



All to Play For

HIGHLAND PLAY STRATEGY
2006 - 2010



FOREWORD

We know that play positively affects a child's health in numerous ways. However, the amount and quality of play that children experience is being massively reduced due to a combination of factors including passive forms of entertainment, increased road traffic, perceived stranger danger and concerns about bullying.

We are also very aware of the soaring child obesity rate in Scotland. Increasing play opportunities is part of the solution, as research shows that children burn more calories playing actively than they do during organised activity.

Perhaps most importantly, kids inherently want and love to play and they're unaware of the myriad of skills their learning as a result.

In essence, it is intended that the Highlands be a child and family-friendly region to live in, thereby guaranteeing that Highlands' children can exercise their fundamental human right to play, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I greatly welcome this Highland Play Strategy 'All to Play For' which details an appropriate, targeted and methodical approach in order to achieve this objective.

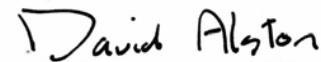


Bruce Robertson
Director of Education, Culture & Sport
The Highland Council

We are lucky to have over 400 community play areas in Highland. However, play is not just about small, neat areas with several pieces of brightly coloured play equipment. Kids choose to play anywhere - on their front doorstep, in a field on the other side of town, or in a small wooded area zoned for housing. We have a plethora of accessible countryside and green space and these informal play spaces also need our attention and protection.

In planning for play, we must guard against over protective actions which can, paradoxically, harm children by depriving them of the opportunities for challenging play. The fear of litigation has too often led planners, teachers and officials to feel they have to design and build play areas primarily to guard against any injury. Sometimes equipment has been 'dumbed-down' to such a degree that children find it boring and seek their excitement elsewhere. Worse still, they may not seek challenge anywhere else and we are then in danger of producing 'cotton wool kids' who are timid, have little resilience, judge risks poorly and consequently underachieve in later life.

This Highland Play Strategy seeks to ensure that all Highland's children and families can access fun, stimulating play environments with appropriate risks, which encourage every child to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities.



David Alston
Councillor
The Highland Council

PLAY STRATEGY GLOSSARY

- **British Bulldogs** A game involving 2 groups of children running towards each other in an attempt to breach each other's territory.
- **Children** For the purposes of this strategy 0-16 year olds, or up to 19 for young people with additional support needs.
- **CRM** Customer Relationship Management System of Highland Council.
- **Early Years Providers** Nurseries and pre-schools whether public, private or voluntary.
- **ECS** The Education Culture & Sport Service of Highland Council.
- **Free play** Play that is freely chosen by the child rather than directed by an adult.
- **Family friendly environment** Environments & activities which encourage parents/carers & children to play together.
- **FHC2** 'For Highlands Children 2' - Highland's integrated children's service plan.
- **Home Zone** A Home Zone is a street designed primarily for pedestrians and cyclists rather than motor vehicles, enabling the street to operate as a space for social use, encouraging children's play.
- **Inclusive play** Play which accommodates all children, regardless of ability, background or culture.
- **New Community Schools** Schools serving the whole community, often with an extended day, offering health & social services and governed by a partnership between the school system and a community agency.
- **Planning Bond** Money paid to councils by developers as a contribution towards the provision and maintenance of play areas.
- **Planning & Development** Planning & Development Service of Highland Council.
- **PPP schools** New schools being built via the Public-Private Partnership method, a system by which the school is built by a private company and payment is staged over several decades.
- **PTA's** Parent Teacher Associations.
- **TECS** Transport, Environmental & Community Services of Highland Council.
- **TOPS** System of training, equipment bags and cards for active play and sport.
- **Top start** Active play training and equipment for age 3 - 5's.
- **Top tots** Active play training and equipment for 18 months - 3 year olds.
- **Young people** Approximately 11 - 16 year olds for the purposes of this strategy.

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'ALL TO PLAY FOR' HIGHLAND PLAY STRATEGY

DEFINITION OF PLAY

The Highland Council is committed to ensuring that all children have access to rich, stimulating play experiences, with safeguards from inappropriate risk, but full of challenge, offering them the opportunity to explore, through freely-chosen play, both themselves and the world.

CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PLAY

This strategy is rooted in the values stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK Government in December 1991. The Rights of the Child to freedom of expression and association, to be respected and valued and to play are enshrined in the UN Convention. Article 31, in particular, says:

"Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts."

HIGHLAND PLAY POLICY

The Highland Play Policy which underpins this strategy is a statement of intent to improve play spaces and the quality of play experiences within Highland. This Play Strategy is based around the six key objectives of the policy and details an appropriate, targeted and methodical approach to play development in Highland. The six key objectives are broadly:

- PROMOTING A CHILD/FAMILY FRIENDLY ETHOS
- ENSURING CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN
- ACCESS TO PLAY FOR ALL CHILDREN
- INCORPORATING APPROPRIATE CHALLENGE IN PLAY
- ENCOURAGING OUTDOOR PLAY
- ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY AREAS

PLAY STRATEGY POSITION WITHIN STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

- The Community Plan is the key overarching strategic structure for joint work in Highland. The Joint Health Improvement Plan 2004-2007 (JHIP) expands the Community Plan's *'improving health and wellbeing'* section and sets out the agenda for improving health in Highland. The JHIP provides a snapshot of current health improvement work and identifies additional work needed, including *'increasing participation in play.'* The specific indicators for this outcome form part of the Children Services Plan ('For Highlands Children 2') and the Education, Culture and Sport Service Plan.
- The aspiration of 'For Highlands Children 2' (FHC2) is that Highland be "the best place in Scotland for families to live, to grow, to play, to be educated, to be fulfilled and to realise their full potential." Making Highland a family friendly region and promoting positive play experiences are central features of this vision and the development of integrated children's services. The FHC2 specific outcomes for play are to:
 - Determine a basic play provision for a community
 - Increase training in promoting positive play
 - Introduce 'Top start' active play training to early years providers in Highland
- One of the 10 Education Culture and Sport Service Plan goals is 'to improve individual health and wellbeing through play as well as participation in the arts, sport and heritage.' The key measured outcomes detailed for play are:
 - By 2008, introduce Top start active play training to 50% of pre-school providers in Highland
 - By 2008, audit & increase by 20% the number of communities with play areas shared with early years providers/schools
- Play influences all areas of the Education, Culture and Sport Service, stimulating attainment and achievement in schools, improving children's mental health and feeding in to the active lifestyle focus. Getting youngsters playing outside makes it more likely that they will adopt an active lifestyle later in life.
- The development of play in the Highlands in recent years has been guided by a partnership of Highland Council staff and Councillors, NHS Highland staff and voluntary organisations, collectively named 'Play Highland.' This group has been instrumental in bringing the importance of good quality play for children to the attention of relevant staff and the wider public, influencing policy and strategy and securing the position of a full time Play Development Officer for the Highlands.

POLICIES ENDORSED BY HIGHLAND COUNCIL

- ***Policy on the Adoption and Future Maintenance of Children's Play Equipment***
This policy relates to the adoption and consequently maintenance of play equipment supplied through community funded projects, either to existing play areas, owned by the Council, or new play parks provided within established communities. It also states that Highland Council will undertake future inspections and maintenance in accordance with the agreed inspection regime.
- ***Policy for the Management of Risk in Outdoor Play Areas***
This policy refers to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Contract Research Report 426/2002 'Playgrounds - risks, benefits and choices' and adopts the recommendations within this document as the basis for the development of a policy.
- ***The Guidelines for the Provision of Open Space and Play Areas within Residential Developments in Inverness***
This document, endorsed in November 2004, details the council's approach to the provision of all public open space (including recreational areas, children's play parks and facilities, amenity and landscape areas) within residential developments and indicates the standards required.

OTHER HIGHLAND COMMITMENTS TO PROMOTING PLAY

- In 2005, £800,000 of Highland Council capital was allocated to fund the upgrade of council owned play areas, with an additional £100,000 set aside for community groups wishing to upgrade local play areas.
- Highland Council has appointed **Children's Champions**, Councillors from each area of Highland who act as advocates for all matters relating to children, including play.
- In 2004, the design team for the Private Public Partnership (PPP) school build programme adopted the '**Outdoor Space Checklist for PPP Schools**' devised by Play Highland. This checklist was based on information from Grounds for Learning, the Scottish school grounds charity, which details elements considered desirable for a play ground.
- Highland Council and NHS Highland, with support from voluntary groups, has operated the active play programme '**play @home**' for all babies born from August 1st 2002. The programme comprises three books: one for babies, one for toddlers and one for the pre-school stage, with ideas for simple games, songs, rhymes and massage for children and families. **play @home** helps to strengthen parent and child communication through fun, play activities that contribute to muscular development, co-ordination, speech and language skills.
- The '**Let's Make Highland More Active**' initiative focuses on ways in which children, young people and adults can lead healthier lifestyles, supporting the Scotland-wide strategy. One objective is to encourage children and young people to take part in active play.
- This Highland Play Strategy acknowledges both the strategy for physical activity produced by the Physical Activity Task Force, '**Let's make Scotland More Active**' (2002) which states that active play is a vital element to eliminating childhood obesity and works towards the aims and objectives written in the 'Your Choice to Healthy Living - Implementation Plan.'
- This Play Strategy also acknowledges the Highland Council **Youth Strategy**.

HEALTH BENEFITS FROM POSITIVE PLAY

Play positively affects a child's health in numerous ways. It aids social, emotional, physical, cognitive and language development, family and social relationships, well-being and general happiness. Participation in play enables children to develop their social intelligence and resilience and more specifically a sense of self and empathy for others. It offers settings where children can learn to handle stress including humiliation and powerlessness and can be of particular value in times of stress or change. Role play offers the opportunity to act-out a potentially difficult situation in a safe arena. Access to good quality, unsupervised, freely chosen play, with appropriate risk-taking opportunities helps to develop well-rounded adults who have good social networks and relationships and are less likely to become obese.

From birth, babies respond to communication and playing is vital in building bonds with their family. The **play @ home** books, given to all new parents in Highland, contain ideas for simple games for 0-5 year olds. The emergence of imaginative play, at around three to four years, is a very significant step developmentally and freely chosen play is essential to develop this into appropriate exploratory activity which should include the opportunity for appropriate risk taking. By the age of five, children who are able to play outside unsupervised in safety, close to their own homes are likely to have developed good social and motor skills and a sense of autonomy.

The importance of play in children's development is rising on the political agenda. Tessa Jowell, Secretary for Culture Media and Sport has stated that "It is essential for children to have opportunities to practise making and consolidating friendships and to deal with conflict - the basic skills needed in order to become "emotionally literate".....Children themselves identify meeting and spending time with their friends as one of the most important opportunities offered by play and play provision. Play gives children the chance to experience and express the full range of emotions in a "safe" way".

(Timperio A. Salmon J Telford A. Crawford D. *Perceptions of local neighbourhood environments and their relationship to childhood overweight and obesity*, *International Journal of Obesity* (2005) 29, 170-175. doi: 10.1038/sj.ijo.0802865 Published online 7 December 2004)

The Joint Health Improvement Plan, developed by the Highland Wellbeing Alliance, recognises health to be "everyone's business". Promoting opportunities for children to engage in play and ensuring that play continues to be high on the political agenda is an important way for a range of groups, services, individuals and children themselves to improve the health of the Highland population now and in the future.

A NO-RISK CHILDHOOD IS RISKY

- In Britain during 2002, 18 children visited hospital due to injuries sustained on climbing frames in community play areas. In the same year, 3,000 visited hospital as a result of injuries sustained on climbing frames at home. Around 38,000 children a year visit hospital because of injuries sustained in playgrounds compared with 200,000 who get injured simply getting in and out of bed. These facts help put the situation in perspective but unfortunately they may not be recognised in today's litigious society. Planners, teachers and council officials live in constant fear of legal action, so play areas are designed and built to guard against any injury, often making them close to useless in play value terms. The equipment has been 'dumbed-down' to such a degree that children find them dull and seek their challenge elsewhere. "Boring" was how the majority of children described their local parks in a national survey by the Children's Play Council.
- Children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury. By coming into contact with graduated risk taking situations in a controlled environment, children will develop a capacity to identify, assess and manage other activities with risk content. If a play provision does not provide challenging opportunities, children will seek these out in more risky uncontrolled environments. Play often includes risk (physical, psychological and moral) but there's a very important safety measure - it's not for real!
- The policy for the 'Management of Risk in Play Areas' highlights the balance that the Highland Council wishes to strike between providing safe environments and encouraging the necessary risk taking required if children are to experience the full benefits of play.

COTTON WOOL KIDS?

- In some American schools, attempts to avoid upsetting children have gone as far as replacing 'Tug of war' with a less competitive version 'Tug of peace' where the two teams work together. In addition, corrections in children's school work have been made in lilac pen to avoid the upset of using a strong colour like red.
- In the UK, we have blanket bans on British Bulldogs because it's violent - but let's face it, children play it **because** it's dangerous. Skipping has been banned in some schools as the ropes used for 3-legged races could lead to trips. Perhaps the highest profile ban was that of playing conkers, a game which children have enjoyed in this country for hundreds of years, surely with minimal serious injury.
- There appears to be an attitude of "if in doubt, ban it". However, when many recall their childhood, they remember it was considered cool to have a broken arm, you were regarded as a hero with a trophy to show off and have signed. We need to remember this before banning all the things children learn from and often enjoy.
- Some forward thinking play workers have been known to assess the success of a playground by the number of plasters they're required to put on children's bumps and scrapes - the more plasters, the better the playground.
- A huge amount of resources are spent on safety surfacing, however it has not been proven to reduce accidents. Professor David Ball of Middlesex University explains that soft surfaces actually give children a false sense of security - they know not to fall on concrete but often think soft surfaces are safe and end up with more injuries.

**"The risk of injury on UK playgrounds is found to be modest compared with the risks of many other activities in which children are encouraged, for accepted reasons, to participate."
(Health and Safety Executive report 'Playgrounds - risks, benefits and choices.')**

- Local Authorities tend to settle claims out of court as they are worried they may lose a case and consequently open the floodgates to further claims. The government is now looking to cap the liability of Local Authorities and the NHS before more is spent on compensation than services. But it may already be too late to curtail the compensation culture that is developing and start recognising that we each have responsibility for our own safety.

"PLAY NICELY DEAR" - ADULTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PLAY

- Adults' perceptions of what is 'appropriate' playing may often differ from children's. Kids have the right to play and not necessarily in the way adults want them to. Children's play is not always "warm and fuzzy": adults are often shocked by rough and tumble play and need to differentiate between this and actual aggression. Rough and tumble play can help children control and understand aggression, so before jumping in to stop them, we must learn to recognise that what we think is bad behaviour is actually children practising skills through play.
- Kids have the right to be bored, get hurt, get dirty, discuss and negotiate while playing. They don't distinguish between play and learning - neither should we.
- We must also learn to decipher what is damaging bullying and what may be less harmful, childhood teasing which children can learn from. If we encourage children to report anything that upsets them to a teacher or other adult, then they will grow up thinking they cannot resolve differences for themselves and will always want to rely on an older person for solutions. Let's try to leave kids to police themselves as much as possible.
- Perhaps we should carry out a risk assessment on our risk assessments - and take into account the long-term risks involved in not offering more adventurous play. We have to be careful not to make our children childish, rather than giving them a childhood that prepares them for life. After all, children for the main part are mentally sound and can deal with losing in life.

LESS FREELY CHOSEN PLAY = PLAY MALNOURISHMENT

- Children's time is increasingly being organised, formalised and controlled by adults. They're driven to and from school and organised activity such as music lessons, sports coaching and dance classes. We don't always educate them to solve their own boredom problems, but try to keep them occupied and organise their lives instead. Kids have to learn to make decisions and master boredom and adults shouldn't be afraid of this process and its inconveniences.
- Some have described this lack of free play as 'play malnourishment' and the result can be poor neurological development, anti-social behaviour and obesity.
- This decrease in free play outdoors is due in part to parental fears about strangers and traffic danger, which surely must be addressed. Among 10-12 year old children, those whose parents agreed that road safety was a concern were more likely to be overweight or obese, compared to those whose parents disagreed.
- Of course parents are right to be concerned for their children's safety but should be encouraged to keep it in perspective and give their kids more time and more space to play. Parents admit they are not letting their children play in the same way they did. We need to let our kids roam beyond the home base, dependant on age and overall development of course. Parents can make this happen by establishing boundaries for playing outside the home, then retire to a discreet distance and let the kids get on with it.
- Increasingly children are spending more time in formal childcare settings, where activities are principally supervised by adults. We need to ensure that practitioners are aware of the risk of encouraging children's dependency on activity directed solely by adults and the value of freely chosen, unsupervised play to counteract this.
- However a child frequently cannot kick a ball on the pavement outside their house for fear of annoying neighbours or being considered at risk of harm. It could be argued that we impose our adult fears of 'stranger danger' on children, when statistics show that family members and friends pose more of a danger to children than strangers. Media coverage can make children seem more at risk than they really are. In the past, it appears that a whole community felt it had a responsibility to bring-up children, whereas now society seems to distrust any other carers except for immediate family members. This shrinking of the wider community's role misses an opportunity to build strong neighbourhoods and links between families and generations.
- **"We're "in danger of producing a culture of childhood which leapfrogs from playschool to chatrooms, bypassing street games, adventure play and the freedom of the city which comes with territorial independence."**
(Ken Warpole, The Guardian, Aug 7th 2002)
- 'Persil' recognised this worrying trend and developed their 'dirt is good' campaign on the back of learning that 79 percent of children cited 'watching television' as their favourite leisure activity.

"THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS BAD WEATHER, ONLY BAD CLOTHING"

- Energetic, outdoor play increases fitness levels and improves motor, balance and co-ordination skills in children and offers rich aesthetic experiences.
- 'Bad weather' is a major reason for children not being permitted to go outside to play. In schools, teachers are worried that parents will complain if their children come home with wet or muddy clothes and foot wear.
- In the Highlands where the weather is not always sunny and warm, are we not drastically reducing the opportunities for our children to be physically active and consequently endangering their health by taking this attitude? Instead, should we not be looking at methods to safeguard outdoor play and educate parents, carers and teachers about the importance of this essential form of exercise?
- Parents could be asked to send children to school with clothing suitable for the day's weather and educational establishments could amass a store of Wellington boots and waterproof clothing to ensure all pupils are provided for. These strategies have been adopted in Scandinavia where the weather is more extreme than in Scotland and they work well. By robbing our youngsters of experiencing these different weather conditions, it could be argued that we're conditioning them to dislike them for life, further perpetuating the pandemic of inactivity.
- Dislike of inclement weather also affects another opportunity for outdoor exercise - active travel. The traffic chaos around 9am and 3pm only too clearly highlights the number of children being driven to and from school. A significant number of children live within 2 miles of their school and could be walking or cycling rather than taking a lift. The Road Safety Team within the Highland Council also maintain that instilling the benefits of cycling and walking in youngsters, makes them more likely to consider these forms of transport throughout life.
- **"Children in Britain cycle less, travel independently on public transport less and are, in general, much more home-bound than their European peers."**
(Ken Warpole, *The Guardian*, Aug 7th 2002)
- There is also a strong link between active play and physical activity. Those who engage in active play at a young age are more likely to adopt an active lifestyle later in life.
- In addition, children who have been introduced to physical activity through play, are more easily able to adapt to formal organised activity such as games and sport as they grow older. This is a very important point to consider because as our children get older, organised activity and sport become the most common forms of physical activity they will be offered. Children who have not been given the opportunity to experience freely chosen active play can be easily 'turned off' physical exercise when they do encounter it and therefore run the risk of developing health problems associated with inactivity such as obesity.
- However, as not all children enjoy organised sport, it is important for primary children in particular to still be given the opportunity to play. Organised sport may reduce obesity in those children willing to take part, but obviously it has no effect on those who do not. Research shows that children expend more time and energy playing than they do in organised sport. In addition, we know that all children have an innate drive to play. Consequently, enabling children to play more often is likely to have more effect on obesity levels than formal sport.
- Gender researchers argue that outdoor play is vital for both girls and boys but the reasoning for each sex varies. At times, indoor play environments can be unappealing to boys due to their structured layout, making them relish the freedom of being outside. Out of doors, boys can make their own rules, run around and generally make more noise than indoors. Conversely, girls should be encouraged to get active outside and learn to enjoy the challenges inherent in this less predictable form of play.

"I'M NOT PLAYING WITH YOU" - INCLUSIVE PLAY

- Facilitating play which is ultimately inclusive is fundamental for positive play experiences. That is, play which involves all children regardless of their ability, background or culture. Inclusive play doesn't simply happen by letting children out in to the playground: it requires support from adults and an appropriate environment.
- The importance of inclusion has been recognised in the national priorities for education, with an increased emphasis on inclusion which relate not just to children's immediate education, but to far wider outcomes.

"The more successful schools are in achieving inclusive outcomes for their pupils, the better the chances that these young people will go on to prosper in later life and achieve broader social inclusion in society."
(HM Inspectorate of Education, 2002)

- Experiences of play and therefore inclusion **"are central to the child's peer relations, self-esteem, sense of identity and feeling of connection with the school as an institution or community."**
(Play Inclusive Action Research report)
- The Play Inclusive project found that the following were barriers to achieving inclusion in the school playground:
 - Pressure on the timetable
 - Division between play (unimportant, outdoors) and work (important, indoors)
 - Resistance or inflexibility
 - Different understandings of what 'play' means
 - Fears of losing control or status amongst adults

(Play Inclusive Action Research report)

SUGAR, SPICE AND PUPPY DOGS' TAILS - BOYS AND GIRLS PLAYING

Those who work with children will probably have noticed that in the main boys and girls play quite differently.

Consider the differences in learning skills as girls and boys come out to play. Typically the girl plays with her doll and the boy with his toy car. The girl is talking to her dolly. The boy is more focused on moving his car around and making noises. Her early play activity is centred on relationships with people and his on relationships with objects. He may have a rich imaginative landscape in his mind as he dashes around doing things but unlike her he doesn't verbalise it. Not only does her play enrich and develop her language skills but also, early on, she begins to sequence her activities and follow linear processes.

She will make up stories. Her stories will have a clear beginning, a progression and an end. He starts playing at or with something, stops and plays with something else. Now consider how much in learning is sequential, how much is about following linear progressions and how much is about seeing things through from start to end. She learns to be attentive, neat and cautious. With some genetic propensities in this direction, she learns to be caring and responsible. By one year old, she has already developed many learning advantages over her male classmate. She can often even sit at a desk without fidgeting.

This is not to say that the average boy isn't developing skills in other areas. He certainly is. He's a great explorer, more inclined to venture into new domains and seek wild and new experiences.

To develop a boy's language skills, sit down with him as he plays with a car and get him to make up stories with it. Get him to verbalise more. And dads... try to be the one that reads to him. You are an important role model to your young son. Don't let him grow up to think that it is just the women that read and talk about feelings.

Get her to experiment more and take more risks in her play. Rough and tumble play is good for her too as it helps to develop her confidence.

(Jeff Hannan, Culloden Academy, November 2005)

DO WE WANT CHILD-FRIENDLY OR CHILD-FREE TOWNS?

- In attempting to protect formal and informal play space, it is impossible to ignore that there seems to be a swell of opinion against children and young people having their own places to socialise together. Members of communities with play areas, skate parks and sports pitches complain about lighting, noise and even that groups of youngsters are 'standing around in groups together.' Forms of innocuous behaviour seem to have been tarred with the same brush as unsociable behaviour. Perhaps the media has painted such a bad picture of our young people, that they are all viewed as intimidating to other members of the community. Have we gone beyond 'children being seen and not heard' to a society where we would prefer them to be neither seen nor heard?
- **"Too many young people are treated as an environmental problem, to be swept off the streets like litter. Experience shows that, given the right support and skills, young people can be a powerful and positive force for improving the quality of community life."** (Tony Hawkhead, 'Groundwork' Chief Executive)
- In the design and planning of play areas, we can also forget to accommodate the opinion of the main users - the children. Adult perceptions of what constitutes a play area can result in play spaces that are hardly used. Children know what they enjoy in terms of play and with encouragement are able to voice their opinions coherently. It is however important to note that they can only comment on what they have seen and experienced themselves, so it is best practice to provide them with good examples of design and if possible take them to sample suitable play sites.

NOT JUST SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS

- Play tends to be seen as simply formal play areas and play equipment itself. The fact that children can decide to play anywhere seems to be forgotten. Increasing urbanisation, trends in land use and planning have diminished the availability of natural and unplanned free space for children.
- We should be protecting our informal space as vehemently as we do formal play parks they are just as valued by our youngsters.
- "By making sure all children and young people have access to good outdoor space, we as a society will be:
 - Responding to their stated needs and wishes
 - Supporting their healthy physical, social and emotional development
 - Contributing to a reduction in their feelings of exclusion
 - Contributing to the promotion of safer, more harmonious and more cohesive communities"(Children's Play Council - 'More than Swings and Roundabouts')
- Play equipment manufacturers produce glossy magazines with 'off-the-shelf' type solutions often with questionable play value. Those wanting new and upgraded play areas need to be aware that the design should be unique and adapted to the surrounding area and not just a carbon copy of a park down the road. Children want variety in the whole play experience, from visual impact and surfacing to equipment and even texture.
- When it comes to inclusive play equipment, it may be assumed that we need only add a special needs swing or assume all physically disabled children are in a wheelchair. We need to be aware of the needs of children with walkers and leg braces and the fact that most wheelchair users can get out of their chairs.
- When asked, children with additional needs and parents/carers say they would prefer to be able to play with able bodied children on equipment and in areas suitable for as much of the population as is practicable. Ramps have their place but are not the only measure needed. We should consider transfer platforms, good handgrips and broader steps and slides for most of our equipment.

TACKLING THE TRIVIALITY BARRIER

- In order to help people understand the importance of positive play, we need to tackle what has been termed by some the 'triviality barrier' - the initial reaction we can encounter when telling others about play's myriad benefits. Play is an end in itself but we can use the current political climate and its focus on 'outcomes' to convince others of its worth. 'Outcomes' are our friends and these include: tackling the mounting problem of children's obesity, the fostering independence and self esteem agenda, physical and mental health improvement, incorporating risk for nurturing resilience and the crime reduction agenda. These many benefits of play can be highlighted to raise its status in the minds of doubters.
- Those directly involved in encouraging and promoting play are convinced of its benefits, but may rarely be in a position to influence policy decisions which affect the quality of play. Teachers, the police, roads technicians, civil engineers, leisure officers, policy writers and their managers need to be convinced that play is worth fighting for.

A PLAY STRATEGY IS IMPORTANT BUT ONLY PEOPLE CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

- The importance of positive play experiences for our children cannot be underestimated. The benefits are far reaching and the co-operation required for success cuts across council services, voluntary organisations and the public at large. In essence, it is intended that the Highlands will be a child friendly and family orientated region where children and young people will have access to play opportunities which offer variety, adventure and challenge. They will be able to play freely and make choices about where, how and when they play.
- However, this strategy will not safeguard our children's rights to play if it sits on a shelf. Highland Council, its partners and the Highland public must take personal responsibility for what happens in their local area. If every youth shelter scheme or playground is opposed by someone somewhere in Highland then we can only conclude that people have voted for the present against the future.
- **"Strategies alone do not create a single extra play space. In the end it is the political willingness to make it happen and the enthusiasm of people working in the field to be bold and ambitious that makes the difference."**
(No Particular Place to Go' - Ken Warpole.)

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OBJECTIVE 1

Promote the Highlands as a child/family friendly environment in which to live

1.1 Play Environment

- Promote environments and activities that encourage and enable all families, whatever their needs, to participate in play.
- Designated playgrounds and play areas form only a small part of the play environment: informal play spaces should also be considered.
- The play environment has an extremely important role in promoting inclusion. A play area which is prescriptive in its use instantly limits access to someone.
- When planning new developments, children's small size, their eye-line and limited range of activity should be considered.
- The placement of 'No Ball Games' signs, does not promote a child friendly ethos.
- Speed restrictions and home zones should be considered on a holistic basis, as a valid way of ensuring children can walk to school and play in their streets without adult supervision.

<u>Action Points</u>	<u>Lead Officers</u>	<u>Partner Officers/ Services/Agencies</u>	<u>Measurements and Timescale</u>
- Via the Youth Strategy, the Highland Council will ensure young people are valued as having a positive contribution to make to society.	Principal Youth Development Officer, ECS	Community Learning Officers, ECS	See Youth Strategy
- Highland Council's Planning and Development Service and TEC Services will work towards removing 'No Ball Games' signs. Communities which demand 'No Ball Games' signs will have to justify why they are needed against set criteria. When a 'No Ball Games' sign is deemed necessary, it should include directions to the nearest suitable play area.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Community Works Managers, TECS/ Housing Officers/ Planning/Play Development Officer, ECS	Set criteria developed by Dec 2009
- Council staff organising programmes of activities will ensure that they include opportunities for families to participate together.	Active Schools Manager, ECS	Active School Co-ordinators/ Leisure Centre Managers, ECS	All programmes include family activities by Dec 2009

1.2 Child/Family Friendly Communities:

- The Wellbeing Alliance partners are committed to making Highland a family friendly region. Our children's services plan for Highland (FHC2) includes the aspiration that 'Highland is widely recognised as the best place in Scotland to be young; the best place in Scotland for families - to live, to grow, to play, to be educated, and to be fulfilled to realise their full potential.'
- A major element of making a place child friendly is to provide high quality, well maintained play spaces in parks and other open spaces. Additional related priorities include: high quality, affordable sports and leisure facilities, better provision for safe walking and cycling and neighbourhoods designed around the needs of children.
- The Highland Council aims to foster independence and encourage leadership in young people. Children and young people are not only future citizens - they should be active citizens in the present.

- Research the 'Child Friendly Cities' award scheme, with the potential aim of Inverness becoming a recognised positive place to live and bring up children.	Play Development Officer, ECS	Play Highland	Child friendly city award researched by Dec 2010
- Investigate the possibility of a Highland 'Child/Family Friendly' community award scheme.	Play Development Officer, ECS	Play Highland	Child Family Friendly Community Award scheme investigated by Dec 2010

OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure children and families are involved and consulted in all aspects of play provision

Meaningful Consultation:

- Children and families' interests and voices should be at the heart of policy making.
- Children, families and local interest groups should be able to influence play projects that affect them.

<u>Action Points</u>	<u>Lead Officers</u>	<u>Partner Officers/ Services/Agencies</u>	<u>Measurements and Timescale</u>
- Children will be consulted on the installation and removal of play equipment and will be assisted to meet with designers and equipment suppliers in order to understand the process and influence design and equipment selection.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Community Works Managers, TECS/Play Development Officer/ Highland Youth Voice/ Highland Children's Forum	No of children's groups consulted by Dec 2009
- Children and families will be consulted at vital stages of the design of outdoor areas of schools.	Play Development Officer	Estate Strategy Manager/ PPP Project Officer	No of children's groups consulted by Dec 2009
- The Play Development Officer will be invited to local steering group discussions on outdoor designs of PPP schools and will ensure children are being consulted.	PPP Project Officer	Play Development Officer	No of children's groups consulted by Dec 2009
- Children and families will be consulted on the design and content of activity programmes.	Active Schools Manager, ECS	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS/ Leisure Centre Managers/ Highland Youth Voice/ Highland Children's Forum	Consultation process in place by Dec 2009

OBJECTIVE 3

Ensure that all Highland's children and families are able to access fun, stimulating and appropriate play environments

3.1 Inclusion and Play

- All children and young people have the right to access safe, stimulating and appropriate play environments regardless of gender, age, ability, family income, geographical location, lifestyle, ethnicity or culture.
- Play Wales reports that play deprivation in childhood can result in those affected becoming both biologically and socially disabled. The following groups of young people for a variety of reasons, experience difficulty in participating in play: Children with a disability, asylum seekers/refugees, young carers, the homeless, Gypsy/Travellers, looked after children and children from areas characterised by social and economic deprivation.
- For children with disabilities, making friends may be particularly difficult. They may have little contact with people of their own age, through lack of opportunity to meet friends socially out with school and sometimes rely on parents or other adults to create opportunities outside the home. Children affected by disability should be able to access mainstream play provision in their community, including out of school clubs and should receive additional support if required.
- Gypsy/Traveller children living in caravans /trailers on recognised sites and unauthorised encampments should be able to access appropriate play situations and outdoor play spaces.
- Children from families perceived to be 'well-off' may also be deprived of good play experiences. Having numerous toys and a large selection of computer games can significantly restrict creative and imaginative play.

<u>Action Points</u>	<u>Lead Officers</u>	<u>Partner Officers/ Services/Agencies</u>	<u>Measurements and Timescale</u>
- Develop an awareness raising campaign for staff, parents, carers, volunteers & Wellbeing Alliance members to explain the importance of outdoor play, free/unsupervised play, incorporating challenge in play and boisterous play for children.	Play Development Officer, ECS	Play Highland/ECS	Number of awareness raising opportunities secured By Dec 2008
- Development of paid for, out of school care provision in line with 'Schools Out', to include wraparound and where appropriate within schools. ('Schools Out' is a framework for out of school hours childcare.)	Senior Childcare and Family Resource Officer, ECS	Highland Family Resource Alliance	Continue to ensure children accessing provision by Dec 2007
- Highland Council will promote the provision of or access to designated play areas with appropriate play equipment on each of its recognised Gypsy/Traveller sites.	Housing Policy Officer, Housing	Community Works Managers, TECS/Lochaber Routes/CLD Officers, ECS	Increase in the number of accessible play areas by Dec 2010

3.2 Transport

- The public transport network is a valuable resource for young people who wish to travel further from home and do not have transport of their own. Many young people in remote parts of Highland do not have access to a reliable and/or affordable transport network.

- A flexible approach to school bus timetables will be adopted in order to accommodate after-school provision. Extra-curricular activity and play will be held at lunchtimes if school bus timetables can not be altered.	Transport Development Officer, TECS	School Travel Co-ordinators, Road Safety Unit	Increase in flexible school bus timetables for extra-curricular activities by Dec 2009
- Active and sustainable travel will be encouraged, through the work of local communities, Road Safety Officers, School Travel Co-ordinators and Active School Co-ordinators.	Road Safety Officer	School Travel Co-ordinators/ Active School Coordinators	Evaluation of school travel plans and biannual walk to school weeks.
- All schools will be encouraged to devise a school travel plan. Support to parents will be offered by the Road Safety Officers, School Travel Co-ordinators and Active School Co-ordinators.	Road Safety Officer	School Travel Co-ordinators/ Active School Co-ordinators	All Highland schools to have a travel plan by Dec 2009
- Investigate the principles of Safer Routes to Schools with a view to extending these to safer routes to play.	School Travel Co-ordinators, Road Safety Unit	Active School Co-ordinators/ Play Highland	Monitor demand and risk assessments undertaken by Dec 2010

3.3 Home Zones

- In recent years, a method of street design within residential areas has been developed called Home Zones. By design it forces cars to slow down within residential areas enabling pedestrians to share the road space more safely. Home Zones should be seen as a positive way of ensuring children and young people are able to play and socialise in their own community and neighbourhood and on the streets near their home.

-The Planning and Development Service will ensure that all new housing developments comply with the principles of home zones.	Planning Officers	Play Development Officer, ECS/ Play Highland	Number of housing developments adopting the principles of home zones by Dec 2008
- The concept of Home Zones and how to achieve realistic improvements in existing areas of housing will be promoted to interested community groups in Highland.	Planning	Play Highland/ Home zones Network Group	-Number of communities adopting the principles of Home zones by Dec 2008

3.4 Schools and Early Years Providers

- The school day provides significant opportunity to impact on the quality of children's play.
- Play is a fundamental tool in learning and teaching and can feature in school development plans as a support for literacy, numeracy and inclusion.
- Research has shown that concentration in cognitive tasks is improved for up to 20 minutes, if a child is allowed regular breaks which involve physical activity.
- The transition between pre-school and primary is a particularly fragile stage for children. The ministerial response 'A Curriculum for Excellence', suggests "extending the approaches which are used in pre-school in to the early years of primary, emphasising the importance of opportunities for children to learn through purposeful, well planned play."
- Early years establishments are encouraged, through the authority's quality assurance procedures and external inspection, to provide opportunities for play outdoors on a daily basis and ensure energetic play.
- Inclusive play does not simply happen by letting children out in to the play ground, it requires support from all adults with a responsibility for pupils play. Both the play environment and the role of adults greatly influence inclusive play in addition to 'flexibility, respectful relationships with children, a playful mindset and a problem solving, creative attitude.' (Play Inclusive Handbook)
- Parent bodies, including PTAs and Schools Boards often support play through provision of resources.
- In many communities the only play resource may be the school/early year's outdoor area. In this situation, it makes sense to share the limited resources and facilities. In addition, many external funding streams for play area upgrades are only available to facilities willing to make their play areas accessible to the wider community.
- Pre-school practitioners often highlight active play as an area in which they would welcome additional training. Physical education teachers comment that children who have received good instruction in active play before starting school, have significantly better co-ordination than their peers who have not. Parents of children 0-5 years old receive *play @ home* books promoting active games. The Top Play and Top Sport initiatives rolled out in all Highland Primaries and the wider community over recent years, offer training in the use of TOPS play and sport equipment and accompanying activity cards. The programme also has a complementary physical activity programme designed for children in Early Years settings called Top start, which complements *play@home*.

- By 2008, audit and increase by 20% the number of communities with play areas shared with pre-school establishments.	Play Development Officer, ECS	Senior Early Education Development Officer, ECS/Play Highland	Communities with shared play areas increased by 20% by Dec 2008
- Local Management Committees with devolved power from the Local Authority, will ensure schools are seen as a building and grounds where the whole community can access play opportunities throughout the year and out-with the traditional school opening hours.	Local Management Committees	Quality Development Officer, ECS /Play Development Officer	Sample taken of school playgrounds open to communities by Dec 2009
- Devise a policy for the purchasing, installation, maintenance and use of school playground equipment guided by the British Standards and National Guidelines from Rospa.	Health and Safety Advisor, ECS	Play Development Officer	Number of schools requesting policy by Dec 2008
- School staff will be encouraged to develop and use play as a learning tool, including appropriate assessment strategies.	Quality Development Officer, ECS	Head Teachers, ECS	Number of staff using play as a learning tool by Dec 2009
- Head Teachers will be encouraged to further promote play through the school development planning process.	Quality Development Officer, ECS	Head Teachers, ECS	No of school plans including development of play opportunities by Dec 2009
- Distribute the Play Inclusive (P.inc) handbook and report to every Highland Primary School and Active School Co-ordinator.	Play Development Officer, ECS	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS	Report and handbook distributed to all Highland Primaries by Dec 2006

- All Highland Primaries will be encouraged to collect suitable junk items and dress-up clothing for play times consequently implementing the recommendations of the Play Inclusive research project.	Play Development Officer	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS	Number of primaries with a junk/dress up collection by Dec 2007
- Investigate the possibility of the Play Inclusive Project team undertaking inclusive play workshops at Highland Primary Schools.	Play Development Officer,	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS	Number of inclusive play workshops in Highland Primaries by Dec 2007
- Investigate training for the Active School Co-ordinators and Out of School Club Co-ordinators in inclusive play.	Play Development Officer	Active Schools Manager, ECS	Training for ASC's investigated by Dec 2007
- Organise training for 36 staff as Top start active play trainers, who will cascade the training to practitioners in Highland early years establishments.	Play Development Officer,	Active School Co-ordinators, Nursery Co-ordinator Teachers	36 staff qualified as Tops trainers by Dec 2006
- The working hours of Additional Support for Learning Auxiliaries in schools will be assessed to ensure children with additional support needs can be accompanied to out of school hours activity provision where identified as part of an Individual Education Plan.	Support for Learning Manager, ECS	Quality Development Officer, ECS	Sample a no of schools to find if children accessing provision by Dec 2008
- Active School Co-ordinators will provide support in sourcing funding to provide play equipment for use in the playground.	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS	Active Schools Manager/ Head Teachers, ECS	Number of successful bids delivering new equip by Dec 2007
- Staff and volunteers will have access to play and sport equipment as a play resource during breaks, lunch and after school.	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS	Active Schools Manager/ Head Teachers, ECS	Number of schools using store of equip in playground by Dec 2007
- Out of school sector staff to contact their relevant ASC for information on play, sport and physical activity available.	Out of School Co-ordinators	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS	Number of ASC's contacted by Dec 2007

3.5 Childcare and Early Education Workforce

In Oct 2006, Managers/Lead Practitioners in the Childcare sector will be required to register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). It is likely that Practitioners and Support Workers will be invited to register some time in 2007, at which time 'practitioners' will need to be qualified to Level 3 Play work, or at least be working towards it and be able to evidence this (not all workers required to be qualified.)

- Workers in registered provision will have or will be working towards appropriate qualifications by the due date with a strategy to assist this.	Senior Childcare and Family Resource Officer, ECS	HFRA, ACT	Staff to have met registration requirements within SSSC timescales (SSSC to announce registration dates in 2006)
- Information will be gathered on which qualifications are currently held by the Childcare and Early Education Workforce and the qualifications staff are working towards. Identification of staff unable/unwilling to achieve the appropriate award will also be gathered.	Senior Childcare and Family Resource Officer, ECS	HFRA, ACT	Information gathered by Dec 2006

OBJECTIVE 4

Ensure that all play environments enable children to take appropriate risks which encourage the child to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities

4.1 Policy for the Management of Risk in Play Environments

- 'A Policy for the Management of Risk in Outdoor Play Environments' makes clear Highland Council's position on children developing their capabilities through challenge in play and on having accidents which may lead to non-serious injury.

- Children *need* stimulating play opportunities in order to advance physically, emotionally and mentally and should be encouraged to take appropriate risks in their play.

<u>Action Points</u>	<u>Lead Officers</u>	<u>Partner Officers/ Services/Agencies</u>	<u>Measurements and Timescale</u>
- The Highland Council will adopt, and encourage its partners to adopt, the principles contained in the Health and Safety Executive report 'Playgrounds - risks, benefits and choices.'	Play Development Officer, ECS	Play Highland	Key principles adopted by Dec 2009
- Develop an awareness raising campaign for staff, parents, carers, volunteers & Wellbeing Alliance members to explain the importance of outdoor play, free/unsupervised play, incorporating challenge in play and boisterous play for children.	Play Development Officer, ECS	Play Highland/TECS	Number of awareness raising opportunities secured By Dec 2008

4.2 Fixed Equipment in Play and Recreational Areas

- Well designed play equipment can assist a child in taking appropriate risks.

- Stimulating playgrounds cannot be risk-free.

- Fixed equipment in playgrounds can be inappropriate for the age group using the play space. This can lead to equipment being abused, vandalised and even dangerous to young people who attempt to use the equipment for alternative purposes.

- Play areas with fixed equipment should have signs indicating who is responsible for them, who to contact if equipment is damaged, the number to call if someone has an accident and information on where there is a play space for your age group. Signs used should be low enough for children to read and should be able to be read by children or parents/carers with visual impairments. In addition, signs should also use pictorial symbols to assist those with varying reading abilities.

- Play areas will be designed to incorporate an appropriate level of challenge and risk.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Quality Service Performance Officers, TECS/ Play Development Officer/Planning	Number of areas designed which have risk incorporated by Dec 2008
- Highland Council staff with responsibility for play areas will ensure equipment meets the required standards and is suitable for the designated age and stage of children and young people using it.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Community Works Managers TECS/ Planning/ Play Development Officer	All new play areas designed with age and stage of children in mind by Dec 2008
- An appropriate signage system for play areas will be investigated which details the level of challenge/risk in a play environment and provides contacts for emergencies and maintenance.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Play Development Officer/ Community Works Managers, TECS/ Play Highland	Signage strategy investigated by Dec 2010
4.3 Maintenance:			
- To take appropriate risks, play areas must be free of unreasonable hazards including those which arise from poor maintenance.			
- TEC Services personnel responsible for community play areas will ensure maintenance regimes comply with agreed standards.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Community Works Managers, TECS	Annual Dunlop inspection results
4.4 Schools and Early Years Providers			
- Staff face conflicting issues on a daily basis when trying to incorporate curriculum demands and safety. One such conflict is the drive to provide a challenging experience which stimulates enquiry, confidence and independence conflicting with the need to create safe, low risk environments.			
- Education staff will be supported to view risk assessments as a means to providing challenging play while minimising unreasonable hazards.	Play Development Officer, ECS	Senior Early Education Development Officer, ECS/Play Development Officer, ECS/Head Teachers	A generic risk assessment that incorporates challenge as a vital element of play will be made available to all staff by Dec 2008
- Support and advice will be provided through ASC and Sports Development Officers on generic risk assessment for play, sport and activity.	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS	Sports Development Officers, ECS	Number of schools/centres where advice has been provided by Dec 2008
4.5 Free and Imaginative Play			
-Due in the main to parental anxiety about children's safety, free play/unsupervised play has reduced to a ninth of what it was in 1971 (Mayer Hillman). Factors include: 'stranger danger', road traffic, parents working longer hours, bullying concerns, inappropriate play spaces, fewer older siblings to act as escorts and fragmented communities. When children play on their own with peers, they have to evolve their own techniques and rules, a process that allows them to learn through practical experience how to make friends and manage disputes. (Jennifer Cunningham) Free/unsupervised play opportunities should be encouraged, to reflect its importance both in terms of children's development and as a cultural expression.			

<p>- Develop an awareness raising campaign for staff, parents, carers, volunteers & Wellbeing Alliance members to explain the importance of outdoor play, free/unsupervised play, incorporating challenge in play and boisterous play for children.</p>	<p>Play Development Officer, ECS</p>	<p>Quality Development Officer, ECS/Senior Early Education Development Officer, ECS/Senior Childcare and Family Resource Officer</p>	<p>Number of awareness raising opportunities secured by Dec 2008</p>
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OBJECTIVE 5

Ensure that all Highland's children are able to access outdoor activities in most weather conditions to ensure that the foundations for an active lifestyle are established

5.1 Promoting and Protecting Natural Play Environments

- The natural environment is an ideal playground for children and young people. In Highland we are fortunate to boast substantial areas of diverse, accessible countryside and green space. The Scottish Executive recognises these require protection for play, formal recreation and sport and has published the planning policy consultation document SPP11. The document proposes new national minimum standards for open space within new developments and states that every local authority must prepare open space audits.

- Children say they want more opportunities to play out, in stimulating natural spaces where they can have fun, be with their friends and use their imagination. Research shows that children's access to natural play spaces is being seriously compromised, with a negative effect on their physical, mental and emotional health. To compensate for the loss of natural play space, local authorities need to find ways of protecting and developing open and green space to allow children more everyday contact with nature. (Colin Rennie and Marguerite Hunter-Blair, The Scotsman 14/08/06)

- A play area mapping and rationalisation exercise is useful in order to ascertain numbers and quality of existing play areas. This process should not be detrimental to the overall quality and number of play areas.

- New play areas may be provided by utilising a planning bond system whereby housing developers pay an agreed sum for every development out with self-build. However, if this system is to be used to its full advantage, care must be taken to ensure that play provision is given appropriate priority and quality within the scheme and not seen as an add-on to be sited at the area least favoured for housing.

<u>Action Points</u>	<u>Lead Officers</u>	<u>Partner Officers/ Services/Agencies</u>	<u>Measurements and Timescale</u>
<p>Highland Council will audit open space for play, sport and formal recreation as per Scottish Executive directions.</p>	<p>Planning</p>	<p>Play Development Officer/ Green Inverness Officer/ National Playing Fields Assoc</p>	<p>As per Scottish Exec directions</p>
<p>Highland Council will develop policy to protect open and green space to allow more everyday contact with nature and participation in play, sport and recreation.</p>	<p>Planning</p>	<p>Play Development Officer/ Green Inverness Officer/ National Playing Fields Assoc</p>	<p>As per Scottish Exec directions</p>

'The Guidelines for the Provision of Open Space and Play Areas within Residential Developments in Inverness' will be adopted and implemented Highland-wide.	Senior Area Planning Officers	Community Works Managers, TECS/ Play Development Officer	Guidelines adopted by all Highland Areas by Dec 2010
- The Highland Council and partnership agencies will work with private developers to ensure appropriate compliance with the planning bond system.	Senior Area Planning Officers	NPFA/Green Inverness/ Play Development Officer/ Community Works Managers, TECS	NPFA and Green Inverness to be involved in planning bond decisions by Dec 2010
- A basic play provision for a community will be determined including: tarmac and grass play surfaces, formal and informal play spaces, skateboard parks etc.	Play Development Officer	ECS/TECS/Play Highland	Standard established for Highland communities by Dec 2008
- An annual audit of outdoor, formal play areas will be carried out by TEC Services which will also identify which communities are in the process of upgrading existing and developing new play areas.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Play Highland/ECS	Initial audit completed by Dec 2009 and updated annually

5.2 Schools and Early Years Providers:

- The importance of children playing outdoors and experiencing most weather conditions should be safeguarded by all early years centre, primary and secondary staff.
- Schools and Early Years Centres are well placed to emphasise the importance of outdoor play, as they have dedicated time and space within their timetable.
- Sufficient experience in running, climbing and balancing is necessary if children are to learn to read and write successfully.
- Given the choice, many children will opt to play and consequently learn outdoors. Outdoor provision can be viewed as part of the 'whole classroom' with even the most uninspiring area being developed imaginatively to enthuse children, fostering in them a 'thirst for learning.' (Nursery World 14/03/04)
- The outdoor design of schools can greatly affect the quality of play for children attending.
- Schools should be seen as a community play resource which encourages access throughout the year and out-with the traditional school opening hours.
- Grounds for Learning (GFL) the school grounds charity, offers advice on using the outdoors to deliver the curriculum, play equipment suitability, grass cutting and how to get parents involved in projects. All GFL programmes are free to participants and can include benefits such as teaching and learning resources, training and funding. GFL state that with creative thinking and a little spade work, schools can develop a playground which offers a variety of play experiences for children through designing various areas. These can include: a seating area, a garden area, a digging area, a climbing area, wheeled toy area and trying to utilise different surfaces, gradients, colours and even scents where possible.
- The formation of a healthy lifestyle can be aided by playground and on road cycle training for school pupils. - The Highland Council Road Safety Officers, facilitate cycle training at Highland Schools and help disseminate information on the health benefits of pupils cycling to school to pupils, parents and school staff.

<u>Action Points</u>	<u>Lead Officers</u>	<u>Partner Officers/ Services/Agencies</u>	<u>Measurements and Timescale</u>
- Develop and promote a 'Playground Upgrade Pack' for schools.	Play Development Officer,	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS/ Highland Environmental Network	Playground Upgrade pack developed by March 2007 and uptake by Dec 2008
- New Highland schools will be designed taking in to account the advisory guidelines produced by Play Highland (15/05/2003 - 'Outdoor Play Space and PPP.)	PPP Project Officer	Play Development Officer/ Play Highland	All new schools adhering to advisory guidelines by Dec 2006
- The Outdoor Play Policy for early year groups will be reviewed and highlighted in support visits.	Senior Early Education Development Officer, ECS	Nursery Co-ordinator Teachers, ECS/ Highland Pre-School Services	Policy reviewed and no of support visits by Dec 2008
- Children will be encouraged to experience most weather types and will be supported to play outdoors in the rain and wind as well as in fine weather. This will be done through liaising with parents and teaching staff to encourage children to come to school equipped with coats and a change of footwear.	Quality Development Officer, ECS	Play Development Officer/Senior Early Education Development Officer/Head Teachers	Number of settings permitting children to play outdoors in wet weather by Dec 2009
- Schools will be encouraged to facilitate outdoor play by building a stock of outdoor clothes and shoes in addition to sheltered areas so that children can play in the open air with some protection from the weather.	Quality Development Officer, ECS	Play Development Officer/ Head Teachers	Number of schools building a stock of outdoor apparel and shelters by Dec 2009
- The use of a wide range of play equipment within the playground will be advocated and protected by school staff. What is deemed as appropriate equipment to support challenging play will be guided by risk assessment.	Quality Development Officer, ECS	Head Teachers/Active School Co-ordinators/ Play Development Officer, ECS	Number of schools actively advocating the use of a wide range of play equipment by Dec 2008
- Organise training for Playground Supervisors/Classroom Assistants/Auxiliaries and senior pupils to learn about becoming play advocates in the school playground.	Active School Co-ordinators, ECS	Play Development Officer, ECS	Numbers attending training by Dec 2007
- Develop an awareness raising campaign for staff, parents, carers, volunteers & Wellbeing Alliance members to explain the importance of outdoor play, free/unsupervised play, incorporating challenge in play and boisterous play for children.	Play Development Officer, ECS	Quality Development Officer/Senior Early Education Development Officer, ECS/Senior Childcare and Family Resource Officer	Number of awareness raising opportunities secured by Dec 2008
5.3 Maintenance:			
- The maintenance regime in and around formal play areas needs to be continually reviewed taking in to account children's needs.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Quality Service Performance Officers, TECS/ Play Development Officer	Results of Dunlop annual assessment

OBJECTIVE 6

Encourage community involvement in the development and maintenance of play environments

6.1 Community Needs:

- It is vital that relevant Highland Council staff are aware of play needs and aspirations of people in their local area.

<u>Action Point</u>	<u>Lead Officers</u>	<u>Partner Officers/ Services/Agencies</u>	<u>Measurements and Timescale</u>
- Identify key staff that will be contact points for community involvement in play.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Quality Service Performance Officers, TECS/Play Development Officer/Play Highland	Key staff identified by Dec 2006
- Communities will be encouraged to support their play environments and The Highland Council will respond to community involvement informing groups of policy and best practice.	Principal Service Support Officer ECS	Play Development Officer/ Quality Service Performance Officers, TECS/Community Councils	Community monitored by CRM and contacts with QSP's in TECS by Dec 2007
- Key staff dealing with public enquiries about play areas will attend a Play Forum staged by Play Highland, where policy and best practice will be discussed and promoted.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Quality Service Performance Officers, TECS/ Play Development Officer, ECS /Play Highland	Staff numbers attending by Dec 2007
- A 'Community Play Area Upgrade Pack' will be developed as an information source for community groups.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Quality Service Performance Officers, TECS/Play Development Officer/Play Highland	Play area upgrade packs disseminated to relevant staff by Dec 2008

6.2 Funding:

- Funding routes should be made transparent and available to community groups.

- In June 2005, the Highland Council announced that £900,000 of capital funding would be made available for the upgrade of play equipment and surfacing.

- The Play Development Officer will disseminate guidelines and application forms for £100,000 funding available to community groups wishing to upgrade their local play area or skateboard park.	Play Development Officer, ECS	Head of Roads and Community Works, TECS	Total of £100,000 awarded to community groups in Highland by Dec 2007
- Area Committees and TECS staff to determine play areas which will be upgraded via the £900,000 capital funding.	Area Committees	Community Works Managers, TECS/ Play Development Officer/ Principal Service Support Officer	Areas allocated for upgrade decided by Dec 2006
- Funding information and assistance with funding applications will be made available to community groups by Area TEC Services staff.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Quality Service Performance Officers, TECS	No of community groups offered funding info by Dec 2007
<p>6.3 Voluntary Sector:</p> <p>- Relevant staff should be aware that community groups often contact local voluntary organisations first, when wishing to upgrade a play area</p>			
- Voluntary Action Groups throughout the Highlands will be made aware of the policy 'Adoption of Play Equipment provided through Community Funded Projects' and the Community Play Area Upgrade Pack.	Principal Service Support Officer (Specification) TECS	Quality Service Performance Officers, TECS/Childcare and Family Resource Partnerships/ Play Development Officer	No of Vol. Orgs sent a copy of the documents by Dec 2008

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