transport, housing, community development, childcare, leisure, education and the third sector) have also been involved to ensure the necessary information is gathered to produce a detailed analysis of the opportunities currently available to children.

Key Findings: Sufficiency came to be accepted as the point at which the focus of people's attention was moved from a general sense of dissatisfaction, in which many subjective and object issues needed to be addressed to improve their opportunities for play, to a position of general satisfaction, in which people would only highlight minor qualitative adjustments to improve their own or others opportunities for play. Sufficiency of opportunities to play comprises of a mutually dependent assemblage of assets (a situation where in essence the whole is far greater than the sum of it's parts) across a range of themes that work in concert to influence people's subjective experience of sufficiency of opportunity to play.

All of the assets required for sufficiency can be arranged across three themes of spatial (range, quality and proximity to space), temporal (object time for play or the subjective experience of time) and psychological issues (subjective and perceptual experience of time and space, permission, resentment, belonging, fear and so on). Children's play is dependant on all three themes, and sufficiency of opportunity to play can only exist where all three themes are sufficiently assembled. Our qualitative data suggests that the themes which most negatively affect satisfaction with sufficiency are psychological and temporal. However,

all three themes are inter-dependant and can not be addressed in isolation; therefore we also can not address sufficiency in isolation.

70% of children in Wrexham rate their overall satisfaction with play as 7 or above out of 10, or alternatively “good” or “great”, and these children are identified as experiencing sufficiency of play because they identify little room for improvement. 20% of children then rate their satisfaction as “ok but in need of improvements”, or 5/6 out of 10. A further 10% of children rate their satisfaction as “not good” or “rubbish”, or below 5 out of 10. This means that more than 1 in 4 children are dissatisfied with their opportunities for play and these children have been identified as experiencing a lack of sufficiency. In comparison with the data provided by children only 25% of parents rate their satisfaction with their children’s opportunities for play as “good” or “great”, with 35% rating them as “ok” and a further 40% rating them as “not good” or “rubbish”.

Whilst targeted work is needed to address the needs of those rating lowest, the greatest gains in terms of securing sufficient opportunities for the majority of children could be made by focussing on the issues identified by the 20% rating “ok” in an attempt to improve their rating to that of “good”.

Conclusion: Significant gains have been made in terms of supporting children’s play since the endorsement of Wrexham’s current play strategy five years ago and there are some excellent examples of work being carried out in Wrexham to uphold children’s right to play. However, we recognise there is still more that needs to be done in relation to most of the objectives identified in that play strategy. Furthermore, the majority of work associated with the play strategy has tended to focus on developing more quality play *provision*, and whilst we need to secure these services and facilities in recognition of the significant contribution they make to play sufficiency, more of an emphasis needs to be placed on promoting children’s play within the wider public realm.

The following 12 prioritise identified through the play sufficiency assessment support this approach and provide focus for our work in securing sufficient time and space for children’s play, ensuring we address the most significant barriers to deliver the greatest benefits:

- Priority 1) Increase *object* play-time during term-time
- Priority 2) Enhance opportunities for playing in Winter
- Priority 3) Secure safer streets for play
- Priority 4) Secure a wider range of spaces for play
- Priority 5) Secure spaces for play in close proximity to children’s homes
- Priority 6) Ensure quality design for play value
- Priority 7) Secure a greater range of provision for ‘Teenagers’
- Priority 8) Improve children’s *subjective experience* of time & space
- Priority 9) Increase parental permission for play
- Priority 10) Improve support for disabled and marginalised children
- Priority 11) Improve the generalised negative disposition to children & play
- Priority 12) Improve people’s perception of teenagers

When considering these prioritise against each of the matters addressed by the play sufficiency assessment there are three recurring areas for development which would present opportunities for creating real and lasting change:

- **Policy for Play** - despite recognition of play within a range of policies there remains a tendency towards departmentalism, particularly between children and young people's services and those departments responsible for the wider public realm. However, given that play sufficiency is a dependant upon a wide range of interconnected issues across the themes of time, space and attitudes, it can not be addressed in isolation, and so we need to find ways of prioritising this work across a range of agendas. This can be achieved by ensuring recognition of the value of play throughout all relevant local authority strategies.
- **Play Development** – securing sufficiency will require a driving force to maintain momentum and coordinate cross-departmental activities in support of children's play. Furthermore, community involvement and ownership of local opportunities for play is essential to affecting and sustaining change on the ground. Both of these issues could be addressed by sustaining a play development team and recognising playwork as an approach to community development in support of children's play.
- **Professional Development for Play** – given that children display a playful disposition to their worlds, anyone working with or on behalf of children would be best placed to do so if they had an in depth and up to date understanding of children's playful behaviour. This would lead to the design and development of communities, services and facilities that were more in tune with children's innate desire to be playful.

In line with the Welsh Government's statutory guidance, evidence from Wrexham's play sufficiency assessment has been used to inform the development of two action plans, one for 2013/14 and another for 2014 onwards, aimed at enabling the Local Authority to secure sufficient play opportunities for children across the county borough (so far as reasonably practicable). The plans have been developed by considering how each of the 12 prioritise identified through the play sufficiency assessment could be addressed at a policy, community or family level. The individual actions included are then those that would potentially have the greatest impacts on the 12 priorities *and* which represent cost effective approaches to sustaining real and lasting change.

2. Introduction

This report provides an abridged version of Wrexham's first Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA), which was submitted to the Welsh Government on 1st March 2013, in accordance with the local authority's duties in respect of *part one*, Section 11 of the Children and Families Measure (2010). Wrexham Council's Executive Board subsequently endorsed the priorities and associated actions identified through the PSA on 9th April 2013.

The report begins by providing a brief background to the statutory duty and matters addressed by the sufficiency assessment. It then goes on to describe the approach taken to carrying out Wrexham's first PSA, before presenting the key findings and prioritise identified from the research.

At this point the full PSA includes a detailed narrative across a comprehensive list of specific considerations associated with each matter addressed by the statutory guidance. This additional information, describing in detail Wrexham's existing strengths, shortcomings and possible areas for improvement, may be of interest to particular individuals whose work relates to these specific issues (the full PSA is available on request from the WCBC Play Development Team). However, this shorter report excludes some of this detail and includes only the concluding remarks from each 'matter' within the full PSA.

The report ends by presenting the overall conclusion from Wrexham's PSA before going on to describe how the information was used to inform the development of action plans, aimed at enabling the local authority to secure sufficient opportunities for play in accordance with their duty under *part two*, Section 11 of the Children and Families Measure (2010). The resulting action plans are available as separate documents, as is the report submitted to Executive Board and minutes from the associated meeting where the PSA was discussed and approved.

3. Background

Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess *and* secure sufficient play opportunities for children. The Welsh Government commenced the first part of the duty, to carry out an *assessment* of play opportunities, on 2nd November 2012 with local authorities submitting their play sufficiency assessments to the Welsh Government by 1st March 2013, together with action plans setting out how they intend to improve and/or protect opportunities for play in their area. The second part of the duty is expected to be commenced in spring 2014 and will require local authorities to *secure* sufficient play opportunities with regards to their PSA, so far as is reasonably practicable.

The introduction of this statutory duty builds on the Welsh Government's ongoing commitment to upholding children's right to play as set out in their Play Policy (2002)¹ and subsequent Play Policy Implementation Plan (2006)², and coincides with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child publishing a 'general comment' on Article 31 (right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts), explaining in detail its meaning and importance for governments worldwide³. As a consequence Wales is the first country in the world to legislate for play in this way, and this is part of the reason the country was awarded the International Play Association (IPA) Right to Play award in July 2011⁴.

"Creating a Play Friendly Wales" is the Welsh Government's statutory guidance for local authorities on assessing the sufficiency of play opportunities for children living in their area. The guidance begins by stating that children "have a fundamental right to be able to play". It then goes on to recognise that play is central to children's enjoyment and well being, can help mitigate the negative effects of poverty by building resilience, has value for children's holistic development, and also contributes to the well-being of families and the wider community.⁵

The statutory guidance is clear that, whilst valuing the important contribution made by services and facilities for play, sufficiency of play opportunities involves much more than designated play provision alone. The Welsh Government recognises that some of the impacts of modern society can restrict children's freely chosen and personally directed behaviour (play) and so the central aim of the duty is to create "an environment where children can freely play" and to "make communities more play friendly". As a consequence the statutory guidance requires local authorities to take the following matters into consideration when carrying out their PSA:

- **Matter A: Population** – the number of children and young people, population density and ethnicity profiles.

¹ Welsh Assembly Government (2002) *Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy*, Cardiff: WAG.

² Welsh Assembly Government (2006) *Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy Implementation Plan*, Cardiff: WAG.

³ UNCRC (2013) *General comment No. 17 (2013): The right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (Article 31)*,

⁴ www.playwales.org.uk/eng/righttoplayaward

⁵ Welsh Government (2012) *Creating a Play Friendly Wales: Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on assessing for sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas*, Cardiff: Welsh Government.

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- **Matter B: Providing for diverse needs** – opportunities available for disabled children, and children from different communities and cultures.
- **Matter C: The space available for children** - including both open spaces and outdoor unstaffed maintained play spaces e.g. green spaces, public parks, school grounds and residential streets, playgrounds, Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs), wheeled play areas and youth shelters.
- **Matter D: Supervised Provision** - including playwork provision and structured recreational activities e.g. open access play provision, out of school childcare, indoor play centres, youth clubs, leisure centres, and other adult run sessions.
- **Matter E: Charges for Play Provision**
- **Matter F: Access to Spaces/Provision** - including access to information, publicity and events (how children’s play is promoted across the county borough), children’s independent mobility, safe walking and cycling routes, traffic calming measures, and public transport provision.
- **Matter G: Securing and Developing the Play Workforce** – the structure and size of the workforce and the availability of qualifications and other play based training.
- **Matter H: Community Engagement and Participation**
- **Matter I: Policy and Implementation Agendas** - the extent to which children’s play is supported within service planning and delivery.

The Play Sufficiency Duty came at a time when Wrexham’s existing play strategy was due to be reviewed, and so presented an ideal opportunity to evaluate the local authority’s current position and identify priorities for the next three years.

The Wrexham Play Strategy 2009 -2013 was the Local Authority’s second play strategy. The purpose of this five-year play strategy was to increase the number of children and young people having regular access to a wide range of play opportunities within their own communities. The strategy applied to all types of play provision and aimed to address issues around play being restricted in the general environment.⁶

Wrexham now has an established infrastructure for play and the WCBC Play Development Team in partnership with Wrexham’s Strategic Play Forum has been leading on the implementation of the current play strategy. In addition Wrexham is fortunate to have a number of playwork organisations that have been recognised as models of good practice and the local play sector includes individuals who have been instrumental in the development of the play and playwork agenda nationally.

⁶ Wrexham County Borough council (2009) *Wrexham Play Strategy 2009 – 2013*, Wrexham: WCBC

4. Methodology

4.1 Aims and Objectives

Wrexham County Borough Council's Play Development Team led on the play sufficiency assessment in partnership with Glyndwr University, and were supported by our Performance & Development department. The following objectives were agreed and describe the aim of the assessment:

- To establish a baseline in terms of the percentage of children and young people who report satisfaction with their ability to access time and space for play as part of their daily lives.
- To identify representations of play sufficiency and the social and physical conditions that support this.
- To identify geographic areas lacking in sufficiency and the possible reasons for this.
- To use the data generated to develop indicators for the assessment of play sufficiency in other areas.
- To identify opportunities to promote time and space for play, in those areas lacking sufficiency, and recommend appropriate interventions.

4.2 Theoretical Framework

Prior to describing the theoretical approach taken it is worth mentioning that this report uses some technical terms to explain complex issues associated with the assessment of sufficiency of opportunities for play. These technical terms will be explained as and when they appear throughout the report. To begin it may be useful to clarify what is meant by the term 'affordance'⁷, which is used repeatedly in the report, and refers to a feature or characteristic of an environment which may present an opportunity for play to occur.

In order to provide a framework for our research (and taking a lead from Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell's Manchester Circles⁸) we adapted Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach⁹ to consider the affordances for play presented by the home/family environment, how these are affected by and in turn affect the affordances within the child's local neighbourhood, and how all of this is affected by the wider context within which the community exists. Within each level we then investigated how the following physical and social factors coalesce to affect children's day to day play experiences. These lines of enquiry were identified from research and theory developed over the past five years, since UNICEF's report on children's well-being in developed countries¹⁰:

- Time - how often and how much time children spend playing
- Space - that exists within children's locality and the 'quality' of that space
- Access - children's independent mobility, the permission they are granted and the physical accessibility of space.

⁷ Gibson, J.J. (1986) *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Hillsdale (NJ): Lawrence Erlbaum.

⁸ Play England (2008), *Quality in Play*. London: NCB

⁹ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979), *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁰ Unicef Report. (2007), *'Report Card 7, Child Poverty in Perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries'*. The United Nations Children's Fund

- Attitudes - of children, parents, other community members, and people who work with children.¹¹

Drawing on the work of Kytta¹², we then applied the concept of constrained, promoted or free fields of action to each of our lines of enquiry to consider how these affect children's ability to actualise (make real use of) the potential affordances for play within a local community. In this model a constrained field refers to time, space, access or attitudes that prevent children's self-directed action; promoted fields are then those that regulate children's action (i.e. they promote particular forms of behaviour); and free fields are those that allow for children's free action. The children involved in the research came to understand these as red, amber or green fields of action.

4.3 Research Methods

To enable an effective and detailed assessment to be carried out mixed research methods were used to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, and to ensure rigour, credibility, trustworthiness, and to a degree; transferability in the information produced. Quantitative research generated a large response rate which helped to establish the general levels of satisfaction regarding opportunities for play across the county borough. The qualitative data then provided greater detail enabling us to identify how people's level of satisfaction is affected by localised social and physical conditions. To achieve this the following research tools were developed:

- Facilitated group work in schools using a mosaic approach – class of children from a primary school in each of 6 case study communities covering a total of 10 LSOAs. These communities were selected to represent varying levels of deprivation, population density, urbanization, open space and play provision.
- Online questionnaires - for children, young people, parents, and playwork and childcare professionals
- Focus groups - with parents, professionals and other marginalised groups.
- Community auditing of spaces for play – audit tool to consider accessibility and play value developed and applied to 49 sites across the 6 case study communities by playwork professionals. 12 of these sites were then cross-checked by children to compare results.
- Semi structured interviews - with lead professionals associated with policy areas identified in the play sufficiency statutory guidance
- Mapping of demographics, spaces and service - data collected from across Performance & Development, Planning, Education, Family Information Service, Environment and Leisure.

4.4 Analysis of Data

One of the principles of the research was to support children's informed participation, and ensure that their opinions were given at least equal weight to that of adults. As a

¹¹ Lester, S. & Russell, W. (2008) *Play for a Change: Play, Policy and Practice – A review of contemporary perspectives*. London: National Children's Bureau; Lester, S. & Russell, W. (2010) *Children's right to play: An examination of the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide*. The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation.

¹² Kytta, M. (2003) *Children in Outdoor Contexts. Affordances and Independent Mobility in the Assessment of Environmental Child Friendliness*, Helsinki University of Technology, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies.

consequence during the analysis of data an emphasis was placed on the information provided by children, starting with the facilitated group work from schools and then comparing this with the results of children's online questionnaires. This enabled the findings developed from the qualitative tools to be corroborated by those from the quantitative data providing further credibility of our conclusions. The themes drawn from this process were then cross referenced, corroborated and added to from the data produced by parents and other adults.

4.5 Research Challenges

The time scale available to complete the assessment presented the most significant challenge. In particular there was insufficient time to develop and test our research tools and provide our research assistants with the level of training required to ensure consistency in their implementation. In addition the time pressures and time of year made working with schools and parents more difficult, and this led to gaps in data collection. Furthermore, although a wide range of partners were involved, there were examples when other local authority departments and some partner agencies were underrepresented, or a high level of effort was needed to ensure their engagement. Based on the findings from our research, this all provides further evidence of individuals and organisations struggling to prioritise time resources in support of play.

4.6 Stakeholder Engagement

The following provides an overview of the 850+ individuals involved in our play sufficiency assessment:

- Facilitated group work in schools: 162 children aged between 8 and 11
- Online questionnaires: 421 from children and young people, and a further 102 from parents and carers
- Workforce Audit: online questionnaires completed by 86 practitioners and 36 managers from local authority, third sector and private playwork and childcare settings.
- Parents focus groups: 28 Parents and carers from within our case study communities
- Professionals focus groups: 56 Professionals from a broad range of disciplines working with or on behalf of children
- Targeted focus Groups: 7 Young Carers, 4 Gypsy Travellers, 6 Children with English as an additional language, 5 disabled children, 2 Young People from the Senydd (Youth Parliament), 8 Parents of disabled children, 13 adults from the over 50s forum, and 1 foster carer.
- Semi-structured interviews: 30 lead professionals including representation from third sector organisations

5. Key Findings

5.1 What is Sufficiency?

Sufficiency came to be accepted as the point at which the focus of people's attention was moved from a general sense of dissatisfaction in which many subjective and object issues needed to be addressed to improve their opportunities for play to a position of general satisfaction in which people would only highlight minor qualitative adjustments to improve their or others opportunities for play. Sufficiency of opportunities to play comprises of a

mutually dependent assemblage¹³ of assets¹⁴ (a situation where in essence the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts) across a range of themes that work in concert to influence people's subjective experience of sufficiency of opportunity to play.

All of the assets required for sufficiency can be arranged across three themes of spatial (range, quality and proximity to space), temporal (object time for play or the subjective experience of time) and psychological issues (subjective and perceptual experience of time and space, permission, resentment, belonging, fear and so on)¹⁵. Children's play is dependant on all three themes, and sufficiency of opportunity to play can only exist where all three themes are sufficiently assembled. Our qualitative data suggests that the themes which most negatively affect satisfaction with sufficiency are psychological and temporal. However, all three themes are inter-dependant and can not be addressed in isolation; therefore we also can not address sufficiency in isolation.

Improving people's rating of satisfaction with any one asset does not significantly improve their overall rating with satisfaction of opportunities for play, however one poor asset can bring the overall satisfaction down. Also, slightly lower levels of satisfaction across a range of assets, in comparison with the norm, will result in a significantly lower rating of satisfaction overall.

Where children express dissatisfaction, the issues they identify as contributing to sufficiency are validated by the presence of those features in communities where children express satisfaction. This would suggest that introducing these features is not a significant risk i.e. they have been proven to work. In addition where children experience sufficiency they provide ideas for how their environments could be further enriched i.e. they ask for more of the things that already work. In comparison, where children experience a lack of sufficiency they request those features that would enable them to access time, space and psychological conditions for play.

5.2 Play Sufficiency in Wrexham

70% of children rate their overall satisfaction with play as 7 or above out of 10, or alternatively "good" or "great", and these children are identified as experiencing sufficiency of play because they identify little room for improvement. 20% of children then rate their satisfaction as "ok but in need of improvements", or 5/6 out of 10. A further 10% of children rate their satisfaction as "not good" or "rubbish", or below 5 out of 10. This means that more than 1 in 4 children are dissatisfied with their opportunities for play and these children have been identified as experiencing a lack of sufficiency.

Whilst targeted work is needed to address the needs of those rating lowest, the greatest gains in terms of securing sufficient opportunities for the majority of children could be made by focussing on the issues identified by the 20% rating "ok" in an attempt to improve their rating to that of "good".

¹³ Lester, S. & Russell, W. (2012), 'Children's Play and Well-Being' [Paper presented to the children's well-being in Wrexham conference held at Glyndŵr University, 4th May 2012]. Wrexham: Glyndŵr University.

¹⁴ Morgan, A. and Ziglio, E. (2007), Revitalising the evidence base for public health: an assets model, *Promotion and Education Supplement 2* pp17-22

¹⁵ Nottingham City Council and Russell, W. (2006), *Reframing Playwork; Reframing Challenging Behaviour*. Playwork Impact Evaluation. Nottingham: Nottingham City Council

In comparison with the data provided by children only 25% of parents rate their satisfaction with their children's opportunities for play as "good" or "great", with 35% rating them as "ok" and a further 40% rating them as "not good" or "rubbish".

People's interpretation of these statistics and recommendations will depend on the value they attached to children and their play. However, it is worth noting that in some other circles an incident rate of 1 in 4 would be considered a crisis. Furthermore, whilst this data presents a snapshot in time, there is anecdotal evidence from professionals that the situation may be deteriorating rather than improving, for example individual schools are further reducing their "play" or "break" times. This brings the securing element of the sufficiency duty into sharp focus, and so our action plan should be as much about securing the opportunities that exist as it is about improving the situation where we can.

5.3 Temporal Issues

1 in 3 children are dissatisfied with their time for play during term time compared to 1 in 5 during holiday periods. In comparison 45% of parents reported that their children did not have enough time for play.

Two thirds of children recognise that the time when they are free to do as they choose best supports their play, with 98% identifying time when they are told how to behave or act as least supportive of play. However, two thirds of children report spending the majority of their time during term time in environments that restrict or regulate their behaviour. In contrast two thirds of children report having mostly free time (when they can do as they choose) during the school holidays. This would suggest improving the sufficiency of play opportunities throughout the year, rather than focussing on holidays (as is currently the case), would increase overall satisfaction with opportunities for play.

Priority 1) Increase object play-time during term-time – There is a limited amount of time (we can not create more) and so there is a need to recover and protect some more of that time for play. For example, this could be achieved by increasing children's time for play between lessons in school or making sure other structured activities, homework and chores do not take up too much of children's free time outside of school.

Priority 2) Enhance opportunities for playing in Winter - Children and parents consistently report less time for play in winter due to it getting darker earlier and the colder weather. The greatest gains in terms of increasing children's time for play could therefore be made by enhancing opportunities for play during the winter months.

5.4 Spatial Issues

One in four children are dissatisfied with the range of places they have access to in which they can play, and 60 % identify room for improvement in the quality of the spaces they currently play in. In comparison 50% of parents are dissatisfied with the range of places available to their children and 90% identify room for improvement in the quality of the spaces available to their children.

Children value playing in a broad range of places, and it is important to recognise that these can be staffed or unstaffed, formal or informal, and natural or man-made. However the places children value most outside of the home are not formally recognised as spaces for play, but instead are the streets where they live. Whilst parents also recognise the value of local streets, fixed equipment play areas are spaces they most value outside the home.

Priority 3) Secure safer streets for play - Children identify lighting, pavements, alleyways, cul-de-sacs and speed bumps among the features that support their independent mobility and play. Where children have access to a range of spaces for play they identify fewer issues with getting to those places. Road safety, the proximity of provision (i.e. how close it is to home) and the need for more direct routes are particular issues for children and parents living in the more rural communities. This means that the road safety measures we currently implement are identified as being supportive but more of them are needed particularly in the more rural locations.

Priority 4) Secure a wider range of spaces for play - Children value having access to a variety of spaces in which they can have different types of play experiences. In addition there appears to be fewer issues associated with the attitudes of other community members where children have access to a broader range of spaces i.e. they are able to negotiate who they share space with and therefore avoid potential conflicts.

Priority 5) Secure spaces for play in close proximity to children's homes - For children and parents the closeness of space to their homes is a major factor and this is backed up by the emphasis placed on playing in the streets near their homes. Furthermore, proximity becomes even more significant during winter because the distances children can walk or ride (i.e. their independent mobility) is further reduced.

Priority 6) Ensure quality design for play value - The 'quality' of spaces for play is a major factor for children and parents. Children value flexible spaces that they can use and adapt in a variety of ways, which can incorporate both man-made and natural features including trees for climbing, hills for rolling down, places for hiding and opportunities to build dens. For parents the issue of quality was particularly focussed around fixed equipment play areas, which appear to serve as landmarks and support them in giving their children permission to "play out". The children we spoke to identified fixed equipment play areas as particularly important for younger children, even though they themselves often chose instead to play in the more natural edges around these sites.

Priority 7) Secure a greater range of provision for 'Teenagers' - Children and parents both identified that improved provision for young people (teenagers) would help create more space for younger children. Young people also reported a lack of welcoming public spaces and the need for cheaper public transport to support their independent mobility.

5.5 Psychological Issues

One in four children are dissatisfied with the attitudes towards their play that they experience. Furthermore, throughout all themes there is an overriding emphasis on attitudes and how these restrict children's play, for example when asked about their *time* for play children's responses still refer to the attitudes they experienced during these times. In addition, 88% of children reported that they usually feel safe when playing out, however in

comparison 60% of parents said that concerns about their children's safety can stop them from letting their children play out.

Priority 8) Improve children's subjective experience of time & space - Children value adult run, recreational activities both in and out of school, however there are examples where these do not support play. In contrast children from communities that have playwork provision interpret this as being supportive of their free play and identify it as a potential improvement as opposed to other recreational activities, which are sometimes identified as barriers to play. Furthermore, although time and resources for play are significant factors the overriding constraining issue in schools is the attitudes that children experience, for example, restrictions on the use of different spaces or a lack of permission for different types of play. However, despite some very negative view points associated with schools, there was also evidence that where schools made small changes in respect of children's play, these improvements were readily recognised by children.

Therefore, by encouraging adults who deliver services for children to be more supportive (and tolerant) of children's playful behaviour we can improve children's subjective experience (their perception) of the time they spend within these spaces therefore improving their overall satisfaction with the services they access.

Priority 9) Increase parental permission for play - Parents have concerns about safety linked to the attitudes and actions of others, dogs, and traffic. However, concerns over safety seemed to be more associated with other people and dogs rather than traffic in the more densely populated, deprived urban areas. In some cases these concerns are so severe that they stop parents allowing their children out to play, despite some parents recognising that the consequences of their actions as being damaging for their children.

Priority 10) Improve support for disabled and marginalised children - Of those reporting the lowest levels of satisfaction, they were more likely to be older children and more than half of them reported that they did not play out at all, despite being of an age at which the majority of other children are playing out regularly. Furthermore, 40% described themselves as being disabled. It is therefore likely that the barriers to play these children experience are more severe than those experienced by the majority of other children and these children are therefore in need of targeted intervention because they are currently being 'disabled' from playing.

Priority 11) Improve the generalised negative disposition to children & play - Children who reported satisfaction with the attitudes they experience, still identified specific examples of people restricting their play, some of which can be justified. This would suggest that some tensions will always exist and might not necessarily have a detrimental impact on children's play. However, across the majority of communities children and parents reported experiencing generalised negative attitudes towards children and their play.

Priority 12) Improve people's perception of teenagers - Younger children and parents were particularly concerned by the presence and behaviour of 'teenagers'. However when we spoke to young people they confirmed attitudes as the overriding factor but rather than reporting concerns about other young people they focussed more on adult 'perceptions of young people.

6. Matter Conclusions

6.1 Matter A: Population

The majority of data required to complete the play sufficiency assessment was available, however the ways in which this information is recorded is inconsistent and is held in a range of different departments. As a consequence locating and collating this information was not always straight forward and in some cases took much longer than expected. Given that this information is likely to be of use in the planning and review of other services, there would be further benefit in ensuring the data is easily accessible. In addition there is a particular issue regarding the lack of clarity about the number of disabled children and young people living within the county borough which is making the planning, delivery and monitoring of services for these families more difficult and potentially less effective.

6.2 Matter B: Providing for Diverse Needs

In general there needs to be a broader approach to inclusion, one that recognises that children can be restricted from playing for a range of reasons including physical or mental impairments but also segregation or marginalisation. However, particular attention should be paid to the play needs of traveller children and children with severe and complex impairments who require specialist support to access opportunities for play. There is also a need to place a greater emphasis on addressing the play needs of children living in our more rural communities focussing on the accessibility of their local spaces for play, and we need to continue to support the use of Welsh language in our staffed play provision, especially in those communities with high numbers of Welsh speaking families.

6.3 Matter C (1): Open Spaces

There is a need to move away from the idea that space for play is somehow separate to other types of space and that play only occurs in designated areas. Instead we should be recognising that children can, will and want to play in a wide variety of spaces and that this should not be restricted unless there is a very good reason to do so. Furthermore, the connections between these spaces are equally important.

The green network mapping represents a significant development in terms of securing sufficient space for children's play, and together with the Local Development Plan, presents opportunities to ensure evidence from this play sufficiency assessment influences planning policy. In doing this greater consideration should be given to the accessibility and play value of space for children, recognising that barren open spaces offer little play value to children and that they tend to play at the edges of these large areas where they feel less exposed. This then highlights the need for design interventions that are more in tune with children's use of space, for example introducing features around the periphery of sites and developing 'defensible' spaces. The Local Authority includes individuals with expertise in this type of design (e.g. landscape architects in planning and play development officers) but these need to be better utilised across the council.

6.4 Matter C (2): Outdoor Unstaffed Designated Play Spaces

Unstaffed designated play spaces remain an important element of play sufficiency and we need to continue to focus on improving the play value of our existing stock. In doing this we can promote greater community ownership of these spaces by ensuring children, young people and adults are involved in their design and development. However, the current emphasis put on fixed equipment play areas is out of balance with children's actual experiences of play and so we also need to support communities to recognise the value of other types of spaces for play and identify ways of increasing children's access to opportunities for play in the wider public realm.

6.5 Matter D (1): Supervised Play Provision

Given the financial climate the current level and distribution of staffed play provision across the county borough is reasonably good, however all of the existing open access play provision could potentially cease to operate within the next three years as a consequence of their existing funding coming to an end. An emphasis should therefore be placed on securing the current infrastructure for playwork provision because these organisations are essential in driving the local play agenda forward. In addition there is a need to target the development of new playwork projects in rural communities.

In general the quality of provision is also good but there would be value in developing some form of quality assurance system to support providers in evaluating their settings and demonstrating their quality. Furthermore, an emphasis on consistent delivery throughout the year in close proximity to children's homes is likely to have the greatest impact in terms of increasing people's satisfaction with their opportunities for play.

6.6 Matter D (2): Structured Recreational Activities for Children

Again the existing level of provision across sport, leisure, cultural and youth services is good with a range of plans being in place to support the development of these types of activities, however, an emphasis needs to be placed on securing the long term future of these services. In addition there would be value in promoting a playwork approach within some of these activities, with the aim of improving children's subjective experience of time and space for play. Furthermore, caution needs to be taken to ensure children experience a balance between these more structured activities and sufficient free time for play. These issues would be addressed by actions identified within Matter G: Securing and Developing the Play Workforce.

6.7 Matter E: Charges for Play Provision

The local authority places a significant emphasis on ensuring children living in areas of deprivation have access to play services that are free at the point of entry. For this reason Wrexham's three full time adventure playgrounds are located within the communities that have the highest levels of deprivation. However, many of these services only have funding guaranteed for a further two years under the Families First and Communities First programs and so consideration needs to be given to how they might be sustained in the long term.

6.8 Matter F (1): Access to Space / Provision

Significant gains have been made in terms of establishing more 20mph zones and there are opportunities to explore other road safety measures, for example, temporary street closures for play. There is also a need to further emphasise the role of residential streets as shared public spaces within policy to ensure the needs of playing children are considered alongside those of car users. However, this may need to be addressed at a national level because regional transport plans are based on Welsh Government guidance.

Securing safer streets is a priority in itself, however, by promoting children's play in and around the streets where they live we can also address priorities associated with the proximity and range of spaces, parental concerns and the generalised negative attitudes towards play. Furthermore, by introducing the concept of potential and actualised affordances we can begin to establish whether the design of our communities enables children to access the opportunities that appear to be available. This then highlights the importance of children being enabled to move around their communities independently through the creation of safe and playable, walking and cycling routes between spaces, and this links to work due to be undertaken as part of the forthcoming Active Travel Bill.

6.9 Matter F (2): Information, Publicity and Events

A significant amount of work is being carried out to promote available play services and facilities, however this could be better coordinated to make the best use of limited publicity resources.

6.10 Matter G: Securing and Developing the Play Workforce

There is a need for a comprehensive professional development framework across playwork, childcare and youth work services that provides a clear structure for qualifications and a progression route from introductory training to degree and post graduate studies. In addition play needs to be embedded within the local authority's workforce development strategies in recognition that anyone working with or on behalf of children would benefit from an improved understanding of their playful disposition.

6.11 Matter H: Community Engagement and Participation

Ongoing community engagement and participation is essential if we are to address the priorities identified through the play sufficiency assessment and sustain real improvements in terms of children's opportunities for play. However this type of development work takes time and requires consistency and flexibility in its delivery to ensure we can respond to the changing demands of different communities. Sustaining the local authority's Play Development Team and ensuring it has sufficient capacity should therefore be a priority for the play sufficiency action plans.

6.12 Matter I: Play within Relevant Policy and Implementation Agendas

Reference is made to children's play in a range of local authority strategies and playwork has been used to help address a variety of agendas. However, there is a tendency for linking play with individual outcomes and associating it with only particular areas of children's lives. As a

consequence there are opportunities for greater recognition of the broader benefits of play throughout local authority policy, particularly in the more overarching higher level strategies where an improved emphasis on play would help to ensure that other departmental plans took this into consideration. Furthermore, given the priorities identified through the play sufficiency assessment, particular attention should be placed on promoting the importance of play in education, planning, transport, childcare and community safety strategies. However some of these, including education and transport, would be best addressed at a national level.

7. PSA Conclusion

Significant gains have been made in terms of supporting children's play since the endorsement of the current play strategy five years ago and there are some excellent examples of work being carried out in Wrexham to uphold children's right to play. However, we recognise there is still more that needs to be done in relation to most of the objectives identified in that play strategy and for this reason the majority of criteria within the play sufficiency assessment proforma are currently rated amber (with only 6 being identified as red). Furthermore, the majority of work associated with the play strategy has tended to focus on developing more quality play *provision*, and whilst we need to secure these services and facilities in recognition of the significant contribution they make to play sufficiency, more of an emphasis needs to be placed on promoting children's play within the wider public realm.

The following 12 priorities identified through the play sufficiency assessment support this approach and provide focus for our work in securing sufficient time and space for children's play, ensuring we address the most significant barriers to deliver the greatest benefits:

- Priority 1) Increase *object* play-time during term-time
- Priority 2) Enhance opportunities for playing in Winter
- Priority 3) Secure safer streets for play
- Priority 4) Secure a wider range of spaces for play
- Priority 5) Secure spaces for play in close proximity to children's homes
- Priority 6) Ensure quality design for play value
- Priority 7) Secure a greater range of provision for 'Teenagers'
- Priority 8) Improve children's *subjective experience* of time & space
- Priority 9) Increase parental permission for play
- Priority 10) Improve support for disabled and marginalised children
- Priority 11) Improve the generalised negative disposition to children & play
- Priority 12) Improve people's perception of teenagers

When considering these priorities against each of the matters addressed by the play sufficiency assessment there are three recurring areas for development which would present opportunities for creating real and lasting change:

- **Policy for Play** - despite recognition of play within a range of policies there remains a tendency towards departmentalism, particularly between children and young people's services and those departments responsible for the wider public realm. However, given that play sufficiency is a dependant upon a wide range of interconnected issues across the themes of time, space and attitudes, it can not be

addressed in isolation, and so we need to find ways of prioritising this work across a range of agendas. This can be achieved by ensuring recognition of the value of play throughout all relevant local authority strategies.

- **Play Development** – securing sufficiency will require a driving force to maintain momentum and coordinate cross-departmental activities in support of children’s play. Furthermore, community involvement and ownership of local opportunities for play is essential to affecting and sustaining change on the ground. Both of these issues could be addressed by sustaining a play development team and recognising playwork as an approach to community development in support of children’s play.
- **Professional Development for Play** – given that children display a playful disposition to their worlds, anyone working with or on behalf of children would be best placed to do so if they had an in depth and up to date understanding of children’s playful behaviour. This would lead to the design and development of communities, services and facilities that were more in tune with children’s innate desire to be playful.

The play sufficiency assessment provides a baseline that progress can now be reviewed against, ensuring that the interventions we make result in real and lasting changes for the children and families within our local communities.

8. The Way Forward

8.1 Action Planning

The Welsh Government’s Sustainable Development Bill will require public sector authorities across Wales to embed sustainability in how they deliver services, aligning social, economic and environmental objectives. Working towards play sufficiency has the potential to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits but our focus must be on sustaining the improvements we make. With this in mind, the action plans have been developed by considering how each of the 12 prioritised identified through the play sufficiency assessment could be addressed at a policy, community or family level. The individual actions included are then those that would potentially have the greatest impacts on the 12 priorities *and* which represent cost effective approaches to sustaining real and lasting change. In addition we have prioritised actions which would enable us to address the 6 criteria rated as red in the play sufficiency pro-forma.

Unfortunately there has been insufficient time to discuss and clarify the targets and milestones associated with each of these actions and there are significant limitations involved in action planning when the availability of future resources is unclear. However we think that all of the actions identified for the next 12 months can be delivered using existing resources and focus on developing the systems that will enable the local authority to secure sufficient opportunities for play in the future. Furthermore, there is additional work to be carried out using the data collected for the play sufficiency assessment, including mapping satisfaction levels and developing indicators for play sufficiency, with the aim of prioritising geographic locations for development work.

The draft action plan for 2014 onwards is therefore likely to change as these actions are addressed and will be re-developed over the next 12 months to provide greater detail in

terms of the targets, milestones, costs and potential funding sources associated with each of the actions. In the meantime approximate costs have been included where new funding may need to be secured.

8.2 Play Sufficiency and Wrexham's Single Plan

The recommendations and subsequent actions resulting from the play sufficiency assessment will inform the implementation of Wrexham's single plan. However, the intention is that the actual play sufficiency action plans will continue to be implemented and monitored by the Strategic Play Forum, although this group will be re-branded as the Play Sufficiency Partnership in order to clarify its role in leading on this statutory duty.

The priorities identified through the play sufficiency assessment demonstrate that play can be considered as contributing to all three prioritise identified in Wrexham's Single Integrated Plan. However in terms of informing the needs assessment and for ease of monitoring the play sufficiency duty has provisionally been included within the Single Plan's priority to ensure Wrexham is: "a place where people can live independently and are healthy and active". Progress on securing sufficient opportunities for play will then be reported under outcome 1.3: "more people will feel good about themselves and life in general". In doing this the Single Plan recognises that the percentage of children and young people reporting satisfaction with their ability to access time and space for play can be considered as an indicator for children's well being in general.

The delivery plan will then include an action to establish a Play Sufficiency Partnership by formally identifying 'play champions' within each relevant local authority department and partner organisation whose work impacts on those matters addressed by the play sufficiency duty. The role of this group will then be considered in the Local Service Board's re-structuring to support the implementation of the Single Plan.