

Pride in Place: Delivering for Play: An analysis of a report from Play England

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England, and for information to Wales, Scotland, and Ireland

1 Executive Summary

Based on the report by Play England: 'Freedom to Play' this briefing considers the main findings and recommendations.

The Government's Pride in Place Impact Fund is investing **£150 million across 95 areas** (including 64 areas in England, each receiving £1.5 million over two years, totalling £64 million) to improve public spaces, including play and leisure facilities, as part of the wider £5 billion Pride in Place programme for local renewal.

Play England's report suggests that whilst this is a significant opportunity to improve the spaces that matter most to communities, in the case of children and young people, the benefit will only be real if delivery is planned, evidence-led and rooted in the principle of Play Sufficiency.

2 Overview

What Play Sufficiency means

Play Sufficiency means that every child has enough time, space, opportunity, and freedom to play in their everyday lives. It goes far beyond playgrounds and covers:

- formal and informal play areas
- parks and open spaces
- streets and neighbourhood spaces
- school grounds (including out-of-hours use)
- natural and green areas
- active travel routes
- supervised play settings such as adventure playgrounds
- community recreation facilities

When Play Sufficiency is achieved, play opportunities are **adequate in quantity, quality, accessibility, inclusivity, and integration** across the community.

A pathway for delivery

Play England's ten-year strategy - [It All Starts with Play!](#) - provides a ready-made framework to help councils plan and deliver their Pride in Place investment.

Recommendations: Five practical steps:

1. Diagnosis

- Carry out a Play Sufficiency Assessment and spatial mapping audit before committing funds.
- Identify gaps, inequalities, and opportunities across your authority.

2. Targeting

- Use robust evidence, including [University of Sheffield research and data](#) on stark inequalities in playground provision, to make sure resources go where they are most needed.
- The University's national playground dataset offers valuable evidence to guide investment.

3. Securing

- Secure projects through planning policy by writing them into your Local Plan and design codes and aligning them with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), particularly the recent change to [Paragraph 104, which now includes 'formal play spaces'](#).
- This gives play spaces statutory weight and helps protect them in the long term through planning gain (S106/CIL) and maintenance planning.

4. Delivering

- Apply Play England's established principles of quality and inclusion.
- Ensure new or refurbished spaces are stimulating, child-led and welcoming to all children, including disabled children, girls, and those in disadvantaged communities.

5. Sustaining

- Recognise the role of staffed provision and adventure playgrounds, where skilled playworkers build trust, resilience, and connection.
- Plan for long-term investment, workforce support, and community partnership.

Together these steps provide a clear route from **diagnosis to targeting, securing, delivering, and sustaining**.

Investing proportionately in children

Children make up around **20% of our population and 100% of our future!**

Play England encourages local authorities to consider allocating at least a proportionate share of their Pride in Place funding - **a minimum of 20% where possible** - to children's play, ideally reflecting the percentage of children in your area.

Some councils may wish to go further, using local data to prioritise neighbourhoods where access to play is most limited.

Data and digital tools to support you

- **University of Sheffield National Playgrounds Dataset** – mapping around 34,000 playgrounds across England and revealing sharp inequalities in provision.
- **Playces digital tool** – developed with the University of Sheffield, this mapping platform provides real-time insight on play provision, inequalities, and investment options through interactive dashboards.
- **Borough Profiles** – available on request, these give a snapshot of local play provision, child population, and access to space.
- **Crowdfunding platforms** - can help councils attract additional investment and community support for locally led projects and can also help leverage CIL and S106 contributions to expand the scope and impact of Pride in Place initiatives.

More information or a demonstration of the Playces platform or Borough Profiles, is available from Play England.

7. APSE Comment:

APSE welcomes this report by Play England and will continue to champion local government initiatives to provide all children with safe and secure public spaces to explore play. However, APSE also reflects the revenue support for play spaces and public realm has suffered some of the most severe losses in revenue support over the last 15 years. A key issue for APSE member councils is that whilst many have successfully bid for, and attracted, capital investment for play areas and schemes the long-term costs of maintaining, inspecting, and ensuring safe play spaces remains problematic. Whilst play can be integrated across a range of services including sports and leisure, the vital role of accessible public realm and play parks, is a vital but often under-funded component.

APSE member councils can access discussions play provision through its networks which are free for members to attend, including its parks and public realm and sports and leisure networks.

Shami Scholes

Research & Business Support Officer

Email sscholes@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 advisory groups, 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 advisory groups are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Advisory groups 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 advisory group meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area, please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national advisory groups include: -

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

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more detail



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

NEW MUNICIPALISM
Delivering for local people and local economies