

Model statement of principles for a Play Strategy

(From the Audit Commission's Best Value Performance Indicators Library)

The Authority recognises the significance and value of play and the poverty of play opportunities in the general environment. It is committed to ensuring that all children have access to rich, stimulating environments, both in and out of doors, free from unacceptable risks, thereby offering them the opportunity to explore through their freely chosen play, both themselves and the world. The policy is based on the understanding that every child needs opportunities to play both on their own and, crucially, with others.

The Authority is committed to ensuring that environments, services and provision for play are attractive, welcoming and accessible to every child irrespective of age, gender, background or origin, or of individual capacities and abilities.

The Authority will work towards increasing play opportunities for and eliminating barriers to the take-up of play provision by disabled children and children with specific cultural needs. This will take the form of developing increased inclusive provision or, if necessary, separate provision, recognising that separate provision may sometimes be a valuable staging post for particularly vulnerable children. Use of specialist services should only be at the choice of the child or their advocate and all mainstream services must be welcoming and accessible to all children.

The Authority recognises that:

- children play in a variety of public spaces as well as in dedicated provision
- play environments should provide safe, stimulating play opportunities that place children at the centre of the play process
- children need to encounter and learn to manage an acceptable level of risk in their play
- children's views should be sought and listened to
- children should have access to the widest possible range of play experiences and play environments, both indoors and outside.

Judgements about quality in provision will be based on the degree to which children are provided with opportunities to experience directly:

- the natural elements – earth, air, fire and water
- fabricated and natural materials and tools – consumables, 'loose parts'
- challenge – in the physical environment, in the social context and in private
- free movement – running, jumping, climbing, rolling, balancing
- emotions – both painful and pleasurable, the chance to validate a range of feelings
- a variety of stimulation to the senses – hearing, taste, smell, touch, sight
- play with identity – drama, dressing up, role plays, masks, face painting

- varied social interactions – freely chosen across the age, ability, gender, ethnic and cultural barriers, co-operating, resolving conflict, chatting, negotiating, sharing
- change – building/demolishing, transforming environments, the effect of the seasons and weather, growth and decay, predicting and planning, interesting physical environments – plantings, varied levels, enclosed/open spaces, mounds, steps, walls, shelters, surfaces, platforms, seating, privacy, vistas, flexibility.

Audit Commission (BVPI 115).