

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Executive – 12 September 2005

Report from the Director of Children and Families

For action

Wards affected:

All

Report Title: A Play Strategy for Brent

Forward Plan Ref: C&F05/06-008

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The draft Play Strategy for Brent (Appendix A) has been produced in line with the government review of children's play: '*Getting Serious About Play*', DCMS 2004. The Strategy is a three year plan formulated in response to a request by The Children's Consultative Forum for Brent's Children's Play Service to take the lead in preparing and consulting on a draft strategy for Brent.
- 1.2 The draft Play Strategy contains the following:
- an account of the nature, value and importance of play.
 - an outline of the values and principles of the strategy
 - a summary of current provision
 - a set of objectives
 - the results of a wide ranging play consultation with over 500 Brent children
 - an implementation plan to transform the Play Strategy into action.
- 1.3 There is much excellent work already happening in Brent in support of play. Good working partnerships between the council and the voluntary sector have been developed to supply training for and the provision of supervised play activities in out of school settings and in early years provision (such as in the new Children's Centres). Funding from the Children's Fund has enabled the development of new play opportunities for children with special needs. The Parks Service is waiting for two new play areas to come on-line and in the near future new fixed play areas in Chalkhill and Stonebridge. Beyond installing integrated play units the Parks Service

adds custom parts to ensure easier use by wheelchair users specifically.

1.4 The strategy identifies a number of key issues for Brent:

- The need to encourage evolving attitudes towards play and children – where play is seen as vital to a child’s life by both parents and decision-makers.
- The need to further enhance existing play spaces and develop more spaces where possible – both within green spaces and within the ‘street environment’.
- The need for play facilities to be suitable for all children including those with disabilities.
- The need to broaden and enhance the varied range of play opportunities for children – more innovative and better quality play opportunities should be available. This will include working with play providers, parents and integrating play into broader health and educational projects e.g. Children’s Centres.

2.0 Recommendations

That the Executive:

2.1 Note the findings of the Play Strategy.

2.2 Agree the recommendations of the Play Strategy (see 3.5 below).

2.3 Agree to adopt the Play Strategy and its implementation plan.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Context

This draft Play Strategy has been produced in line with the government review of children’s play: ‘*Getting serious about play – a review of children’s play*’ produced by Department of Culture, Media and Sports (2004).⁵ This included a proposed funding stream from the New Opportunities Fund (now called The Big Lottery) to enhance and develop play provision, which the Government has now confirmed to be £155 million for England. A key recommendation of the review was the designation of a local ‘Play Champion’ from within the elected members to advocate the strategy and provide political leadership.

3.1.1 The Children Act (2004) specifies recreation as one key outcome for the newly designed children’s services. The Play Strategy will play an important role in contributing to the improvement of children’s well-being (as defined by reference to the five key outcomes in the ‘Every Child Matters’ framework).

3.1.2 The draft Play Strategy is also responding to regional initiatives. In January 2004, Mayor of London published ‘*Making London better for all children and young people*’ which set out the Mayor’s policy on children’s play: that all children should be able to play within their local neighbourhoods and have safe and attractive play spaces within easy walking distance of their homes. In April 2005, the Mayor of London

published: *'A guide to preparing play strategies; planning inclusive play spaces and opportunities for all London's children and young people'*.

3.1.3 The play strategy is linked to many local strategies and it can crucially contribute to meeting the aims and objectives of Brent's Corporate Strategy:

- *Supporting Children and Young People*

Supported play facilities fill a crucial need for all children but in particular they offer activities to many children at risk from social exclusion including those already excluded or absent from schools.

- *Promoting quality of life and the green agenda*

The Strategy supports the aim of ensuring green spaces and quality play areas and equipment to be available for all children. Play has a crucial role in encouraging children to be more active.

- *Regeneration and priority neighbourhoods*

The Strategy aims to develop play facilities in the most deprived communities and reducing the play gap between disadvantaged and other areas.

- *Tackling crime and community safety*

Good local play and sports facilities steer 'hard-to-reach' young people away from crime and social exclusion.

The strategy has been produced following consultation within the Council including the crucial areas of Sports, Parks Housing and Regeneration.

3.2 Purpose of the Play Strategy

3.2.1 The purpose of the strategy is to:

- address the play needs of children and young people in Brent
- act as a clear outline of how Brent intends play provision to develop from 2005-2008
- be flexible and able to respond to future change and development in play services.
- improve the basis of quality in play provision
- provide a framework for allocation of resources
- continue to emphasise the close co-operation between all agencies in the provision and development of a play service
- promote children and young people's health through active play
- offer parents and carers safe environments for their children whilst they pursue employment or training opportunities.

3.3 Links to other strategies

3.3.1 The draft Play Strategy is informed by Brent's **Community Plan and Corporate Strategy**. It links to Brent's **Parks Strategy 2004-2009** which gives the results of an audit of play areas in the borough, an identification of gaps in the provision, and an action plan to develop and improve provision. It is informed by Brent's **Unitary Development Plan** which sets out the statutory planning framework on the development and preservation of Brent's urban and green environment, and in particular its outdoor space and indoor sports facilities. The Strategy will also make links with the **Children's Fund Strategy**, the

Early Education and Childcare Strategy, the **Sports and Physical Activity Strategy** and the forthcoming **Open Space Strategy**, which will audit areas in the borough where children like to play but do not fall under the scope of the play area audit..

3.4 **Current Provision**

3.4.1 ***Unsupervised Play Areas***

All Brent's children's play facilities within Brent parks meet with Health and Safety regulations and Audit Commission standards and will soon meet recommended European Community Safety Standards. All new equipment installed meets the latest European Standard. Brent's Park Service has undertaken a recent audit of existing play facilities using the Green Flag Award Standard. Brent's play areas score an average of 8 out of a potential 10 across the Borough. Play areas appear to be an aspect of Brent's parks which is above average quality.

3.4.2 Brent Parks Service has recently undertaken a baseline assessment of children's play areas. This audit of children's play areas found that there is a deficiency of play areas in Brent. A total of 39 unsupervised play sites were audited, (including sites with no play equipment).

Findings include:

- Imbalances in play provision across the Borough. Wards such as Stonebridge, Harlesden and Queensbury have a very low playground provision in relation to child density.
- There is a lack of either supervised open-access play areas or supervised adventure play areas and play areas which provide the necessary level of support for children with disabilities

3.4.3 ***Supervised Play Opportunities***

There are a wide range of providers of supervised children's play opportunities in the borough, including the Children's Centres, Youth Centres, Holiday Playschemes and Out of School Clubs run by voluntary and private providers and the voluntary sector (in partnership with Brent's Children's Play Service), mobile and special projects. Play opportunities are a crucial part of childcare provision in early years settings, such as nurseries, play groups and mother and toddler clubs.

3.5 **Recommendations of the draft Play Strategy**

To ensure an efficient and effective strategic delivery of play services, there should be a clearly defined management infrastructure in place. This strategy recommends:

- A stakeholders group in the form of a Play Forum should be created to monitor the implementation of the play strategy and make recommendations for future development.
- The designation of a Council Member 'Play Champion' and a Play Development Officer to coordinate implementation of the strategy. It is proposed that the Chair of the Brent Youth Forum be designated as Play Champion for 2005/06.

A Play Development Officer would be responsible for:

- Raising the awareness of play
 - Publicising, promoting and disseminating the play strategy
 - Encouraging changed attitudes towards play and children – where play is seen as vital to a child’s life by both parents and decision-makers
 - Developing a coherent, cohesive and co-ordinated approach to the development of play opportunities
 - Ensuring that Council funded or play provision provided directly by the Local Authority will make decisions with reference to the play strategy
 - Encouraging and supporting all play providers to adopt the values and principles highlighted in the play strategy
 - Developing partnerships across different forms of provision and between departments, sectors, organisations and projects
 - Identifying additional funding sources for play and disseminating funding information to relevant groups
 - Stimulating the creation of joint projects and partnerships in support of children’s play
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- That Brent Children’s Play Service works in close partnership with other play deliverers to provide a range of play services and opportunities which meet the needs of all children, young people and their families
 - That more play spaces are identified – both within green spaces and where possible within the ‘street environment’
 - A commitment is made to work with play providers to help ensure all play facilities are suitable for all children including those with disabilities
 - A commitment is made to work with play providers, parents and to integrating play into broader health and educational projects e.g. Children’s Centres to develop more and better quality play opportunities
 - That the Play Service pursues funding opportunities available to develop open-access play in Brent in particular, the creation of at least one supervised Children’s Adventure Playground from lottery funding

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations in this report. No new posts are proposed, (the Play Development Officer post involves re-designation of an existing post) and the provision of new play spaces will depend on successful bids to the Big Lottery Fund.
- 4.2 The strategy does provide the basis for considering how existing revenue resources - in the play service itself and in other related council service areas - and capital resources, such as those available to the parks and sports and leisure service, can be used effectively to deliver the objectives of the play strategy.'

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 S10 Children Act 2004 requires Children's Services Authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation with other bodies with a view to promote the well-being of children in the area and the definition of well-being specifically includes recreation.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 The draft Play Strategy is based on the principle that play is a right of all children whatever their circumstance. Children and young people from all communities, ages and abilities were consulted about their needs and wishes and these have been incorporated into the work. Special surveys/focus groups were conducted for children with special needs and their parents/carers.
- 6.2 The strategy focuses on children of all ages, taking into account: children's different abilities, age, gender, and cultural backgrounds, social, family, economic and environmental situation.
- 6.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed for the draft Play Strategy

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 There are no staffing implications arising from this report. Existing staff already have play development within their job descriptions and can be designated as Play Development Officer.

8.0 Environmental Implications

- 8.1 No specific implications or issues.

Background Papers

- i) Government papers on Play Strategy 2004.

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact
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