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**PLAY AND FREE TIME STRATEGY**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor McEwan,  
Children’s Services Portfolio and  
Councillor Jenny Chapman, Leisure Services Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To present the Play and Free Time Strategy which has been subject to formal consultation to members for final approval.

**Information and Analysis**

2. The need to improve the provision for children’s play is acknowledged in a range of national policy areas from Planning, Open Spaces and Transport to Health, Education and Child Care. Local authorities in England have a statutory duty under the Children Act (2004) to co-operate in their provision for the enjoyment of play and recreation as part of the five key outcomes for all children.
3. In 2004 the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) published the report of a review of children’s play in England. The report “Getting Serious about Play” made recommendations on the use of national lottery funding for improving children’s play opportunities through a new, dedicated children’s play programme. One of its recommendations was that local authorities need to take the lead in planning for play across their area.
4. The ‘Big Lottery Fund’ announced details of the new £155m Children’s Play Initiative in March 2006. The amount of funding available to Darlington Borough Council area will be £257,251. To receive this allocation of funding the Council are required to take the lead role working with all local partners in the play sector to develop a portfolio of projects that focuses on areas of great need and forms the local play strategy.
5. The Play and Free Time Strategy is based on an independent assessment of what play and free time activities currently exist in Darlington and what given projected population growth, is likely to be required in terms of future facilities and services. The Play and Free Time Strategy needs to be submitted to the Big Lottery, along with a range of projects to spend this allocation by 10th September 2007.

6. At this stage the draft strategy is submitted to Cabinet to get agreement in principle, in order that it can be submitted to the Big Lottery by the deadline. Further consultation is still required, particularly with Scrutiny, the Children's Trust and the Play Partnership. A joint meeting of Lifelong Learning and Environment Scrutiny Committees has been arranged for 12 July, in order that their input can be included. In seeking Cabinet's agreement at this stage, it will therefore be necessary to delegate power to the Director of Community Services to amend the strategy to reflect the input of Scrutiny, the Children's Trust and the Play Partnership and to make any factual corrections prior to submission.

## **The Strategy**

7. The document sets out what organisations in the Borough will do between 2007 and 2012 to improve the quality of play opportunities for the Borough's children and young people.
8. There are a number of important reasons why a Play and Free Time Strategy will benefit the children and young people of Darlington, as well as their parents, carers, communities and the many organisations that are trying to improve play opportunities in Darlington. These are:
  - (a) The strategy provides a co-ordinated and joined up approach to developing play through prioritised actions based on evidence of need.
  - (b) Because all the issues around play for children and young people are properly considered, it means that a more inclusive approach can be adopted rather than just meeting the needs of those who shout loudest.
  - (c) By demonstrating that issues of play have been properly considered, it means that agencies such as the Council, the Voluntary and Community Sector and Private Sector, can make clear allocations of resources to make the actions happen.
  - (d) This hard evidence approach provides the basis for bids to organisations such as the Big Lottery, trusts and charities for further funding.
  - (e) A Play and Free Time Strategy is essential in helping deliver many of the Government's Every Child Matters targets while raising the value and importance of play locally.
  - (f) Under planning legislation, the evidence of 'play need' gathered for the Play and Free Time Strategy can be used to negotiate with property developers to provide improved play spaces when they are granted planning permission for developments such as housing estates and town centre regeneration.

## **Vision**

9. The vision of the Darlington Play Partnership is to make quality play and free time happen in Darlington for all children now and in the future.
10. *'Building on a strong foundation of a child focused Borough, the Play and Free Time Strategy will endeavour to make quality play and free time opportunities accessible for all children and young people regardless of age, ability, background or where they live. As well as improving the infrastructure for play in both urban and rural wards, the Play Strategy will campaign to raise the profile of play as a vital part of children and young people's enjoyment and achievement.'*

## **Aims and Objectives**

11. To deliver the vision, the Darlington Play Partnership will do the following:
  - (a) Encourage a strategic approach to play to enable the best use of resources.
  - (b) Promote and raise the profile and the importance of play to children, childcare providers, young people, their parents and communities.
  - (c) Ensure that play is included on agendas of other groups and is integrated with appropriate plans such as the Children and Young People's Plan and the Open Spaces Strategy.
  - (d) Ensure mechanisms are in place, which encourage all stakeholders to make an ongoing contribution to future planning processes – play provision.
  - (e) Develop, monitor, review and evaluate the Play and Free Time Strategy and the appropriate targets.
  - (f) Make recommendations to relevant partnerships in respect of allocation of play funding and other appropriate funding opportunities.
  - (g) Measure progress against standards set by the Play Council's performance indicators and those agreed at a local level by the partnership.
  - (h) Maximise external funding for play, e.g. through section 106 agreements.
  - (i) The objectives are based on the partnership's research and consultation, as well as national and local good practice

## **The Play Partnership**

12. The Darlington Play and Free Time Strategy has been developed in consultation with children, young people, partners and carers with the wider community, by a range of organisations who together form the Darlington Play Partnership. The Play Partnership will remain after the strategy is launched and members can leave and join as appropriate. The Play Partnership will take forward the Play and Free Time Strategy.
13. The partnership's membership will be reviewed during the delivery of the Darlington Play and Free Time Strategy. However, for the purpose of developing the strategy, the membership consisted of the following representatives:
  - (a) Councillor Chris McEwan, Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Play Champion)
  - (b) Andrew Carter, Planning Officer
  - (c) Brian Graham, Head of Street Scene
  - (d) Jackie Hiles, Development Manager, DAD
  - (e) Kate Hinchliffe, Extended Schools Co-ordinator
  - (f) Kevin Kelly, Senior Practitioner, Children's Disability Team
  - (g) Kirsty Thompson, Regional Development Officer, Play England
  - (h) Lynn Kilpatrick, Locality Manager, Connexions Service
  - (i) Martin Landers, Centre Manager, Maidendale House
  - (j) Mervyn Bell, Head of Youth Services
  - (k) Michelle Deans, Regional Programme Manager, Play England
  - (l) Mirrin Hunter, Policy Development Officer, Children's Services
  - (m) Nigel Potter, Groundwork North East
  - (n) Roy Broadbent, Strategic Support Manager, Community Services
  - (o) Sharon Brown, Head of Performance Development & Community Partnership
  - (p) Steve Thompson, Assistant Director, Leisure and Arts

## **Outcome of Consultation**

14. Young people said that they wanted more activities to do and more safe places to go. The emphasis for young people was on social activities and on having activities that they can do such as creative technology, making music and using the Internet.
15. There is a clear gap in the play/free time opportunities that are available for children and young people and play/free time they actually do. When asked in a school questionnaire ‘What do you regularly do in your free time at the moment?’ The top five answers were as follows:
  - (a) Socialising with friends
  - (b) Using the Internet
  - (c) Listening to music
  - (d) Chilling out on your own
  - (e) Playing computer games
16. Additionally, the free time activities that children and young people were most likely to want to be involved with in the future were:
  - (a) Creating music
  - (b) Going to activity clubs
  - (c) Creative arts activities
  - (d) Sport outside of school
  - (e) Water based activities

## **Key Themes**

17. During the consultation a number of key themes emerged:

### **Places to go**

18. Children and young people want more places that they can go to spend time with their friends, take part in informal games such as football, and not be stopped by local residents.

### **Natural Play**

19. Younger children want to be able to make dens, climb trees and explore natural areas.

### **Informal Activities**

20. Children and young people like activities – arts, music, computers, football and other sports, learning new things. It is important that when activities are provided for children and young people that they are done in an environment where they can make their own choices about what they do and when they do it.

## **Creative Play**

21. Constructive and creative play such as creating art and music were priorities identified by young people and parents, and are important for development, particularly for children with disabilities and special needs.

## **Financial Implications**

22. As referred to earlier in the report, submission and acceptance of the portfolio of projects identified within the strategy will release the allocation of funding to a total of £257,251. It should be recognised that although this will enable early improvement in play provision, the main aims of the strategy and the work of the play partnership will be to provide a co-ordinated approach across all sectors to enable best use of existing resources together with preparing future bids to support the aims of the strategy through to 2012.

## **Legal Implications**

23. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

## **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

24. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is considered that the contents of this report will have a positive effect in improving the offer of play activities available.

## **Council Policy Framework**

25. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework.

## **Decision Deadline**

26. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter. The strategy needs to be submitted in September 2007

## **Key Decisions**

27. This report affects all wards within the Borough and as such represents a key decision.

## **Recommendation**

28. It is recommended that:

- (a) Cabinet are requested to adopt the Play and Free Time Strategy which covers the period from 2007 through to 2012.

- (b) Delegated power be given to the Director of Community Services to make any final amendments to reflect consultation with Scrutiny, the Children's Trust and the Play Partnership and to correct any errors in liaison with the Cabinet Member with the Children's Services Portfolio.

## **Reasons**

29. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) To enable Darlington to receive the Big Lottery allocation of funding to a total of £257,251.00 aimed at providing funding for some of the projects included within the strategy action plan, the projects and strategy deadline for submission by 10 September 2007.
- (b) The strategy provides a framework to encourage a strategic approach to play provision and enable the best use of resources.

**Cliff Brown**  
**Director of Community Services**

## **Background Papers**

- (i) Cultural Strategy
  - (ii) Children's and Young People Plan 2006-2009 Investing in Tomorrow
  - (iii) Darlington Local Agreement - Young People of the Future
  - (iv) Community Strategy – Where Quality Comes to Life
  - (v) Sport and Physical Activity Strategy
  - (vi) Youth Justice Plan 2006-2007
  - (vii) Planning Policy Guidance
  - (viii) Open Spaces Strategy
  - (ix) Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy
- Big Lottery Funding – Planning for Play

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