

# An Executive Summary of the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) 2025 - 2028:

## The state of play in Cardiff

### 1. Local Authority Summary Statement

Cardiff is proud to be the UK's first UNICEF accredited Child Friendly City. This designation by the UK Committee for UNICEF recognises Cardiff as a city with children and young people at its heart, where their rights are respected by all. Our city is a great place for babies, children and young people to grow up, with an environment that champions their voices and ensures they are actively involved in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.

Since integrating into Early Help, Cardiff's Children's Play Service, with the support of Play Wales, has successfully reconnected with partners to emphasise the importance of play, and Cardiff's role in protecting, developing, and promoting play opportunities for our youngest of citizens.

To develop the assessment, Children's Play Service officers facilitated four key workshops: *Population*; *Places where Children Play*; *Supervised Provision*; and *Policy Synergy*. These workshops, based on the themes from the new Play Sufficiency Assessment template from Welsh Government, created a platform for stakeholders to discuss play and children's experiences, share information, and identify gaps. This approach promoted reflection and discussion around service impact on play and made clear Cardiff Council's statutory obligation and responsibilities for the Play Sufficiency Assessment. Additionally, an online survey was also undertaken and promoted for completion by children and providers, receiving 743 responses from children.

The primary results from the play sufficiency assessment (PSA) and the suggested actions to achieve sufficiency, as detailed in the Cardiff Play Sufficiency Assessment, are as follows:

- a) There is a need to focus on raising the profile of play training to secure service delivery, due to concerns raised regarding the recruitment of qualified play staff across the city.
- b) There is an identified need to support children with a range of needs to access meaningful play opportunities, in accordance with need, across the sector. Of the children who told us that they have a disability, the top 3 places to play were in my house or a friend's house (74.2%), in my garden or a friend's garden (41.2%) and in a play area with swings, slides and other equipment (27.8%). Of the children who said they had no disability, the top 3 places to play were in my house or a friend's house (37.5%), in places with bushes, trees or flowers (33%) and in my garden or a friend's garden (26.9%).
- c) Further efforts are required to obtain current information on available play opportunities for families and to map provisions more accurately so that families can easily

understand what is accessible within their vicinity. Additionally, it is important to identify safe routes for accessing these provisions and open spaces.

- d) Further work needs to be undertaken to develop ways to publicise safe and local places to play, including a strengthened social media presence, to raise awareness of children's play services available
- e) There is a need for improved transition between services that work with children and young people at different ages/stages of life e.g., Children's Play and Youth Services. Additionally, there is a need for improved collaboration between services who are working simultaneously with the same populations of vulnerable children e.g. Education and Children's Services. A child's relationship with a trusted adult, engagement with the local community, and the development of a sense of belonging and purpose can serve as protective factors in their life, safeguarding them from risks such as exploitation, as outlined in the Local Government Association's Tackling Child Exploitation Resource Pack.
- f) Further research is needed to understand the availability of staffed play provision within and across the sector. In '*The Big Play Survey*', children indicated that they feel safe during supervised play sessions and that they can express themselves freely without the threat of bullying or criticism, which they have suggested occurs in unsupervised play provision.
- g) There is a need to establish a working group for children's play with the support of Child Friendly City, inviting key stakeholders to contribute to, and develop a vision and action plan for play in Cardiff, embracing the shared responsibility for ensuring the actions set out in the resulting PSA Action Plan are met.

## 2. Methodology

The PSA has been an excellent way to bring partners together to discuss opportunities for children to play across Cardiff. Cardiff is fortunate to have a Council Children's Play Service, dedicated to facilitating staffed play provision across the city for children and young people, and responsibility for facilitating the assessment process.

The methodology applied for the 2025-2028 Play Sufficiency Assessment has been strengthened and developed from previous years, creating a more robust process that includes engagement with partners in greater breadth and depth, and draws evidence from a variety of sources. This has been made possible, in part, by the support of senior leaders and Councillors, brought about by organisational change. In some places, this change in assessment process and methodology has led to a discrepancy between the RAG status of some items on the 2022-25 PSA and 2025-28 PSA. This is reflective of the more strategic and holistic view point that has been taken in determining the RAG status of each item for 2025-28, and the changing needs of the population.

The assessment has enabled a critical evaluation of the provision of play opportunities across all local authority directorates, as well as services offered by the Councils' partners. The assessment has identified gaps in provision, new opportunities, and has provided information on areas for improvement as well as examples of good practice.

The following steps and actions were undertaken to complete the assessment:

## The Launch

To launch the Play Sufficiency, key stakeholders were invited to attend an event facilitated by Play Wales. The event aimed to reconnect with key individuals and share the main principles of the Play Sufficiency Assessment, emphasising the local authority's duty to provide meaningful play opportunities in Cardiff. The aim was for everyone to recognise how their area of expertise can influence and support the development of a play friendly city.

A wide variety of partners engaged with the assessment process, including: Cabinet Members, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff Third Sector Council, Cardiff Youth Service, Child Friendly City, Childrens Services, Headteachers, Housing & Communities, Inclusion (Education), Libraries, Menter Caerdydd, Neighbourhood Regeneration, Parks, Planning, Public Health, Residential Children's homes, SAFE, Seren in the Community, Sport Wales, Transport & Environment.

## Workshops

Following the stakeholder event thematic workshops were developed based on the new reporting mechanism for Welsh Government. The workshops provided an opportunity for people to engage in person, and to foster positive relationships with both internal and external partners. The workshops focussed on four areas; population, places where children play, supervised provision and policy synergy. They were designed around the matters outlined in the policy documentation [Wales: a play friendly country](#). The purpose was to bring key stakeholders together to share information about their services, gain a better understanding of potential partners for engagement, and explore collaboration opportunities for the Play Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan. Additionally, this helped identify key partners to support the PSA Action Group, which will be responsible and accountable for identifying and monitoring the action plan.

## Written submissions requested

After the thematic workshops, the Councils Childrens Play Service reached out to partners, providing them with a template that highlighted criteria relevant to their service areas or expertise, for them to complete within a set deadline. This assisted in identifying which criteria were being fulfilled and determining the appropriate RAG status. Upon receiving this information, Cardiff Children's Play Service compiled the Play Sufficiency Assessment and an accompanying a report to go to the Councils cabinet for approval and publication.

## The Big Play Survey

Play Wales formulated a *Big Play Survey* to garner the thoughts of children and young people about their opportunities to play. The intention of the survey was to depict a picture of play at a national level. With the support of both Cardiff Research Centre, we were able to consult both digitally, using social media platforms and directly, through consultation workshops. Cardiff Children's Play Service were able to bring consultation to life, delivering playful consultation sessions with schools and after school's clubs across Cardiff. Play providers were invited to participate in an online survey and in total there were 743 respondents. Furthermore, through the support of Child Friendly City we were able utilise the outcomes of their consultation with children and young people as part of the Local Development Plan review, totalling 719 responses.

### 3. How engagement with children and families has informed the Play Sufficiency Assessment

Children's Play Services conducted the national online *Big Play Survey* with the help of Cardiff Research Centre. The survey was available online and on paper, for four weeks from 14<sup>th</sup> October to 10<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The aim was to reach as many children and young people as possible. The survey collected information of the opportunities children and young people had for accessing play and playing out and gathering their views about the state of play locally.

To ensure consultation was accessible for all, we conducted the following:

- *The Big Play Survey* was promoted through a series of scheduled posts from Cardiff Council's main Facebook page, which was shared by the Children's Play services and through wider Early Help Facebook pages.
- A team of 18 Playworkers liaised with school staff across Cardiff to run 18 workshops with Year 2 and Year 5 classes. A further 3 Welsh language sessions were facilitated with the support of Clwb Carco and a session supported by Shirenewton Flying Start was also undertaken with the Gypsy Romany Traveller community. Cardiff Children's Play Service received training on consultation to enhance engagement using their existing play skills and knowledge. This enabled the team to understand what is important for children and young people living and playing in Cardiff. They were also supported by Play Wales and their research papers on effective participation and consultation with children and young people.
- The Children's Play team utilised community sessions to increase participation through a further 11 play sessions, plus half-term pop-up sessions. In each of these, the team worked directly with the children and supported them to complete a survey. This also gave the team the opportunity to capture vocal responses.
- The Big Play Survey was circulated within the wider Play network to have a pan Cardiff reach and to ensure connection with specific groups (e.g. LGBTQ+, and Gypsy/Romany/Traveller communities).
- Afterschool clubs and children that attend Specialist Resource Base for pupils with Complex Learning Needs were also given the opportunity to take part in the survey via paper copies.

In total, the Children's *Big Play Survey*, garnered over 743 responses, compared to the 416 responses received for the 2022 – 2025 period, reflecting a 75% increase from previous years.

The responses will be analysed by the Play Sufficiency Assessment Working Group. The findings will be reviewed and used to inform improvements, which will be incorporated into the PSA Action Plan for Cardiff Council and its partners to implement as part of the statutory obligation.

### 4. Maximising resources

Cardiff Council maintains a core budget dedicated to Children's Play Service and to the provision and development of play opportunities for children most in need. Other council

budgets also contribute to the direct or indirect support of play opportunities, such as the budget for Parks and Leisure, or Youth Services.

Additionally, several Welsh Government grants are used to provide and enhance play opportunities for babies, children and young people through the Council's Early Help services or are used to support other organisations across the childcare and play sector to provide opportunities through specific grant application processes.

## What's changed?

The most recent PSA 2025 – 2028 identified how various Council directorates and decisions by partner agencies influence and shape opportunities for play. As a Child Friendly City, stakeholders from both internal and external groups are working towards creating an accessible, safe, and enjoyable city for children to grow up in and explore. Thematic workshops have been conducted to examine and explore how different services use their resources to promote, develop and acknowledge the importance of play.

A notable development is the integration of the Children's Play Service into the Council's Early Help framework, establishing a comprehensive support system for babies, children and young people from pre-birth up to 18 years of age. These changes brought management support and recognition of play's value for children, enhancing relationships and joining services up, to improve delivery. This change and the PSA has helped the Children's Play Service expand projects and strengthen third sector delivery to increase play opportunities for babies, children, and young people.

Since the last PSA in 2022 - 2025, Cardiff Council and its partners have advocated for a separate Play Policy in the Local Development Plan to further embed opportunities for children and the Right to Play. Safe and stimulating play is essential for children and young people's mental and physical health. It is not just an activity confined to playgrounds and play areas but is something that can be done in all aspects of a child's life, in a wide variety of locations and environments. Accessing a variety of opportunities for play and being able to be independently mobile within their neighbourhood, is important for children and young people's wellbeing and development.

## How Welsh Government Programmes have been used locally

### Playworks Program Funding:

This program aims to support play providers in maintaining the sustainability of their play projects. The following have been partnering organisations since 2022: Clwb Carco – Play Care; Seren in the Community – open access play; Menter Caerdydd Bwrlwm – open access play; South Riverside Community Development Centre – open access play; Ely & Caerau Children's Centre – stay & play; Learning Partnership Board – open access play; Ty Gwyn Special School – Play Care. Over a span of three years, Playworks has financed a total of 1,124 sessions across 36 weeks of school holidays.

### Play Streets:

Cardiff Play Services supports children's play within their neighbourhoods through the Play Streets initiative. Over a three-year period, 18 streets have taken part in this project, where the streets are closed to through traffic to create a safe environment for children to play. This initiative enables children to participate in physical activities, learn new skills such as riding

bicycles, and gain confidence in outdoor play. Furthermore, it encourages relationships among neighbours and strengthens community bonds. There is an accessible and well-promoted Play Streets project in Cardiff, a way of arranging temporary road closures, to support more children to play outside their homes. Cardiff Children's Play support resident-led Play Streets, which Play Wales reports improves the health and wellbeing of children and families, reduces social isolation for older residents, enables community activity and develops more joined up and cohesive neighbourhoods. This type of social interaction, intergenerational play and community cohesion are protective factors in keeping children safe from harm.

## Quotes from Play Street participants.

*"I love Street play because everyone can play with the skipping ropes, and I can ride my scooter/bike in my street without worrying"*

Bobby aged 8."

*"Street play has helped to develop the community spirit. Its lovely to see everyone out in the Street chatting and having a hot chocolate."*

*"The children love Street play and are so happy when they are playing together outside their houses"*

*"Street play is great for community spirit. Everyone is welcome and it's lovely to all be outside chatting"*

## Play Shacks:

The Play Shack initiative has established a total of 16 shacks, with 7 located on school premises, 1 in a nursery, 4 in community grounds, 3 are associated with community organisations, and 1 is located within temporary housing accommodation for families. These shacks are primarily equipped with loose parts that stimulate children's imagination, enabling them to engage in play that is entirely self-directed and intrinsically motivated. The children frequently participate in activities such as constructing dens, building go-karts, and making extensive use of the available resources.

## Quotes from Play Shack participants:

*"Our play shack has taken play and opportunity to a new level enabling us to have larger loose parts more risky play and the children love it"*

*"From Slack lines to den wars the sessions enrich the playing child and allow them to play when they want on their own terms. We use the shack during school, after school, Community events and during holidays".*

## 5. Monitoring

Lead strategic responsibility for Play is led by the Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty & Supporting Young People, with cross portfolio support from the Cabinet Members for Children's Services, and Culture, Sport & Parks. At an operational level, the PSA is overseen by the Operational Manager for Early Help within the Children's Services Directorate and is facilitated by the Councils' Children's Play Service.

With the support of Welsh Government and Play Wales, Cardiff Councils' Play & Parenting Development Manager has secured representation, on the Regional Partnership Board, alongside representation from the Vale of Glamorgan. This allows Cardiff to influence play-related matters at a strategic level and provides an opportunity to report annually on the Play Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan.

Furthermore, with the support of Corporate Policy, a paper was produced outlining the Play Sufficiency Duty with recommendations for the Cardiff Public Service Board to consider. The Board agreed recommendations to receive the findings of the 2025 Play Sufficiency Assessment and the PSA Play Action Plan, once developed. Moving forward, an annual report will highlight significant developments, achievements, and challenges, along with the updated PSA Action Plan.

The 2025/26 Play Sufficiency Action Plan will focus on addressing the identified priorities and areas for improvement from the assessment, aiming to enhance current provisions and address gaps. An initial step will be to assemble key stakeholders to form a Play Sufficiency Assessment working group responsible for the PSA and PSA Action Plan, to agree governance arrangements and terms of reference. The goal of the Play Sufficiency Working Group will be to review and agree on the identified priorities in the PSA, the gaps in provision, and the subsequent actions needed and who is responsible to address these priorities.

Cardiff Council and its partners have advocated for a separate Play Policy in the LDP to further embed opportunities and the Right to Play. Cardiff is the first city in the UK to be formally recognised as a UNICEF Child Friendly City (CFC): a city with children and young people at its heart, where the rights of children and young people are respected by all, a great place to grow up. As part of the Council's overall Child Friendly City approach, urban planning and design is identified as a child friendly priority area and this policy seeks to embed this approach in the plan to create play friendly spaces.

Further details on the implementation of this policy will be outlined in the Play Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). This guidance will complement the Open Space SPG and will be based on the Ministerial Review of Play and Cardiff's Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA). It aims to highlight the importance of incorporating play opportunities within urban environments to support the physical, mental, social, and emotional development of children.

By aligning the Play SPG with the Ministerial Review of Play and PSA, Cardiff can ensure a comprehensive and cohesive approach to enhancing play opportunities across the city, supporting the vision of a child-friendly Cardiff where the rights of children to play are fully realised. This guidance will ensure a comprehensive and cohesive approach to enhancing play opportunities across the city in new developments. This detailed SPG will be prepared following adoption of the plan in 2026.

## 6. Conclusion

This Play Sufficiency Assessment conducted with partners, families and children, highlights many positive aspects and shows that there are significant opportunities for babies, children and young people in Cardiff to engage in play across the city. In comparison to previous Assessments, the level of engagement with children has increased from 416 to 743 responses and increase of 75%. Notwithstanding this, it is acknowledged that there are still areas for improvement, opportunities for growth and/or development, that will need to be addressed moving forward.

Cardiff Council has made good progress in responding to the duty, safeguarding the Council's Play Service and ensuring that there are sufficient play opportunities within local communities and for the most vulnerable children.

Good progress has been made in implementing appropriate governance arrangements in place and ensuring that Children's Play is high on the agenda of the Council, including its Cabinet, and Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Committee. Commitment has also been secured from the Public Service Board to receive a copy of the PSA and updates on the progress of the Action Plan.

Cardiff has reached several milestones, such as obtaining the UNICEF Child Friendly City status. The Child Friendly City Team and the Parks and Planning Department have also cooperated to create a replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) Play Policy. The Replacement LDP is scheduled to be reviewed by Cabinet and Council in January 2025, with plans for an eight-week consultation period starting in February 2025.

The establishment and engagement of a new Play Sufficiency Assessment Working Group, with accountability for taking the PSA forward, will ensure that the importance of play is recognised and maintained within other Council directorates and across partners, where policies and actions impact children's ability to freely access play opportunities.



## 7. Theme analysis

<b>Population:</b> <b>Matter A:</b> The number of children in respect of each age range within its area <b>Matter B:</b> The needs of children from different cultures and backgrounds within its area <b>Matter E:</b> Whether there is a charge for play provision and where there is a charge
<b>What children have told us:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>The Big Play Survey</i> revealed in total 267 out of 624 referenced rubbish, glass and dogs mess as what's not good about their outdoor spaces.</li><li>• 97 out of 634 respondents (13.3%) thought of themselves having a disability.</li><li>• Of the children who responded to the questionnaire, 71.2% were aged 5-11 years and 28.8% were 12-16+ years old.</li><li>• Of the children who told us they had a disability, 49% said they were allowed to play out without an adult, compared to 55.7% of children who did not identify as having a disability.</li></ul>
<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A 75% increase in the responses to the Big Play Survey across the city from the 416 responses received in 2022-2025 and the recent consultation results garnered 743 respondents.</li><li>• There is existing grant-funded support to deliver Welsh language opportunities from third sector organisations, through Cardiff Council.</li><li>• The engagement received from children aged 5-16+ years.</li></ul>
<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is an identified need to support children with a range of needs to access meaningful play opportunities</li></ul>
<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There are opportunities for collaborative working and better channelling of resources.</li></ul>
<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The sustainability of services which are reliant on short-term grant funding.</li></ul>

<p><b>Places where children play:</b></p> <p><b>Matter C: The space where children can play, including open space, and any other space</b></p> <p><b>Matter F: Traffic measures that are used to promote access to play</b></p> <p><b>Matter I: The extent to which education and local development planning policies take into account the need to enhance play opportunities for children</b></p>
<p><b>What children have told us:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Big Play Survey</i> revealed in total 267 out of 624 referenced rubbish, glass and dogs mess as what's not good about their outdoor spaces.</li> <li>• That there is not enough suitable equipment for children of mixed ages or abilities e.g. children with accessibility needs or sensory sensitivities.</li> <li>• Accessible toilets in parks and play venues is often lacking.</li> <li>• Of the children who told us that they have a disability, the top 3 places to play were in my house or a friend's house (74.2%), in my garden or a friend's garden (41.2%) and in a play area with swings, slides and other equipment (27.8%). Of the children who said they had no disability, the top 3 places to play were in my house or a friend's house (37.5%), in places with bushes, trees or flowers (33%) and in my garden or a friend's garden (26.9%)</li> </ul> <p><b>Referenced from the survey; "Nothing for someone with my needs." "No where I can go independently"</b></p>
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic calming measures, school streets, play streets</li> <li>• Cardiff Children's Play Service have regular staffed play sessions throughout the year, free to access.</li> <li>• Local Development Plan review and play strategy developed for planning</li> <li>• Wide range of open / green spaces which are free to access across the city.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all communities across Cardiff have access to safe supervised play provision.</li> <li>• Open play spaces not currently assessed for play value by the Parks Service.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Councils Parks team have requested play training following consultation and involvement in stakeholder events.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impact on capacity and sustained resource.</li> <li>• The recruitment of suitably qualified play staff to support registered play provision.</li> </ul>

**Supervised provision:****Matter D: Supervised play provision****Matter G: Playwork training and workforce development****What children have told us:**

- The children participating in the Council-staffed play sessions indicated that they also attend other play provisions. Additionally, they mentioned that older children frequent youth centres, which offer weekly sessions with various activities such as cooking, crafts, and trips. Children also join sports teams when signposted by staff.
- Children say they feel safe at supervised play sessions, and they feel they can be themselves without the bullying and criticism they may get at an unsupervised play provision.

**Quote from children as follows: - ‘Do we (playworker) get paid for what we do, I would like to do this when I grow up.’**

**Strengths**

- The Children's Play Service and third-sector organisations provide numerous play provisions, many of which are funded by Playworks.
- The Councils Early Help Workforce Development and Accredited Centre team support with legal and regulatory training as well as wider continuous professional development
- Flying Start play opportunities for children under 4 provided are high quality and free at the point of access.
- There are third sector organisations contributing to the wider play opportunities available for children and young people
- Cardiff has a play service funded by core Cardiff Council budget.
- There is an inclusive offer available for children with higher support needs.

**Weaknesses**

- There is evidence to suggest capacity to deliver consistently across the city
- The recruitment of staff with experience of both play development and children with complex needs who are available to offer play opportunities in school holidays.

**Opportunities**

- The opportunity to upskill the wider Early Years workforce in children's play development
- To raise the profile of Cardiff Children's Play Service and what services it provides
- The opportunity to continue developing Play Shacks / Play Streets.

**Threats**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The recruitment of suitably qualified play staff, including staff who are suitable to support children in the inclusive play offer.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Policy synergy, engagement, advocacy and information:</b></p> <p><b>Matter F:</b> Measures used to promote access to play, including the provision of information, publicity and events</p> <p><b>Matter G:</b> Training opportunities for the play workforce</p> <p><b>Matter H:</b> The level of community engagement and participation</p> <p><b>Matter I:</b> The extent to which other policies of a local authority take into account the need to enhance play opportunities for children</p>
<p>What children have told us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We need to do more regarding advertising what available, using social media platforms that they use, like Instagram / snapchat etc, maybe videos of sessions or live videos.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The facilitation and support of Cardiff Council events such as National Play Day, Flying Start events.</li> <li>The development of new governance arrangements for the Play Sufficiency Assessment Working Group.</li> <li>The Local Development Plan review and plans to develop a Play Policy for the Planning Directorate, in partnership with Child Friendly City.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The limited social media presence on platforms that children and families use, advocating for play.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The development of new governance arrangements for the Play Sufficiency Assessment Working Group.</li> <li>The development of a new Cardiff Children's Play Service website.</li> <li>The aim to improve Cardiff Children's Play Services social media profile.</li> <li>The opportunity to continue to build strong working relationships with key stakeholders through the development of the Play Sufficiency Assessment Working Group.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The impact of staff attrition on internal and external relationships developed within a 3 year Play Sufficiency Assessment cycle.</li> <li>The impact on capacity and sustained resource.</li> </ul>