

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

16th DECEMBER 2014

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

PLAY SUFFICIENCY AUDIT

1. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise Members of the current status of play provision across Rhondda Cynon Taf and the new statutory duties placed on Local Authorities since July 2014 relating to play.
- 1.2 To agree the Rhondda Cynon Taf Play Sufficiency Assessment – Refresh Report – September 2014 and the 2014 – 2015 Play Sufficiency Assessment Action Plan.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:-

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report;
- 2.2 note that as from 1st July 2014 the Council must secure sufficient play opportunities in its area for children, so far as reasonably practicable, having regard to its Play Sufficiency Assessment and Play Action Plan; and
- 2.3 agree the Rhondda Cynon Taf Play Sufficiency Assessment – Refresh Report – September 2014 and the implementation of the 2014 – 2015 Play Action Plan as annexed at Appendix 1 to the report.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Welsh Government want every child to have a wide range of challenging and interesting opportunities to play and enjoy their leisure time. This aim is being implemented through the use of legislation.
- 3.2 Rhondda Cynon Taf and the former Mid Glamorgan County Council has supported the provision of open access play services for over thirty years, in recognition of the positive and preventative impact such services have on children, young people and their development. In this respect, the Council was way ahead of its time in recognising the intrinsic value of play provision.
- 3.3 In recent years the Council has developed more sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the critical role that play (open access play in particular), has in the development of children and young people, together with the

development of critical life skills in preparation for adult life and active citizenship.

- 3.4 More recently, preventative Public Health Wales services talk about open access and other play activities as being key to the fight to overcome childhood obesity and to support the development of healthier lifestyles.

New Statutory Functions

- 3.5 Welsh Government is the first in the world to introduce legislation to ensure play sufficiency is assessed and considered by all Local Authorities in Wales.

- 3.6 Welsh Government believes that high quality play opportunities for all children may contribute to mitigating the negative effects of poverty on children's lives and help to build their resilience. Play can also be a means of reducing inequalities between children living in families that can afford to pay for costly recreational activities and those that cannot, so thereby reducing poverty of experience for all children.

- 3.7 The Welsh Government Play Policy states that:

“Play is so critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills that society should seek every opportunity to support it and create an environment that fosters it. Decision making at all levels of government should include a consideration of the impact of those decisions, on children’s opportunities to play.”

- 3.8 In November 2012 Welsh Government placed a duty on all Local Authorities to assess the sufficiency of play opportunities for children in their areas. Sufficient in relation to play opportunities, means “sufficient having regard to quantity and quality”.

- 3.9 In July 2014 the Welsh Government commenced an additional duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient play opportunities, so far as reasonably practicable, having regard to their assessments. This puts into effect the complete Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 that relates to play opportunities. There is also a duty to publish information about play opportunities for children within the County Borough and keep that information up to date.

- 3.10 "Wales - a Play Friendly Country" is the updated statutory guidance for local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas. This replaces the previous "Creating a play friendly Wales" statutory guidance.

- 3.11 The Statutory Guidance is intended to:-

- Support Local Authorities in completing their Play Sufficiency Assessments and Play Action Plans for achieving sufficiency. It sets out

the purpose of the duty and the matters to be taken into account in assessing sufficiency.

- Support Local Authorities in securing sufficient play opportunities. This will be through the implementation of the Play Action Plans which the Council is required to develop to maintain the strengths and improve on the shortcomings Welsh Government have identified in Local Authority Play Sufficiency Assessments.

3.12 The Welsh Government encourages Local Authorities to acknowledge the importance of play in children's lives and make a firm commitment to work strenuously within Local Authority structures; with partner organisations; with children and their families and communities to ensure that children have access to the Play opportunities that they want and have a right to expect.

4. THE RHONDDA CYNON TAF PLAY SUFFICIENCY ASSESSEMENT - (the 'PSA')

4.1 An inter-agency working group was established in 2012 to develop and oversee the completion of the PSA. RCT Cultural Services, Sport RCT and Leisure Services were engaged early in the assessment process to ensure sport and the provision of physical activity for children and young people was captured accurately. The PSA culminated in the development of an action plan, which offers broad, overarching strategic actions required to meet the needs identified by the Assessment. Below is a brief overview of successes and challenges identified by the PSA and PSA annual refresh for 2014 (as annexed at Appendix 1 to this report):

- **Matter A Population** – Diverse location (databases) of population data and the need to ensure cross referencing and validation of the information.
- **Matter B Providing for Diverse Needs** - demand for settings that support children with specific requirements (physical, behavioural, communication, language preference) exceeds available resources.
- **Matter C Spaces for Children to Play** – positive opportunities identified for a range of departments to work together to deliver better play opportunities.
- **Matter D Supervised Provision** – need to secure the resources needed to sustain current provision and where possible develop additional support for disabled children and others with diverse needs.
- **Matter E Charges for Play Provision** – no proposals to introduce charges for open access play at point of delivery due to the high levels of deprivation in our local communities, which is where most open access play is delivered.
- **Matter F Access to Space and Provision** –a range of access assessments that need to be carried out, which will undoubtedly lead to further actions to improve access for all service users.
- **Matter G Securing and Developing the Workforce** – qualification status and CSSIW registration of provision requires investment and support.
- **Matter H Community Engagement and Participation** –children and parents identified that parks (play facilities) are amongst the most popular areas where children like to play. Building dens and riding their bikes are

what they most like to do and 34.9% said that the weather was the biggest barrier to playing outside.

- ***Matter I Play Within All Relevant Policy and Implementation Agendas*** –Inclusion of Play in the Single Integrated Plan demonstrates a positive approach to play provision, in its widest sense.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The Rhondda Cynon Taf PSA annual refresh for 2014 as annexed at Appendix 1 to this report demonstrates that the Council has a good range of activities, including cultural and sporting activities for children and young people, covering all ‘matters’ listed above. We know that we have one of the most well developed play services in Wales and we have developed an effective delivery model utilising third sector organisations, which provides best value.

5.2 Recent Welsh Government feedback concerning an update on the previous Play Action Plan suggests satisfaction with the quality and detail of reports submitted – although the feedback is slight in comparison to the volume of work involved in carrying out the duty.

5.3 At present, the majority of children are able to access a diverse range of leisure, cultural and play opportunities; this includes provision for disabled children and those from minority ethnic groups. Welsh Language Play provision is particularly well developed through effective partnership work with Menter Iaith and Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin.

5.4 Open access play facilities provide critical preventative services to children and their families, which includes;

- Preventing family breakdown by providing care for vulnerable children, including those who are disabled and those on the child protection register.
- Providing services that support the physical and emotional well being of children thus supporting the health agenda and a reduction in obesity in children.
- Enables children from poor family backgrounds to experience stimulating activities often in place of a family holiday.
- Helping children and young people to develop many of the life skills required for active citizenship including work.
- Reducing the risk of public nuisance activities and community angst.
- Providing an effective preventative service in terms of youth offending.
- Enabling the integration of disabled children (many with high level complex needs) in ordinary community based activities.
- Providing an affordable form of childcare for working parents when combined with ‘wrap around’ care, which they fund themselves.

5.5 The services the Council offers provide excellent value for money in terms of the number of children and young people it supports. The cost of delivering open access play equates to 76p per child per hour, or alternatively - £1.52 per session.

- 5.6** The Council regularly consults with children and young people and their families and without doubt, this is a highly valued service appreciated by all socio economic groups in its communities.
- 5.7** To date the feedback from Welsh Government regarding the quality of the Council's reports and the actions planned to support the play agenda has been positive.
- 5.8** The PSA together with the 2014 – 2015 Play Action Plan (attached to Appendix 1) and the implementation of the measures set out therein will continue to deliver a proactive and measured approach to the new statutory duties and the delivery of services. Delivery of the Play Action Plan will help ensure the Council complies with its statutory duty to secure, so far as reasonable practicable, sufficient play opportunities in the County Borough for children. However Members should note that the level of development that can be achieved is limited by a lack of Welsh Government funding to support the new duties and the loss of Cymorth / Families First funding. Front line delivery of open access play provision during school holidays will continue to be prioritised.