



Play Matters in Tower Hamlets

A strategic approach to play in Tower Hamlets

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FOREWORD

Play Matters in Tower Hamlets

Play is a fundamentally integral part of healthy development for all children and for society.

It is therefore encouraging that this Strategy, solely dedicated to improving play opportunities for every child in the Borough, signifies the start of a 10-year planning process and local partnership that aims to ensure that the future growth in child population will be adequately served with good quality, accessible play provision.

The Strategy has been developed through partnership working and the recognised need for a clear strategic framework that ensures play is sufficiently resourced and valued.

While the Play Strategy has a significant role in securing additional funding for play in the Borough through the Big Lottery Fund Children's Play Programme, its importance and scope looks beyond this short-term funding injection, at the longer term implications for those providing, facilitating and supporting play.

It is a very exciting time for play both nationally and locally with many innovative projects across Tower Hamlets leading the way and helping to make the Borough a more playable place.

This is just the beginning for the Council, Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust, the Play Association Tower Hamlets, and the many partners involved.

We look forward to implementing the Strategy and making a significant and positive difference to the lives of children and young people in the Borough and hope they in turn will be convinced that their right to play matters to us all.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Scope

The Council's vision is to improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Tower Hamlets. It is a vision that is shared by all partners in the Tower Hamlets Partnership, which comprises residents, the Council and other public service providers, businesses, faith communities and the voluntary and community sector. The provision of accessible quality play facilities will contribute significantly to the achievement of this vision, supporting health, community cohesion, economic and social wellbeing.

This document is entitled **Play Matters in Tower Hamlets – A strategic approach to play in Tower Hamlets**, and is the Play Strategy for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Consistent with the Mayor of London's guidance and guidance issued by the Children's Play Council it will contribute to the Tower Hamlets Children and Young People's Plan and form the basis of the Council's submission to the Big Lottery Fund Children's Play Programme.

Tower Hamlets is at the heart of London's aspirations for the future and set to grow rapidly over the next decade with an additional 31,500 new homes being built, a substantial proportion of which aimed at families. Alongside this significant growth in housing needs to sit the development of social and physical infrastructure such as schools and health care facilities, and an increase in the provision of publicly accessible open spaces and playable spaces to meet the needs of children and young people in the future.

The Play Strategy makes a broad assessment and analysis of the quantity, quality and current usage of existing play spaces and services and their current accessibility. It covers the free-time activities of children and young people from 0 to 18 years old, whether facilitated in designated provision or chosen by them in the wider public realm. At the same time the Strategy takes account of the significant projected increases in child population over the next ten years and assesses existing provision in the light of emerging population changes recognising that playable space needs must be addressed as part of a balanced approach to urban management and place shaping.

It is not within the scope of this strategy to set the detailed agenda for every play space and service that exists within the Borough. However, it does provide those agencies and funding organisations engaged in the delivery of play with a clearer picture than has hitherto existed of play deficiencies and future areas of demand to inform their own detailed planning.

A wide range of Council departments and partner organisations deliver children's play. Until now there has been no overarching strategic framework or comprehensive research base to assist these providers in delivering a consistent and planned offer based on a detailed analysis of location and quality of current provision. This strategy draws together the data collected by play providers and supplements this with data from a range of major mapping, consultation and quality assessment projects commissioned to close the extensive gaps in the local knowledge base. It looks at supervised and unsupervised play provision and, where appropriate, identifies detailed actions. The document includes an action plan for the next 3 years that will be reviewed annually and which will drive forward service improvements whilst setting measures against which performance can be judged.

As well as linking with the Children and Young Peoples Plan the Strategy will clearly link to and complement other strategies such as the Community Plan, the Open Space Strategy

and the Local Development Framework. In developing this Play Strategy the five principles within *Every Child Matters*¹ have been fully considered.

This Strategy will enable the Council and its partners to establish clear priorities for play as the basis for decision making, service development and strategic planning across a range of linked agendas. It has also been prepared as an informed foundation on which to plan and drive forward further local research.

1.2 Defining Play

Play is an essential part of every child's life. It is vital to their development and a fundamental human right. Article 31 of the UN Convention on Human Rights, ratified by the UK government in 1991, commits authorities at all levels to recognise a child's right 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.'

This Strategy adopts the recommended definition set out by the Children's Play Council guidance for play strategies *Planning for Play*²:

*'Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behavior 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.'*³

While older children and young people tend not to describe their free time activity as play, the term play encompasses their equal need and right to meet and socialise with their peers.

1.3 A Vision for Play in Tower Hamlets

Whilst the Community Plan sets out the broad vision the Council and its partners have for Tower Hamlets, it is useful, within the context of this Strategy, to provide a more specific vision for play. The following has been developed by the Council and its partners and reflects the overarching objectives of the Strategy.

'To provide an environment in which all children and young people can access play provision that meets their needs and aspirations, offers them the opportunity to develop important social skills and allows them to enjoy the act of playing.'

In order to achieve this, the Council and its partners recognise that:

- Play environments should provide safe, stimulating play opportunities that place children and young people at the centre of the play process.

¹ Department for Education and Skills (2004) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, London: HMSO.

² Children's Play Council and Big Lottery Fund (2006) *Planning for Play: guidance on the development and implementation of local play strategies*, London: Big Lottery Fund.

³ NPFA, Playlink and Children's Play Council (2000) *Best Play: What play provision should do for children*, London: NPFA.

- Children and young people should have access to the widest possible range of play experiences and play environments, both indoors and outside, within easy reach of their homes.
- Play takes place in the home and in a variety of public spaces as well as in dedicated provision.
- Children and young people need to encounter and learn to manage an acceptable level of risk in their play.
- Play is an essential part of physical activity and the learning and development process.
- Children and young people's views should be sought and listened to through observation by adults and participation by children in decision making.
- Children should be allowed to be children.

SECTION 2: WHY PLAY MATTERS TO EVERY CHILD

‘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.’

‘While it is central to children’s own culture, play is different from structured cultural activities like sport, art, music and dance. Given the opportunity children play wherever they are. It is what they do when they are allowed free time and space to use in their own way, for their own reasons and for no external outcome, reward or goal.’⁴

The government report *Every Child Matters* has five themes – being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic well-being. Play has a direct impact on all of these themes, which are further developed by the *Planning for Play* guidance issued by the Children’s Play Council.

2.1 Play and Learning

Play is an essential part of the learning process for children and young adults. It contributes to a wide range of mainstream agendas, all of which are essential to the well-being and quality of life of the individual and the wider community. One of the most important of these is education. Play is increasingly being used to stimulate children to think about issues, concepts and as a way of developing concentration and co-operative skills that will help them in the classroom and in study situations as well as in adult life. Particularly for younger children play is an essential part of the learning process. Children learn by playing with new ideas consolidating what they have been taught and acquiring new skills. Quality teaching recognises and builds on the balance between structured teaching sessions, study, learning and play to ensure optimum achievement.

Play is recognised by schools in Tower Hamlets as an essential part of physical activity and learning. The balance between play and learning changes as children get older but throughout school life opportunities to play are encouraged. Play in schools can range from sixth formers in their common room to working out dance routines in the playground or investigating worms in the digging area of a nursery.

Children spend most of their active day time in schools during the week. Whilst much of this is directed and supervised by adults they remain an important mechanism for the delivery of play opportunities. At playtimes and beyond, the school day can provide important spaces for unsupervised and informal play. All 99 Tower Hamlets schools are linked to Children’s Centres and Extended Schools, planning to optimise the use of their facilities, including play opportunities.

Tower Hamlets recognises play as an essential partner to formal education in terms of its fundamental role in enabling children and young people to engage positively with the complexities of the world around them.

There is evidence to suggest that free play has a direct positive impact on children’s ability to meet formal educational goals. For example, a Head teacher who improved free play opportunities during school break time reported that:

⁴ Children’s Play Council (2005) *Children’s Play Council Briefing 4: Play in coordinated children’s services*, London: National Children’s Bureau, p. 1.

The children value the freedom of playtime and find that the range for their choice is wider so that they are more ready to accept the work load demanded during the time of their formal education.⁵

Many schools also produce guidance for parents on ways they can play with their children to support their development.

2.2 Play and Health

Outdoor play is essential for children and young people's healthy development and well-being. Research shows that children get more exercise playing outdoors than in any other form of free-time activity, including organised sport.⁶

Good play opportunities promote good physical, mental and emotional health, giving children and young people the chance to try out and experience a range of emotions and allowing them to learn and develop emotionally by promoting resilience and fostering self-esteem.

The Chief Medical Officer advises that 'children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes moderate-intensity physical activity each day'.⁷ There is growing research evidence that increased opportunity for free play can contribute significantly to this goal. The Government White Paper *Choosing Health* noted that many children appear to have 'less time being physically active because of the increase in car travel and a heightened concern about the potential risks of unsupervised play outdoors'.⁸

In parallel with concerns about the physical health of our children and the rise in childhood obesity and related disorders (a particular problem in Tower Hamlets), there is also evidence of a sharp increase in mental illness. The Mental Health Foundation estimates that at any time 20 per cent of children and young people experience psychological problems. Their report *Bright Futures* states that the opportunity for risk taking in unsupervised play helps children build self-confidence and resilience – key protective factors for mental health. Given the decrease in opportunities for playing out unsupervised, the report also recognises the importance of supervised opportunities for play and the role of these services in supporting children's mental health.⁹

Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust recognises the importance of play and provides both therapeutic play and an opportunity for free play in children's wards and through services for sick children. The Speech and Language Therapy Service, for example, promotes play as a means for language and development of communication skills.

⁵ Playlink (1999) *Playlink's Play at School Scheme*, London: Playlink, p.11.

⁶ Mackett, R. (2004) *Making Children's lives more active*, London: Centre for Transport Studies, University College London.

⁷ Department of Health (2004) *At least five a week: Evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health*, London: HMSO, p. 3.

⁸ Department of Health (2004) *Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier*, London: HMSO, p. 43.

⁹ Mental Health Foundation (1999) *Bright Futures: Promoting Children and Young People's Mental Health*, London: Mental Health Foundation.

2.3 Play and Community Cohesion

Enjoyment of play is significantly compromised for many children because of overt and institutional discrimination, including intolerance of diversity between different ethnic and religious groups, discrimination against children with disabilities and gender intolerance. These forms of discrimination and their fear of them affect not just the quality of play but also family confidence to engage in or allow independent play.

Play fosters social inclusion. It helps children understand the people and places in their lives, learn about their environment and develop their sense of community. Where children from diverse backgrounds can play together, the process can be hugely beneficial to social cohesion. It can bring whole family groups together, promote cultural understanding and break down social stereotypes.

Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society is part of the government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion. Community-based evaluations show that play projects can improve connections and trust between local communities.¹⁰ *Prove it!*, an approach to evaluation that has been piloted in outside play and recreation spaces, has been shown to have a measurable impact on local interaction, new friendships, community know-how and community safety.¹¹ Research carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that regular encounters in parks were seen as first steps towards friendship or as '...the beginning of a community'.¹²

2.4 Play and the Environment

Research conducted by Demos and the Green Alliance (*A Child's Place*, Demos, 2004) has found that the development of urban children from disadvantaged backgrounds is negatively affected by their limited access to the natural world when compared to children in rural environments. Among the report's key recommendations was that children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be provided with more and better opportunities to access good quality open space.¹³

Children and young people between the ages of 0 - 18 represent approximately a quarter of the Borough's population. The planning, public realm and regeneration functions of the Council seek to create an environment that demonstrates its respect for children and young people. Planning design and architecture must play a central role in delivering new and better quality spaces in which children and young people can play and integrate effectively with the wider community over the coming years.

The Council's recently adopted *Open Space Strategy* highlighted the lack of open space within the Borough against the national standard (1.2 ha per 1000 pop against a national standard of 2.4ha per 1000 pop- National Playing Fields Association Standard). Open space is one of the most popular places for children and young people to participate in play activities and the *Open Space Strategy* is committed to improving quality and provision.

¹⁰ Home Office (2005) *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: the government strategy to increase race equality cohesion*, London: Home Office.

¹¹ The New Economics Foundation (2001) *Prove it: measuring impacts of renewal*, London: New Economics Foundation.

¹² Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2006) *Public spaces and social relations in East London*, London: The Policy Press.

¹³ Thomas, G and Thompson, G (2004) *A child's place: why environment matters to children*, London: Demos.

2.5 *Play and Risk Awareness*

Children require play spaces where they feel relaxed about their personal safety but can get excitement and sufficient challenge from their play experience. Children can learn through experience and discover things for themselves in environments that are challenging and stimulating and enable them to take acceptable risks (to freely undertake actions that push against the boundaries of their own current abilities).

Enabling children and young people to play safely in non-dedicated play spaces within their local environment, such as streets, squares or HomeZones, allows them to develop risk awareness in relation to other road users. They will also be able to develop the skills necessary to navigate their neighbourhoods more safely.

If play provision fails to offer children varied and interesting experiences, children may seek challenge and stimulation elsewhere, in areas that may contain unacceptable levels of risk to themselves and others. They may go on to lack the experience and skills to distinguish between levels of risk in the wider world.

The Council and its partners recognise children's need to encounter risk in a safe environment and support the Children's Play Council's position statement on risk in play provision.

*'Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children and young people stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.'*¹⁴

¹⁴ Children's Play Council (2002) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: A Position Statement*, London: Children's Play Council, p. 1.

SECTION 3: BARRIERS TO PLAY

Children and young people's opportunities to access play in Tower Hamlets are limited by many factors outside their control. These include busy roads, lack of tolerance for children and young people, poverty and other social factors. Perceptions of crime and community safety also affect individual and family decisions about whether and where children can go out to play. While this Strategy, in line with the Mayor of London's guidance, focuses on freely accessible play opportunities, it should be noted that access to many supervised play opportunities is restricted for some by price and their targeted nature.

3.1 Safety Concerns of Children, Young People, Parents and Carers

Children and young people express considerable concern about the restrictions on their independent activity, their enjoyment of public space and about the lack of provision for regular and enjoyable exercise. They commonly identify many barriers to play, recreation and their enjoyment of public space. These include: fears for their safety from traffic and bullying; and dirty, run-down play areas and parks.

Studies show that children's independent mobility continues to be curtailed both in terms of territorial range (the distance from home) and license (particular activities, place or modes of mobility, such as not crossing roads or going to places alone).

A Home Office citizenship survey in 2003 reported that two out of three 8 to 10-year-olds never went to the park or shops on their own and 33 per cent never played out with their friends without an adult being present. Among 11-15 year-olds, one in 10 never met their friends outside the home without an adult being present and nearly a quarter, (24 per cent) never went to the park or local shops on their own.¹⁵

In 2005 a survey, commissioned by the Children's Play Council for National Playday, found that 39 percent of 7 - 14 year old children did not play outdoors as much as they would like to and that only 52 percent of the respondents played outdoors more than 4 hours a week during term-time. One in five played outdoors for less than 1 hour a week.¹⁶ A number of studies have shown that the reasons children do not play out more relate to personal and parental safety fears and lack of good play spaces.

¹⁵ Home Office and DfES (2005) *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top level findings from the children and young people's survey*, London: HMSO.

¹⁶ British Market Research Bureau (2005) *Survey for the Children's Play Council and the Children's Society*, London: Children's Play Council.

3.2 Perceptions of Children and Young People by the Wider Community

Groups of children or young people gathering in public spaces are often perceived as posing a threat or a nuisance, even when they are simply enjoying being together. This can lead to adults in some communities being hostile to any measures to provide public space for them. Anti-social behaviour by a minority is undoubtedly a problem but many children and young people complain that they are increasingly denied access to public space.

Research commissioned by CABE Space shows that ‘place making’ – improving the design, maintenance and supervision of parks and other public spaces – is a more effective solution to anti-social behaviour than simply increasing security measures.

Tower Hamlets Council and its partners recognise that play environments, whether designated play space or part of the wider public realm must be of good quality. Proper maintenance contributes to the sustainability of play environments and forms a necessary part of a positive approach to what CABE Space has described as ‘place making’.

‘CABE Space believes that the use of target hardening as a first response to anti-social behaviour is resulting in the fortification of our urban environment. There is a better solution: invest in place making, improving public spaces, to prevent the onset and escalation of these problems. Evidence from CABE Space’s study shows that well designed, well maintained public spaces can contribute to reducing the incidence of vandalism and anti-social behaviour, and result in long term cost savings.’¹⁷

3.3 Roads and Transport

Physical barriers such as road, railway lines and canals can restrict access to play for children. While play opportunities might be close to children’s homes, the effective catchment areas of many play areas in Tower Hamlets are often severely restricted by many such barriers.

Studies have shown that, where traffic is slower, parents allow their children to play outdoors in much greater numbers than in similar streets where it is faster. Studies also concluded that fear of abduction was more of an effect of children not being allowed to play outdoors than its cause.

The availability or otherwise of public transport can also impact on children’s ability to access play opportunities.

3.4 Accessibility to Play for Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities’ ability to enjoy inclusive play is restricted by the design of play spaces, the accessibility of equipment, the availability of toilets, washing facilities and distance from home. Furthermore, intolerance or lack of understanding displayed by other children and their families can help to exclude children with disability from engaging in play

¹⁷ Caba Space (2004) Policy Note: Preventing Anti-Social Behaviour in Public Spaces, London: Caba Space, p. 3.

with others. Additional safety concerns from parents, carers and children themselves may self restrict access still further. Social care support plays an important role in empowering children with disabilities to access play opportunities and the Strategy stresses the importance of play to all social care providers. However, it is not the purpose of this document to address mainstream social care issues but to provide a reference point for social care professionals.

3.5 Population Growth and Development Pressure

Tower Hamlets is at the heart of London's growth aspirations. In line with the objectives of the Mayor of London, Tower Hamlets' emerging Local Development Framework seeks to facilitate:

- An increase in housing provision (being 31,500 new homes from 2007 to 2016);
- An increase in the provision of affordable housing;
- An increase in the provision of family sized accommodation (including 45% family housing in the social rented sector and 25% family housing in the market and the intermediate housing sector);
- The appropriate provision of social and physical infrastructure required to support the growth in housing (including schools, health care facilities, public transport and utilities); and
- An increase in the provision of publicly accessible open spaces (including sufficient playable space to meet the needs of children and young people).

The spatial strategy set out in the Local Development Framework prioritises the provision of high quality, modern infrastructure to support population growth and benefit existing residents. Consequently it takes a proactive management approach to designating sites for new facilities in response to estimated future demand.

Delivery of the above competing Government objectives and requirements is challenging in a compact inner city environment. The Borough already has a deficiency of publicly accessible open space in some areas (as identified in the Open Space Strategy) as well as an acute need for housing provision (as identified in the Housing Needs Survey). It is important that play space needs are addressed as part of a balanced approach to urban management and place shaping.

SECTION 4: POLICY AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

4.1 National and Regional Policy Context

The **Children Act 2004** stipulates the enjoyment of recreation as part of the outcome framework for coordinated Children's Services. The Act requires local authorities and their partners to consider children's enjoyment of recreation and to specifically include play provision in the development of coordinated services.

The **Every Child Matters** agenda sets out the overarching legal and regulatory framework for improving outcomes for children and young people. The aim is to provide services organised according to children's needs rather than traditional service boundaries. The Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework links enjoyment to achievement recognising the importance of free time and space for children and young people as a factor in their formal and informal learning.

There are five key outcome areas of the Every Child Matters Framework. Play can contribute significantly to all of these areas:

➤ **Being healthy**

Improved play provision can promote good emotional, mental and physical health for children and young people.

➤ **Staying safe**

More challenging and stimulating play and youth provision can enable children and young people to manage risk in safer environments, diverting them from potentially dangerous activities elsewhere.

➤ **Enjoying and achieving**

Play provision where children live and go to school helps them to learn, grow and develop by providing opportunities for physical activity, socialising with their peers and having fun whilst contributing to achievement at school and to their personal development.

➤ **Making a positive contribution**

Giving children and young people a real say in the decision making process for play and youth provision, within a framework that requires them to consider others, can encourage them to take responsibility for their actions and help to build community cohesion.

➤ **Economic well-being**

Good quality accessible play provision can help reduce the impact of poverty on the quality of family life, child development, family health and well-being.

The **Children's Fund** is a government funding initiative supporting new partnerships some of which have a strong focus on play.

The **Big Lottery Fund** has allocated £955,902 over three years to Tower Hamlets through the Children's Play Programme which requires a robust and sustainable cross-cutting play strategy to underpin local plans for how the money will be spent. Action Plan priorities within it must set the rationale for the Big Lottery Fund application.

In July 2005, the Government published the **Youth Matters** Green Paper on the future of youth services in England. This proposed a major set of universal and targeted measures for

13-19 year-old young people and proposes a 'youth offer' with young people having more and better things to do and places to go.

The **Government's livability agenda** has from the outset emphasized that children and young people have rights as users of public space. The Government's 2002 report **Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener** stated that high quality green spaces go a long way to encouraging people to pursue healthier lifestyles through exercise such as walking, cycling and active children's play.

Government planning guidance promotes **traffic calming, home zones and measures to improve walking and cycling**, all of which can improve children and young people's access to play opportunities.

Government housing and regeneration initiatives have supported improvements to the built environment alongside economic measures, with a growing focus on improving public spaces. Research in 2006 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that a focus on play and public space was a key factor in making new and regenerated communities attractive to families. CABE drew similar conclusions from its research into the views of residents of new housing. These findings are especially relevant to the growth areas in South East of England set up under the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan, and to Housing Renewal areas.

The Planning Act 2004 requires local authorities to replace Unitary Development Plans (UDP) with a **Local Development Framework (LDF)** by 2007; this will give a spatial expression to council strategies, including the play strategy. The LDF will contain new policies on open space, sports and recreation, which will be prepared in line with national and regional guidance.

Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 17 on Planning, Sport and Recreation¹⁸ requires Local Authorities to set local open space standards, including quantitative, qualitative and accessibility thresholds. It states that Local Planning Authorities should formulate effective planning policies to protect open space and ensure adequate provision of high quality open spaces, and that Local Planning Authorities should seek opportunities to remedy deficiencies in provision in terms of quantity, quality or accessibility.

The Mayor of London published **Further Alterations to the London Plan** in September 2006 which included a revised borough housing target of 3,150 dwellings per annum until 2017 (approximately a tenth of all housing growth in London). It also includes an additional policy requiring borough's to prepare 'Children and Young People's Play and informal recreation strategies' and requiring all new housing provision to include provision for play and informal recreation. Supporting this new policy the Mayor has developed benchmark standards for play which will form **Supplementary Planning Guidance to the London Plan** and has produced guidance on the development of play strategies for London Boroughs. This guidance has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this strategy and is considered complementary to the Children's Play Council guidance that has taken precedent.

The **Mayor's Children and Young People's Strategy (2004)** sets out regional priorities for Play and encourages local authorities to develop play strategies as well as ensure that public spaces available for children to play are not lost when places are being redeveloped and that planners allow for these spaces when designing new developments.

¹⁸ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2002

4.2 Local Policy Context

The **Tower Hamlets Community Plan** sets out five major themes by which the Council's vision, set out at the beginning of this document, will be delivered. These themes are at the heart of everything the Council does. Each theme is supported by 12 priority outcomes. The delivery of quality and accessible play provision contributes to all of the Community Plan themes and all of the priority outcomes.

Theme	Key Priority
A Better Place for Living Safely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cleaner, greener, safer Tower Hamlets
A Better Place for Living Well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decent homes in decent neighbourhoods • Healthier communities • Improved outcomes for vulnerable children and adults
A Better Place for Creating and Sharing Prosperity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing sustainable communities • Increased local employment
A Better Place for Learning and Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased educational attainment • Increased participation in sporting, leisure and cultural activities
A Better Place for Excellent Public Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient and effective services • Locally focused services empowering local people • Stronger and more cohesive communities • Improved equality of opportunity

Table 1: Community Plan Themes and Council Key Priorities

The Tower Hamlets Community Plan is delivered through an annually updated **Strategic Plan** identifying top level objectives and detailed targets.

The Community Plan has been developed and is monitored in partnership with local stakeholders through the **Tower Hamlet's Local Strategic Partnership**. This consists of the Council's main service delivery and community partners.

The Tower Hamlets **2006 – 2009 Children and Young People's Plan** is a single, strategic, overarching plan for children and young people showing how the five Every Child Matters outcomes will be delivered across all children's services in Tower Hamlets. The Play Strategy is one of a number of locally derived linked plans and strategies underpinning the Children and Young People's Plan.

The Government is promoting an extended schools programme to encourage schools to make their publicly funded facilities more accessible to the wider community. The Tower Hamlets **Extended Schools Strategy** recommends that by 2010 all schools will offer an extended service including childcare, study support, family learning, support services and improved access for children and their families to other services.

Tower Hamlets is part of Wave 2 of **Building Schools for the Future (BSF)**. BSF provides investment for schools to redevelop and rebuild their learning environment. Work on the first Wave 2 schools is due to begin in the second half of 2007. This will lead not only to the redesign of schools but also their playgrounds.

The Council has developed a **Local Area Agreement (LAA)** with the other stakeholders in the Tower Hamlets Partnership. The LAA builds upon the priorities set out in the Community Plan and seeks to accelerate improvements in outcomes for local people, with a particular focus on: Economic Regeneration, Healthier Communities, Older People, and Children and Young People. Key themes in the Children and Young People Block include children and young people's health and support for parents. The play strategy will support these objectives.

Central government is introducing a number of different **social housing models** that places all social housing at arm's length from local authorities. Tower Hamlets, in common with other boroughs has an increasingly diverse range of social housing management and investment structures. As management structures for housing change, so will the responsibility for play spaces on housing estates.

The **Draft Local Development Framework (Draft LDF)** is a series of documents detailing the future spatial development of Tower Hamlets. The Draft LDF recognises the vital contribution that play and open space makes to local residents quality of life and sets out a clear commitment to protect and promote all types of open space from Metropolitan Open Land to local parks. Once the LDF is formally adopted it will have significant influence on the future protection and provision of all open space, including play space, across the Borough, as well as other social infrastructure such as schools and health facilities. The LDF also offers an opportunity to introduce supplementary planning documents on design and location of play within developments.

Funding secured from **planning contributions** (Section 106 agreements) can be used for capital development of play provision. Under new regulations introduced in 2005 it may be used for play-related revenue expenditure. A play strategy which identifies priorities based on need will improve the local authority's position in securing play-related planning contributions.

The **Tower Habitats Biodiversity Action Plan** sets out objectives and proposes action for the protection, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity with measurable targets to be implemented at the local level. The plan has been prepared and implemented using in partnership between the Council, the voluntary sector, businesses and individuals working in, or with a strong interest in, biodiversity issues. The Plan aims to promote the enjoyment of wildlife in Tower Hamlets' parks, squares and burial grounds.

A borough-wide multi-agency Obesity Strategy and action plan is being developed, based on the recently published National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance on the prevention, identification, assessment and management of obesity in adults and children. Promotion of active play in early years and school settings is one of the key recommendations in the NICE guidance and the action plan will identify the contribution that partners can make to promoting active play and physical activity amongst children and young people.

The **2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games** in East London present a number of challenges and opportunities for play. The Olympic Park will be a large new landscape park on the eastern fringe of the Borough serving existing as well new communities on the edge of the park. This major open space project presents an opportunity to incorporate play into the Olympic legacy. Play can also be incorporated into the Cultural Olympiad and Live Site programming, which form the main elements of the Olympic arts and events programme.

4.3 Key Findings & Recommendations

The need to develop a sound social policy base for play is increasingly being acknowledged by Central Government. While national policy has yet to emerge, regional policy is developing fast supporting the provision of play spaces and services, and there are a number of national and regional policy themes, which impact on play. In addition, there are a number of national, regional and local funding and delivery mechanisms for local services, which enable the targeting of funds towards the provision of play as a contributor to shared priorities.

The key areas of policy impacting on children's and young people's play opportunities are the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda as well as urban development and regeneration policies. The Strategy recognises that other key policy themes discussed above (such as the cleaner, greener, safer agenda and school's capital development programmes) impact on play provision. As these predominantly relate to physical development and improvement of existing services, they are discussed in the context of local play space provision (Section 7).

Play contributes to all ECM themes and particularly supports children and young people in staying healthy by engaging in self-directed physical activity. Play as a social activity, which encourages interaction between children and young people enables them to make a positive contribution to their communities.

Planning, housing and regeneration policies, which aim to establish sustainable communities, including homes for families, acknowledge that spaces for children and young people are essential in the development of new and existing places. The implementation of these policies at local level determines the degree to which children's and young people's play opportunities are part of the development process. The emergence of the Local Development Framework with associated supplementary planning documents presents an opportunity to safeguard existing play opportunities while setting guidance for new play spaces. At the same time the ongoing programme of housing estate regeneration with associated stock transfers carries risks and offers opportunities for play provision in Tower Hamlets.

In a high growth location with increasing development pressure such as Tower Hamlets, developers' planning contributions have a significant role in mitigating the impact of population rises on existing play provision. In order to maximise the impact of planning contributions on play, both planning and play policies must clearly demonstrate the need for play as an integral part of the process of establishing sustainable communities. However, increases in population figures also increase pressure on existing play facilities. As the child population grows and housing density increases, the demand for play facilities will rise accordingly.

The national and local policy context will be addressed through a number of activities linked to the following Play Strategy Objectives. These are linked to the 5 outcomes of Every Child Matters (shown in brackets)

4.4 Play Strategy Objectives

- 1. Support children and young people to develop positive attitudes to difference and diversity within play environments** (Making a Positive Contribution)
Develop activities to ensure open access play spaces and services are welcoming and, where reasonably practicable, accessible to all children regardless of social background, ethnicity, faith, gender, and physical or mental capacity.
- 2. Promote the contribution of play to maintaining healthy lifestyles** (Being Healthy)

Enable health and other professionals working with children, young people and their families to maximise positive health impact of play.
Ensure that the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games have a positive impact on play provision.

3. Safeguard and extend children's and young people's access to designated play space (Enjoying and Achieving).

Ensure the Council has robust urban planning and housing policies and design guidance, which protect and improve existing play spaces and promote the development of high quality play provision in new developments.

SECTION 5: TOWER HAMLETS BOROUGH PROFILE

5.1 Key Statistics

Population Age Structure

Based on 2006 population estimates there are 54,904 children and young people between the ages 0-18 living in Tower Hamlets, representing 24.2% of the Borough population¹⁹. The numbers of children and young people resident in Tower Hamlets are above the England and Wales National Average whilst the numbers of residents aged 40 years of age and older are below the national average.

Ethnicity

The 2001 census breaks down the ethnic groups in Tower Hamlets as follows:

White 51.4%	Black African 3.4%
Bangladeshi 33.4%	Black Caribbean 2.7%

Religion

The two major religions in the Borough are: Christianity (38.6%) & Islam (36.4%)

Poverty Indicators

The Borough is one of the most deprived in London with levels of unemployment, overcrowding, and (although rapidly improving) a lack of educational qualifications significantly higher than the national average. However, there is a lack of detailed statistical projections for child poverty making it difficult for this parameter to be applied to the strategy at this time. Further work has been identified in the action plan subject to improved statistical data becoming available.

Projected Changes in population 2006 – 2016 affecting the need for play space

The population of Tower Hamlets is set to increase dramatically over the ten years from 2006 to 2016. This section sets out some of the main projections and headline figures. A more detailed breakdown of child population projections by ward is included in the mapping documents associated with this Strategy.

At Borough level

- By 2016 the number of 0 to 4 year olds will increase from 18,456 (2006) to 23,796, representing an increase of 5,340 children.
- By 2016 the number of 5 to 18 year olds will increase from 36,448 (2006) to 47,230, representing an increase of 10,782 children and young people aged 5 to 18.

At a LAP level

- Each LAP area will experience an increase in real numbers of children and young people.
- The highest number of children and young people in 2006 were found in LAPs 1 (9,509), 3 (7,601) and 6 (7,512).
- By 2016 the highest number of children and young people will be living in LAPs 1 (10,572), 6 (11,071) and 8 (11,137).
- In addition, by 2016, LAPs 3 and 7 will have the same level of child population as LAP 1 had in 2006.

¹⁹ Source: Greater London Authority (GLA) 2005 round interim ward projections - Scenario 8.07

- The lowest increases in overall child population will be in LAPs 4 and 5 with 351 and 839 respectively.
- The changes in child population are linked to overall changes in population patterns with increased population density occurring in the eastern part of the Borough and the Isle of Dogs.

The overall projections for each LAP are shown in the table below:

LAP	2006			2011			2016		
	All persons	0 to 4	5 to 18	All persons	0 to 4	5 to 18	All persons	0 to 4	5 to 18
1	39,776	2,944	6,565	44,144	3,231	6,921	46,705	3,275	7,297
2	24,673	2,132	4,443	28,062	2,371	4,763	30,375	2,486	5,172
3	27,947	2,715	4,886	31,527	3,036	5,576	34,071	3,095	6,392
4	25,623	1,899	4,051	27,125	1,903	4,249	28,614	1,879	4,422
5	21,744	1,510	2,777	24,418	1,638	3,215	24,972	1,529	3,597
6	26,218	2,487	5,025	35,767	3,465	5,953	40,589	4,105	6,966
7	27,434	2,447	4,916	32,131	2,924	5,467	37,179	3,370	6,304
8	33,612	2,322	3,785	48,869	3,386	5,391	58,950	4,057	7,080
Total Pop	227,027	18,456	36,448	272,043	21,954	41,535	301,455	23,796	47,230

Source: Greater London Authority (GLA) 2005 round interim ward projections – Scenario 8.07

Table 2: Population projections by LAP area for all persons, 0 to 4 year olds and for 5 to 18 year olds for the years 2006, 2011 and 2016

SECTION 6: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Approach

The Play Strategy has been developed in partnership with the relevant statutory agencies and the main Third Sector providers in the Borough. These organisations came together as the Steering Group for the Draft Strategy and their assistance and direction have been invaluable in the preparation of this document and the research that underpins it. In addition the Council and its partners recently commissioned community consultation exercises as part of the Children and Young People's Plan. The Steering Group drew on the play specific findings of these exercises in the preparation of the Play Strategy. Furthermore the analysis drew on London wide consultation undertaken by London Play. All of this has fed into the development of this strategy and the key priorities identified in the action plan. Consultation has deliberately focused on direct input from children, young people, their families and other residents, with input from community representatives or organisations playing a secondary role. Further work with the LAPs, Third Sector and community organisations is planned to feedback the detailed findings and develop local consensus on play priorities. This is dealt with in the action plan.

Children and Young People's Plan (2006)

The Tower Hamlets Youth Participation Strategy has ensured that children's voices are firmly reflected in all our strategies. In the Children and Young People's Plan, first produced in 2004, following extensive consultation children asked for 3 play related priorities:

- greater access to play for disabled children
- more opportunities to play
- safer places to play.

Some progress has been made in all these areas, but children have made it clear that they believe more should be done. Consultation on the 2006 Children and Young People's Plan included focus groups across schools, children's provision and youth clubs.

The groups raised some common play related themes:

- Young people believed being able to be out and about helped them to be healthy
- They perceived that many green spaces that they could play in are being built on and that park maintenance could be improved in some areas.
- All age groups were concerned about safety, with younger children particularly concerned about bullying, and all children were concerned about violence and drugs. Younger children suggested more adult supervision of play areas, older children recommended more CCTV. They raised the issue that play across different groups would be easier with better supervision, and particularly mentioned more park wardens as a possible solution.
- All ages recognised the importance of play and expressed a wish to have access to a wider range of activities to complement their education.

Extended Schools Strategy Consultation 2006

As part of the Extended Schools Strategy consultation has been undertaken with over 500 parents to inform the Tower Hamlets childcare audit. This included questionnaires and focus groups. The key findings were:

- Parents appreciated the accessibility and safety of after school clubs and saw these as safe places for their children to play after school as well as childcare provision.
- Day Nursery and playgroup provision was valued not just as childcare but also because of the wide range of opportunities to play and learn with other children.
- Focus groups with young people of 11+ preferred an increased number of play activities, rather than formal childcare.

Parks and Open Spaces Annual Survey

Following on from the 2003 Best Value Review of the Parks and Play Service, the Service introduced a parks focused annual survey of users. The KMC survey has been used as an improvement baseline and a method to secure community feedback. Much of it is relevant to play. The survey, which has been adopted by a number of London Boroughs, assesses residents' satisfaction and usage patterns across a range of indicators for parks and open spaces, including frequency of usage, ease of access, cleanliness, security, and facilities provided.

In addition to providing Borough wide measures, data can be analysed in relation to specific parks. This analysis is being used in the Open Space Strategy to help target resources to improve poorly performing parks and open spaces so that they are better equipped to meet the needs of local people. In order to provide value for money in the implementation of the Play Strategy, prioritisation of improvement projects to parks and open space play space should acknowledge the prioritisation outlined in the Open Space Strategy. The key findings are summarised below.

Satisfaction Ratings c/f the National Average - based on 85,000 responses where 2= v poor, 4=poor, 6 = fair, 8 = good, 10= v good

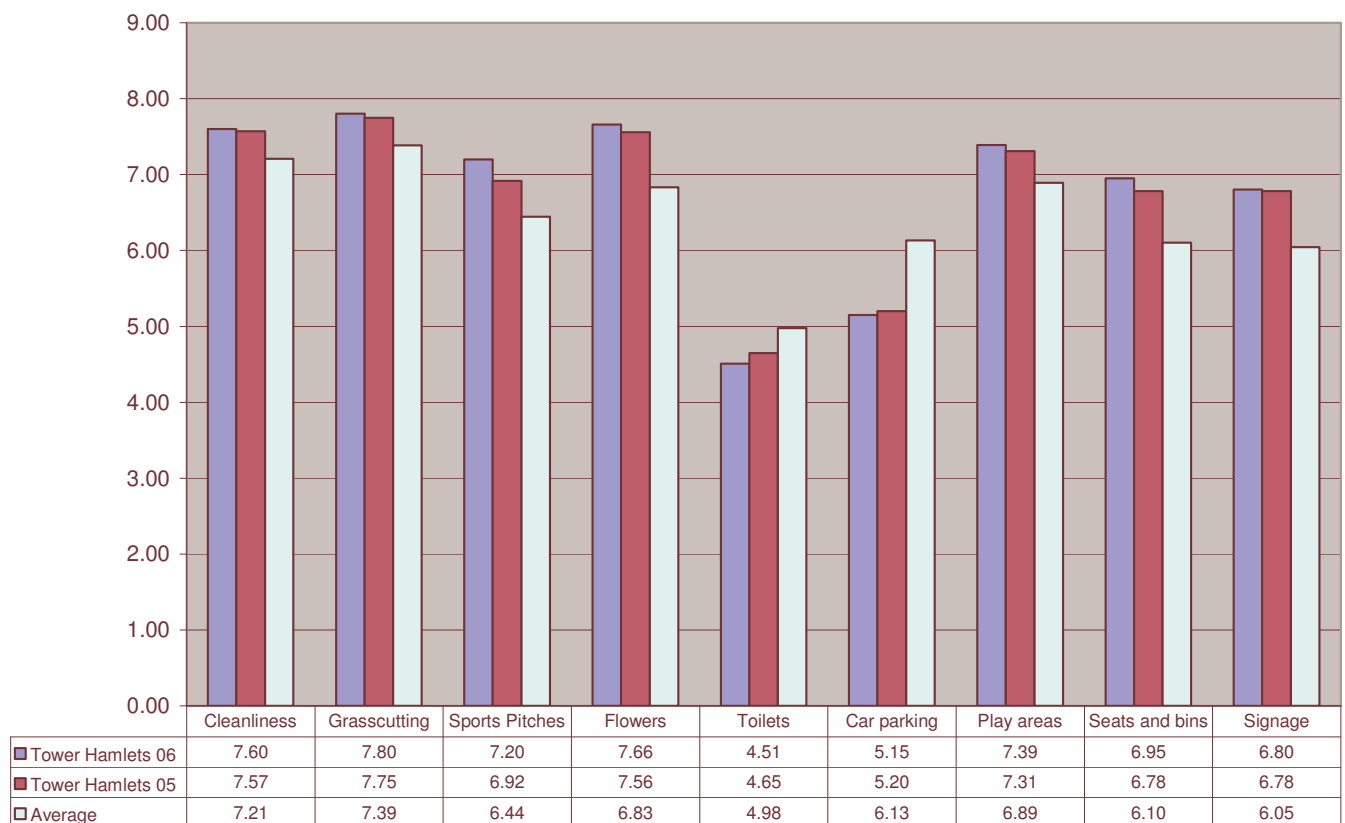


Table 3: KMC Survey Results for Parks and Open Spaces in Tower Hamlets

In addition to satisfaction with facilities in parks and open spaces the KMC survey provides data on users' perception of safety. In 2006 81% of users stated that they felt safe, very safe or that safety was not an issue for them when visiting parks. 19% felt unsafe or very unsafe.

Play Association Tower Hamlets (PATH) Play Map Consultation 2004

A survey of 420 children in Tower Hamlets was undertaken by PATH as part of the production of a children's play spaces map developed to promote the best places for children's play in the Borough. This involved children in 10 primary schools and 3 secondary schools. The research was also extended to include some family fun days, local events and play and youth projects.

Findings showed that respondents

- enjoyed their local parks and wanted play spaces close to home
- highlighted bullying
- were concerned about damaged equipment and litter
- wanted to see improved safety and accessibility

Consultation with London's Children

As part of the consultation for developing the Mayor of London's guidance, children were asked their advice on making London a better place for children to play. The key findings were:

- Ensure adequate play space on housing estates.
- Keep London's play spaces tidy and safe
- Make streets safe for children to play
- Give free access to leisure centres
- Improve football facilities, swings and playgrounds
- More activities after school. Closer activities to school.
- More skate parks (inc. BMX etc)
- More parks, fewer cars
- Larger play areas
- More places to hang out with friends.

6.2 Findings

Across these various consultation exercises a number of themes were raised consistently, both by parents, carers and children and young people. Particular emphasis was given to the quality and preferred type of play provision as well as safety and accessibility of play provision. The key findings are summarised below. The consultation and research identified many excellent examples of play provision and play support activities, many of which were delivered by the Third Sector and community organisations.

Safety and Accessibility

Children play in their local area. Most children will experience the street outside their home as an open space, in the same way as they would a local park or playground. Travel to their chosen play space was normally less than 10 minutes and most children walked to their play spaces. Cycling was the second most popular means of transport with few children using

cars or buses. Younger girls were more likely to be driven to a play space than the boys of the same age group. Not all the children played primarily in a designated play space; some attended after school provision and adventure playgrounds but most played in the local park and out on the streets. Others played in their own homes or at friends and relatives.

Play Preferences

The preferences for types of play equipment and environment were slightly different according to ages and genders. Children aged under 12 were more interested in natural play spaces than the over 12's. The 5-7's also found fixed play equipment particularly appealing whilst the 8-11's preferred trees, flowers and animals in their play spaces. Sports pitches were a popular choice with older children rating them more highly. Bangladeshi girls were more interested in benches and swings. Swings were the most popular piece of play equipment across all ages. Toilets were also seen to be a necessary amenity. Children wanted a variety of places; some where they can make noise and others where they can find peace and quiet. Children wanted safe and equal access to clean open spaces and undamaged play facilities.

Barriers to Play identified by local children and young people

The factors that children identified which restricted their ability to play included: homework, being too busy, bullies, safety fears, traffic, parents and other adults. Children felt that it was important for adults and children to work together, to know where to play, to feel safe, and that their play spaces should be free and open at the right times.

7 CURRENT PROVISION

Play opportunities are delivered by the statutory and voluntary sector through a wide range of partnerships providing supervised and unsupervised play for children and young people in the Borough. The London Borough of Tower Hamlets also delivers play provision directly through Idea Stores and libraries, the arts and festivals programme, the provision of space in parks and on estates, through the youth service, schools, early years provision and holiday programmes.

In common with the rest of London and the UK, historically there has been no overarching strategic approach to play provision. Consequently data relevant to the provision of play has been fragmented, incomplete and variable in quality.

In developing the Play Strategy the Council and its partners have undertaken a gap analysis of existing data. Where possible the Council has commissioned surveys and research to close gaps in knowledge of quality and distribution of provision.

7.1 Classification and Methodology

Dedicated play space describes play opportunities of a physical nature which are designed for the sole purpose of play or to encourage play. This category includes play grounds, ball games areas, skate parks and adventure playgrounds. Often such facilities can be found in parks or within estates and housing amenity land. The amount and location of this provision is typically more stable over time and linked more directly to spatial and urban planning considerations.

Play services describes play provision which takes place in a number of spaces, both dedicated and not, and provides children with an organised play environment. This includes, amongst others, services such as play groups, toy libraries, stay and play sessions or after school play clubs. Play services change relatively quickly over time, many of them dependent on short term funding from a much wider range of sources and funding regimes. Play services are much more flexible being more able to move about within communities. Levels and the targeted nature of provision are subject to significant fluctuations over relatively short periods of time. Consequently this strategy can only give a snap shot of play services.

Open access play provision relates to those play spaces and services which meet the play principles of being free of charge, where children are free to come and go as they wish, and where children are free to choose what they do (known as the 3 Free criteria). On the contrary, **limited access** play provision does not meet one or more of these criteria.

	Open access	Limited access	Data gathered
Dedicated play space	Housing play areas Ball games areas Park play areas Wheeled play areas (e.g. skate / BMX parks)	Adventure playgrounds City farm play spaces School play spaces	Address (inc postcode) Size/boundaries Owner/landlord Target group Catchment area Capacity Play equipment

Play services & services which include play elements	One O'clock Clubs in parks (stay and play)	After school clubs Childminder networks Children's Centres Holiday play schemes Toy libraries Parent/carer and toddler groups Nurseries Playgroups Private 'pay for play' Breakfast clubs Full day care Museums Other	Formal/informal features Supervision/wardens/rangers Opening hours, access Charges, funding Quality against criteria Improvements needed/planned Usage/take-up
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Table 4: Categorisation of Tower Hamlets Play Spaces and Services

The starting point for this strategy has been the development of a comprehensive database mapping location, play type and provider of all spaces and services across the Borough where the primary purpose or a central element is children's play. In order to map locations play provision was split into the two categories of play services and dedicated play spaces. Furthermore the methodology distinguishes between open access and limited access provision. This distinction builds on the recommendations by the Big Lottery Fund guidance on play provision, which emphasises that any typology should highlight play provision which 'is free of charge, where children are free to come and go (other than where safety is an issue for children with particular needs), and where they are free to choose what they do.'²⁰ It also acknowledges the Mayor of London's Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on play, which emphasizes the need for the provision of play spaces.²¹ At the same time Tower Hamlets recognises that some limited access provision has the potential to become open access. For this reason and to provide a broader perspective on play, limited access provision has been included in this Strategy.

A comprehensive desktop review of existing data for parks and open spaces in relation to play spaces was undertaken. It was clear from this review that data had not been captured in a planned or systematic way. The available data was checked in the field and initial findings confirmed the need for a comprehensive audit of dedicated play space provision.

Cultural Services and Housing officers carried out a comprehensive survey of all unsupervised play spaces within the Borough. This covered play spaces transferred to RSL's. Over a hundred additional play sites were identified that did not appear on any existing database. This data was plotted on a GIS database and travel time/distance standards derived from national guidance were applied. The survey activities were split into two main exercises. One focused on Parks and open spaces, the other on housing estate based play areas. Factors restricting access such as roads, railways, rivers and canals have been included in the assessment process. Catchments have been drawn at 250 meters for all parks play spaces based on a locally adjusted catchment indicator derived from the GLA guidance on play and open space strategies. Catchment areas for housing play spaces have been identified as the estate only and therefore serve the residents of the particular estate.

Assessment of spaces took place against a standardised quality grading system. The standard for parks and housing estate based play spaces is set out below:

²⁰ Children's Play Council and Big Lottery Fund (2006) *Planning for Play: guidance on the development and implementation of local play strategies*, London: Big Lottery Fund, p. 48.

²¹ Greater London Authority (2006) *The Mayor's Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance – Providing for children and young people's play and Informal recreation*, London: Greater London Authority.

- **Good** – Equipment in good condition, recently refurbished with good surfaces and pathways, entrances.
- **Average** – In reasonable condition, requires some refurbishment in the near future.
- **Poor** – In poor condition, still used by children/young people but in need of redesign and replacement due to age of equipment and may need relocation due to poor access.
- **D (derelict) 4** - Equipment removed but still used by children and young people for play.
- **D5** – Not formally de-designated as a play space. Equipment removed and site no longer used for play.
- **D6** – No longer a designated play space.

Analysis has been undertaken at LAP level and is useful as a basis for taking forward decisions about play provision in the Borough. However, care should be taken when making assumptions about need based on the LAP tables as the catchment areas of some play spaces will cross LAP boundaries. Analysis should ideally be refined to Super Output Area level. Unfortunately population projections at this level are not currently available. However further refinement of the analysis is recommended using ward level data and this has been included in the Action Plan.

The data on play service provision was collected through a number of channels in order to secure the most comprehensive snap shot of play service activity possible. PATH undertook a survey of its members, Officers reviewed existing websites of umbrella organisations and data provided by the children’s information service completed the picture.

7.2.1 Dedicated Play Spaces (open access)

Dedicated play spaces (open access) in parks and open spaces

Parks and green spaces offer the chance for children and young people to socialise, be quiet and physically active and to be able to play freely in natural surroundings or to have fun in formal play facilities. They provide the principal opportunities for a wide range of formal and informal play that are used by thousands of local residents every year.

There are 54 equipped play areas, 21 ball games areas and 2 wheeled play areas across parks and open spaces. Of the 54 equipped play areas 15 are targeted at children between the ages of 0 and 4 years. 16 are targeted at children and young people over the age of 5, and 23 cater for children and young people of all ages. In addition, all parks and open spaces provide grassed areas for play.

Table 1 below provides a breakdown of the quantity of parks and open space dedicated play space provision across each LAP area against the child population. Caution is needed when interpreting this data as the catchment areas of some spaces will cross LAP boundaries.

LAP AREA	Number of sites	% Borough provision	of % child population (2006)	% child population (2016)
LAP 1	10	13%	17%	15%
LAP 2	6	8%	12%	11%
LAP 3	14	18%	14%	13%
LAP 4	9	12%	11%	9%
LAP 5	6	8%	8%	7%
LAP 6	11	14%	14%	15%

LAP 7	10	13%	13%	14%
LAP 8	11	14%	11%	16%
Total	77	100%	100%	100%

Table 5: Parks play areas in each LAP

The quality assessment shows that there is a marked variation in quality of play space provision across the Borough. The high scorers are generally those sites that have benefited from relatively recent investment.

Typology	Good	Average	Poor	TOTAL
Parks Play Areas 0-4 years	8	3	4	15
Parks Play Areas 5+ years	9	3	4	16
Park Play Areas all ages	12	7	4	23
Ball Games Areas	9	3	9	21
Wheel Park	2	0	0	2
TOTAL	40	16	21	77
%	52%	21%	27%	100%

Table 6: Quality of parks and open spaces play provision by type

LAP AREA	Good	Average	Poor	TOTAL
LAP 1	5	1	4	10
LAP 2	4	1	1	6
LAP 3	11	3	0	14
LAP 4	4	5	0	9
LAP 5	0	5	1	6
LAP 6	1	7	3	11
LAP 7	2	7	1	10
LAP 8	4	5	2	11
Total	31	34	12	77
% of provision	40%	44%	16%	100%

Table 7: Quality of parks play provision across each LAP

Major roads, railways, rivers and canals are just some of the obstacles that limit access to local parks in Tower Hamlets. Many of the publicly accessible open spaces are small and awkwardly sited without reference to where residents live compounding inequality of access. However, there is a programme of work being undertaken by the Council's Transportation and Highways Section that is seeking to reduce the impact of these obstacles on pedestrian and bicycle movements.

Accessibility has been assessed as good, average or poor. The overall criteria for assessment was based upon:

- **Good accessibility** – At least 75% of the catchment area is not affected by lines of severance.
- **Average accessibility** – Between 50% and 74% of the catchment area is not affected by lines of severance
- **Poor accessibility** – More than 50% of the catchment area is affected by lines of severance.

LAP AREA	Good	Average	Poor	TOTAL
LAP 1	4	5	1	10
LAP 2	0	6	0	6

LAP 3	11	3	0	14
LAP 4	4	5	0	9
LAP 5	0	5	1	6
LAP 6	1	7	3	11
LAP 7	2	7	1	10
LAP 8	4	5	2	11
Total	26	43	8	77
% Borough provision	34%	56%	10%	100%

Table 8: Accessibility of parks play provision across each LAP

Dedicated play spaces (open access) on housing estates

Council owned housing estates provide a range of play opportunities for children, from small play spaces to larger ball games areas. In addition, increasingly diverse housing management models present a range of challenges and opportunities for the development and management of play space in the Borough. Access to housing amenity land is partially restricted, and in practice only estate residents tend to use it. Much of this play space is fragmented and equipment is generally of poor condition. The future remodelling of these estates offers opportunities for improving the quantity and quality of play space and public access to it.

Dedicated play space provision on Council housing estates takes the form of

- designated play areas in use
- designated play areas currently not in use
- designated ball games areas
- housing open space.

Typically they are very local spaces serving the estate community within which they are located. As a general rule they do not have catchment areas that cross LAP boundaries.

Currently there are 97 areas that are designated as play areas that either have equipment on them or have had the equipment removed but are still being used for play. Of these, 40 are considered to be in good or average condition, with the remaining 57 classified as being in poor condition or lacking any facilities.

In addition to these play areas there are a further 39 areas designated as play areas but where the play equipment has been removed for various reasons (eg vandalism, anti-social behaviour) and are currently not considered to be suitable for play. However, LBTH Housing have confirmed that these latter areas, along with closed designated ball game areas (see below) will still be designated as play areas until such time as local community consultation has taken place on future play provision within the context of this strategy. The majority of the playgrounds are small, intended for very local use, catering for a wide age range from 2 up to 13 years. There are an additional 7 spaces, which are no longer designated as play areas but remain vacant.

There are also 61 designated ball games areas on council owned housing estates that have some form of goal or basketball provision or are considered to be used for play. 36 are considered to be in good to average condition.

There are a further 5 ball game areas where the equipment has been removed and are not presently considered suitable as ball game areas.

In addition to the above there are approximately 53 hectares (132 acres) of grassed areas on council owned housing estates. These are areas of public access but where there is no formal provision of play equipment. Additionally there are approximately 19 hectares (47

acres) of hard landscaping including car parking areas and other open space. Whilst some of this space is unsuitable for play some of it may have real play potential. It is recognised, however, that tolerance of children's play activities in modern communities is significantly lower than in the past and any introduction of new play space could only be achieved in close partnership with the communities they serve.

There are 45 play equipped play spaces, including play areas and ball game areas provided by Registered Social Landlords across the Borough, varying in size and quality. These have been included in the overall assessment.

LAP AREA	Play areas	Ball Games Areas	Total	% of Borough provision	% of child population (2016)
LAP 1	36	19	55	22%	15%
LAP 2	20	11	31	12%	11%
LAP 3	18	4	22	9%	13%
LAP 4	14	11	25	10%	9%
LAP 5	15	6	21	8%	7%
LAP 6	22	9	31	12%	15%
LAP 7	29	10	39	15%	14%
LAP 8	22	8	30	12%	16%
Total	176	78	254	100%	100%

Table 9: Housing play spaces in each LAP

Following substantial investment over the last couple of years many playgrounds have been improved and are in good to average condition. Further investment took place on a number of kickabouts in the 2006/07 financial year. As indicated above there are several play and ball game areas that have no equipment at all and have fallen into disuse.

Typology	Good	Average	Poor	D4	D5	D6	Not known	TOTAL
Housing Play Areas	33	27	27	34	40	10	5	176
Housing Ball Games Areas	27	14	26	4	5	1	1	78
TOTAL	60	41	53	38	45	11	6	254

Table 10: Quality of housing play spaces by type

LAP	Good	Average	Poor	D4	D5	D6	Not known	TOTAL
LAP 1	8	5	16	7	16	2	1	55
LAP 2	9	7	10	1	4	0	0	31
LAP 3	1	3	6	6	3	3	0	22
LAP 4	8	2	7	4	3	0	1	25
LAP 5	4	2	0	10	4	1	0	21
LAP 6	5	6	4	4	5	4	3	31
LAP 7	11	9	6	5	7	1	0	39
LAP 8	14	7	4	1	3	0	1	30
Total	60	41	53	38	45	11	6	254

Table 11: Quality of housing play spaces across each LAP

Accessibility of housing amenity land is often exclusive because of the way housing estates are designed. Even if non-residents are permitted, the design does not always suggest this.

In addition, territorial behaviours in relationship to housing estates also means children and young people are unlikely to make use of play spaces in housing estates other than their own. Therefore catchment areas for play spaces on housing estates have been mapped as the perimeter of the estate.

7.2.2 Dedicated Play Spaces (limited access)

There are a number of dedicated play spaces in Tower Hamlets, which offer a degree of supervision with some restriction of opening times whilst still being open to all children and young people and allowing them to freely choose their activities while at the play space. These are adventure playgrounds and city farms. In addition, there are a substantial number of dedicated play spaces within school grounds. Access to these is normally restricted to children and young people attending the school to which the space belongs. Also, in many cases access to these spaces is restricted to school hours only.

There are 5 **Adventure Playgrounds**, one located in LAPs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7. They provide opportunities for 8-15 year olds to take part in adventurous play.

There are 3 **city farms** in the Borough: Mudchute, Spitalfields and Stepping Stones. They all provide staffed sessions for play alongside a play environment which can be accessed by children when sessions are not running.

A number of schools have audited their playgrounds and remodelled them so that they support a wider range of play types. For example Sir William Burrough primary school has already developed its three playgrounds to support a range of physical play giving children access to natural materials and resources to change their play environment. All schools with Foundation Stage follow the Early Years Service Guidance on outside areas.

Dedicated play space type	Number of Sites	% of Overall Provision
Adventure Playground	5	4.7%
City Farm	3	2.8%
School Playground	99	92.5%
TOTAL	107	100%

Table 12: Limited access play spaces by type

LAP AREA	Number of Sites	% of Overall Borough Provision	% of Child Population (2016)
LAP 1	24	23%	15%
LAP 2	11	10%	11%
LAP 3	17	16%	13%
LAP 4	12	11%	9%
LAP 5	9	9%	7%
LAP 6	11	10%	15%
LAP 7	13	12%	14%
LAP 8	10	9%	16%
TOTAL	107	100%	100%

Table 13: Limited access play spaces in each LAP

7.2.3 Key Findings & Recommendations

- Most children and young people can identify examples of good play space within the Borough but they generally perceive that play provision needs improvement if it is to meet their needs.
- Based on child population projections, current quality and distribution of play provision will not adequately meet demand across the Borough and in future growth areas in particular.
- Consultation has demonstrated broadly consistent and very positive support for activities and provision that engages children and young people in play. However, there is sometimes a low tolerance level of play within residential areas. Traditional play spaces and young people who use them can be viewed with suspicion and fear. This can lead to community pressure to close play spaces in residential areas.
- There are some excellent and highly successful play spaces in the Borough (e.g. Masthouse Terrace, Vallance Gardens, and Mile End Park Children's Park). However, some play spaces are located in areas that, due to environmental and physical changes, may now be inappropriate and can be of outdated design.
- A good proportion of play spaces in parks and open spaces (52%) were rated 'good' by the quality survey with Lap 3 having 78% of this play space type rated as good and LAP 2 having 66%.
- LAP 8 has the highest proportion of housing play spaces rated as good (46%) with LAP 4 having the second highest (32%).
- 34% of play space currently located within parks and open spaces achieved a 'good' rating for accessibility with only 10% achieving a 'poor' rating.
- The fewest number of parks and open spaces play spaces as a percentage of current provision against child population are in LAP 1 (17% child pop/13% total space), LAP 2 (12% child pop/8% total space).
- The poorest quality provision in parks and open spaces is, for the purposes of this summary, based on combined 'average' and 'poor' scores. Whilst 'average' is acceptable the analysis seeks to identify relative need between LAPs. This relative position can best be determined by combining the scores in this way. Using this approach the poorest quality play space in parks and open space play provision expressed as a proportion of provision currently available in each LAP is in LAP 5 (6 out of 6 poor or average) LAP6 (10 out of 11) and LAP 7 (8 out of 10).
- The poorest quality provision of play space on housing estates as a proportion of provision currently available in each LAP is in LAP 1 (42 out of 55 poor), LAP 3 (18 of 22), LAP 5 (15 of 21) and LAP 6 (20 of 31).²²

²² For the purpose of analysis we have assumed play areas for which quality data is not known are poor.

- The lowest (average to poor) accessibility levels to parks and open space play provision as a proportion of provision currently available in each LAP is LAP 2 (6 out of 6), LAP 5 (6 out of 6), LAP 6 (10 out of 11), LAP 7 (8 out of 10)
- The LAPs with the highest levels of child population at 2006 were LAP 1 (9,509), LAP 3 (7,601), LAP 6 (7,512) and LAP 7 (7,363).
- At present 33.6% of the children and young people are under 4 years of age with 66.4% 5 years of age and older. Population projections do not predict any changes to this to occur by 2016. The provision of play provision in parks and open spaces is currently disproportionately balanced towards provision for younger children. There are 15 play spaces catering for young children and 16 play spaces for older children.
- The quality of existing 0-4 play provision and 5+ play provision in parks and open spaces is broadly similar.
- There are a number of excellent adventure play facilities within the Borough (e.g. Glamis Road and Weaver's Field). However, there are presently no adventurous play opportunities for children in LAPs 5, 6 and 8.
- There are a significant number of existing play spaces that could support the existing shortfall in free play sites. Whilst these currently offer limited access to the children of the surrounding community there is strong commitment from all key play providers to ensure that, where possible, the potential of these sites to provide for more freely accessible play is realised.
- Strategic approaches to investment in and the provision of play space through new development are in need of further refinement if current and future needs are to be adequately met.
- Children and young people with disabilities face some of the greatest barriers to play and to free play in particular. The nature and availability of transport, social care packages, information, as well as play space design and public perception, all impact on their ability to access free play on their own terms.
- All key play service providers are committed to improving play spaces within the Borough. All recognise that improvements to strategic management of maintenance and mainstream investment programmes relating to play space are needed to ensure funding is targeted to those areas most in need and to ensure value for money continues to be achieved. Staff engaged in delivering play as part of their wider roles or as play service professionals would benefit from strategic investment in training and capacity building.

It is possible to determine some immediate priority LAPs for play. LAPs 1 and 2 currently have the largest number of children and fewest parks and open space play opportunities. LAPs 1, 3 and 6 have some of the poorest quality play provision on housing estates and LAP 5, 6 and 7 have some of the poorest play accessibility ratings. Along with LAP 8, LAP 6 and LAP 5 have no adventurous play opportunities for children.

Clearly play provision in LAP 6 can be identified as being consistently poor across the range of measures applied by this strategy. LAP 1 is also highly stressed with poor levels of open space play opportunities and poor quality play provision on estates. LAPs 1, 6, 7 and 8 are also projected to have the highest number of children in 2016. LAP 3 will also experience a significant growth in child numbers by 2016. A programme of improvements to play space is required, negotiated with the Local Strategic Partnership; to prioritise the actions needed to address the issues of provision and quality. LAP 1 and 6 should be included in the early

rounds of this programme, which should also plan for the areas of expected growth in child population by 2016. Any such programme should take into account where children prefer to play.

The table below provides an overview of various measures applied in the ranking of open access play space (parks and open spaces) LAP priorities.

Rank	Highest population (2006)	Highest population (2016)	Lowest Quality (average to poor)	Lowest Accessibility (average to poor)	% gap of provision (2006)	% gap of provision (2016)
1	LAP 1	LAP 8	LAP 5	LAP 5	LAP 1	LAP 2
2	LAP 3	LAP 6	LAP 6	LAP 2	LAP 2	LAP 8
3	LAP 6	LAP 1	LAP 7	LAP 6	LAP 5	LAP 1
4	LAP 7	LAP7	LAP 8	LAP 7	LAP 7	LAP 6
5	LAP 2	LAP 3	LAP 4	LAP 8	LAP 6	LAP 7
6	LAP 8	LAP 2	LAP 1	LAP 1	LAP 4	LAP 5
7	LAP 4	LAP 4	LAP 2	LAP 4	LAP 8	LAP 4
8	LAP 5	LAP 5	LAP 3	LAP 3	LAP 3	LAP 3

Table 14: Ranking of LAPs by priority measures

In order to avoid inadequate, fragmented and exclusive play space a clear methodology for directing improvements to community play via the Council's planning and development control functions should be established incorporating free access and catchment areas for play and clear and up to date design guidance.

Investing in existing play spaces on residential land or within estate communities will not necessarily be effective or welcomed. Such provision has set children apart from the wider community and resulted in space that is often identified as a nuisance or feels unsafe. The options available to remodel communities to provide quality, safe and accessible open spaces for everybody but which have intrinsic play value for children and young people should be considered. This should be supported by dialogue with the communities involved. There is a clear need to work with communities to build back tolerance and understanding of the role of play and to counter perceived threat associated with young people.

The Council faces a significant challenge if it is to adequately provide for the play needs of its rapidly growing population. In a Borough where land will always be at a premium school play spaces clearly have a role to play and guidance for schools has been identified in the action plan.

Management decisions affecting play space must be improved to ensure a 'joined up' approach to the development and maintenance of play spaces within the Council and between the Council and its partners.

This analysis of open access play space has informed the following Play Strategy Objectives which are linked to the five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes (shown in brackets).

7.2.4 Play Strategy Objectives

4. Improve play space across the Borough (Being Healthy)

Activities to develop a timed and costed programme of improvements to open and limited access play spaces in consultation with LAPs, prioritising those with the highest current levels of needed and those with the highest projected increases in

child population. The LAPs with the highest overall need in terms of level of provision at present are 1 and 6. LAP 2 will have the most pressure on play space based on current provision by 2016. The largest child population increases are currently projected for LAPs 1, 6 and 8. LAP improvement plans will need to address the long term maintenance and revenue implications resulting from any capital proposals.

5. Enable children to play in the communities where they live (Achieving Economic Well Being)

As part of a sustainable approach to the regeneration of the Borough ensure new developments have accessible play spaces and work to improve the existing urban environment to enable children and young people to play near their homes.

6. Provide improved challenging and stimulating play provision to enable children and young people to manage risks (Staying Safe)

Ensure adequate adventurous play opportunities for all children and enable children to experience and learn to manage risk in a safe environment.

7. Create a culture throughout the Borough, which is supportive of children playing in the streets and communities where they live (Making a Positive Contribution)

Through the development of play initiatives and development of play spaces engage with community groups and residents to raise tolerance of play and awareness of the benefits of play.

7.3.1 Play Services (open access)

The audit has identified only one particular type of play service which can be defined as providing an open access environment. Although supervised, One O’Clock Clubs provide a free of charge service, which children are free to come to and leave as they wish and where they are free to choose their activity. There are 6 One O’clock Clubs which provide ‘stay and play’ activities for families with children under 5s and under 8s during the holidays. These are managed currently by Cultural Services, but management will be transferred to Children’s Services in the near future.

LAP AREA	Number of Sites	% of Child Population
LAP 1	0	15%
LAP 2	1	11%
LAP 3	1	13%
LAP 4	1	9%
LAP 5	1	7%
LAP 6	1	15%
LAP 7	0	14%
LAP 8	1	16%
TOTAL	6	100%

Table 15: Open access play services by LAP

7.3.2 Play Services (limited access)

The Strategy acknowledges that, particularly in the field of limited access play services, provision is often delivered as a secondary element of a wider children’s agenda. This is the case in the field of education where play times and other play activities present opportunities

to support children’s learning within a more structured learning based framework. In these cases the Strategy does not seek to be prescriptive but rather to provide

- a useful framework for approaching development of that play element
- clear statements of policy for the Council and its partners.

The limited access play service provision in the Borough is provided through a range of activities and providers. Their quantity, type and the distribution are detailed in the tables below.

Play and play related Service (limited access) type	LAP 1	LAP 2	LAP 3	LAP 4	LAP 5	LAP 6	LAP 7	LAP 8	TOTAL
After School club	12	8	7	5	8	10	15	7	72
Holiday Schemes	5	4	3	1	3	7	6	4	33
Children’s Centre	3	1	1	2	1	2	2	3	15
Parent and Toddler	11	9	10	6	7	8	15	9	75
Playgroup	4	2	4	2	3	2	5	3	25
Toy Library	12	7	11	9	3	11	13	5	71
TOTAL	47	31	36	25	25	40	56	31	291

Table 16: Limited access play services by LAP Area (data gathered in 2006, number of toy libraries updated in 2007)

There are 71 **toy libraries**, which provide a lending service for toys and training for families to support play in the home.

There are 25 **playgroups** across the Borough, with at least one in every LAP. These provide play and learning activities for children under 5 and deliver free nursery education to three and four year olds, as well as some two year olds. They are all inspected by Ofsted and working towards quality assurances accreditation, supported by the Early Years Service and the Early Years Network, Tower Hamlets (previously known as PUFA). As the entitlement to free nursery education changes from 12.5 hours to 15 hours of early education, the centres will require support to meet this new expectation.

Children’s Centres have started to deliver integrated services to support children and parents in order to maximise children’s opportunities, enable them to fulfil their potential, and to close the gaps between outcomes for the most disadvantaged children and others. In phase one Tower Hamlets is developing 15 Children's Centres, at least one in each LAP area. The services provided include good quality early play and learning sessions, some of which are specifically designed to encourage physical play, or messy play, or to support the development of children’s speech and language. Parents and carers are supported in being more knowledgeable and confident in supporting their children’s learning and development. The Centres also signpost parents and carers to other play and learning activities, including playgroups, One O’Clock Clubs, toy libraries, and parent/carers and toddler groups.

Toyhouse Libraries is funded to run a diverse range of **soft play** services, each geared towards families who have specific needs, providing exciting play environments for children and parents/carers to use and have fun together, whilst offering opportunities for adults to build their own networks of support. They offer this service both for families with children under 5 and for children with special needs.

PATH and Barnardo’s were selected by Tower Hamlets Children’s Fund to develop a new programme of **children’s community play** projects. The aim was to develop additional culturally appropriate play projects for school aged children, which they can ‘own’, where they can feel confident and safe and reduce their exposure to criminal or anti-social

behaviour. In addition, the projects target children who currently miss out on play services, in particular Bangladeshi and Somali girls as well as children with disabilities.

PATH have been piloting a form of **outreach play** in areas across the Borough delivering play opportunities in parks, green spaces and on estates.

Alongside these children's community play projects a number of **open access play provisions** run in the form of holiday playschemes, out of school provision and outreach programmes. There is at least one **holiday playscheme** in each LAP area.

There are three **museums** (Ragged School Museum, Docklands Museum and the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood), which offer both programmed activities and the opportunity for imaginative play through their activities.

There are a variety of **after school facilities** across the Borough, particularly for the 5-11 age range. Development plans for the Children's Centre programme include an expansion of wrap around childcare, within educational settings, for under 5's. The majority of limited access after school clubs are working towards the Aiming High quality assurance model.

There are 72 **after school childcare schemes** across the Borough, particularly for the 5-11 age range, that offer play opportunities in a closed access setting usually for a fee.

The **Junior Youth Service** is the main provider of after school care operating from 27 schools during the term time and 3 schemes during the holidays. It is an expanding service as although a large number of primary aged children use this service, the majority do not. It is not free (although charges are low) and is aimed particularly at working parents.

There are 4 kite-marked **childminder networks** in Tower Hamlets, each serving two LAPs. They are expected to link with Children Centres. Inclusion support is available through the Area Inclusion Co-ordinators (Early Years Service).

Tower Hamlets **Youth Service** provides local facilities offering opportunities to meet, to get involved in discussions, projects and activities and to take part in drama, music, sport, volunteering and youth action. They provide opportunities to learn new skills and to pursue informal education that will be recognised through accreditation whenever possible. Confidential information, advice and counseling services are provided and local forums through which young people can take part in planning new activities and programmes are encouraged. They commission the third sector to run clubs, outreach sessions and one off programmes. The Youth service has made a commitment to support the transition of children from play projects to youth programmes and supports the concept of freely chosen activity through its youth work curriculum.

7.3.3 Key Findings & Recommendations

Play services are often highly specialised in nature, offering targeted and needs-based services reacting to localised needs and priorities. Unlike play spaces, they can vary greatly in how they are provided, who has access to them, and where they are delivered. While some play services will have the provision of play opportunities at their core, others may include play as an element alongside other services such as childcare or homework support. Because the variety of services offered by play and other providers, it is not possible to make specific recommendations for individual service types.

There are many excellent examples of Third Sector community play projects helping to improve the quality of life for children and their parents/carers. The Third Sector is of the view that even more could be achieved through longer term commissioning and the removal of uncertainty around annual financial planning decisions of key funders.

The Third Sector plays a significant role in the provision of play services and, as with the Third Sector as whole, a key challenge to the stability of provision remains the short term funding often available. Addressing this issue will enable the Council and its partners to provide better value for money in the commissioning of play and related services and a more stable platform upon which to achieve long term positive outcomes.

The focus of this Strategy has been and remains on open access play spaces, which are open to all children and young people without barriers to access such as pricing or other forms of registration. At the same time the Council and its partners acknowledge the contribution structured and supervised play opportunities can make to children's and young people's development.

In line with Mayor's guidance and acknowledging the above the Strategy identifies targeted training and capacity building for Council and Third Sector play staff as a potentially cost effective way of improving quality of and access to play provision.

This analysis of play services has informed the following Play Strategy Objectives which are linked to the five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes (shown in brackets).

7.3.4 Play Strategy Objectives

8. Support and develop play providers (Enjoying and Achieving)

Continue to provide support for play providers increasing their capacity to deliver and improve the quality of the services they provide to children and young people.

9. Further develop partnership working between play providers, statutory bodies and funders (Enjoying and Achieving)

Strengthen strategic and operational links to maximise the potential of play opportunities to contribute to shared priorities.

In particular to plan more effectively to improve free play access to children with disabilities and develop commissioning and funding arrangements in a way that supports sustainability of play initiatives and maximises value for money.

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