

Cannock Chase Council

Play Strategy 2007-2012

Making a difference - Through Play

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Cannock Chase Council

Making a difference - through play

1. Background

This Strategy sets out our commitment to play within the District of Cannock Chase and recognises the potential and value of play in supporting all children to have fun, to extend their learning potential and to fulfil their healthy development.

The Strategy provides the direction for the future; it identifies the national and local play context alongside the underlying principles of quality play provision, and sets out the priorities for the planning and delivery of play, identifying strategic links and partners

It builds upon previous work, reviews and evaluations undertaken by Cannock Chase Council, and it also draws upon guidelines produced by the Children's Play Council.

The Play Strategy will be underpinned by the overarching vision for Children and Young People's Service in Staffordshire:

"Children, young people and their families experience Staffordshire as a great place to live, play, learn and achieve in, and that they will be supported to be healthy and safe from harm."

Staffordshire Children and Young Peoples Plan April 2006

The following high-level priorities of the Children and Young People's Plan, Local Children's and Young People's Trust and Every Child Matters legislation will also help guide the Play Strategy, these are:

- Be healthy;
- Staying safe;
- Enjoying & achieving;
- Making a positive contribution;
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

The development and implementation of this Play Strategy will require strong linkages with other plans and strategies; its success and sustainability will depend on developing improved practice and partnership with employees and stakeholders who have responsibilities for services relevant to play.

Cannock Chase Council have led in the formulation of The Chase Community Sports Network and Play Partnership (Terms of Reference at Appendix 1) and will champion the right to play and bring together key services from all sectors to develop and support play activities and provision. The central focus of the

Partnership and the Strategy will be the involvement and participation of children and young people. Indeed, one of the key strategic priorities is to “improve the engagement and involvement of children, young people and families in the delivery and design of play activities and provision”.

It is recognised that this Strategy will need to evolve as it responds to the changing local and regional needs, new information, legislation and greater involvement by key stakeholders over the next 5 years. The dynamic nature of the document will be achieved by regular reviews and annual evaluation of targets, and through the process of adapting priorities to respond to the changing needs and circumstances of children, young people and our communities.

The Chase Community Sports Network and Play Partnership recognises 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 occasion to support it and create an environment that fosters it. Decision making at all levels of government should include an impact of those decisions on children’s opportunities to play”.

Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy

2. Definitions of Play

The Children's Play Council definition of play is:

***“Play is an essential part of every child’s life and vital to their development. It is the way children explore the world around them and develop and practice skills. It is essential for physical, emotional and spiritual growth, for intellectual and educational development, and for acquiring social and behavioural skills. Play is a generic term applied to a wide range of activities and behaviours that are satisfying to the child, creative for the child and freely chosen by the child. Children’s play may or may not involve equipment or have an end product. Children play on their own and with others. Their play may be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, light-hearted or very serious.*”**

In order to establish an effective Strategy for Play it is important to have a common and agreed understanding of play and its importance.

There are a number of additional definitions now used by play practitioners, academics and organisations and these create useful foundation stones for this strategy.

“Play is freely chosen; personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child ... Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter.”

Best Play 2000

“Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons.”

Getting Serious About Play 2004

“Play is intrinsic to children’s quality of life: it is how they enjoy themselves. It is also a key component of a healthy lifestyle enabling good physical, emotional mental and social development. Strong, vibrant communities have at their heart a variety of places to play. Children and young people should feel confident and safe to play freely –indoors and out-in a manner appropriate to their needs and interests.”

Children’s Play Council Briefing 4 2005

“The right to play is a child's first claim on the community. Play is nature's training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing deep and enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens.”

David Lloyd George

The concept of play can appear a vague one. It could include games, art, drama, singing, dancing, tree climbing, knock and run, collecting things, board games, talking, and playing alone, with an imaginary friend or in groups. The possibilities are endless and the same activity could be classified as play one minute and not the next!

Consider the game of cricket in the street with friends and compare this with the coaching session at the local cricket club. Does this leave you confused about play? It may help to think about the definition of play as “freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated”.

Play is different from the structured cultural activities like sports, art, music and dance. It is what children and young people do, with space to use, in their free time, in their own way, for their own reasons. Play has no external goal outcome, reward or goal but it has an intrinsic value to children’s development, with the process being more important than the end result. The crucial component of play is that it is under children’s control.

The key criteria for play are embodied in “The Three Frees” which state:

Play should be: Free of charge
Children should be: Free to come and go
Children should be: Free to choose

Cannock Chase Council will, with its partners endeavour to meet these criteria through the actions within this strategy.

3. The seven ‘Best Play’ objectives

The seven ‘Best Play’ objectives set out how the definition of play and the underpinning values and principles should be put into practice. They form the basis against which play provision can be evaluated. Our play provision and that which we support will work to these objectives;

Objective One: extends the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.

Objective Two: recognises the child's need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need.

Objective Three: manages the balance between children and young people’s need and want to play and the need to keep them from being exposed to unacceptable risks of life threatening or permanently disabling injury.

Objective Four: maximises the range of play opportunities.

Objective Five: fosters independence and self-esteem.

Objective Six: fosters children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.

Objective Seven: fosters the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.

4. Enriching Play – A Quality & Challenging Environment

We want to create play opportunities that children and young people can enjoy, which offer challenge and variety, and enable interaction, movement and stimulation.

When planning, designing and maintaining supervised or non-staffed places where children and young people play, or should be able to play, we will take into account the following guidelines published in 'Best Play: what play should do for children':

A varied and interesting environment. Examples: things at different levels, spaces of different sizes, places to hide, trees and bushes, open spaces, made things, places to inspire mystery and imagination.

Challenge in relation to the physical environment. Examples: activities which test the limits of capabilities, rough and tumble, sports and games, chase.

Experiencing the natural elements - earth, water, fire, air. Examples: campfires, digging, playing snowballs, flying kites.

Movement - e.g. running, jumping, rolling, climbing, balancing. Examples: beams and ropes, soft mats, bike riding, juggling equipment, ladders, space.

Manipulating natural and fabricated materials. Examples: materials for art, cooking, making and mending of all kinds; building dens; making concoctions; using tools; access to bits and pieces of all kinds.

Stimulation of the five senses. Examples: music making, places where shouting is fine, quiet places, different colours and shapes, dark and bright places, cooking on a campfire, rotting leaves, a range of food and drink, objects that are soft, prickly, flexible, large and small.

Experiencing change in the natural and built environment. Examples: experiencing the seasons through access to the outdoor environment; opportunities to take part in building, demolishing, or transforming the environment.

Social interactions. Examples: being able to choose whether and when to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, compete and resolve conflicts. Being able to interact with individuals and groups of different ages, abilities, interests, gender, ethnicity and culture.

Exploring identity. Examples: dressing up, role play, performing, taking on different kinds of responsibility.

Experiencing a range of emotions. Examples: opportunities to be powerful/powerless, scared/confident, like/disliked, in/out of control, brave/cowardly.

Decisions about what constitutes a quality play environment too often assume that play equipment, usage levels and children's apparent enjoyment of the facilities on offer is synonymous with quality play opportunities.

By working with other providers and partners we will broaden the choice and range of the play environment. For example we will build on our existing and excellent partnership with the Forestry Commission to maximise the use of Cannock Chase Forest and Heathland as a healthy play resource.

This kind of approach will help to facilitate a greater diversity of opportunities with emphasis on the natural environment, natural materials and play-friendly art works and structures.

5. The Benefits of Play

There is a multitude of research that demonstrates that play is central to children's healthy development and quality of life. It is a key element in supporting healthy life-styles and enables good physical, emotional, mental and social development.

Play can have a positive impact on the lives of children by:

- supporting learning;
- improving health and well-being;
- developing social skills;
- promoting physical fitness;
- encouraging confidence and self-esteem;
- promoting emotional well-being;
- developing conflict resolution skills;
- developing skills in assessing risk;

- developing creativity;
- developing skills in problem-solving;
- developing team-work skills and co-operation;
- increasing abilities to make decisions.

Play is not only beneficial to children, but it can have a huge impact on adults, families and communities by:

- reducing stress within families;
- enabling adults and children to participate in enjoyable activities together and supporting family learning;
- creating safer communities through keeping children and young people safe and by diverting some of them from engaging in anti-social behaviour;
- encouraging social cohesion and social inclusion;
- creating volunteering, training and employment opportunities for those living in the local community.

6. Barriers to Play

Barriers in Cannock Chase District

A M.O.R.I. Survey across Cannock Chase District in 2003, which identified that 'activities for young people' was the single most requested improvement in local services according to adults.

Across the Cannock Chase District there are pockets of severe deprivation (see 11.3 Indices of deprivation). Whilst being tackled through the work of the Council and its partners in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), deprivation levels still serve to exclude many young people from enjoying play provision,

Barriers range from mobility and cost to communication. For example the urban rural split – 60% of the district is rural means that public transport is not universally available; the result of the demise of the coal industry means many parents are still unemployed and in receipt of benefit; there are many children in the district who have very low educational attainment levels, with high levels of illiteracy amongst the adult population – often the parents of these children – and traditional printed methods of communicating the range of services is not always successful.

We recognise the many barriers and through the activities detailed in the Strategic Action Plan we will be working to reduce and wherever possible remove these.

Parents' anxieties

Even for the children of financially secure parents there are many things that can interfere with their rights to play. Today, opportunities for children to play are significantly restricted, despite the growing recognition of the importance of play.

"The overwhelming cry from both parents and young people is around the lack of activities and facilities... the thing they say would most improve family life is the provision of places to go and things to do... where they can spend their leisure time with their friends."

(Margaret Hodge, Minister for Children and Families, January 2005)

Parents' anxieties about stranger danger, bullying, child abuse and other crime, limit children and young people's lives and prevent them from exploring their neighbourhood and environments.

"Many children appear to have less time being physically active because of the increase in car use and heightened concern about the potential risks of unsupervised play outdoors."

Government White Paper, Choosing Health (2004)

This fear of crime reduces opportunities for play in Cannock Chase as local research shows:

"Overall 47% of people are either very afraid or afraid of becoming a victim of crime..... with females tending to be very afraid."

The State of Cannock Chase Report Volume 2 Perception Data (2004)

Lack of mobility and freedom

There is a dramatic decrease in children and young people's independent mobility and this has a major impact on access to play opportunities. The proportion of seven and eight-year-olds walking unaccompanied to school fell from 80% in 1971 to 9% in 1990 (One False Move: A Study of Children's Independent Mobility 1990).

The Childhood, Urban Space and Citizenship: child-sensitive urban regeneration study (2000), found that parents allow children to play outside more when traffic is slower and also that the fear of abduction was more of an effect of children not being allowed to play outdoors than its cause.

Children may not always have the freedom to experience a full range of play opportunities, including risky and challenging activities, due to a fear of safety and a litigious society. The growth of 'no win, no fee' culture and a fear of litigation has led to many examples of children's play being restricted, including not playing in snow, not making daisy chains, wearing face masks to play conkers and the removal of play equipment.

“Sensible health and safety is about managing risks, not eliminating them all. HSE is not in the business of stamping out simple pleasures wherever they appear and at whatever cost. We recognise the benefits to children’s development of play, which necessarily involves some risk, and this shouldn’t be sacrificed in the pursuit of the unachievable goal of absolute safety.”

Health and Safety Executive, 2005

Through this Strategy the Council’s Culture and Leisure teams will work with its Economic Regeneration and Planning teams to identify funding to improve the location, quality and quantity of play provision within new and existing developments through, for example, the targeted use of Section 106 monies and European funding.

Poverty

Poverty has a huge impact on access to play opportunities. A report by Barnardo’s, *Playing it safe – Today’s Children at Play* concluded that:

“Children who live in areas of high deprivation are more likely to be denied the opportunity to have play experiences which are both exciting and relatively safe. Parents on low incomes have little choice but to keep their children restricted, with consequences for their future health and development”.

It is recognised that this is a barrier to play in Cannock Chase and, for the last four years, through our Children’s Fund “CHASE IT” programme, we have been working closely with partners to provide a fully inclusive range of activities for children from families in receipt of benefit, low income families, those with little or access to public transport

We are currently exploring ways of extending this scheme and by making a bid to the BIG Lottery we would be able to run a separate free play programme for children and young people across the district, in partnership with the CLP and LSP partners

Lack of tolerance

Lack of tolerance of children and young people, by many adults, can also restrict the development of play opportunities and play space at a community level. Groups of children and young people hanging around on streets are often perceived as a threat even when they are simply enjoying themselves. In play surveys children often complain about being told off for playing outdoors and state they do not feel welcome in public spaces.

“If we want young people to flourish and if we want to divert (them) from anti-social behaviour, thinking about what the community can provide really counts.

Some adults perceive teenagers on the streets as a problem and teenagers want safe spaces to hang out. Surely we must somehow be able to square that circle”.

Margaret Hodge, Minister for Children and Families 2005.

We will harness the combined resources of the LSP, CLP and our partners in the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and Youth Services, to work with children and young people to raise the profile of play and endeavour to change peoples’ perceptions of children and young people gathering together.

Cultures, Attitudes and Prejudice

There are many examples, which demonstrate that inequalities exist in relation to the take up of play opportunities by girls and young women particularly in outdoor play. Parental attitudes and fears lead to girls having less freedom to roam and therefore less access to the same play opportunities afforded to boys.

Children with learning difficulties and disabilities also face significant barriers to play. Negative attitudes and inaccessible physical environments, added to parent’s worries of bullying and concerns for safety; create enormous barriers for children with disabilities to enjoy play spaces.

“Enabling all children to play, and to play together, is about a benefit to the whole community. It is not about overcoming legal hurdles or making expensive provision for a small section of the community. If any child is prevented from playing then it diminishes the play experience of all.”

Whewey & John, Can Play Will Play, NPFA, 2004

Through this Strategy we will work to raise the profile of play and communicate its importance to all our partners and the local community.

7. Impact of Play Deprivation

Exclusion from play can lead to the concept of play deprivation. This may arise if children do not have access to a broad range of quality play opportunities. A range of research suggests that this has a huge negative impact on children’s development and could include the following:

- poor ability in motor tasks;
- lower levels of physical activity;
- childhood obesity;
- limited ability to deal with stressful or traumatic situations or events;
- lack of coping skills e.g. conflict and bullying;
- poor ability to assess and manage risk;
- limited social skills;
- less knowledge and awareness of the wider world;
- low tolerance levels of individual differences.

Through this strategy this Council will work with partners, such as Sure Start and the Staffordshire Youth Service to support the children of the district in transition from childhood to adulthood. In this way we will be able to embed play as a natural and important part of growing up.

8. Values and Principles

Since children and young people are the main beneficiaries of our Strategic Action Plan, we will be guided by the following values and principles for children and young people that are:

- entitled to respect for their own unique combination of qualities and capabilities.
- should have their opinions and reactions taken into account.
- are part of, and contribute to, the cultural life of their communities.
- have a right to be seen, heard and provided for in shared public space to the same degree as adults.
- have a right to play environments that offer challenge, stimulation and delight but are free from unacceptable levels of risk.
- must see the connection between stated policy and what actually happens so that they feel part of a community of trust and co-operation.
- should be able to take control of their own play activity, enriching their experience and enhancing their development.

9. Rights of the Child

As a partnership with we endorse Articles 12 and 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and will try to empower children and help them increase their choices wherever possible.

Their views shall be taken into account when making decisions about play opportunities.

Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 states

‘...all children have the right to express views on all matters of concern to them and to have those views taken seriously’

Article 31, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 states:

‘State 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 ...’

Through this strategy we will improve the engagement and involvement of children, young people and families in the delivery and design of play activities and provision.

10. National Context

Increasingly, play is recognised as being important not only in its own right but also for the contribution it can make to other strategic programmes and plans.

Within the Every Child Matters Framework and Change for Children programme, the government identifies the enjoyment of recreation including play, as a key outcome to be considered in the planning and implementation processes of the Children and Young People’s Plan.

The National Childcare Strategy identifies the Extended Schools Initiative as a key vehicle for promoting play opportunities with expectations that school grounds and premises become open for out of school activities including children’s play.

Early Years and Childcare partnerships have been issued guidance and encouraged by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to promote play as an integral part of childcare plans stating that:

“Partnerships have a crucial role in the promotion and development of good quality play opportunities.”

Play and recreation are important factors in the development of healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities. There is increasingly a need to focus on play in regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and green space plans. Also, open space is a significant cultural resource and children’s play is a distinct activity for inclusion in local cultural strategies.

At a regional level the Regional Forum for Extended Schools may also bring a greater degree of influence over the opening up of schools for play provision.

11. Local Context

11.1 The Profile of Cannock Chase

Cannock Chase District Council is situated on the fringe of the West Midlands conurbation in the south, extending through the Cannock Chase Area of

Outstanding Natural Beauty, to the River Trent flood plain in the north covering 7,800 hectares.

Many of the towns and communities developed because of Coal Mining, 40% of the District can be described as urban. The Cannock Chase Forest separates the old industrial urban areas with 60% of the District being Green Belt; a large proportion of which is also within the AONB (3,008 hectares).

11.2 Social and Demographic Change

The District has an estimated population of 93,300 (mid 2002 Population Estimates, Office for National Statistics), which is evenly split by gender. The Office for National Statistics population projections suggests the District's population will increase to 95,100 by 2010.

. Mid 2002 population estimates indicate that: -

- 21% of the population is aged fewer than 16.
- 63% are of working age.
- Just 16% of residents are aged over 60 for females and 65 for males (although this age group is increasing).

The District's relatively youthful age structure means that provision of play facilities and activities continues to be a key priority for this Council. Current capital programme expenditure on upgrading and provision of parks open spaces and play areas is just over £1million pounds.

11.3 Deprivation - The English Indices of Deprivation 2004 (IOD2004)

Cannock Chase is the most deprived local authority in Staffordshire (excluding Stoke-on-Trent) in respect of its average score of 20.25. It therefore features at 134th out of 354 local authorities making it within the 38% of most deprived local authorities in England.

The District ranks 10th most deprived in the West Midland Region, ranking within the 29% most deprived local authorities.

It is the 3rd worst income deprived Local Authority in Staffordshire with 11,289 income-deprived persons, representing 12% of the District's population.

Employment deprived persons number 6,104, representing 11% of the working age population, leaving Cannock Chase ranking as the 2nd most deprived LA in Staffordshire (excluding S-o-T).

11.3.1 The indices of Multiple Deprivation and Small Area Index

A more detailed picture of deprivation has been built up by Cannock Chase Council's Research team and is published in a Document entitled "The State of Cannock Chase". In addition to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, this document also enables the drilling down to pinpoint smaller areas of deprivation, known as Lower Super Output Areas. Cannock Chase Council uses these indices to inform all its service planning and provision.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD2004) is the overarching indicator of deprivation, beneath this are 7 deprivation domains; Income, Employment, Health and Disability, Education Skills and Training, Barriers to Housing and Services, Crime and the Living Environment.

In addition, two indices – Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index and Income Affecting Older People Index have been developed. These are separate to the IMD but have been compiled using data contained within the index.

The small area index is based upon 37 indicators of deprivation. Whereas the Indices of Deprivation 2000 was based upon 15 wards, the 2004 index is based upon 60 Lower Super Output Areas (SOAs) providing a much more detailed picture of deprivation.

Whilst this level of detail already informs our provision of services for local children, we are aware that the Department of Communities and Local Government proposes the introduction of a Child Wellbeing index in late 2007. This will provide evidence of wellbeing and economic deprivation, material wellbeing of children, child health, educational attainment, crime, victimisation, housing, environment, access and children in need.

This will enable us to further target our services and provision into areas of greatest need.

11.3.2 Lower Super Output Areas (Lower SOAs)

The District has 12 Lower SOAs, which rank within the worst quartile (25%) in England. These are spread across 8 of the District's wards:

- Cannock North (3 Lower SOAs)
- Etchinghill and the Heath
- Hednesford North
- Norton Canes
- Cannock East (2 Lower SOAs)
- Cannock South (2 Lower SOAs)
- Hagley

- Brereton and Ravenhill

11.3.3 Deprivation Themes

The points below set out the geographical coverage of deprivation ranking within the worst quartile in England, within the Cannock Chase District:

- Education, skills and training deprivation has the greatest geographical coverage, covering just half the District's Lower SOAs.
- Employment is a close second within 43% of the District's SOAs.
- Health deprivation covers just under a third of the District
- Income deprivation affecting older people affects 27% of the District's SOAs
- Income Deprivation for all people 20%
- Income deprivation affecting children 17%.

This latter point impacts on children's ability to access play provision. It is for this reason that we are currently working with the Community Sports Network and Play Partnership CLP, LSP and other partners to widen provision across the district, by developing a cluster model for play based around the districts schools.

It is envisaged that we will establish a team of Play Rangers to work in schools raising awareness of the value of and opportunities for play across the district. We intend to make a bid to the BIG Lottery in order to pump prime this activity.

11.4. Strategic Links and Key considerations

A number of drivers exist for the development of play at a national level but there are also a number of local drivers, which need to be considered within this strategy. A key consideration will be to ensure that play is considered alongside other district-wide strategies.

11.4.1 Corporate Plan 2006 – 2009

The District Council has recently established its Locality Board for Children and Young People and reorganised its Cabinet Portfolios to include Children & Young

People as a discrete area of work, reflecting the growing importance of the subject area at the District Council.

The Council's Corporate Priorities are embodied in the CHASE acronym:

Children and Young People
Healthy Communities, Housing and Older People
Access to Skills, Economic Development and Enterprise
Safer Stronger Communities
Environmental cleanliness, safety and sustainability

The Corporate Plan identifies a number of priorities and subsequent actions for the District that the successful implementation of the Play Strategy could impact influence:

- Increasing participation in cultural and sporting activities.
- Developing a healthy community.
- A vibrant economy, a job for everyone and learning opportunities for all.
- Reducing inequalities.
- A clean, safe and sustainable environment.

11.4.2 Children and Young People's Plan

The Every Child Matters framework has led to the development of Children and Young People's Services; play can impact significantly on each of the following outcomes:

- Being healthy;
- Staying safe;
- Enjoying and achieving;
- Making a positive contribution;
- Achieving economic well being;

11.4.3 Local Area Agreement

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) has prioritised outcomes, which will make a real difference to the residents of Cannock Chase and through focusing on the objectives and outcomes we will continue to transform the District.

Implementation of the Play Strategy will assist in the delivery of the five LAA blocks and their priorities.

- Children and Young People.
- Safer and Stronger Communities.
- Healthier Communities and Older People.
- Economic Development and Enterprise.
- Sustainable Development.

The Play Strategy will embed the LAA priorities and actions as central themes and priorities, while it is also important to attempt to embed play within local area agreements.

11.4.4 Housing Developments

It is important again at this point to consider play in its widest form of streets and open spaces and not just play areas. The Children's Play Council Manifesto for Play calls for:

“A major focus on local streets, neighbourhoods, parks and open spaces, to make them safe, attractive play places for children and young people.”

This also means a consideration in future of the creative use of section 106 planning gain agreements and a change in thinking within all services will be required to make a difference for children and young people's play opportunities in the long term.

11.4.5 Safer Communities

The Local Strategic Partnership has identified 5 key priorities for the District:

- Less Crime
- More Visible Policing
- A reduction in anti-social behaviour
- To feel safer
- Safer roads

Play provision in its most simplistic form can be viewed as diversionary activities or spaces. Playwork can have a huge impact on crime statistics by engaging children and young people in purposeful and enjoyable activities. It can also play a part in challenging and forming young people's behaviour and views. The positive relationships and trust, which can develop between playworkers and children, can support improved behaviour in the long term.

11.4.6 Children's and Young People's Health and well-being

Health and well-being are huge concerns both nationally and across the district in relation to childhood obesity, mental health, teenage pregnancies and drug use.

At a national level, for example, the study by the Centre for Transport Studies at the University College London found that:

“Children get more physical activity from kicking a ball around in the park or playground than from PE lessons. The effort of unstructured play burns more calories than the average 70 minutes a week of formal games that pupils get in schools”.

The Mental Health Foundation also stated that:

“The increasingly limited amounts of time children have to play outside or to attend supervised play projects is a causative factor in the rise of mental ill-health in young people”.

Cannock Chase Council is a Beacon Authority for Healthier Communities and has a successful track record of using innovative methods of engaging children and young people in the health agenda. It has been highly commended for its work in using the Arts as a tool for community engagement around the issues of Healthy Eating (with Sure Start) teenage pregnancy, smoking, sexual and mental health and physical activity in partnership with the Forestry Commission and South Staffordshire PCT.

As a local authority we are committed, though a PSA target set in 2004, to “Halt the year-on-year rise in obesity among children under 11 by 2010 in the context of a broader strategy to tackle obesity in the population as a whole” (See Appendix 2 for Childhood Obesity – Local Epidemiology)

As such, the Authority is ideally placed to ensure that the fun and informal education aspects, which form the very basics of play, are used in promoting both healthy lifestyles, for both children and adults and assisting in the meeting of the above PSA target.

Indeed, the South Staffordshire PCT continues to support the Council in the local delivery of “Choosing Health”, by funding a range of health issue based Arts activities in the district, many of which fall into the category of play

Our successful track record over the last 4 years of delivering the Children’s Fund funded CHASE IT scheme for 5 –13 year olds, has meant that we are experienced in using many of our play and fun activities to deliver health messages. For example PCT dieticians have working on our play schemes to promote healthy lunchboxes and the benefits of physical activity. One our existing CHASE IT leaders posts is a dedicated healthy lifestyle co-ordinator.

We have adopted an integrated approach to delivery using not only our Arts Development Team, but also our Sports Development and CHASE IT teams, and have existing and strong partnership with the Schools Sports Partnership including delivery of our Out of School Hours Learning activities

11.4.7 Cultural Strategy

The Cannock Chase Cultural Strategy 2007-2010 seeks to maximise the opportunities, which result from having a co-ordinated approach to the development of cultural facilities and services for residents across the district.

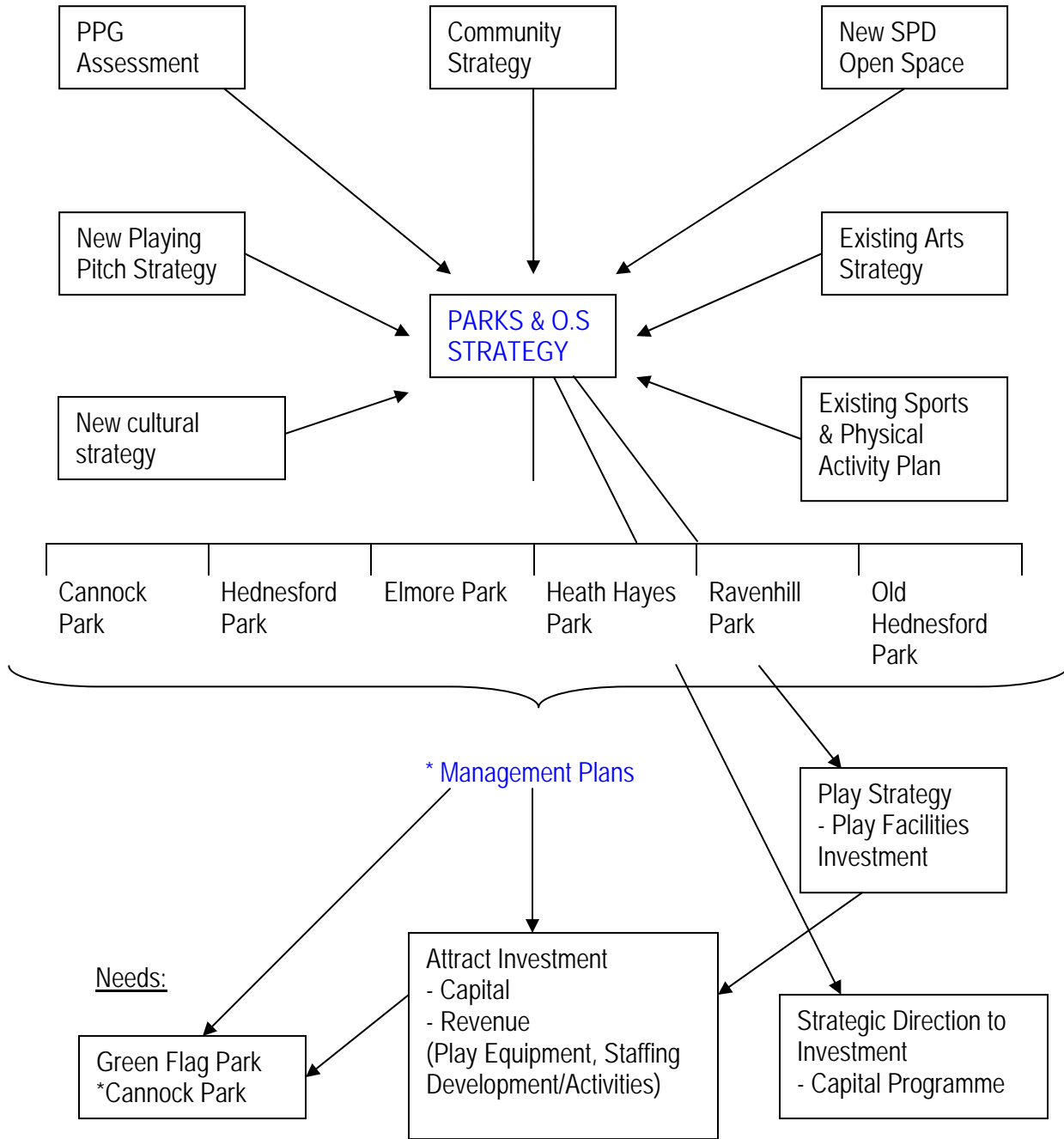
It further seeks to offer direction to all local cultural provides through the whole district and ensure the full potential for developing culture is realised by:

- Developing a shared vision for the development of cultural opportunities across the district
- Maximising existing resources and promote their effective use to develop cultural opportunities to benefit Cannock Chase
- Encouraging a co-ordinated approach to the development of cultural provision
- Encouraging debate about local cultural provision and needs

The overarching aims are to:

- Protect and enhance the environment
- Enhance economic prosperity
- Assist individual and community development
- Promote good practice
- Improve access to cultural activities
- Develop effective partnerships
- Maximise available resources
- Increase and broaden participation
- Develop a network of facilities to accommodate cultural activity
- Protect and enhance the natural and built heritage
- Encourage development of cultural events and festivals
- Develop cultural activity to support personal, community and economic development
- Promote and publicise culture
- Demonstrate the value of culture

Fig 1. Cultural Strategy and its strategic fit with wider strategies and management plans currently under development



12. Local Background for Play

12.1 Chase Sport and Play Partnership

Chase Community Sports Network and Play Partnership evolved as a result of a comprehensive consultation exercise between the major play and sport providers. There was an impetus to create a play partnership and a community sports partnership. Consideration for the formation and development of these two bodies coincided and at the initial meeting all partners unanimously agreed to have one group rather than two separate groups.

It was also agreed at the initial meeting that sub groups would evolve to deal with the differing aspects of work, but it was equally important that the two main areas of work remained close together as there were significant benefits to be gained.

The following organisations were represented at the initial steering group of the Chase Play and Sport Partnership and will remain as partners leading on both play and sport:

- Community Learning Partnership
- Play England
- County Sports Partnership
- South Staffordshire PCT
- Staffordshire Police
- Cannock Chase Community Volunteer Service
- Cannock Chase District Council
- School Sports Partnership
- Age Concern
- Staffordshire County Council
 - Youth Service
 - Staffordshire Early Years & Childcare
 - Extended Years Coordinator

Support has been available throughout the process of developing the strategy and the Chase Sport and Play Partnership from both Play England and CAGE Space.

The Community Sports Network and Play Partnership will report to the District Locality Board to help raise the profile of play and to improve coordination of play work across the district.

12.2 District Needs

12.2.1 Research and Consultation

A range of research and consultation has been undertaken and continues to take place to identify gaps in provision and also good practice, which can be built upon.

A full audit and needs assessment of Parks and Open spaces has been undertaken by this council as part of its work on PPG 17 to prepare the Green Space Strategy and Indoor Facilities Report and to begin work on Parks development and management plans.

As part of this work the Youth Parliament was consulted at a meeting chaired by Dr. Tony Wright MP for Cannock Chase.

We have also been working with a group of young people to undertake a consultation exercise in our local parks. This involved the young people working with a local film company to produce a DVD about a day in the life of the parks. The finished film will inform future parks management and development plans

As part of CHASE IT we carry out ongoing evaluation and consultation exercises to ensure that participants' views and wants are taken into account when planning new activities. A sample Satisfaction sheet from CHASE IT is attached at Appendix 3.

We consult local people through our Citizens' Panel and use the annual Local Democracy Week as a vehicle for consulting children and young people: for example over 200 children were consulted in order to ascertain their views on a major new play area.

As stated at point 11.3.2 we use the "State of Cannock Chase" to enable us to target our CHASE IT activities at the greatest area of deprivation within certain wards

The Arts Development Officer is currently working with our Housing Service and the Beth Johnson Housing Association, using the Arts as a tool to break down barriers to engagement with a group of hard to reach young people, in order to gain their views and incorporate these into provision within a new joint management housing development

Research into the play needs of the District was also undertaken by Staffordshire County Council as part of the formulation of the County Council Play Strategy.

Information gained through CHASE IT work has revealed gaps in provision for children with special needs

We have used “Playtrain” to train a team of young consultants to carry out work at the Museum of Cannock Chase, the findings of which we used to introduce a Toys and Games Gallery and to inform our Toys and Games Education Pack.

12.2.2 Gaps in provision.

The County Council’s research identified Preschool care as being in quite a healthy state across the district supported by Sure Start, with the over 12’s being identified as the age group targeted by Staffordshire Youth Service.

The County Council’s research highlighted gaps mainly around holiday, weekend and twilight provision for the 8 – 12 year olds. The need for a holiday play service was also an area that was specifically highlighted

In addition to our CHASE IT programme there is another widely recognised and respected group providing activities in Norton Canes – KONCAS (Kids of Norton Canes Activity Scheme) provides holiday activities within that area, but there needs to be a wider provision for the district as a whole

Research work undertaken as part of the audit of green spaces for the Open Spaces Strategy identified a lack of open spaces generally across the district, but specifically in areas where deprivation was most prevalent.

The Key recommendations relating to Children and Young People arising from the Green Spaces Strategy work were as follows:

- Improve provision for young people and toddlers through a wider range equipment
- Introduce equipment that caters for children and young people with disabilities
- Introduce signage on all sites with site details and contact numbers
- Increase maintenance improvements
- Remove evidence of vandalism quickly
- Involve children and young people in the design and choice of provision
- Develop a strategy for young people’s provision that provides a balance between active and passive space that is formal, well designed and provided in areas that are safe for young people whilst not causing a nuisance for residents.
- Aim to provide good quality sites as a minimum

The CHASE IT’ programme currently offers the 5-13 age group a range of trips around the West Midlands and also activities based at the Council’s major facilities. However, whilst some of these activities are offered free for Children with access issues, under the Children’s Fund criteria, we do charge for other activities within the programme.

Cannock is fortunate to have within its district “SNAP” a Special Needs Adventure Playground that specifically caters for the play needs of disabled children, but a fee is charged to this service. Through our CHASE IT programme we can only offer some free tailor made activities for those with special needs.

We need to undertake more consultation with children and young people as our Citizens’ Panel does not capture the views of children or young people under the age of 16, and so reflects adult perceptions of what children need. We also know from our Citizen’s Panel that only 27% of respondents heard about CHASE IT in schools.

12.2.3.Closing the gaps

We have begun to close gaps in Council provision through CHASE IT, our Capital Programme Scheme to improve play provision and parks and open spaces and Out of School Hours Learning work etc.

It is expected that the Community Sports Network and Play Partnership will enable us to work with partners to *“widen and develop play opportunities and activities cross the district maximising local resources and ensuring quality provision”*

Our extensive local knowledge gained from delivering and working with partners; for example the Primary Care Trust and Sure Start, (list of current partners at Appendix 4) confirms that many children and parents do not know how to play, and in many cases where to play.

Through our Strategic Action Plan, where it is not possible to provide new open spaces, we intend to provide activities on other sites, particularly school play grounds, to encourage children and young people and their families to re-engage with play, in their parks and open spaces - *“developing a cluster approach to play development through working with schools, parents and organisations in local areas”*.

Across the wider district there have been less opportunities for disabled children young people to engage in play activities. Another of our strategic priorities will be *“to ensure that children and young people with disabilities are further enabled to access play opportunities, services and facilities. We will strengthen our partnership with SNAP, the districts two special schools and the voluntary sector.*

Through our Leisure Development work we have identified and worked with a range of Voluntary sector partners, to ensure a range of opportunities for children and young people and skills development and accreditation (previous case studies at Appendix 5)

There is a range of Private sector play provision within the district; this ranges from play barns attached to public houses to private cycle hire firms on Cannock Chase. Where the latter type of organisations can assist us in delivering our objectives we may commission them to provide services for some of our play work, For example “Kids on Bikes”, Horse riding, Go-Karting etc.

It is our intention through the implementation of The Play Strategy, particularly through our proposed CHASE IT – PLAY project, to build upon the success of the current CHASE IT brand and programme. We will offer free play activities through extended schools and out of school activities, working with partners and organisations within defined cluster groups. This will enable us to access areas where we can best engage with our target age group, build new partnerships and create capacity to provide play opportunities. (Full details of our CHASE IT - PLAY project proposal to the BIG Lottery Fund can be seen section 15).

Through targeting primary school age children CHASE IT - PLAY will, by supporting children and young people in transition, close the gap in provision between Sure Start and Staffordshire Youth Service.

Through CHASE IT – PLAY we intend to raise the profile and importance of play to everyone in the district. We wish to celebrate what we already do well and disseminate our best practice amongst partners and stakeholders.

Building on our Beacon strengths we will ensure play is part of the healthy development of local children. We want to establish aspirational and culturally diverse festivals and events, creating new challenging and exciting spaces. We hope to offer employment opportunities for local people through our proposals for Play Rangers; we will provide consistent equality practice and play work training. We will consolidate and improve consultation, and engagement with children and young people.

12.3 Inclusion and Equality

Cannock Chase Council is committed to inclusion and equality.

The Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) Community within Cannock Chase is very small representing 1.4 per cent of the total population. Through this Play Strategy we will work with a range of partners to raise awareness of diversity and to celebrate different cultures.

We will highlight targeted groups and areas of disadvantage throughout the district to ensure inclusion and equality of access to play opportunities.

As part of any new capital or revenue investment in any service we will undertake extensive impact assessments and monitoring, as part of the corporate equality policy.

13 Workforce Development

Cannock Chase District Council is committed to workforce development and is a registered Investor in People. We will recognise the following qualifications available to individuals working in the play sector:

- Take 5 for Play – Volunteers
- NVQ Level 2 in Play work – Assistant play worker, play worker, holiday play scheme worker
- NVQ Level 3 in Play work – Senior Play worker/co-coordinator, play work leader
- NVQ Level 4 in Play work – Play work manager, play work development officer.

We will encourage and support all staff working in the play environment to gain or hold play qualifications, and we will actively encourage volunteers to develop their skills and qualifications through training.

We will seek partners, such as Cannock Chase College, with whom we can work to develop courses which use play as an access route to employment; replicating our success in establishing accredited courses in “Arts and Health” and “Cultural Heritage”.

There are several groups of workers around the District who interface with local children and young people and it is proposed to offer training in conflict resolution to them:

- Park Keepers
- Community Support Officers
- Street Wardens
- Arts Development Team
- Sports Development Team
- Countryside Rangers
- Local clubs and associations
-

This training will raise the awareness of the needs of children and young people and encourage them to use parks and open spaces to play.

14. The Cannock Chase Play Strategy

14.1 Our mission statement is “To make a difference through play”

14.2 Strategic Aim

Our strategic aim is over the five years of this strategy, to work in partnership to improve the quality of, and extend the quantity of, play provision and opportunities across the district.

This aim supports the Council’s Corporate Vision that is:

“ By 2015, Cannock Chase District will be recognised as a place where everyone’s lives are enriched by a strong cultural identity, vibrant local economy and pride in the outstanding natural environment”

14.3 Strategic Objectives

Our strategic priorities for the life of this strategy are to:

- Develop a cluster approach to play development through working with schools, parents and organisations in local areas
- Widen and develop play opportunities and activities across the district, maximising local resources and ensuring quality provision
- improve engagement and involvement of children, young people and families in the delivery and design of play activities and provision
- Maximise opportunities for children and young people with disabilities and special needs to further benefit from play activities and services
- Reduce barriers to play, particularly targeting identified areas of deprivation, where young people and families face difficulties accessing play spaces, activities and provision
- Raise the profile and importance of play and improve understanding of the importance of play with parents carers and local community members, partnerships and key stakeholders

These six objectives will be met through the achievement of the activities detailed in the strategic action plan

14.5 Performance Management and Quality Assurance

We will use the Council's performance management system CorVu to gather information and record our progress, as well as partners' indicators within their various service specific plans covering activities for children and young people, as well as working towards meeting the voluntary BVPI 115.

We will measure progress against targets will be reported on to the Children and Young People's Select Committee, and be published as part of the Council's Corporate and Performance Plan.

In addition, we await the outcome of the proposals for adoption of the 5 indicators for play, currently being piloted for the Children's Play Council and Play England, as set out below:

Indicator 1 – Participation

- Description – The percentage of children and young people aged birth to 16 from all social and ethnic groups, including those who are disabled, who play for at least four hours each week.
- Method of Generation – School and Household Survey.

Indicator 2 – Access to a variety of facilities and spaces

- Description – The percentage of children and young people aged birth to 16 that have access to a dedicated place for play and informal recreation, which is within appropriate walking or cycling distance.
- Method of Generation – The open space and play strategy audit. GIS mapping.

Indicator 3 – Quality of play spaces

- Description – The proportion of dedicated play spaces that meet a quality score of at least 60% of the potential of the site as determined by the play space audit.
- Method of Generation – Assess against the quality standards utilised in the play space audit.

Indicator 4 – Quality of play services

- Description – The number of play services and youth clubs having achieved a recognised quality mark status such as *Quality in Play* or *YQSM Quality Mark for Services for Young People*.
- Method of Generation – Confirmation of numbers from the accrediting organisations.

Indicator 5 – Satisfaction

- Description – The percentage of children and young people from all social and ethnic groups, including those who are disabled, who think that the range and quality of play facilities and spaces they are able to access in their local neighbourhood is good/very good.
- Method of Generation – School and Household Survey.

BVPI 115 – Extend Play Strategy Development

The Audit Commission has developed a voluntary performance indicator BVPI 115 on the development of local play policies. This is summarised below: -

Services/practice (from BVPI 115)

Every county, unitary and district authority should have an agreed play policy and strategy: -

- The play policy should be widely scoped, including any local authority services that might directly or indirectly impact on children's play opportunities.
- The play policy should clearly identify the importance of play.
- The policy should be integrated with other relevant community, corporate and departmental plans.
- The policy should be developed drawing on consultation with a range of relevant stakeholders.
- The policy should be endorsed by the Chief Executive and/or members of the relevant committee.
- The play policy should be based on a clear baseline assessment of local needs and identify current provision and opportunities for play.
- The play policy provides a clear framework for implementation and delivery.
- A play policy working group with key partners should be established to oversee the implementation and delivery of the policy.
- A framework is in place for monitoring progress and regular reporting of plans.

The BVPI provides a detailed method of quantifying how far a local strategy goes in terms of meeting each these key elements and at overall score can be calculated.

Quality Assurance

Wherever possible we will ensure the use of relevant standards or accreditation to assess and assure the quality of provision as we do with Quest Accreditation for our Leisure Centres and Sports Development, Museum Accreditation and Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme for Museum Services etc.

As part of our Cultural Services plan we are working “Towards An Excellent Service” (TAES Accreditation). And we aim to gain Green Flag Status for our key parks. The cumulative effect of Green Flag Status will be to ensure attractive, vibrant spaces in which children and young people feel safe to play.

14.5 Action Plan

The action plan is attached to this strategy as a separate document

15 CHASE IT - PLAY

Cannock Chase council has a successful track record of partnership working, particularly around delivery of activities for children and young people, through its current CHASE IT programme.

In order to maximize opportunities for play it is proposed to submit an application to the BIG Lottery Fund to support the establishment of a separate play initiative.

It is felt that the use of the existing well known and widely respected CHASE IT brand will guarantee the highest profile for play in amongst our target audience of children, young people and their families. We will, therefore, be submitting our bid under the banner of CHASE IT – PLAY, the focus of which will be working around extended schools to provide opportunities for children and young people to enjoy the “THREE FREES” of Play: -

Play should be: Free of charge
Children should be: Free to come and go
Children should be: Free to choose

16. Appendices& Bibliography

Appendices

- 1 Terms of Reference for Cannock Chase Community Sports Network and Play Partnership

- 2 Childhood Obesity – Cannock Chase Practice Based Commissioning group-
Local Epidemiology
- 3 CHASE IT satisfaction survey sheets
- 4 List of current partners
- 5 CHASE IT supporting skills/workforce development

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