

# **Play England: Ten-year national play strategy and call for statutory requirement for “play sufficiency”**

To: Local Authorities in England

For information only to all other local authorities in the UK

## **1 Summary**

Play England has launched a new ten-year strategy setting out a vision for every child in England to have access to safe and high-quality places to play.<sup>1</sup> Alongside this, the organisation is calling for a House of Lords amendment to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to create a statutory requirement for “play sufficiency.”<sup>2</sup> This requirement is designed to guarantee that children and young people have adequate play opportunities in new developments.

If adopted, the amendment would represent a major shift in national planning policy by placing play alongside housing, infrastructure and sustainability as a core element of spatial planning.

This has direct implications for local authorities who would become responsible for assessing and ensuring play sufficiency within local plans.

## **2 Background**

Play England’s Ten-Year Strategy (2025–2035) builds on its longstanding advocacy for children’s play and equal access to public space. The strategy is rooted in strong evidence linking play to physical health, mental wellbeing, social cohesion and community resilience.

It identifies six priorities:

1. Embedding play in planning and design.
2. Tackling inequalities in access.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.playengland.org.uk/strategy>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.playengland.org.uk/newsblog/consultation-response-proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-nppf>

3. Strengthening local play partnerships.
4. Supporting play in schools and childcare settings
5. Ensuring inclusion for all children.
6. Recognising play as a key component of public health and community life.

The accompanying call for a House of Lords amendment to the NPPF aims to embed play in planning law, requiring local planning authorities to consider play sufficiency in every major residential or regeneration development.

### **3 What is “play sufficiency”?**

The concept is modelled on Wales’ Play Sufficiency Duty, introduced under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010,<sup>3</sup> which obliges local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas. Play England argues that a similar statutory approach is needed in England, where access to quality play spaces has declined due to austerity, reduced maintenance budgets and competing land-use pressures.

Embedding play sufficiency into the NPPF would require local councils to:

- Include a strategic assessment of play provision in their local plans.
- Ensure developers adhere to agreed-upon play standards.
- Use planning conditions or Section 106 agreements to secure and maintain play infrastructure.

Without national statutory guidance to follow, Leeds City Council has pioneered the local implementation of play sufficiency. As the first local authority in England to do so, it has committed to a comprehensive, city-wide action plan designed to maximise play opportunities for children and young people.<sup>4</sup>

### **4 Implication for councils**

If the amendment is adopted, local authorities will have a key role in shaping and delivering the national play agenda. Councils would need to review local plans, open space strategies and design codes to ensure play provision is built into policy and measurable through local standards. This may involve preparing regular play sufficiency assessments and aligning policies across planning, leisure, education and public health.

Funding will be a key consideration. Meeting play sufficiency standards will require both capital

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://play.wales/play-policy-legislation/play-sufficiency/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://news.leeds.gov.uk/news/senior-councillors-approve-new-play-sufficiency-priorities-and-appoint-new-leeds-play-champion>

investment and sustainable maintenance funding. Councils may need to work with developers, voluntary organisations and public health teams to identify shared funding opportunities.

A play sufficiency duty could also help address inequalities in access to play across urban, rural and deprived areas, aligning with wider public health and community wellbeing goals.

## **5 APSE comment**

Play England's ten-year strategy marks an important step in recognising play as an essential component of place-making, drawing directly on successful legislation already in place in Wales and Scotland.

APSE has long supported the principle of play sufficiency as consistent with local authorities' duties on health, equality and sustainable communities.

For councils, this agenda represents both a challenge and an opportunity: a challenge to integrate play into already complex planning systems and budgets, but an opportunity to embed children's wellbeing at the heart of local development.

For advice on this matter, all APSE members can sign up to APSE's Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network, which is an online network providing four learning events across the year, with expert speakers from across the parks and greenspace sector.

On 6 June 2025, a special APSE network meeting covered the evolving world of playgrounds and play facilities. The session focused on good space design, accessibility and the importance of benefit-risk assessments in creating safe yet stimulating environments. Eugene Minogue, Executive Director at Play England, spoke at the meeting. The slides are available to download [here](#).

You can sign up to the APSE's Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network using [this link](#).

**Matt Ellis, Principal Advisor**

**Email:** [mellis@apse.org.uk](mailto:mellis@apse.org.uk)

## Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular network meetings, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE Network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email [enquiries@apse.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@apse.org.uk).

Our national networks include:-

- FM and Building Cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

Visit [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk) for more details.



Association for Public Service Excellence  
3rd floor,  
Trafford House,  
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.  
telephone: 0161 772 1810  
fax: 0161 772 1811  
web: [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk)

**NEW MUNICIPALISM**  
Delivering for local people and local economies