

Report of the Swansea Peer Review: The Children's Play Strategy for Swansea

February 2008



**Bridging the
Policy
gap**

Pontio'r Bwlch Polisi

Acknowledgements

Firstly, thank you to Karen Grunhut of the City and County of Swansea for her ongoing support and commitment to the project.

Secondly, thank you to Alice Greenlees for volunteering her time to Chair the two-day event. Swansea was the first Peer Review and Alice coped superbly with the changing agenda on the day and managed to create a warm and friendly environment that all the participants appreciated.

Finally, thank you to the Swansea participants for volunteering their time and knowledge to Bridging the Policy Gap.

Sally Mackenzie

National Co-ordinator
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List of Abbreviations

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| BTPG | Bridging the Policy Gap |
| DDA | Disability Discrimination Act |
| DWP | Department for Work and Pensions |
| MUGA | Multi Use Game Area |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| NGO | Non-Government Organisation |
| OMC | Open Method of Co-ordination |
| SPTF | Social Policy Task Force |
| TARDIS | Transporting Activities Round Districts In Swansea |
| WAG | Welsh Assembly Government |

1 Overview of Day One

1.1 Introduction

This report is the summary of a two day event held in Swansea on the 13 & 14 September, 2007. The event brought together around 60 participants from government organisations, non-government organisations and people from the community. It was held in The Phoenix Centre, a community venue in the Townhill area of Swansea.

These people were brought together to assess the success of the Children's Play Strategy for Swansea. They were asked to consider whether the strategy successfully delivers what it sets out to deliver and whether this corresponds with what the Welsh National Play Policy is trying to achieve. The purpose of this is to understand how the policy is helping to reduce poverty and social exclusion in Swansea, and also whether there was anything that could help improve the strategy itself or the implementation of this strategy. As well as appraisal of the local policy, the Peer Review wanted to understand what could be learnt from the implementation of this policy that may help improve social policy elsewhere in the UK.

1.2 Welcome Address

Councillor Holley, Elected Member
Alice Greenlees, Chairperson

The day began at 1.00 with a welcome from Councillor Holley followed by a welcome from Alice Greenlees, the Chairperson for the event.

1.3 Introduction Exercise

Helen Elton, Play Right

Participants were asked to talk to their neighbour about their favourite memory of play from childhood. The exercise demonstrated that there were a number of common themes linking people's memories as they most often occurred outdoors in natural environments, involved trees or water, lacked adult supervision, and involved other children. The exercise got people to think about play in a personal context but also to realise play is not limited to the playground.

1.4 Background to the Project

Sally Mackenzie, Bridging the Policy Gap, National Co-ordinator

The project is being funded by the European Commission to raise awareness about the social inclusion and social protection activities of the European Union. More importantly, the funding is designed to engage more people in that work.

The project will achieve this by holding Peer Reviews of this type in Glasgow and London as well as here in Swansea. In each place we will be looking at different policies that try to reduce poverty and social exclusion, but each in very different ways. This process will raise awareness about European processes, but we also want to improve the policies that we are reviewing, and understand what is working well and whether there are lessons from the implementation of this policy that could be used to improve policies targeting poverty elsewhere in Britain.



Most of the people at this Peer Review were local, with local knowledge and local experience. They came from government and community groups as well as people with experience of poverty or exclusion whose lives and those of their children, are impacted by the Children's Play Strategy for Swansea. This group was joined by the Reference Group: 15 people from the *Bridging the Policy Gap Partnership*, which includes representatives from local, devolved and central governments as well as voluntary organisations, academics, and people with personal experience of poverty or exclusion from across the UK. We knew from the preparation meetings held in the lead up to the peer review that there are many issues around play provision in Swansea, the Peer Review aimed to make use of a unique mix of knowledge and expertise assembled to help identify solutions some of these issues. The project also hopes to demonstrate the value that this method of participation can add to the policy process, particularly in linking local government agendas to national government more effectively.

1.5 Introduction of the Reference Group

Peter Kelly, Director of The Poverty Alliance

This project was the result of 5 – 6 years work encouraging public participation in policy making. It was part of a larger process of trying to learn how different regions are using different policies to tackle poverty across the UK. He explained that we were there to act as a “constructive friend” to the process and asked people to openly engage in dialogue and leave behind their organisational roles.

1.6 The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion

Tricia Griffith, Family Poverty Unit, Department for Work and Pensions

The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAP) sets out where we should be going in relation to Poverty and Social Inclusion. ¹The need for a plan exists because of the 78 million people living in poverty across Europe. Not only is this terrible for the people living in poverty and the loss of dignity that accompanies this, but it is also a waste of potential and a waste of resources for Europe.

The NAP is the outcome of an ongoing policy development process. It focuses on four key policy objectives:

- **Policy Objective 1: eliminating child poverty;**
- **Policy Objective 2: increasing labour market participation;**
- **Policy Objective 3: improving access to quality services; and**
- **Policy Objective 4: tackling discrimination.**

The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAP) is part of the European framework known as the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC), which enables Europe to share best practice in the area of social inclusion and social protection. This framework was created by the European Commission as a way of co-ordinating member state activity on a range of social policy issues. ² The overall aim of the process is to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010.

1. See 'Working Together: The UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2006-08' <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2006/nap/>

2. For further information regarding the EU Social Inclusion process visit: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/poverty_social_exclusion_en.htm



A NAP Inclusion has been produced three times since 2000. The direct experience of people living in poverty feeds in to the development of the Plan in a number of ways. The development of the last NAP Inclusion was supported by the Get Heard project and the next NAP Inclusion, due for publication in the autumn of 2008 will be influenced by a number of activities, including the People Experiencing Poverty Conference which took place in Warwick in July 2007 and well as the outcomes of the Bridging the Policy Gap project. The Social Policy Task Force, a group of anti-poverty voluntary organisations, meets regularly with the Department for Work and Pensions to discuss the NAP and its progress.

It is important to remember that poverty is not inevitable. There would not have been a decrease in child poverty if this was the case. But we need events like these to hold policy makers to account and to ensure that their methods and processes are transparent. Such events are also important to ensure that more progress is made and that action is taken to help those most in need. The lessons from 'Bridging the Policy Gap' will be feed into the writing of the next NAP in 2008.

1.7 Presentation about the Children's Play Strategy for Swansea

Gerwyn Jones, Principal Officer, Community & Youth, City and County of Swansea

Stephen Cable, Children's Play Officer for City & County of Swansea

Play in Swansea used to be considered a 'Cinderella' service for the council, an afterthought that people didn't value or couldn't put in context of their own work. With the help of a very active voluntary sector in Swansea, the council began a co-ordinated approach to get people talking about what could be done better.

There was a desire to achieve better things and to ensure people understood the importance of play in society. They realised that they needed broad buy-in so they asked everyone important to play to participate: education, social services, healthcare, planners, and the local voluntary sector to participate in putting the strategy together.

It was emphasised that they did not want the Strategy to gather dust and set out a number of ways the Strategy is playing an active role:

- a. **The Play Fund: Provides funding for local play projects but in order to be eligible the project must adhere to the objectives of the play strategy;**
- b. **The strategy is available at public libraries and in schools;**
- c. **The Play Partnership Sub-group makes sure objectives are being met and action points are being met; and**
- d. **User feedback: the strategy provides the community with a mechanism with which they can hold the council to account and point out when they are failing to deliver the objectives of the strategy.**



In 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government produced their own Play Policy, that set out its recognition of the importance of play, and its commitment that society should seek every opportunity to support it. In 2004, a set of recommendations were developed in relation to this policy, by the Play Policy Implementation Group. These informed the Welsh Assembly Government's national play strategy "Play in Wales", that was published in February 2006. Swansea has also decided that whilst the Children's Play Strategy 2003 for Swansea provides a good basis for play there was a need for a document that focused more on implementation. A revised strategy is currently being written, that will reflect the national strategy, Play in Wales, and will also develop an Action Plan for a revised Swansea Strategy. They have postponed the progress of that action plan in order to incorporate the comments and consultation from this project.

The Chairperson then asked if there were any questions from the floor.

In response to a question about whether children were involved in creating the strategy Stephen explained that children were consulted as part of the writing of the review; they had visited schools and would survey the children with questions requiring a yes, no or maybe response. They also held events involving both children and parents where they would split children and parents up to ask the questions. An interesting divergence of views was expressed when asked if play was important almost 100% of children agreed that it was important compared with about 25% of parents.

It was generally children between the ages of 5 – 15 who were consulted about the play strategy. For children under 5 they ensured they consulted with groups who represented this age group.

In response to a query about where the Strategy sits in relation to Swansea's anti-poverty and social exclusion work Stephen explained that there was a need to fight for play, its importance and that it needed to be accessible for everyone. Stephen pointed out that the Play agenda is for people not of voting age; this puts it at a political disadvantage when campaigning for improved play opportunities. It does play an important part across the whole of the authority and they try to engage with the Anti-poverty and social inclusion teams where possible.

Another participant spoke of 21st century poverty and the need for clean green spaces whoever you are; you want this available for your children to play.

A point was made that disadvantaged included disabled children and these children needed more than clean open spaces in order for them to engage in play.

Stephen finished by pointing out that simply having a Play Strategy will not automatically fix all of Swansea's play issues, but an important aspect of having a play strategy was that people could identify these gaps in provision and hold the council to account.



1.8 Strategy in Action

Gwion Bowen, Team Leader, Bonymaen Adventure Play Project, Play Right

A slideshow of pictures showing some of the play that goes on as part of the Adventure Play project was given. The principles of Adventure play were explained as being about exposure to the elements and risk, being 'free play' and always child-led. The Project simply turns up with 'loose parts' and gives children access. Hand tools are provided and children make their own play environment and do as they please.

In response to a question Gwion advised that the gender division was fairly evenly split between girls and boys, with girls just as likely to pick up a hammer as the boys.

One participant spoke of her daughter's experience of Adventure Play and her own pleasant surprise at seeing her daughter pick up a hammer and nails to create her own play environment and the positive impact this had on her confidence levels. As a mother, she was also pleased to see her daughter having the confidence to try new things.

There was a discussion about the accessibility of the Scheme to children with disabilities or physical impairment. The scheme had a policy of open access and throughout the recent holiday period while based in Bonymaen they never turned a child away. To his knowledge, no children with disabilities had participated. Some members of the audience were aware of children with disabilities that had participated but because of the nature of the scheme, the Play Workers may not have been aware of the disability, which they felt was a credit to this play scheme.

However there was a strong feeling from parents of disabled children that the scheme was not open access to children with severe disabilities, as they require a much higher level of supervision to ensure their safety.

1.9 Introduction of Discussion Questions

Karen Grunhut, Anti-poverty Policy Co-ordinator, City and County of Swansea

A number of preparation meetings were held in order to prepare community members for their involvement in today's meetings. An example of one exercise 'Reclaiming the Words' was given. The object was to look at words or phrases that are commonly used in government documents and ask people from outside of government what they think they mean. The exercise is a useful one for demonstrating the gap between government and the community. To demonstrate the point, Karen presented the results for the phrase 'The Corporate Approach'. This is a commonly used phrase within Local Government and is viewed as a positive concept but the perception from the community participants was mostly very negative with scary connotations such as spin, big business, lack of consultation, suits and ties, and 'The Dark Side'.

After this exercise, participants were introduced to the NAP and given the opportunity to discuss their thoughts about play. As a group they then considered how play could help reduce poverty and social exclusion and developed the following set of benchmarks.



With a play strategy that reduced poverty we would see:

- **Children who are well-balanced; creative, with opinions, able to challenge;**
- **Less crime and anti social behaviour;**
- **Children playing on the street freely; and**
- **Children as an active part of the community.**

Following on from these benchmarks were a number of themes that had been turned into discussion questions. It was important that the questions were discussed in the context of trying to achieve the benchmarks set out above. The questions that were devised by the participants in the preparation meetings structure the remainder of this report.

A discussion followed about the benchmark criteria. One participant who identified herself as a 'parent/carer' of a physically disabled child felt they did not adequately represent disabled children. She felt disabled children deserved a specific mention because their needs are so different from other children and because there is currently a serious lack of suitable play facilities for disabled children in Swansea. Other participants disagreed with this statement and felt the benchmarks were justifiable as they were developed by the community and covered 'all' children and it was undesirable to identify the needs of one group over the needs of another.



2. DISCUSSION QUESTION ONE

Part One:

What are the good examples of play in Swansea

Part Two:

What makes them good?

Part Three:

Where play spaces are not successful, what could be done differently to make them better?

2.1 Key Findings: Question One, Part One: What are the good examples of play in Swansea?

Examples that were raised by several of the groups included The Bonymaen Kids Play Initiative and the Play Right Adventure Play team. Both examples of 'supervised' or 'provided' play albeit both with a child-led approach to play. In addition to 'structured play' experiences, examples of good play included elements of the natural or urban environment such as the 'piece of grass outside the Guildhall', the beaches and parks on offer around Swansea and also, the streets themselves. It was felt that these are the areas where children are most able to express themselves and play with others with little or no adult supervision.

Other specific examples included:

- Youth Service: particularly integrated play;
- Ysgol Crug Glas;
- Circus Eruption - Interplay;
- Closing of the local streets for child's play (during last year's play day);
- Pirate Ship - mobile provision;
- Penplas family centre - child led;
- The TARDIS;
- Youth Shelters;
- Blackpill (popular due to the nearby toilets, although as one of the few upgraded facilities in Swansea it is often overcrowded);
- Summer schemes; and
- Play Zone



2.2 Key findings - Question One, Part Two: What makes them good examples of play?

2.2.1 Accessible and Inclusive

One of the common themes between all groups was that good play needed to be accessible and inclusive of all children. It was felt that an important part of inclusion was allowing children to be seen as children rather than labels.

2.2.2 Local

Local provision was viewed as a high priority for successful play provision. Keeping play local meant there was no transport cost associated with play, it was readily accessible and children could play with their neighbours and school friends. Local play also had wider benefits for the community as a whole. It was seen as a useful tool for getting families to engage with each other. It wasn't just the opportunity to 'play' together that built up social networks, the process of applying for funding or creating and maintaining play spaces was also an opportunity for the community to come together and get to know each other and the local children. Not only did this build a sense of community but it also had the ongoing benefit of creating ownership and pride in the play facilities.

People were very clear that a sense of ownership would only exist when the community was engaged from the very early stages of planning.

It was also stressed that the most important members of the community to engage in the process were the children who are the 'end users' of play facilities or activities. Children should also be included in the ongoing life of play facilities, it was suggested they could help building, maintaining (e.g. litter picking) and improving (e.g. fundraising for trips or new facilities) the play provision. People felt that this all helped to build ownership and pride in the local area and encouraged children to look after their communities.

2.2.3 Fee or Free?

It was important that activities were free in order for them to be inclusive. Some parents struggle to send their children on 'free' trips because of the hidden costs: packed lunches, spending money, drinks, transport to and from the pick up point.

For some parents even a small charge for a play facility would be enough to exclude their children from participating. A 50p charge per child may be reasonable for some people but for a single parent family with more than one child this may be the choice between "bread and play".

One participant thought that if there was general agreement that there was a 'Right to Play' provided for in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child then it follows that there should be free access just as there is universal and free access to education and health.

The contrasting argument was that in some situations, a small charge would be the difference between a play scheme and no play scheme. Some felt that in this scenario a small fee to participate is better than losing the opportunity for play altogether.

Another argument in favour of a fee was that people tend not to value things that are free. Free things are prone to abuse but by putting a value on something we encourage others to value it.

One solution suggested was that charges could be voluntary and dependent on what the adult earns. If they are on a low income, then they would not have to pay anything.

It was also pointed out that Swansea has a number of 'free' natural facilities such as a beautiful coastline and forests, but most of it is very difficult to access by public transport: "if you live in the wrong end of Swansea".

2.2.4 Child Led

The play activities considered most successful were those activities that were child-led, such as the Adventure Play projects. Enthusiastic staff supervise the children but stand back allowing the children to play freely, only intervening when the children want them to or need them to.

2.3 Key findings - Question One, Part Three: Where play spaces are not successful, what could be done differently to make them better?

2.3.1 Marketing

Many parents felt that there was a lot of good play provision in Swansea but before their involvement with this Peer Review they were not aware of it. The first action they wanted to see was some marketing materials identifying all the different facilities. All agreed that this should be designed by the children and the best way to get the information to all parents in Swansea was to give it to the children at school and ask them to give it to their parents.

2.3.2 Toilets and Change Facilities

The issue was cited regularly as a barrier to play, especially for very young children and disabled children.

People wanted to see improvements to the provision of toilets and changing facilities in and near play facilities. Participants spoke of a lack of toilet facilities in most play areas. Where toilet facilities did exist they were poorly maintained and not kept clean. One participant's plea for a consistent supply of toilet paper in public amenities was met with loud support from others.

One parent was unaware of any public toilets in Swansea catering for the needs of disabled children. Changing facilities in particular are only designed for very small children and do not take into account the needs of older disabled children. This factor alone excludes disabled children from participating in most of the fixed play facilities in Swansea.



2.3.3 Risk and Reward

Most groups discussed risk and reward and how it related to supervision and safety. There were various opinions about suitable levels of supervision. It was agreed that there was no 'one size fits all' approach. Supervision should be delivered according to a child's needs, and that this should include a child's ability and language skills. Also agreed was the need for hands-off adult supervision, a watchful eye only getting involved when necessary for safety reasons. One parent felt this was important because:

"A child doesn't like to be supervised. They don't like to be watched. (Its) About an equal balance, letting them go out and play but at the same time not giving them too much supervision."

Community Participant

Most, but not all, participants agreed that low levels of supervision were healthy for children's development, in particular when trying to teach children about risk.

One parent said:

"I was talking to my daughter last night, who is five, she likes to use her imagination more than anything. The time she really enjoys herself is when she's out running and I let her have a bit of responsibility. And she does fall over and she does hurt herself but I think it's about giving children the opportunity to experience risk and do a risk assessment themselves about whether they should jump from there to there or whether 'I should run this fast'. I think open spaces are the key and making open spaces safe for them."

Community Participant

Parents wanted their children to be able to experiment with risk and learn lessons from this. They felt that children should be allowed the freedom to make their own mistakes.

Another example of low supervision working well was the Arson Project, which uses fire play to teach children about the dangers of fire. People were also supportive of the return of the Park Warden. People felt the Warden was a great way to provide non-invasive supervision for the children playing in parks, as they were able to limit their engagement to instances of danger.

Not all parents had the same attitude towards risk. Where many parents felt that Health and Safety regulations were over-protective and high levels of supervision not desirable this was not the case if your child was physically disabled or experienced learning difficulties. These children have much lower risk thresholds than other children and may not be able to make their own decisions about safety. Not only does this mean they have a much higher chance of injuring themselves but also, depending on the nature of their disabilities, the consequences and ramifications of the injury could be more severe than other children. Parents of children with disabilities wanted play environments to be as safe as possible.

Additionally, for children with disabilities, supervision offers more than just protection from injury, the help of an adult in the act of playing may be the only way for that child to properly engage and therefore gain a sense of inclusion.



Safety was not just about adult intervention. Making spaces as safe as they could be through the use of planning and urban design was also considered important. An example was given of one play area prone to joyriding being made safer by large boulders being placed around the edge of the space to prevent vehicles from entering. 'Home Zones' were given as another example of urban design positively impacting the safety of children and encouraging them to play locally and freely. A Town Planner present said that home zones were being included in design briefs for new developments in Swansea.

2.3.4 Area-based Play

It was generally agreed that there is a patchwork of good examples of play across the City and County of Swansea. It was felt that good examples were more likely to be found in areas designated 'Communities First' by the Welsh Assembly Government. This had positive impacts for these communities as it provided a funding pool to draw on. A community participant added that the process of applying for funding could in itself, benefit community relations.

However, a mother of a child with physical disability felt that this situation was very socially exclusive for her child as there was no good play provision locally and it was difficult to travel to use play provision elsewhere. But as she didn't live in a Communities First area there was no funding available to her.

A worker from the organisation Play Wales pointed out that:

"There is a difficulty for the council when funding play as there is currently no statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide play facilities. Deprivation of play provision happens across socio-economic conditions but the funding for play available from the Welsh Assembly Government is targeted in the most disadvantaged areas."

Play Wales Representative

She suggested that this may change if the Welsh Assembly make play services a statutory duty, which is something that her organisation is encouraging.

2.4 Recommendations

- The Play Right model of play should be extended to cover all of Swansea and similar schemes should operate in Schools.
- In addition to the work of Interplay, there should be a Play Development Worker specialising in the needs of disabled children.
- Facilities for young people to meet (e.g. youth shelters) should be more common across Swansea and the young people who would use them should be involved in the design and build process. One example of this was the development of the Vetch football ground. Young people were consulted about the facilities they would like as part of the redevelopment and they asked that the team dugouts be retained for use as youth shelters.
- Fully accessible replacement for the TARDIS.
- Toilet facilities to be included in all new fixed play equipment areas and existing toilets to be better maintained. All facilities should be DDA compliant and provide changing facilities suitable for changing older children with disabilities.
- A local quality mark or 'Charter mark' should be developed to encourage good practice and enable organisations such as schools, hospitals or businesses to demonstrate a commitment to play.



3. DISCUSSION QUESTION TWO

Objective Five of the Strategy is: “To increase the value of play spaces in the Swansea area in terms of design, location and maintenance so they meet the needs of Children and Young People”

- **Question Two, Part One:** Can you identify examples where this has happened or is happening?
- **Question Two, Part Two:** Did obstacles exist? If so, what were they and how were they overcome?

3.1 Key Findings - Question Two, Part One: Can you identify examples where this has happened or is happening?

Good examples included:

- Bonymaen Kids Play Initiative
- Penlan Adventure Play
- Phoenix Centre Playground
- The Vetch
- Adventure Play, Penlan: This project was mentioned by several of the groups as a good example of a play project, it was felt that the reason this project has been successful was because the children were involved and consulted in deciding where they wanted the site to be placed, and what they wanted.
- Interplay
- Blackpill
- Multiple Use Game Areas
- Brynmill Park (aimed at a younger age group)
- Singleton park

3.2 Key Findings - Question Two, Part Two: Did obstacles exist? If so, what were they and how were they overcome?

3.2.1 Consultation

“Adults don’t understand what is wanted, ask the children; children have all the answers.”

Community Participant

All groups discussed the importance of involving children and young people when providing play facilities. It was stressed that children needed to be involved before any decisions had been made and should continue to be involved in the life and maintenance of the play facilities.

If necessary, youth workers should be used to 'up-skill' children so they feel confident engaging in adult environments. The Phoenix Centre Play Area exemplified this approach. Young people had to find their own funding for the facilities. Initially, the barrier faced by the children was getting adults to listen to their views, and to take them seriously. An area-youth worker said the general response of adults was "what do you know anyway, you're only a kid." They had to acknowledge that communication between the two generations was difficult so "youth workers worked alongside the young people to help them through the process. They taught committee skills training so they didn't make fools of themselves because they knew what the procedure was."

The Phoenix Centre Play Area has benefited from the engagement of children and was listed by several of the groups as one example of Objective Five being successfully met.

A community participant, who observed a link between lack of consultation and low-level antisocial behaviour, provided a further argument in support of consultation with young people. She suggested that in areas where young people were involved in the creation of Multi-use Games Areas, (MUGAs) the MUGAs have been less prone to vandalism than in areas where young people have not been consulted. As against examples where consultation has apparently decreased vandalism levels to zero, she contrasted Penlan's MUGA, where there was no consultation or involvement of young people before construction of the games area, which has been the subject of vandalism and graffiti.

"If you give children ownership right from the beginning, they don't vandalise, they don't wreck things, because it's theirs. If you stick something there and say, 'right, that's yours' they're not going to care. That's just the nature of young people"

Youth Development Worker

The Bonymaen Play Initiative was given as another example of play that successfully meets the criteria of Objective Five. Again, it was felt that much of its success was due to a child-led play environment that involved children in key decision-making such as interviewing staff.

One group felt that it was probably impossible to meet 100% of needs 100% of the time. However, they did feel this might be more achievable if you worked at the local level. Local consultation was seen as key to achieving this.

Another group felt a good starting point for consulting children about their local facilities was School Councils. Although it was felt the children on the councils are generally the more confident, self-assured children and other methods should be used to engage children who may be less articulate.

Consultation must include disabled children; parents and carers should be consulted where disabled children are unable to represent their own views adequately. The most recently refurbished play area in Swansea is Brynmill Park. The play area is compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act, advice about which was provided by the supplier of the fixed play equipment. But, according to one participant, there was no consultation with disabled children or their carers before the park was constructed. The end result is that the playground



might meet the 'minimum standard' benchmark of the DDA, this participant felt it is not accessible for disabled children. The participant viewed this as a lost opportunity because of the lack of play facilities for disabled children in Swansea coupled with the lack of available funds for new play facilities.

Community consultation and involvement can help ensure limited budgets are spent wisely and the end result well utilised by all local children. This last point is true of all consultation; it also enables communities to understand budget limitations and empowers them by allowing them to make the spending decisions for themselves.

As well as consulting children, the rest of the community needs to be engaged. This is an important part of gaining community support for a project. It can help break down intergenerational barriers caused both by lack of contact between generations and negative portrayals of children in the media:

"We (have to) do a lot of intergenerational work now. We have to bring the older generation on board, a lot are just frightened of children, they see a gang and they think 'here's trouble'"

Play Worker

Such barriers sometimes result in older people objecting to new play facilities in their communities:

"older people...don't really understand. Older people say we don't want the kids doing that, we don't want them on the streets but then they object to taking them off the streets by providing them with something to do."

Community Participant

The example of Penlan was given of one development where local people were quite apprehensive at first, but this dissipated over time. One participant noted the need to "get out and talk to local residents about what is being done and the benefits it will have for young people and the community as a whole."

3.2.2 Integrated Approach required

It was recognised that 'play' comes under many different services. This included the planning, highway, and education authorities as well as the Parks Department and the Children and Young Peoples Departments. The feeling was that this tended to result in disjointed delivery and play not being consistently valued across the Community. A community participant gave one example of this; she has called the Police several times to report vandalism by older children at her local Play facilities. She said they consistently fail to arrive in time to prevent it from happening and in most cases they turn up the following day after the damage is done.

On the contrary, participants involved with the consultation process regarding the future of the Vetch site felt it stood a good chance of success because:

"...it was a multi-agency consultation: play team, youth service, regeneration – lots of different departments coming on board and it had community engagement at the centre of it."

Play Worker



One of the reasons so many different agencies are responsible for play is that it is not restricted to playgrounds. Some of the best play areas were simple, open spaces such as the streets outside children's homes. Several of the parents objected to the posting of 'No Ball Games' signs on the streets of Swansea. They felt these sent a very clear anti-play message. They felt adults should be more tolerant of children's natural desire to play wherever they are and that this should not be restricted to tightly defined playgrounds.

Open green space was also considered important play space; some felt the council was too quick to sell off land for housing without considering whether there is benefit of retaining or providing new green spaces.

Private Developers were seen as an important partner in the delivery of high quality play across Swansea. Section 106 Agreements were viewed as important tools for play, particularly when negotiating provision of open green spaces. Developers can also design child-friendly 'HomeZones' that create play-friendly streets designed for people rather than vehicles. It was recognised that too often an 'adult agenda' can get in the way of delivering play-friendly developments. Participants felt the council was too quick to approve planning applications on existing open space without giving due considerations to the local need for that open space. There were developments where significant number of new family homes were planned but with very limited space dedicated to play facilities or open space. Such development will be to the detriment of the existing community that already suffers a shortage of suitable play spaces.

It was felt that if the City and County of Swansea were seriously committed to play, then it needed to embed the play strategy into its planning policy and design briefs requiring all new developments to incorporate high-quality play spaces suitable for all children. This should include both fixed play structures and well-maintained open spaces. The council needed to send a clear message to developers that it valued play and recognised the benefits of it for children and the wider community.

The desire from the community was to see a more co-ordinated approach to play across the services with the ability to influence play in Swansea.

3.2.3 Inclusive

All participants agreed that play must be inclusive and be available to all children regardless of age, ability, religion, language or culture. An agency called Interplay works towards ensuring that play is inclusive and accessible to all. However, some parents felt their children were being excluded because they lived in areas that weren't designated Communities First areas and therefore weren't subject to the influx of funding that other areas were. As such their children weren't able to access (without travelling) play opportunities that were available for other children. Children with disabilities who may have less opportunity for interaction with other children particularly felt this exclusion. It was felt by most parents present that play can help reduce social exclusion as long as it is accessible to all. The maxim: "happy children equal happy families" was agreed by everyone and is another example of how play can improve social conditions in a community.

Others raised the concern that there were some areas of Swansea where territories had been marked out by local youths. They felt there was an opportunity for detached play workers to work with different groups and encourage interaction through sport and play which could breakdown rivalries and build understanding between groups.



One participant had difficulty taking her children to play areas because of a large age gap between her eldest daughter and the younger two. She said that part of the obstacle is the fixed idea of what children want and 'what play is.' She felt this usually resulted in play activities designed to suit 'five year old girls in pigtails.' She cited Brynmill Park as an example where they removed flexible facilities and replaced them with a fixed play park aimed at very young children. She felt that more flexible ideas are needed to enable children of different ages, backgrounds and abilities to play together. Singleton Park was given as a better example where the fixed activities included activities that suited older children.

3.2.4 Risk v Health and Safety

Most parents felt that health and safety concerns had intruded too far into children's play and it was unhealthy and damaging to a child's development for them to operate in risk-free environment. Children need to be exposed to risk to learn lessons about rewards, limits and consequence. One participant recalled testing herself as a child to see if they could overcome the risk and wanted her child to be able to do the same.

Risk assessments should be undertaken from the child's viewpoint. Children will adjust their play activities to suit the type of surface they are playing on. Children will take more care when playing on areas without safety surfaces.

However parents of children with physical and intellectual disabilities felt that the play facilities needed to be as safe as possible. Adventure Play was given as an example by one parent of a play type that would be too risk-intensive for her child to participate in.

Participants felt that adult supervision was important but the message was this didn't mean that supervised play had to be adult-led; the role of the adult could simply be to intervene when a child was at risk of injuring themselves or others.

3.2.5 Funding

Funding for play facilities was not readily available from the Council, and what funding was available for fixed equipment play areas was controlled by the Parks Department not the Play Team. The Play Team receives core budget for staffed play provision as well as Welsh Assembly Cymorth Grant for play development. Play Right a local play charity receives no core funding, but some limited project funding for staffed play provision from the Cymorth Grant. Participants understood that the council couldn't commit to a complete overhaul of play facilities, but at the very least they felt there should be a commitment to a rolling program of works that new facilities would be built, to improve existing facilities and provide money for the proper maintenance of all play parks and open spaces. One table thought a 'gap analysis' might be useful to understand what play facilities were missing and where they should be located. Again it was felt that by keeping this local, you might be able to meet the majority of needs at the local level.



3.3 Recommendations

3.3.1 Consultation

Examples of successful community consultation and the benefits that it can bring are well evidenced in Swansea by the Phoenix Play Centre and other examples described above. Meaningful consultation is not easy to undertake, especially if children are involved and can take considerable time and resource but the benefits in terms community buy-in and creating a sense of ownership are extremely worthwhile and have numerous long-term benefits for the local community. A great deal of consultation has associated the writing of the new Children's Play Strategy for Swansea and this Peer Review forms part of that process. Community participants were clear that they wanted to be consulted about play opportunities in Swansea and they wanted their children to be involved in that consultation. Consultation should happen as a matter of course whenever new or improved play opportunities are being considered. This is the only way that the Local Authority and the Play Partnership in Swansea can hope to meet the needs of the local people.

3.3.2 Political Support and embedding the importance of play

It was not clear how much political support the strategy enjoyed. Local people were reporting real tensions between play (and the space for play) and other planning issues. These tensions appear to have been resolved in ways that often reduced play opportunities. Additionally it was clear from many of the conversations at the Peer Review that there was a lack of joined-up thinking across the Authority; it seemed that many departments with the ability to positively influence play in Swansea did not co-operate as fully as was desirable. It was suggested that a 'play champion' drawn from within the authority might help to push play up the local political agenda and make sure departments across the council take play seriously and participate in the play partnership.

There was also a desire to for the play strategy to form part of the council's planning policy. People wanted to ensure developers seeking planning permission incorporated the principles into new developments.

3.3.3 Resources

Resources are obviously at the heart of many questions around implementation. It appeared that perhaps the play strategy was in place but that the resources needed for implementation were not necessarily guaranteed. Participants understood that there were limited funds available for play in Swansea but suggested that a 'gap analyses' could occur at local levels across Swansea in order to identify what the community felt was needed to improve play opportunities. People also wanted the council to consider committing to a program of works that it would undertake when funding became available. This was felt particularly important in terms of increasing the number of play facilities that were DDA compliant.

3.3.4 Links to National Policy

There was no explicit link made in the policy between play and child poverty. The strategy should try to refer to relevant National Policy documents such as 'Fair Future for our Children' and 'Rights to Action'. Not having the link is not detrimental but it is potentially a missed opportunity in terms of gaining support for the importance of play.



4. DISCUSSION QUESTION THREE

Considering Objective 2 of the Play Strategy states: ‘To put play in the spotlight, advocate for and on behalf of children and young people and the need to play and promote greater awareness of the role of play in child development and the benefits of play for everyone’.

- Do you think that organisations (excluding those directly involved in play) in Swansea value play? Please provide examples.

4.1 Key Findings

4.1.1 Overview

The conclusion seemed to be that some organisations in Swansea do value play sufficiently, but many organisations do not value play or could place more value on it. The Council was credited with good practice in many respects such as the play team and its leadership role in the Play strategy, but a lack of funding for play coupled with a lack of joined-up action across departments made it difficult for some to believe that play was valued across the Authority. The predominant reason given seemed to be a lack of understanding of the positive benefits that play can have on an individual child, on the child's family and on society more generally. For this reason, many of the tables discussed the need for an education campaign publicising the importance of play.

4.1.2 Schools

There was mixed opinions on whether Swansea Schools were placing enough value on play. To a large degree, it seemed to depend on the individual schools and whether the Head Teacher valued play or not.

The head teacher of Cwm Primary school attended the Peer Review and advised that in her school play was central to their ethos. Children were encouraged to play outside in all weather and parents were encouraged to provide appropriate clothing to enable this. The teacher felt that it was the parents that needed encouragement to value play more highly.

“Schools are under serious pressure from parents about the type of play they are allowed to do, parents don't want them going home wet, or covered in paint.”

Head Teacher, Primary School

It was noted that not all schools were as proactive with play as that of the representative in the current group – ‘many schools’ simply pushed children out into the playground after lunch. There was some debate as to whether play activity should be directed by adults. Some schools were reluctant to allow children to take any risks in the playground because of fear of litigation if a child injured him or herself. One of the community representatives told an anecdote about her own children who had been reprimanded for the headmaster for ‘playing martial arts’ in the playground. It was noted that this seemed an unfair decision, and that play workers would not necessarily see someone playing at martial arts as being a violent or harmful play activity. Once again the fact that schools fear litigation was highlighted, making a number of them very risk averse.

The issue of whether or not children should be free to play unrestricted arose particularly with regards to damaging their school uniforms which can be very expensive to replace. The



school representative said she encouraged parents to buy uniforms as cheaply as possible. People agreed this was sensible for children at junior schools when uniforms are generic but uniforms for secondary schools are compulsory and more costly because they are school specific. A mother of four girls explained how difficult it could be to keep a large family in school uniforms:

"It's taken me 6 weeks holidays to get each child back to school by buying them something each week. My 6 weeks holidays haven't been going out enjoying time with my kids; it's been buying clothes each week to get them back to school. Therefore I don't want my kids running around the playground (ruining) a £27 pair of shoes because I can't afford another pair for a year."

Community Participant

Even where uniforms are not compulsory, there is still pressure on parents to make sure their child is not the odd one out:

"If my youngest was the only one without a uniform, I feel terrible. Everyone else has a uniform. My daughter is the only one that looked different in the school photo, (because) on that day she didn't have her uniform. I'm not having my child looking different."

Community Participant

It was felt that there is an emphasis in Wales on the principle of play being important before the age of 7 (the foundation phase) but that this was 'squeezed out' at secondary school where the focus switched to numeracy and literacy. Parents felt this focus was detrimental to a child's personal development. One parent said her daughter spends 3 hours solid on homework every night. The importance of this is drummed into the children, but the value of play is ignored.

Play isn't just restricted to school time and people felt that school grounds should remain open and accessible outside of school hours. This is beginning to happen in Glasgow. Head Teachers and caretakers think this will present problems but people felt this was an easy way for a school to demonstrate the value play and its contribution to the community. It was also suggested that the school's concerns could be overcome by simple adjustments such as caretakers working flexibly or using community volunteers to provide some adult supervision out of school hours.

4.1.3 Community-facing organisations

The Police, Fire Service, Church Organisations, Healthcare partnerships and local businesses all received a mixture of compliments and criticisms in terms of the value they individually place on play.

It was felt that the Police did value play as demonstrated by the Blue Light Discos that they regularly hold. However, it was also felt that slow responses to reports of vandalism and bad behaviour at play facilities and not taking such issues seriously reflected poorly on their attitudes to play.

"Police don't support the adventure play that is going on - they can't be bothered. They're reaction time when things go wrong is too slow...The parents in Penlan are fighting a losing battle, every time they phone the police they come out the next day, so they feeling as if they're doing it on their own. Let's get together and see how we can change things."

Community Participant

Community Officers got 'brownie points' for their proactive attitudes towards children playing but Police were seen to view play as 'not what they do'.

Police were seen as viewing children only as capable of 'creating trouble'. They needed to understand that play had a positive role to play in reducing anti-social behaviour. Police were seen as a key target for an education campaign about the benefits and importance of play (see 'recommendations' below).

The Fire Service received compliments for their involvement in youth activities particularly the occasions when they allow children access to the Fire Trucks and equipment.

Local church groups were seen as good examples of organisations that take play seriously. Providing youth clubs and organised trips or discos for local children.

The local health board was viewed as another agency that could do more to encourage play. Especially given the important role play has in tackling childhood obesity and keeping children healthy and happy. Great Ormand Street Hospital for Children in London was given as a good example of a hospital that incorporates play into both buildings and ethos.

Some local businesses did value play and were prepared to sponsor play activities. Low Cost Vans donated two vans to The TARDIS and Outreach Teams to allow them to deliver a full summer program throughout Swansea. This is an example of positive community support for play and more could be done to create links between local business and Swansea's play offering.

"A lot of profile raising is needed to encourage that coordinated response, because there is some drawing together to talk about play, but getting all agencies involved in that can be difficult because there are different perceptions about the importance of play"

Play Wales Representative

4.1.4 City and County of Swansea: Joined up thinking across the council

Positive comments were made about the Council's involvement in the Play Strategy and the work being done to improve play provision. People cited the Children and Young People's Department and Social Services as departments that do value play and recognise the impact it can have on poverty and social exclusion. However, it was felt that not all council departments value play in the same way. Play is not represented in any of the Council's key strategic documents or plans. This is problematic as it is these documents that combine to dictate the key priorities of the council and therefore the key spending areas.

The play officer from the Council pointed out that we all need to be involved in making play great. Children play everywhere, not just council-determined play areas. This makes play a cross-cutting issue, it's not just about play specific activities: Highways, Planning, Culture & Tourism, Regeneration Services, Urban Design, Education, Healthcare, Parks all have a role to play. It was felt that the Play Partnership could be used as a more strategic body and include representatives from all the relevant departments and agencies. This may have the advantage of enabling the community to work together to influence and to 'build understanding and trust between difficult parties.'



4.1.5 City and County of Swansea: Planning / Urban design

The role of planning, urban design and highways was recognised as very important to improving play in Swansea. There are a number of good examples recently that demonstrate a commitment to play; Gerwyn Jones gave the following example:

“Highways – traditionally nothing to do with play, but agreed to shut roads so children could play; they realised because of last summer’s play day ‘reclaiming the streets’ they could make a contribution to play.”

Council Representative

Design of residential areas was viewed as very important. Developers are being encouraged to incorporate Home Zones into new developments; the Vetch Development was cited as one example of where this was happening. But most wanted the Planners and Urban Designers to give more thought to how play should be incorporated into new developments, especially with regards to the provision of safer play areas. Also, where permission has been granted for development on existing open space, that development should provide play provision for the whole neighbourhood that is sacrificing that space; not just conservative estimates of the number of children that will be living on the new development. Play provision of this type would also improve the integration of the development into the existing community.

4.1.6 The Community

Several participants thought that older people do not understand the younger generation and mostly view young people with fear. Work should be carried out to try and get older people to consider what young people need in the 21st Century and how it differs from their own experience. For instance access to outdoor space is more limited now and parents are more protective and more careful about allowing their children out to roam freely. Understanding the different experiences could help build relationships.

One parent felt that society only values activities that have measurable outcomes. This is not possible for play because the point of play is the process, not the outcome. Because of this it is a difficult activity to get society to value. But people did feel that there was responsibility on the community:

“I know the kids in my communities, if they know you and they feel you listen to them, then you’ll get that back, if you know them they’re less likely to actually hurt you... (this is) something that I’ve been wanting to do in our community and the Arson Projects that we’ve had in schools is part and parcel of that, which is actually to get each other to know each other. So when they’re on the streets instead of it being a youth running away, it’s Michael, and I can call him by name and he knows me and there’s automatically a communication and a dialogue. But that’s beyond agency, that’s people, that’s you, me, that’s everybody.”

Head Teacher, Local Primary School

4.1.7 Overall awareness of the Strategy

The existence of the strategy does appear to have raised the prominence of the issue of play within the local authority. However, awareness amongst external groups such as children and community groups appeared quite low. The consistent attitude expressed by the community groups was that they ‘were doing it anyway’ and the strategy did not inform their decisions.



This raises questions about the importance of the strategy in ensuring effective delivery across a range of agencies. It may be that the 'further' agencies and organisation are from the Local Authority the less likely they are to be aware of its existence. There are likely to be inefficiencies in the delivery of the strategy if all of the relevant local actors are not aware of its existence. For instance, local organisations could be making use of the strategy to lever in additional resources. Awareness amongst children was also low; the Children at Cwm Primary were unaware of the Strategy although happily benefiting from the play opportunities it was creating.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Jamie Oliver-style education program needed

All tables discussed the need for an education campaign promoting the value of play. Several tables spoke of the need for a 'Play Champion', or a 'Jamie Oliver of Play' to create the same interest and community activation that Jamie Oliver did for school meals. Another suggestion was to look at the election of a 'Young' Mayor, something that is being undertaken by the London Borough of Newham. The role of the 'Young' Mayor could include the promotion of play in Swansea.

An awareness-raising campaign was also felt necessary to combat the negative press coverage of young people, which some participants felt 'demonised' children and young people.

The core components of this campaign could be as follows:

Target Audience:

- Council Officers and Politicians;
- Welsh Assembly Government;
- All Schools;
- Parents and non parents – e.g. grand parents;
- Other departments within the council not directly engaged in play i.e. Transport, Planning etc.

Key Messages:

- "Happy children make happy families";
- Play is development – Children learn through play;
- Play helps children with both physical and mental health issues;
- Children at play are not a threat: "If children have somewhere they know they can play in their neighborhoods – park, open green space, playground they may be less likely to hang around streets and cause trouble";
- Play is essential for personal development, without play you are impoverished;
- Children have a right to play secured by United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- "Investment in play is an investment in the future"

Key Channels for distribution

- Local Businesses (“not McDonalds!”);
- Local media e.g. Council newsletter;
- Internet targeting – particularly of Welsh Assembly Members ensuring that play is on their agenda, they understand that play provision is impacted by a wide range of factors and policies promoting and supporting play are supported by all Welsh Assembly Members;
- Children are best at getting the message across

Possible Promotional Activities

- Need to demonstrate good examples and the impact that they have on the community;
- Community members and children should be used to promote the importance of play;
- Need to use National Play Day to engage those not already engaged i.e. Police, Fire Services, Health, Urban Planning, and Transport. These organisations need to be reminded what constitutes play and sold the benefits of play. They also need to understand that play is not an automatic part of childhood. Society needs to ensure that children have the time, space and tools to enjoy play;
- More Development Workers should be employed to get out and promote the benefits of play and improve communication; and
- Different departments & organisations should be involved in the development and delivery of the Play Strategy.



5. FINAL EXERCISE

Participants developed the following lists of advice for any organization wanting to implement their own Play Strategies:

5.1 What to Do:

- Use plain language – make sure everyone can understand it.
- Recognise that what a community wants may change, but their needs do not.
- Consult and involve all children at every stage.
- Consult all relevant stakeholders – service users / carers / parents / relevant council departments e.g. Highways, Planning, Parks.
- Be open and transparent and give realistic promises of what can be delivered.
- Identify sustainable funding.
- Make play accessible to all. Provide support if necessary.
- Should be a 'living' document – not a dust gatherer.
- Send community representatives to sell the strategy.
- Should send a clear message about the benefits of play.
- Value play.

5.2 What not to Do:

- Don't assume to know what people need or what children want.
- Don't rely on a fixed idea of what play is. Ask children what they want.
- Don't take forever.
- Don't expect everything to be perfect first time around – be prepared to be flexible.
- Don't give up.
- Don't work in isolation.
- Don't focus too much on hard targets.
- Don't let others define the agenda. Work in partnership.



5.3 How to implement a play strategy:

- Establish ownership of strategy and facilities. Consider community ownership as an option.
- Clear communication strategy targeting all relevant outside agencies and service providers.
- Ensure all organizations and departments understand the benefits of play and their role in delivering the strategy.
- Ensure Schools are involved in the implementation of the strategy.
- Appoint a 'Play Champion' to advocate for play.
- Children should map play areas and write booklets marketing the play strategy.
- Ensure the provision of safe, accessible, affordable play areas/spaces.
- Enthusiastic and well trained play workers and volunteers will help spread the message about the importance of play.
- Evaluate. Follow up and find out if children and others are happy with the strategy after implementation. Be prepared to change.

5.4 Topics without consensus

Most of the above points were reached with general consensus. But it is worth noting that there were two issues where opinion was divided:

5.4.1 Fee or Free?

Please see discussion question 1 which documents this discussion in more detail.

5.4.2 Risk or no risk?

Please see discussion question 1 which documents this discussion in more detail.



6. TRANSFERABLE LESSONS

One of the main objectives of Bridging the Policy Gap is to identify lessons in policy implementation that could help improve other policies in the UK tackling poverty and social exclusion. This report already sets out the lessons identified by participants in relation to creating play strategies (see section 14) below are broader lessons identified by the Reference Group:

6.1 Evidence-based

To make the strategy transferable, it needs to be underpinned with some tangible evidence of the value of children's play, in terms of:

- The benefits to children's development;
- The benefits to society;
- The extent to which play can be demonstrated to have an impact on poverty and social exclusion.

6.2 Social Inclusion

An inclusive strategy means explicitly recognising minority needs and adjusting for them. Play activities / facilities for children with a range of abilities need to be visible in the development of the strategy so that they can be – and seen to be – openly debated and included.

6.3 Full Political Backing

Good strategies will only be well implemented when they can rely on full political backing and an awareness of the scale of impact the strategy could have.

6.4 Child Poverty

To tackle this issue, policy makers must think much more broadly than simply issues of household income. Access to services such as decent play provision can have a major impact on the physical and mental health of children.

6.5 Shared Ownership

This is one of the most commendable aspects of Swansea's Child Play Strategy. Swansea seems fortunate to have community groups active in the promotion and provision of play, but equally importantly a Local Authority willing to engage and enter into shared ownership of the agenda with the community. This has many obvious benefits but it becomes more beneficial to a service that the Local Authority is not statutorily required to provide. The community partners may be able to sustain the strategy even if the Local Authority are forced to pull out because of cuts to funding. This remains to be tested and would obviously have a serious impact on the delivery of the strategy, but it may help community groups secure their own funding to carry on aspects of the work.

7. CONCLUSION

The biggest lesson for many participants was that there should be a Play Strategy or a Play Policy, and that it should have a high priority. The Children's Play Strategy for Swansea was viewed by all participants as an excellent tool for promoting play in the local area. Many of the participants from outside the locality noted that the Strategy was a groundbreaking document for a UK Local Authority and was an important attempt by the Swansea Play Partnership to demonstrate to the wider community the importance of Play for the individual child, the family and the wider community.

However, as noted by Stephen Cable, the Local Children's Play Officer, the Strategy is a living document and adjustments will need to be made to both the document itself, and to the delivery of it, if it is to remain relevant to the people of Swansea. The delivery of the 'action plan' is the next phase of this process. There were several issues that come out of the Peer Review quite strongly.

Social Inclusion was one of the major themes over the two days. In some parts of Swansea, local play facilities or activities were creating stronger community relations and some believe, reducing instances of anti-social behaviour. Play can engage children who may be more likely to suffer social exclusion because of physical or intellectual differences, or language and cultural differences. Play is a critical development tool for children and exclusion from playing with peers from an early age could have serious long term impacts on that child's personal development but also how they interact with society. People accepted that there is no 'one size fits all' approach but accessible play opportunities make a critical contribution to successful play.

There were also very good examples of where consultation had been used successfully to help build a sense of community and a sense of ownership in local play provision. People viewed consultation as the backbone of community support. Without meaningful consultation you could not expect the community to be happy with the outcome, nor could you expect the solution to fix the problem. Meaningful and ongoing consultation could solve problems, ensure money was spent wisely and create pride in the local community. To be effective, consultation shouldn't take too long, must be followed up and should happen at a local 'neighbourhood' level. In this way, people are more willing to participate because they can understand the problem, provide solutions and see the outcome of the consultation.

Whilst working at the local level is important, it must be noted that there may be 'Swansea-wide' problems that will not be tackled at a local level i.e. the lack of play facilities for disabled children. Whilst the feeling was that consultation needed to include the whole community, the most important group to consult was children and young people. They should be consulted regularly, meaningfully and as far as possible, allowed to make the decisions about what, how and where play should be delivered. This may require the Play Partnership to provide support and skills training to help children and young people reach the best decisions for them but this type of training should be viewed as a positive aspect of the process.

The more participants talked about play, the more people began to realise just how many agencies have an impact on the delivery of play in Swansea and the more vital the partnership approach became. There was a need to demonstrate the positive impact that good, inclusive play provision can have for the community as a whole and then engage those that could contribute to play and make a difference. This may demand a targeted approach which would give an opportunity to show that they do have a role to play. The success of this more



targeted approach can be seen as a result of last year's national Play Day which was themed 'Reclaiming the Streets'. To mark the event the Highways department were asked to close down several neighbourhood streets so they could be 'reclaimed' exclusively for playing. Not only was the event successful, but it had the longer lasting positive impact of making the Highways Department understand their role in relation to providing good quality play in Swansea.

It also appears that the Strategy needs to be a lobbying and promotional voice for play. This should be aimed at the local community, the local authority and finally with the Welsh Assembly Government. Parents are a child's first play partners. they need to understand how to play and the importance of play as a development tool. This has proved vital in the first 3 years of a child's life but continues to be important into the teenage years. The observation was made that play does seem to be valued in the foundation phase of education in Wales (up to age 7) but then the focus shifts very quickly to intellectual attainment and an environment of constant assessment. In amongst this pressure, it can be very easy to dismiss play as an unnecessary 'luxury' but parents and, also schools, need to recognise that play still has an important role to play in the creative and social development of young people.

Within the City and County of Swansea, lobbying should focus on ensuring play is valued across the authority. This should be demonstrated by ensuring the play strategy is embedded in the corporate documents that define the City and County's strategic priorities and therefore their funding priorities.

At the national policy level, there is an opportunity to work with other Local Authorities and National Play Organisations such as Play Wales to lobby the Welsh Assembly Government on the issue of play. One of the major focus points of this exercise should be to ensure that the 'Right to Play' for children is recognised by making all Local Authorities in Wales statutorily responsible for play provision.

If the recommendations offered during this Peer Review can all be incorporated into the delivery of the Children's Play Strategy for Swansea, then the strategy might begin to reduce poverty and achieve the benchmarks established by the participants of the Swansea Peer Review, that is that Swansea will begin to see:

- **Children who are well-balanced; creative, with opinions and able to challenge;**
- **Less crime and anti social behaviour;**
- **All children playing on the street freely; and**
- **All children taking an active part of the community.**



Appendix One: Participant List

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Alice Greenlees | Chairperson |
| Cllr Chris Holley | City & County of Swansea |
| Cllr Joan Peters | City & County of Swansea |
| Cllr Graham Thomas | City & County of Swansea |
| Jack Straw | City & County of Swansea |
| Richard Parry | City & County of Swansea |
| Dave McKenna | City & County of Swansea |
| Tom Messere | City & County of Swansea |
| Gerwyn Jones | City & County of Swansea |
| Stephen Cable | City & County of Swansea |
| Nicola Williams | City & County of Swansea |
| Bethan Walilay | City & County of Swansea |
| Carole Hewitt | City & County of Swansea |
| Alan Twelvetrees | City & County of Swansea |
| Chris Maggs | City & County of Swansea |
| Richard Leggett | City & County of Swansea |
| Sarah Jenkins | City & County of Swansea |
| John Locke | City & County of Swansea |
| Mark Thomas | City & County of Swansea |
| Chris Burston | Reference Group (Department of Work and Pensions) |
| Celia Moignahan | Reference Group (London Borough of Newham) |
| Katherine Duffy | Reference Group (Social Policy Task Force) |
| Tricia Griffiths | Reference Group (Department of Work and Pensions) |
| Karen Grunhut | Reference Group (City & County of Swansea) |
| Shona Honeyman | Reference Group (Glasgow City Council) |
| Peter Kelly | Reference Group (The Poverty Alliance) |
| Michael Wright | Reference Group (Scottish Government) |
| Ian Mather | Reference Group (Community Member) |
| Debbie Jones | Reference Group (Community Member) |
| Janice Docherty | Reference Group (Community Member) |
| Ali Safder | Reference Group (Community Member) |
| Sally Mackenzie | Reference Group (Bridging the Policy Gap National Co-ordinator) |
| Victoria Morgan-Beatty | Community Member |
| Annabelle Purdie | Community Member |



| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Megan Wheatland | Community Member |
| Clare Lucignolie | Community Member |
| Angela Purcell | Community Member |
| Karen Cousins | Community Member |
| Jason Jenkins | Community Member |
| Amanda Diamond | Community Member |
| Ali Morris | Community Member |
| Natalie Salomon | Community Member |
| Sheila Brayden | Community Member |
| Paula Churchill | Community Member |
| Elaine Thomas | Community Member |
| Katie Thomas | Community Member |
| Sylvia Pullen | Community Member |
| Julie O'Connor | Community Member |
| Zena Perks | Community Member |
| Amanda Taylor | Cwm Primary School |
| Gwion Bowen | Play Right |
| Helen Elton | Play Right |
| Nicky Echanis | Barnardos |
| Sue Giles | Swansea & Brecon Diocese |
| Sarah Southern | Play Wales |
| Dai Bryan | Menter Iaith |
| John Thomas | Interplay |



Appendix Two: Links to relevant documents

Working Together – UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2006 - 2008

For further information about this strategy and to download the document itself please visit:
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2006/nap/>

Children's Play Strategy for Swansea

For further information about this strategy and to download the document itself please visit:
<http://www.swansea.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1924>

Welsh Assembly Government Play Strategy

For further information about this strategy and to download the document itself please visit:
<http://www.playwales.org.uk/>

Bridging the Policy Gap

For further information about this project and to access other reports please visit:
<http://www.povertyalliance.org/btpg/>

Appendix Three: Glossary of Local Terms

Play Right

Play Right is a registered charity constituted to work across the two counties of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. The activities of the charity fall under two main headings – play provision and support for play providers. In terms of support it offers play training, a play resource centre and scrap store, equipment lending service and a library and information service. Play Right is at the forefront of the delivery of open access, staffed, adventure play provision in Swansea. It provides the Penlan adventure playground, which is the open access play element of the Swansea (Integrated) Children's Centre. It also has outreach play workers in Bonnymaen working on a project to develop an adventure playground there. During the summer Play Right runs two projects. The St Helen's Playscheme serves the heart of the city: multicultural and inclusive, it is designed to meet the needs of all the children of the area. The Mobile Project (Pirate Ship) works across both counties, working with the two local authorities' play development teams during the planning stage, to identify areas with little or no play provision, so that gaps can be filled. These projects contribute to meeting the aims of the Welsh Assembly Government Play Strategy, the local play strategy and will contribute to meeting the requirements of the Single Plan.

TARDIS

(Transporting Activities 'Round Districts In Swansea) Mobile Play Project supports communities throughout the City and County of Swansea by providing a whole variety of stimulating play opportunities.

The aim of the project is to

- provide increased play provision in areas that have limited or no play provision
- to help set up and support parent and toddler groups in all areas
- to assist in the establishment of after school clubs
- to visit communities to provide play and creche facilities
- to promote play training
- to provide and promote Open Access Play Sessions
- to provide Free open access play sessions
- to support and work with all play orientated organisations

Appendix Four: The Swansea Peer Review Programme

THE SWANSEA PEER REVIEW PROGRAMME

Day One

| TIME | ACTIVITY |
|--------------|---|
| 12.00 | Lunch and Registration |
| 1.00 | Welcome and Administration |
| 1.10 | Icebreaker engaging all participants |
| 1.20 | Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project, purpose & desired outcomes • Introductions by the 'Reference Group' |
| 2.00 | A word about the NAP Social Inclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this project form part of it? |
| 2.15 | Presentation about policy under review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an overview of policy (background, description, successes) & the stated aims of the policy. • Opportunities for questions |
| 2.35 | Strategy in Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation from some of Swansea's play activities |
| 2.45 | Introduction of Discussion Questions with background of benchmarks set in preparation meetings |
| 3.00 | Close Day One |

THE SWANSEA PEER REVIEW PROGRAMME

Day Two

| TIME | ACTIVITY |
|--------------|---|
| 09.00 | Tea/Coffee |
| 09.30 | Welcome and admin announcements |
| 09.45 | Reminder of the Discussion Questions |
| 10.00 | Discussion Question One: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the good examples of playing in Swansea and what makes them good? • Where play spaces or facilities are not successful, what could be done differently to make them better? |
| 10.30 | Feedback to whole group |
| 10.45 | Morning Break |
| 11.00 | Discussion Question Two: <p>Objective Five of the Strategy is: "To increase the value of play spaces in the Swansea area in terms of design, location and maintenance so they meet the needs of the Children and young people"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you identify examples where this has happened or is happening? • Did obstacles exist? If so, what were they and how were they overcome? |
| 11.30 | Feedback to whole group |
| 11.45 | Discussion Question Three: <p>Objective Two is: To put play in the spotlight, advocate for and on behalf of children and young people the need to play and promote greater awareness of the role of play in child development and benefits of play for everyone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think that organisations (excluding those directly involved in play) in Swansea value play? • If yes, please give examples. • If no, please give examples. • How can this be encouraged and who needs to be encouraged? |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| 12.15 | Feedback to whole group |
| 12.30 | Lunch |
| 1.15 | Identifying the transferable elements <i>Large Group discussion about what might be transferable, what shouldn't be transferred and conclusions.</i> |
| 2.15 | Evaluation of the Peer Review (Written questionnaire to be completed) |
| 2.45 | Conclusion of peer review |

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DWP Department for
Work and Pensions



Tea in the Pot
Anti Poverty Network Cymru
Social Policy Task Force



LASE
Local Authorities &
Social Exclusion Network

Action and Rights of Disabled People in Newham