

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3

12 DECEMBER 2022

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

PLAY SUFFICIENCY DUTY, ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN TO SECURE SUFFICIENT OPPORTUNITIES IN BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- inform the Committee of the statutory duty on all local authorities to secure a sufficient quantity and quality of play opportunities for children and young people in relation to Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the statutory guidance produced by Welsh Government in July 2014;
- seek comment and observations on the three-year assessment conducted during 2021-22 and the proposed action plan for 2022-24 which is required in relation to the statutory matters established by Welsh Government in relation to play sufficiency.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

- **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
- **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
- **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

3.1 The Welsh Government commenced the first part of the statutory duty relating to play sufficiency, under Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure

2010 requiring local authorities to assess the sufficiency of local opportunities, in accordance with regulations subsequently published in 2012.

- 3.2 Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) has conducted and submitted play sufficiency assessments and action plans as required by Welsh Government during each cycle and this report presents the fourth cycle of assessment and action planning.
- 3.3 The assessment process requires a review of baseline positions and progress that has been made in relation to the areas of focus that have been established by Welsh Government. The assessment provides a higher level overview of progress made and issues identified and the process is designed to utilise available information, relevant evidence, and engagement approaches to help identify areas for improvement and priorities for action.
- 3.4 The definition and scope of “play” is broader than might be anticipated in this context and inclusive of areas such as recreational activity, schools’ activities and clubs, junior and youth clubs, leisure, sporting activities, cultural and arts activities, youth provision, events, freely chosen play and holiday activities. It is also broad in its consideration of all the places and spaces that could add value and support the securing of play sufficiency.
- 3.5 It is notable that the Authority is required to ‘secure’ rather than be fully responsible for the delivery of play sufficiency and this approach has been positively evidenced in previous phases of assessment by working collaboratively with partners and stakeholders. The growing focus on utilising co-production based approaches is important in the context of play sufficiency.
- 3.6 The information gathered via the assessment process is used to indicate and highlight the priorities that can be identified for the forthcoming three-year period (with annual action plans) and annual reporting requirements. The play sufficiency assessment and identified priorities is also intended to connect to the Public Service Board and Wellbeing plans within the assessment process.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The issues/ matters that have needed to be considered within the assessment and action plan relate to the Welsh Government framework can be found in the assessment report and are as follows: -
 - a) Population
 - b) Providing for diverse needs
 - c) Space available for children to play
 - d) Supervised provision
 - e) Structured recreational activities
 - f) Access to space/ provision
 - g) Securing and developing the play workforce
 - h) Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas

- 4.2 The scale and volume of the issues/ matters and the range of issues that are needed to be covered highlights the importance of a 'One Council' approach and the need for collaboration and capacity building with stakeholders and partners.
- 4.3 The key responsibilities that would apply in relation to play sufficiency for BCBC would be as follows: -
- a) To secure sufficient play opportunities in the County Borough, so far as is reasonably practical, having regard to its assessment and action plans
 - b) To publish information about play opportunities and keep the information published up to date
 - c) To have regard to children and young people with diverse needs, including those living with disabilities or additional needs
 - d) To commit to work within and across the Council, with partner organisations, with children and their families and communities to ensure that children and young people have access to sufficient play
 - e) To monitor play sufficiency and support the lead Corporate Director, Cabinet Member who is "champion" for play sufficiency and the designated lead for managerial and delivery functions of play sufficiency reporting and requirements
 - f) To ensure the play sufficiency assessments form part of the local needs assessments linked to the Bridgend Wellbeing Plan, co-ordinated by the Public Service Board and to be integrated throughout the planning cycle
 - g) To ensure that children and young people participate in the planning for play and the monitoring of play provision as part of developing citizen engagement and scrutiny procedures
 - h) To review budgets of relevant policy areas that affect children's play opportunities and maximise their benefit for play and contribution to wellbeing planning
 - i) To consult with parents, the local community, and any other interested stakeholders on the development of play opportunities and development of child and play friendly communities
 - j) To develop and implement an annual play action plan showing continuous improvement in securing opportunities contributing to high level Authority plans
- 4.4 The 2019-2022 Play Sufficiency assessment and action planning cycle was significantly disrupted at a National level by the pandemic and national restrictions

being applied across Wales. The impact is recognised in the assessment described below:-

- a) Recent engagement with young people in Bridgend suggests 30-40% of young people may have been negatively impacted by the pandemic in terms of their physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing and also their motivation to re-engage in community opportunities
- b) Many of the places and spaces that young people would have traditionally used prior to the pandemic were curtailed and many face a challenging period of rebuilding (e.g. leisure, culture, community halls, youth venues)
- c) Digital engagement and opportunities, during this period, will have replaced 'face to face' activity and connecting with peers and friendship groups for long periods of time with young people spending extended time within their home space
- d) Extra-curricular activity opportunities will also have been curtailed for long periods in line with restrictions and also the opportunities to build skills and confidence in key areas (e.g. school swimming programmes, national standards cycling, physical literacy programmes and fundamentals)
- e) Additional support will have been available for some vulnerable young people but confidence in re-engaging in opportunities will have also been impacted

4.5 Although this has been a challenging period it also encouraged a range of new approaches and also support from funded programmes: -

- a) New programmes and activities were commenced for care experienced children and young people with safeguarding concerns during holiday periods and as a partnership between service areas.
- b) Programmes supporting children and young people with disabilities developed digital approaches, family opportunities and home visits and a networking approach was developed with community groups and organisations and support for programme development.
- c) Family Active Zone resources and packs were created to support whole household wellbeing activities within or near their homespace with positive results. This included supply of equipment and online activities/challenges and guidance promoting the importance of family time to support sufficient play.
- d) Programmes to provide wellbeing and respite support for young carers have emerged and seen growth with a young carers network being progressively built. The network has been supporting planning of activities that meet identified needs.

- e) The 'Summer of Fun' and 'Winter of Wellbeing' investments by Welsh Government has supported more young people and more community partners to develop opportunities close to home in partnership with BAVO including a focus on disability, Welsh language, disadvantage and supporting the resilience of community groups.
- f) The opportunities for youth groups ,in particular ,to expand services and opportunities has seen growth including collaborating as a network and recognising that the play sufficiency duty extends to 17 years of age. For some young persons funded initiatives support has extended to 24 years of age.

4.6 The assessment and action plan that have been produced are provided at **Appendix 1** but some of the key themes that will need focus are provided below: -

- a) It will be important for the Council to recognise how play sufficiency can help support community Covid recovery for children and young people as a 'One Council' approach. The Council may benefit from establishing a more formal leadership approach that involves all relevant contributors within a "One Council" approach but working collaboratively with stakeholders and key partners.
- b) The Council cannot deliver play sufficiency in isolation from partners and stakeholders will have a role in helping to secure it and also longer term development and ownership of local opportunities. The duty on the Council is to secure sufficient quantity and quality of play by working creatively with others and showing ongoing improvement via such collaborative approaches.
- c) Whilst good progress has been made supporting many people with diverse needs, there remains scope to build on this base with partners and progress further. There is a focus within the play sufficiency assessment framework on children and young people with additional needs, young carers, residents of rural areas, children of differing cultural backgrounds, gypsy travellers and LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) children to be considered.
- d) One of the challenges resulting from the legacies of the pandemic is that whilst there is a need to focus on diverse needs and related inequalities in regard to play sufficiency there is also a more universal need for such opportunities and support to enhance wellbeing of far larger numbers of young people in general with challenges to their overall wellbeing. The opportunities that young people will want to engage with may need to be designed differently and with young people as part of a co-production approach in some cases.
- e) The Council is showing commitment to larger scale improvements of children's play which has the potential to contribute to specific aspects of the overall play sufficiency duty. When taking this work forward, considerations will need to

include reviews of the accessibility of locations, their strategic purpose including play destinations, their ability to support inclusive play recognising additional and diverse needs (including physical, learning and sensory), play value assessment to maximise the impact of assets and space, unmet need and ensuring community engagement.

- f) Having seen the positive response from communities in recent years to lead on the development of community opportunities, and more localised opportunities, this could, following review, see the Council developing a facilitatory role in some instances and a delivery role where needed or most appropriate.
- g) Ensuring that the Council's larger leisure and cultural partnerships with Halo Leisure and Awen continue to develop appropriate opportunities with, and for, young people and families including support to reduce or remove price as a barrier to participation. Similarly, to ensure that opportunities are inclusive and recognise diverse needs.
- h) The economic climate and cost of living increase will increase the importance of low cost or no cost opportunities for the most needy being available. As part of the Council's socio economic duty this will need to be recognised when investment into play sufficiency is considered and recognising that play in its broadest sense is the right of every child.
- i) The Council will need to review its capacity to sustain a workforce of sufficient quantity and quality to meet its play sufficiency responsibilities in terms of service delivery but potentially leadership also. This will potentially require the creation of a leadership group with Lead Cabinet Member and Lead Corporate Director representation. The play sufficiency duty is broad and across all policy areas including education and schools, town and country planning, traffic and transport, early years plans, family policy and initiatives, inter-generational policies and health and safety.
- j) The role of a play sufficiency leadership group would include an overview of key areas of focus and also development of a performance framework that would indicate whether progress or gains were being made. The responsibilities would need to span across directorates as part of a "One Council" approach but also include external partners and key stakeholders. Examples of areas of focus could include school swimming attainment, participation in low cost or no cost opportunities, for people with diverse needs, infrastructure developments and improvements, workforce development and raising awareness of play sufficiency and its objectives.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect upon policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 An equality impact assessment was conducted in line with the original assessment in 2014 but this has been reviewed in response to the challenges of the pandemic and more recent information that has been gathered. The initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy. The Play Sufficiency assessment framework is a national one produced by Welsh Government and inherently designed to increase focus on reducing the impact of poverty and inequality on children and young people, particularly those with diverse needs. The pandemic has created a need to recognise that a larger number of children and young people are now also in need of support.

6.2 The play sufficiency duty comes as part of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty agenda which recognises that children and young people can have a poverty of experience, opportunity and aspiration, and that this kind of poverty can affect children from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds. As such, the Play Sufficiency Duty connects well with the Socio Economic duty and a focus on removing barriers to reduce disadvantage.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The Wellbeing goals identified within the Act have been considered in the preparation of this report

Long Term	The play sufficiency commitment is a long-term Welsh Government aspiration that is embedded within regulations. It aims to redesign infrastructure, opportunities and engagement to better support children and families
Prevention	As part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 there is a recognition of the contribution of play to the wellbeing of children, young people and young adults and also the broader support for family and household resilience
Integration	The focus on diverse needs will encourage a cross Council and cross sector approach to developing and sustaining opportunities that meet needs. There are a broad range of opportunities for partners to contribute to play sufficiency
Collaboration	Play Sufficiency requires the Council to secure sufficient opportunities and the Council can achieve this by working collaboratively with communities and partners

Involvement Working with children and young people and communities to co-design and co-produce appropriate and sufficient play opportunities is an integral part of the duty and also our approach

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 Any financial implications will apply across directorates, and it is uncertain as to how much can be absorbed within existing core revenue budgets. In recent years, Welsh Government have provided a range of funding support schemes but there is no confirmation of future or ongoing investment.
- 8.2 The resourcing of play sufficiency delivery and governance has received short term support by Council via an earmarked reserve, and this may need to be reviewed in due course.
- 8.3 The resourcing of sufficient services, opportunities or place based developments will need to be considered as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy whilst recognising the financial pressures that apply alongside other statutory requirements.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 The Committee is recommended to note the detail of the play sufficiency statutory duty and the scope of services that are contributing to creating a 'play friendly' society as identified within the play sufficiency assessment and provide observations and comments on the 2022-2025 assessment and the action plan that has been developed as an initial response to the findings of the assessment.

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Background documents:

None