



**Resources and Community Services
Scrutiny Panel
The Council's Policies and Provision
of Children's Play in Tameside
6th November 2003**

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RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF POLICIES FOR AND PROVISION OF CHILDREN'S PLAY IN TAMESIDE

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR

I am pleased to present the Resources and Community Services Scrutiny Panel's Report on Children's Play.



Children's play is a non-statutory service, but nevertheless our findings show that people feel it is important to have good quality, safe and easily accessible play areas near to where they live. Sadly, as parts of this report will highlight, equipped play provision in Tameside is not as good as it could be, either in quality or in geographical spread.

However, this report does not seek to focus on the negative points, but rather it seeks to put forward a case for greater investment in Children's Play, not least because, as a service, it crosses through several of the Council's key priorities, including health, education, tackling crime and disorder and the environment. As well as setting out a need for additional finances for maintenance, it also highlights good practice from other metropolitan authorities in bringing in additional capital expenditure and external 'match funding' that could easily be adopted by Tameside.

This should be seen as a positive report for the future of Children's Play in Tameside.

I would also like to thank the Members of the Panel for their full involvement in this scrutiny exercise, and the Scrutiny Support Unit, who (as ever) have worked extremely hard. Thanks must also go to Ms Issy Cole-Hamilton of the Children's Play Council who visited us from London, and contributed so much to this exercise, and to the Officers and Councillors who have come before the Panel at various stages.

Finally, during this scrutiny exercise we have conducted extensive consultation with residents, community groups and young people right across Tameside, and I would like to thank the public for showing an interest in this subject as in many ways, this is their report.

COUNCILLOR ANDREW GWYNNE Chair of the Resources and Community Services Scrutiny Panel..

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The members of this Scrutiny Panel decided to undertake this review due to concerns about the provision and maintenance of children's play facilities in Tameside. In particular members wished to consider the number and condition of equipped play areas in the wider context of children's play and how they could help improve the service.
- 2.2 The number of equipped play areas in Tameside had been drastically reduced from 99 in 1990 to 30 in 2004. The vast majority of the original sites were in a poor condition and budget limitations meant that the 1990 figure could no longer be sustained. The Panel was very concerned that the number of sites planned for 2004 should not reduce and that provision should be increased.
- 2.3 The Scrutiny Panel was informed by both a representative of the Children's Play Council and the Public Health Specialist from the Primary Care Trust of the benefits to be gained from children's play. This related to both physical, social and emotional development.
- 2.4 Following discussions with both officers and the Cabinet Deputy Community Services, it appeared that a definitive policy for children's play still had to be agreed by the Council. In addition, it was unclear which cabinet member had overall responsibility for children's play policy and provision. This was something that the Panel felt should be addressed with a single executive member having responsibility for policy, provision and maintenance of children's play areas.
- 2.5 Members of the Scrutiny Panel visited Stockport and Manchester and were very impressed with the provision made in those authorities, and the ability of these two councils to draw in funding for children's play provision. Stockport stated that £5million had been raised since 1997, through planning development arrangements, agreed with the developer, in lieu of Section 106 planning agreements. Manchester had raised considerable sums through Friends of Parks organisations applying for matched funding. An example was given of funding that had been received as part of a crime reduction initiative. It was felt that Tameside could learn much from these approaches and other examples of good practice.
- 2.6 In Tameside funding was insufficient for adequate maintenance of the existing play areas and there was very limited capital funding to increase provision.
- 2.7 Funding for the provision of equipped play areas was very limited, with the majority of capital resources derived from income provided through Section 106 planning agreements. The Panel was informed at the time of the review that the actual use of the capital receipts sourced through these

agreements was not monitored, although it is understood that this situation has since been rectified.

2.8 Section 106 planning agreements did not relate to housing developments of less than 50 dwellings, whereas in Stockport all developments were the subject of a development premium payment agreed with the developer.

2.9 The Head of Planning confirmed to the Scrutiny Panel that it was intended to incorporate the need to provide children's play facilities in the new Unitary Development Plan for Tameside. This would be followed by supplementary planning guidance to introduce a "Community Fund", which would operate in a similar way to arrangements in neighbouring authorities.

2.10 The Scrutiny Panel was confident that if the recommendation contained in this report were implemented, the outcome would have benefits far beyond the simple provision of playgrounds, but also provide significant health and social benefits.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

Councillor Andrew Gwynne (Chair), Councillor P Harrison (Deputy Chair), Councillors Duffy, A Holland, S Quinn, M J Smith, Walsh (part), Wareing (part), Welsh and K Wright

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW ON CHILDRENS PLAY IN THE BOROUGH

The following Terms of Reference and objectives for the Review were approved by the Panel at its meeting held on 12th June 2003 :-

Terms of Reference

“ To review the policies and provision of children's play in the borough to inform policy development”

Objectives

- A. To produce accurate information on the provision of children's play areas.**
- B. To clarify and assess past, present and future policy for the provision of children's play and the development of that policy.**
- C. To record user satisfaction and identify any improvements.**
- D. To assess need and whether current and planned provision will meet that need. (See appendix one for details of the Scoping Document)**

5. METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The Panel commenced the review by meeting with the Cabinet Deputy, Community Services in order to ascertain current Council policies and provision of children's play.
- 5.2 The Panel, accompanied by the Council's Playgrounds Manager undertook site visits to the following play areas within the borough :-
- King George Vth Playing Fields - Ashton-under-Lyne
Peregrine Crescent - Littlemoss
Lees Park - Droylsden
York Road - Droylsden
Granada Park - Denton
Tame Street - Denton
- 5.3 The Panel received information from the Head of District Assemblies and Head of Recreation with regard to adopted performance indicators, location, quality and quantity of play areas together with budget allocations.
- 5.4 Consultation took place with children and parents through six summer play schemes attended by members of the Panel and Scrutiny Support Unit. Questionnaires were distributed to all elected members inviting their comments on location, quantity and quality of provision. The Panel also invited the views of community groups who had a particular interest in children's play provision such as playgroups, Brownies and Cubs groups, and Resident's Associations. The Council's Quality Auditors undertook interviews in local parks as part of their routine consultation.
- 5.5 To enable the Panel to make comparisons on policies, provision and ways of assessing need with those of neighbouring local authorities, visits were undertaken to Stockport MBC and City of Manchester Council.
- 5.6 The Panel received evidence from representatives of Planning, Housing Renewal and Youth Services in order to discuss broader issues relating to children's play in particular, potential funding through Section 106 Agreements and issues around young people.
- 5.7 Information as to the value of children's play was received at a special meeting of the Panel attended by Issy Cole-Hamilton, Policy and Research Officer from the Children's Play Council. This evidence had been gathered through a two-year consultation and policy development programme culminating in the the publication of 'Making a Case for Children's Play: Building policies and strategies for school aged children' in 2002.

5.8 Information has also been included from the Specialist in Public Health, Tameside and Glossop Primary Care Trust together with observations received from the Borough Treasurer and Borough Solicitor.

6. REVIEW FINDINGS

6.1 BACKGROUND

6.1.1 The Panel began its review by establishing the development of children's play provision in Tameside over recent years.

6.1.2 In 1990, 99 designated play areas existed in Tameside. Most of these play areas were poorly maintained and had little or no equipment.

6.1.3 In 1992, the Leisure Services Committee recommended a programme of improvements for children's play areas. This involved identifying those play areas to remain, to be redeveloped or to be removed. It was recommended that the Council provide a number of 'modest' sites and a smaller number of larger strategic sites. The Committee requested that the Director of Leisure consult ward members about the future of children's play provision in each ward.

6.1.3 To assist resource allocation a review of play areas put each ward into one of three categories:

- Those with the greatest deficiency in play provision
- Those with moderate deficiency
- Those with the least deficiency

6.1.4 Following the review the Committee approved a list of 54 play areas in order to attempt to match resources to what could be afforded and raise standards to British Standard 5696. Those play areas were to be located around centres of population. By 2000, following closures and reorganisation, 44 play areas existed in the borough.

6.1.5 A report to Cabinet in July 2000, appended to this report as appendix 2 acknowledged that the target of 54 quality play areas could no longer be afforded and a review was needed in order to meet increasingly stringent safety standards within the European Standard BS EN 1176 which relates to play equipment.

6.1.6 Approval was given to the Cabinet Report which recommended a reduction in the number of designated play areas from 54 to 30, 20 locations of which were to be decided by District Assemblies.

6.1.7 Following approval of the Cabinet Report, an Action Plan was developed to reduce the number of sites to 30 by 2004 with a milestone target of 36 by 2003.

- 6.1.8 The Panel was informed that the decision to reduce the number of children’s play areas was largely driven by budget constraints and heard that the rationale for closures included regulatory standards not being met and residents’ complaints.
- 6.1.9 The Panel was informed that for at least the past 10 years, the annual budget for the maintenance of equipped children’s play areas has been £25,000. Additional development monies have been received from time to time through planning Section 106 Agreements.

Conclusion:

1. The Panel concluded that the limited budget available has restricted the development and provision of children’s play facilities especially equipped play areas for children of all ages.

6.2 CURRENT PROVISION

6.2.1 EQUIPPED PLAY AREAS

- 6.2.1.1 There are currently 36 designated play areas in the borough, 9 of which are due to be closed by 2004 and 3 new sites are awaiting completion.
- 6.2.1.2 The Panel heard that by 2004 there will be 30 designated play areas in the borough 10 Strategic Sites, 10 Local Plus and 10 Local Sites
- 6.2.1.3 Strategic sites are the largest sites in the borough with one located in each town plus Stamford Park. Strategic play areas are for children up to the age of 14 years and made up of a toddlers area with sand, together with a junior and senior area. The sites cover an area of over 1000 square metres and contain a minimum of 14 items covering 5 types of equipment. Strategic sites should also have a free play area for informal sport.

Two of the borough’s strategic sites are pictured below. Both sites have a sand pit and are adjacent to playing fields. King George V also has a caged all-weather area for basketball and football.



Strategic Site,
King George V Playing Fields,
Ashton-under-Lyne



Strategic Site,
Lees Park,
Droylsden

6.2.1.4 Local Plus sites are slightly smaller than strategic sites and are for age groups up to early teens. There is one Local Plus site per town, each containing up to 7 types of equipment (5 for children up to 8 years, and 2 for youths). Local Plus sites can include equipment for basketball, football, shelter for youths meeting friends etc. The Cabinet report referred to in section 6.1 above indicated that all areas would have a Local Plus Site.

6.2.1.5 Local Sites are smaller than Local Plus and appeared to be unevenly spread across the borough. Local play areas cater for children up to the age of 8 years and cover an area of 400 square metres. The sites contain a minimum of 5 types of equipment covering swinging, sliding and rocking.



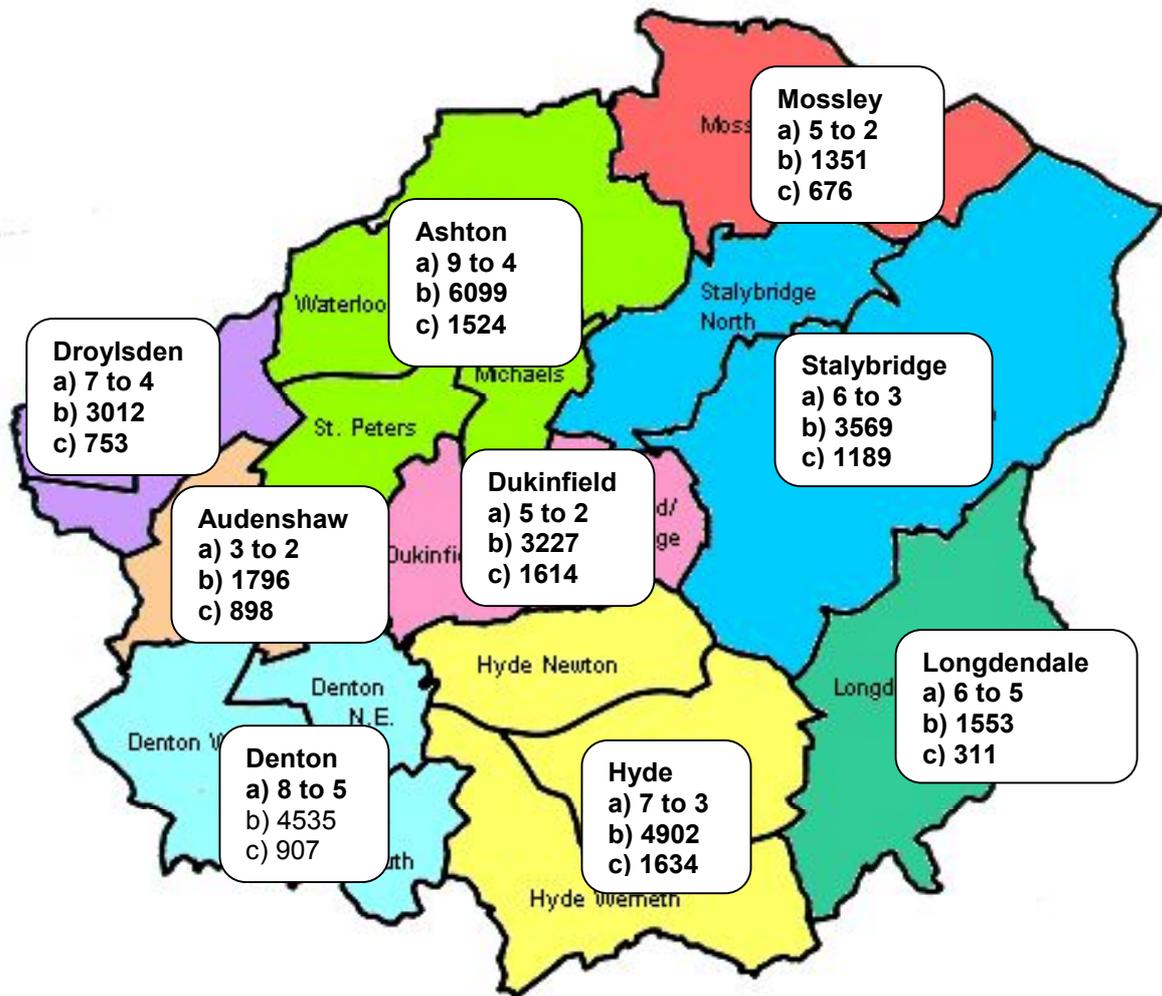
6.2.1.6 Leech Brook Avenue, Audenshaw is run entirely by the Denton and Audenshaw District Assembly and is therefore not on the list of corporately designated areas. Following anti-social behaviour which resulted in the removal of half of the equipment situated on the site, consultation took place with local residents. After consultation it was decided that the remaining equipment was to remain and that Denton and Audenshaw District Assembly undertake responsibility for the site.

6.2.1.7 Leigh Street, Hyde is currently under development and will include a skate park and play area. It is not clear whether this site will be run by Hyde District Assembly or will be added to the list of corporately designated areas.

6.2.1.8 The map below (figure 1) shows provision of play areas in 2000 and the planned provision by 2004 after re-organisation has taken place. It also shows the number of children aged 5-16 years of age in each area and the number of children aged 5-16 years per play area based on 1991 census figures. 2001 census figures are not currently available at town level although the total population of 5-16 year olds in Tameside has increased from 30,044 in 1991 to 32,769 in 2001.

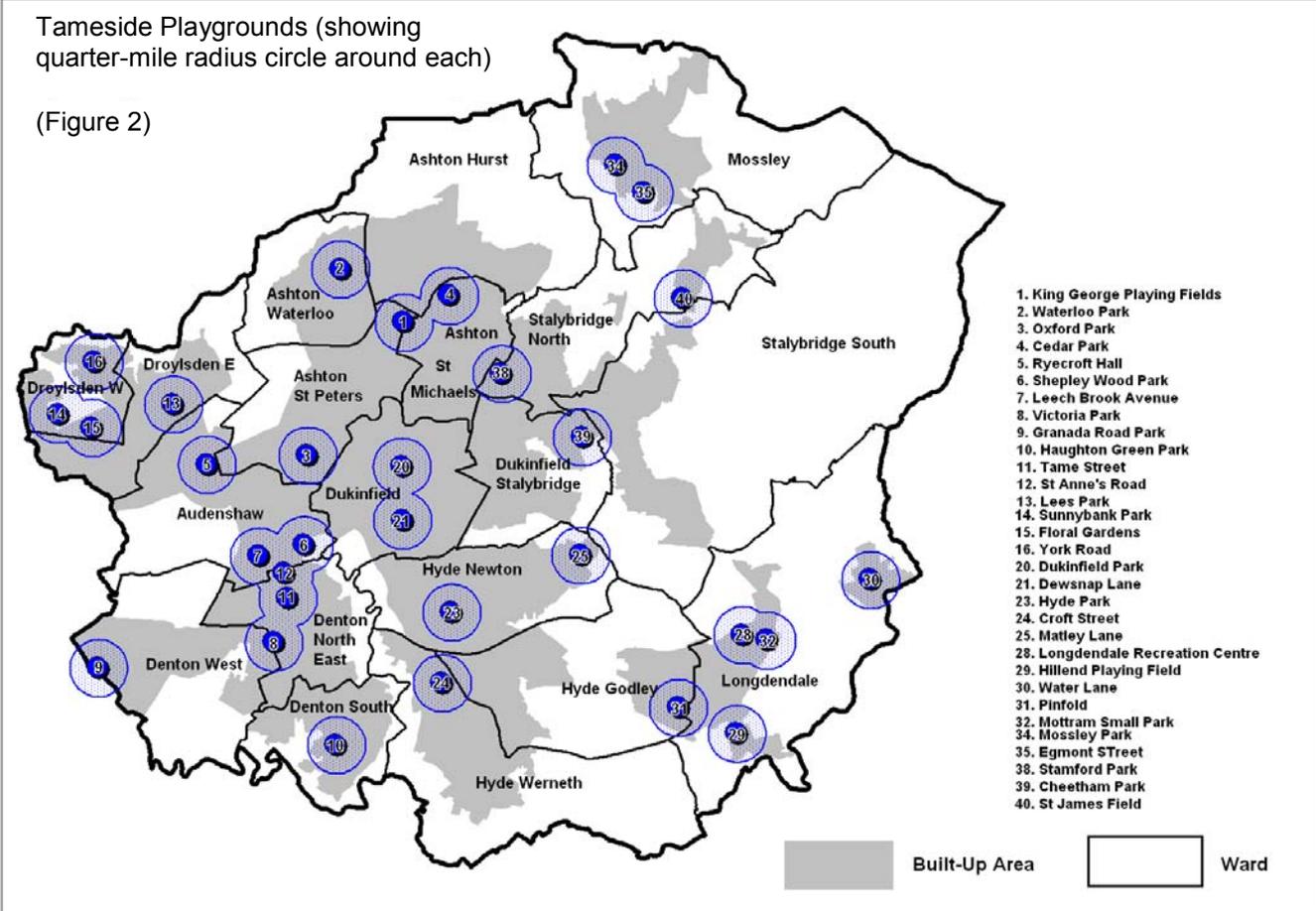
Key to map (figure 1)

- a) Original number of play areas to Number of play areas after reorganisation
- b) Total number of children aged 5-16
- c) Number of children 5-16 per play area



(Figure 1)

6.2.1.9 The map below (figure 2) demonstrates the extent to which play areas are within easy walking distance in built up areas. Each play area has been allocated a number. Missing numbers indicate that the play area has already been removed.



6.2.1.10 The Panel visited several play areas in the borough which included examples of a Strategic, Local Plus and Local sites identified as corporate designated areas.

6.2.1.11 The Panel also visited sites in Stockport and sites located in community parks in Manchester. Manchester has 4 types of parks which are determined by size rather than equipment.

6.2.1.12 Like Tameside, Stockport MBC and Manchester City Council did experience problems with vandalism and the panel heard that where possible, provision is always made for older children when play areas are introduced to help prevent this problem. This should be in place before the play area is constructed.

6.2.1.13 Manchester City Council commenced a 10 year improvement programme in 1994. The Panel heard that the number of play areas would reduce from 170 to 99 equating to 3 play areas in each of the 33 wards.

- 6.2.1.14 The Panel has received information that the above programme has been revised. Manchester City Council are to take a different approach with the development of a 'Manchester Standard for Play'.

Conclusions

2. That the current number of play areas in the borough is inadequate and sites unevenly spread.
3. Much of the equipment on play areas is 10 years old and often in a state of disrepair.
4. There appeared to be no clear criteria to determine the location of sites on re-organisation.

Recommendations

1. That 30 equipped play areas be the minimum number of sites and that the allocated budget be sufficient for this number to be developed and maintained to a high standard.
2. In view of the number of children per play area, in the long-term, 30 play areas is not sufficient and should be increased.
3. That provision is made for young people as well as children when play areas are introduced.

6.2.2 QUALITY OF EQUIPPED PLAY AREAS

- 6.2.2.1 In Tameside out of 282 individual pieces of play equipment in parks across the borough it was estimated that 64 pieces of equipment are missing, completely out of use or in need of immediate repair or replacement. The surfacing is in need of repair or replacement at 8 sites.
- 6.2.2.2 Statistics collected by the Department of Trade and Industry show that there are around 40,000 injuries to children on playgrounds in the UK each year which require a visit to hospital with one fatal accident occurring every 3 to 4 years on average.
- 6.2.2.3 The causes of accidents can be grouped into 'management causes' such as poor design, unsuitable equipment, incorrect installation, poor inspection and poor maintenance, and also 'user causes' such as lack of supervision, misuse of equipment and unsuitable clothing.

- 6.2.2.4 Tameside Council's Audit and Risk Management Unit estimates that between 1993 and 2003, the Council has paid just under £100,600 in compensation for 12 accidents in play areas. This is paid out of the Council's centrally maintained insurance funds. Services contribute to the maintenance of these funds and additional insurance premiums.
- 6.2.2.5 Acts of Parliament which apply to children's play areas are the Occupiers Liability Act (1957), the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1992).
- 6.2.2.6 Local authorities can be sued for negligence under these Acts should harm be caused by lack of maintenance to surfacing etc. The Council might also be at risk of criminal prosecution and other enforcement action from the Health and Safety Executive if its playgrounds do not meet proper safety standards. Playground providers must therefore ensure that play areas are safe and work to avoid foreseeable accidents. A series of standards help ensure that playground providers do not contradict the Acts of Parliament.
- 6.2.2.7 Although not legally binding the Health and Safety Executive strongly recommends that providers of play areas meet the following two European Standards as a minimum. Equipment BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177 for impact absorbing playground surfacing such as special tiles and natural materials such as turf or bark.
- 6.2.2.8 In Tameside, much of the existing play equipment predates the European Standard which was introduced in 2000 and is therefore acceptable, as the new Standard is only enforced on sites built after 2000. Previous to this was the British Standard which had some higher and some lower expectations.
- 6.2.2.9 The National Playing Fields Association and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents produce guidelines for playgrounds. The standards affect playground reorganisation and refurbishment. Equipment can be replaced with similar equipment on a site that does not meet minimum distance requirements from neighbouring houses but should any additional equipment be introduced, the site would have to be moved. The 1998 ruling by the Ombudsman concerning a play area in Tameside was based on the site not being a sufficient distance from neighbouring houses, a NPFA standard.



If the site above were to be improved it would have to be moved because it is less than the minimum distance away from neighbouring properties.

- 6.2.2.10 Previously, the Audit Commission had required all local authorities to adopt performance indicators for play areas based on the NPFA standards. These performance indicators are no longer required by the Audit Commission and a decision has yet to be taken by the service as to whether the statistics will still be gathered for internal purposes, although they do not appear in the District Assembly Business Plan for 2003/04.
- 6.2.2.11 Tameside uses its own set of standard definitions for children's play areas. These are Local, Local Plus and Strategic Play area. These standards will impact upon the Council's ability to meet the relevant health and safety standards and will also effect the performance indicators used by the Council to ensure these standards are being met.
- 6.2.2.12 The Recreation Service and District Assembly officers felt that the Council should consider developing its own standards and definitions to reflect local needs and priorities and that performance indicators could be devised to incorporate those definitions.
- 6.2.2.13 The Health and Safety Executive recommends that Playground Managers carry out risk assessments on all play areas beyond those issues covered by the European standards.
- 6.2.2.14 Management systems should also be in place to ensure maintenance standards are met and repairs carried out quickly.
- 6.2.2.15 For old facilities, managers need to consider priorities for renewal, refurbishment or removal of equipment. In some cases temporary removal of equipment may be necessary until standards can be met.

Conclusion:

- 5. Tameside's playground service has strived to meet recognised standards as far as possible within the inadequate annual funding available of £25,000 for maintenance of equipped play areas since 1994. Given budgetary constraints, it has been difficult to improve these sites and without further investment closure will continue to be the inevitable option to avoid accidents.**

6.2.3 OTHER PLAY OPPORTUNITIES

- 6.2.3.1 In addition to play areas, information was provided to the Panel of all opportunities for play available to children in Tameside.
- 6.2.3.2 The Play House, Bayley Hall, Hyde Park, Hyde opened in August 1995, funded by Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council and Children in Need and has the Council's only soft play centre, the Rainbow Room.
- 6.2.3.3 Play equipment at the Play House is designed for children up to 8 years of age and comprises all the latest equipment including arial glides, hanging snakes, crawl tubes, interactive jungle sound area, slides and ball pools.
- 6.2.3.4 Two years after opening the Play House has extended its facilities to include a Light Therapy room, ideal for children with special needs and a new ITC suite consisting of six computers, which will enable the facility to host computer courses for beginners.
- 6.2.3.5 During term time the Play House offers a variety of activities for children under 5 years.
- 6.2.3.6 During the summer holidays the facility offers summer play activities, available free of charge for children aged 8 –13 years of age offering arts crafts, sports and games, drop in sessions, under 5's sessions and a luncheon club.
- 6.2.3.7 The Council provides free play activities and mobile play at various venues throughout the borough during the summer school holidays which offer a variety of free activities for children aged 8 – 13 years. In 2003 an extra mobile has been run, organised in conjunction with Surestart (Hyde and Ashton) and the Tameside Children's Fund.
- 6.2.3.8 The Events Management Unit provide a variety of affordable entertainment and supervised play opportunities in partnership in a safe environment. The Service is responsible for the provision of entertainment events and recognises the need for stimulus to the local economy and promotion of town centres. Events organised by the Events Management Team include the Stalybridge Splash, the Spirit of the Streets Festival, Splendid Sunday and Christmas Switch On's in some towns.
- 6.2.3.9 Tameside Sports and Youth Service offers a wide range of challenging leisure, social and educational opportunities to young people and communities. The Service Unit offers a network of sporting opportunities, outdoor education, confidential health services, youth arts, local meeting places, advice and information, occasional exchanges abroad and award schemes for young people across Tameside.

- 6.2.3.10 The Recreation Service, in partnership with the Tameside Sports Trust, delivers sporting opportunities to the community at 10 sports centres and swimming pools.
- 6.2.3.11 Sports Development offers a provision which should provide a continuum of opportunities including experiences at schools, voluntary clubs, coaching sessions, community recreation and catering for excellence.
- 6.2.3.12 Children's Play also takes place in informed settings such as playing fields and public open space.

6.3 POLICY DEVELOPMENT

- 6.3.1 A further objective of the Scrutiny review was "to clarify and assess past, present and future policy for the provision of children's play and the development of that policy".
- 6.3.2 Children's play is part of the Best Value Review 'Services to Children and Families' (0-19), which is to begin in September 2003 and conclude in July 2004.
- 6.3.3 An action plan which relates to the Council's Recreation Service Business Plan 2003-04 includes plans for a revised approach to children's play opportunities.
- 6.3.4 The Children's Play Policy Forum, with ministerial support, issued guidance to encourage local authorities to develop policies for children's play as part of their Cultural Strategies. The Tameside Cultural Strategy published in 2003 states that "play has a low profile in the borough which has led to it being marginalized" although the strategy does not make any reference to how children's play in Tameside should be approached.
- 6.3.5 The Council's 'Play as Culture' draft strategy, written by the Head of Recreation is intended to spark debate about the provision of children's play activities as a starting point for developing a strategy for children's play. The Panel was informed that as yet the draft strategy had not been seen by a member of the Cabinet.
- 6.3.6 Tameside's draft strategy states that the Council has already adopted the Charter for Children's Play as its aspiration for children's play. Having heard that a revised version of the strategy had been produced in 1998, the Panel hoped that this would also be adopted.
- 6.3.7 The Panel met with the Head of the Youth Service to discuss links between children's play provision and young people. At the time the Head of the Youth Service had not yet been consulted about the development of the 'Play as Culture' document but was keen to become involved.

- 6.3.8 In terms of management structure, the Panel noted that the draft strategy document argues that the split between strategy which falls within Recreation Service and operation for which the District Assemblies are responsible is not helpful and provision should be a corporate responsibility.
- 6.3.9 The Panel met with the Cabinet Deputy for Community Services who stated that no single Cabinet Deputy has overall responsibility for children's play as a whole with his responsibilities being confined to the management and maintenance of play areas. This response is confirmed when referring to the Council's Constitution.
- 6.3.10 The Panel compared the approach of Tameside Council to a neighbouring authority. Stockport MBC had produced an overarching play strategy in 2002 to tie together all the different elements of play in different sections of the Council. Each individual service area is producing a strategy to contribute to the Council's overall play strategy.
- 6.3.11 Members of the Scrutiny Panel met the Cabinet Deputy (Technical Services) and the Chair of Speakers Panel together with the Head of Planning.
- 6.3.12 Tameside Council's Unitary Development Plan published in 1996 protected existing recreational sites, including children's play areas, and stated that facilities will be improved or added where there is a deficiency. At that time the UDP adopted the NPFA guidelines for recreational space which set out a framework for the provision of recreational space.
- 6.3.13 The original Unitary Development Plan also included included the provision of children's play areas by housing developers unless current provision meets the needs of new residents. The play area could be provided outside of the new development if appropriate or the developer could contribute to the improvement of an existing site near the new development. If necessary planning permission would be granted only if provision and maintenance was agreed by the developer.
- 6.3.14 The UDP observes that "local recreational and play space facilities are not evenly provided around Tameside and the quality of provision is also variable".
- 6.3.15 In March 2002, Tameside Unitary Development Plan – Deposit Draft Replacement Plan was published. The revised version retains the commitment to recreational opportunities and the protection of existing land used for these purposes.
- 6.3.16 The proposed changes included the creation of a 'community fund' which housing developers would contribute to for the provision and maintenance of children's play areas. This amendment was not included in the final draft version of the UDP 2002. However, the Panel was informed by the Head of Planning that he hoped that proposals for a 'community fund'

similar to that existing in Stockport could be introduced in Tameside through the publication of supplementary planning guidance in 2004. The 2002 revised deposit draft UDP required developers to contribute to provision of children's play areas in the new development proportional to the size of the development. If it is not possible to accommodate such facilities the developer will make an equivalent payment to the Council which would go towards play provision outside the development but would still benefit new residents.

- 6.3.17 On a visit to Stockport MBC, the Panel received information that its Unitary Development Plan identifies areas where play areas are needed. If a housing development falls into one of these areas and provision is not already available the developer must provide the play area proportional to the size of the development and contribute to the maintenance fund. Sites have to be in place before the development is complete so new occupiers are aware that a play area is available.



A play area in Stockport built by the housing developer, in consultation with council officers, as part of the planning agreement with Stockport Council.

- 6.3.18 In Stockport there is a well established 'commuted sums' fund for the play policy. For small developments occupied by less than 50 people it may be inappropriate to expect the developer to provide a play area. Instead the developer will be asked to make a payment to the Council to be used for children's play elsewhere but still near the new development. Although individual payments may be too small to make improvements immediately when added together over time facilities can be improved.

- 6.3.20 The Panel heard that Stockport Council has gathered £5m in commuted sums from developers since the system was started in 1994. This has accrued interest of £500,000 which is available for maintenance.



- 6.3.21 In addition to an annual repair and maintenance budget of £120k, which may vary each year, Manchester Leisure have received external matched funding from Surestart, Section 106

agreements, regeneration bodies and any other possible funding opportunities that can be identified.

6.3.22

The Panel heard that both Manchester City and Stockport Council have established several 'Friends Of' groups which are voluntary organisations and enable the authorities to apply for additional funding.

Conclusions

- 6. The Panel was pleased that the Council had adopted the 1992 Charter for Children's Play and expects that it will adopt the 1998 version.**
- 7. Having received information from the Cabinet Deputy (Community Services) it appeared to the Panel that no single Cabinet Deputy is responsible for children's play.**
- 8. The Panel raised concern that key stakeholders such as the Head of Youth Service or Cabinet Members have not yet been involved in the draft 'Play as Culture' document.**
- 9. The management systems for children's play were unclear.**
- 10. The opportunities for funding have not been sufficiently exploited through planning Section 106 Agreements or other sources of external funding.**
- 11. Initially, the Panel were concerned that a variety of officers could not inform the Panel with any certainty how much funding has been raised through planning Section 106 Agreements for children's play and other purposes. This information has now been received.**
- 12. The Panel supports the Head of Planning's suggestion for the establishment of a 'community fund' which will include play provision to be established within the UDP 2004 or supplementary planning guidance.**
- 13. The Panel was impressed with the operation of children's play in the neighbouring authorities of Stockport and Manchester and felt strongly that best practices be implemented in Tameside.**

Recommendations

- 4. That the Council adopt the revised 1998 version of the Children's Play Council's Charter for Children's Play.**
- 5. That in developing a strategy for children's play all organisations that can have an impact such as housing, transport, planning, Early Years, education, the voluntary sector and the commercial sector be involved.**
- 6. That a single champion for children's play be identified within the Cabinet together with a dedicated identifiable officer co-ordinated by a single management structure.**
- 7. That a community fund for development of equipped children's play areas be established, together with a clear and transparent system to enable funding received through Section 106 Agreements to be identified and monitored.**
- 8. That the Council share and benefit from best practice of neighbouring authorities especially with regard to policy, provision and maximizing external funding for children's play areas.**
- 9. That funding for children's play is greatly increased to bring existing play areas up to an acceptable standard.**

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The third objective of the Scrutiny Panel was to "record user satisfaction and identify any improvements".
- 7.2 The consultation focused on equipped play areas as this emerged from the early stages of the review as a key issue within children's play provision.
- 7.3 The Scrutiny Panel carried out the following consultation:
 - Questionnaire to all ward members
 - Questionnaires distributed as follows:
 - via direct mailing to over 70 community groups (Cubs, Brownies, crèches, and Residents Associations etc)
 - by panel members to constituents
 - completed by adults at the summer play schemes
 - through interviews conducted by Quality Auditors in parks
 - Letter in the local press and information leaflet inviting comments
 - Visits to six play schemes in the borough

- Meeting with the East Audenshaw Residents Association

- 7.4 As far as possible the same issues and questions were covered through each method of consultation. This allowed for comparison to be made between the responses from different groups.
- 7.5 The consultation primarily sought to establish the views of service users, largely children, parents and carers. Views were also sought from resident's groups given the impact that play areas can have on the local area. It was also felt that it would be useful to measure the opinion of ward members as representatives of service users and the wider community.
- 7.6 The issues covered by the consultation were:
- Positive and negative aspects of play areas
 - Priority for improvement
 - Suggestions for improvements
- 7.7 Views were received through the questionnaire from 18 out of the council's 57 ward members.
- 7.8 Over 200 self-completion questionnaire and pre-paid envelopes were distributed to community groups, Resident's Associations, to residents by panel members and at play schemes; and 34 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaires completed through interviews with visitors to the borough's parks have been combined with the questionnaires returned through the post since identical questions were asked. In total 73 interviews were carried out in five parks with equipped play areas. Therefore a total of 107 responses have been analysed.
- 7.9 A letter from the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel appeared in the local press from July and over 200 leaflets were distributed inviting comments on the issue of children's play provision in the borough.
- 7.10 The Chair received 8 letters both from individual residents, organised groups including a Residents Association, and a Scout group responding to the leaflet distributed by the Panel.
- 7.11 During August Scrutiny panel members (Cllrs Duffy and Walsh) and Scrutiny Support Officers attended 6 summer play schemes organised by Tameside Council's Play Section.
- 7.12 Each summer play scheme was attended by between 20 and 30 children, generally aged 6 to 14 although there were a very small number of under 5s and over 14 year olds (under 8s were to be accompanied by an adult or older



brother or sister).

7.13 The full consultation report is attached as appendix 3 of this report.

7.14 Key findings from all the consultation exercises are as follows.

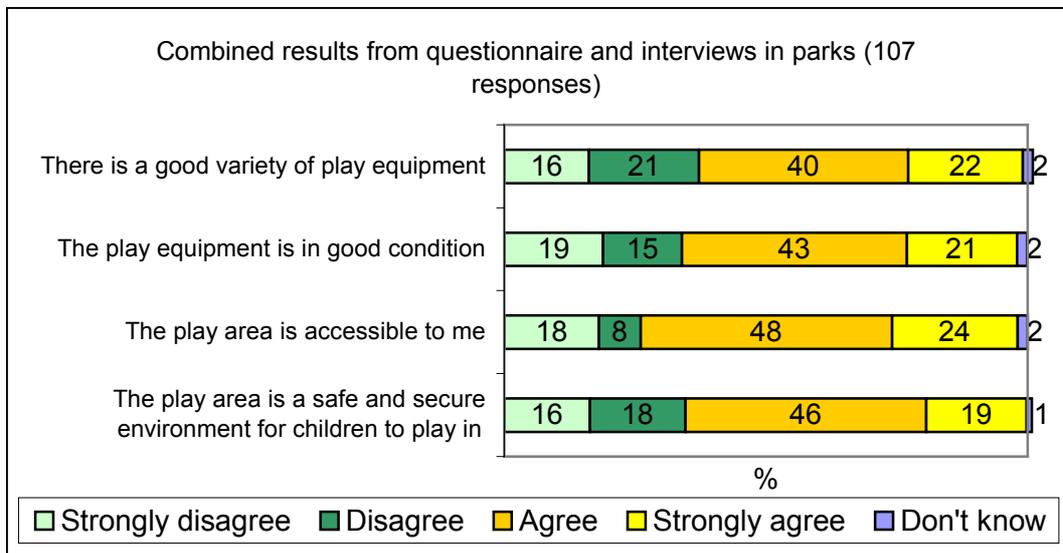
7.15 The top four places children said they play are at home, at a friend's house, in the street and in play areas.

7.16 Children said they like to go to the play areas because they had favourite equipment they enjoyed playing on, to play games and have fun, and to meet friends.

7.17 There was a general feeling amongst all those responding that equipped play provision needs improving although some areas are better catered for than others.

7.18 Of those people responding to the questionnaires most are relatively satisfied with the different aspects of play areas. Two-thirds of those responding were consistently happy with each aspect of the play area covered by the questionnaire

7.19 However, there is a significant proportion of people who are not happy with current provision and around half of these said they 'strongly disagree' with the statements about play areas.



7.20 All groups recognised some common problems in play areas including the condition of equipment, the extent of vandalism, and anti-social behaviour. Vandalism, broken equipment and graffiti were mentioned most by children as the worst aspect of play areas.

“The big kids wreck the climbing frame” (Hyde, aged 10)

“Teenagers spoil it for the little ones” (Interview, Cedar Park)

“Sometimes vandalised with glass so its not safe to play there” (Broadoak, aged 13)

Vandalism and graffiti were mentioned by all groups as a particular problems in Tameside's play areas.



7.21 Suggested improvements to play areas in the borough included more and better quality equipment, a greater number of local sites, greater security, and something for older children to do to keep them from damaging the equipment meant for the younger children. Improved toilet facilities were also mentioned frequently in the questionnaire responses. Ward members also suggested that a long-term strategy for investment and improvement was needed.

7.22 The reasons given for wanting to improve play areas included the need to provide something for children to do in their local area particularly if this helps reduce the likelihood of them going on to committing acts of anti-social behaviour themselves, and children wanted somewhere to play and have fun and to meet their friends. Some ward members also feel that improving children's play areas should be a medium to high priority especially because of its links to tackling crime and improving health.

"Children have nowhere to go unless you spend money - it is expensive to entertain children in cinemas, zoos etc"
(Interview, Cedar Park)

It will make them tired and it will also keep them fit." (Holy Trinity aged 9)

"These are the only areas now where a group of various aged children can have freedom of movement to do as they please in a safe environment" (Child minder attending play scheme, Hyde)

"Lots of people don't have friends near them or a big garden"
(Hyde, aged 9)

"To keep children off the streets and safe away from roads and getting into trouble" (Resident, postal questionnaire)

"There are many priority services this being one but for little outlay the benefits would far outweigh the cost." (Resident, Mossley)

7.23 There were some respondents in all groups consulted who felt play areas did not need to be improved either because the provision was sufficient, that other issues are more important, or that they would simply continue to be vandalised.

“TMBC have got this one right!” (Ryecroft Hall)
“Sort out vandalism, crime and disorder first” (Dukinfield)

7.24 Many comments concerned anti-social behaviour and letters received contained information about ongoing problems in some areas. Younger children too said they were put off from using the play areas because of older children using the play area as a meeting place. For one resident the removal of the play area seemed to be the only solution to these difficulties.

7.25 Although many arguments were given through the consultation for the importance of play areas, a considerable number of problems associated with play areas were mentioned which need to be addressed.

- Conclusions**
- 15. Children’s play areas are important to people for a number of similar reasons including providing children with somewhere safe and exciting to play.**
 - 16. Different groups identify common problems in relation to play areas in the borough including the condition of equipment, the extent of vandalism, and anti-social behaviour.**
 - 17. Many suggested improvements focused on long-term solutions to some common problems such as providing facilities for all ages to prevent older children damaging equipment meant for younger children, and security measures to help prevent vandalism.**
 - 18. Many concerns relate to the misuse of play areas and this needs to be addressed in order for play areas to be enjoyed by the community.**

- Recommendations**
- 10. The views of all stakeholders need to be included in formulating policy particularly when identifying long-term solutions to problems.**
 - 11. The underlying causes of some of the most common problems of anti-social behaviour should be addressed working in partnership with other services.**

8. THE VALUE OF CHILDREN'S PLAY

- 8.1 The fourth objective of the Scrutiny Panel was 'to assess need and whether current and planned provision will meet that need'.
- 8.2 To establish the need for children's play provision the panel considered evidence of the benefits of children's play for children and the wider community and gathered demographic information.
- 8.3 As outlined at section 6.2.1, the 2001 population of school-aged children in Tameside was 32,769.
- 8.4 The maps included in this report demonstrate that play areas are spread unevenly across the borough (figure 1) and there are many built up areas in the borough that are not covered by a play area (figure 2). As mentioned the location of play areas in 2004 is not based on any set criteria for distribution.
- 8.5 Under the current programme of closures and budgetary constraints provision of equipped play areas will reduce. Between 2000 and 2004 the number of play areas has fallen by 35% from 44 to 30. The population of school age children (5-16 year olds) has increased between 1991 and 2001 by 9% from 30044 to 32769 (based on the 1991 and 2001 census produced by the Office for National Statistics). The number of school age children in the borough is increasing whilst the number of play areas is declining.
- 8.6 Consultation with users and residents shows a desire for further outdoor provision and a recognition of the value of play provision.
- 8.7 The Scrutiny Panel received information about two significant pieces of research into the benefits of children's play 'Best Play'¹ and 'Making the Case for Play'².
- 8.8 'Best Play' was published jointly by the National Playing Fields Association, Playlink and the Children's Play Council in 2000. 'Best Play' is widely held to be the most recent authoritative source on the benefits of play for children and the wider community. The following are the key points contained in this document:-
- 8.9 The UK has an obligation under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991) to ensure children can exercise their right to play, leisure, rest and culture: "States parties recognise the right of the child 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".

¹ 'Best Play: what play provision should do for children' National Playing Fields Association, March 2000

² 'Making the Case for Play: building policies and strategies for school aged children' Children's Play Council, 2002

- 8.10 Play is widely defined as something that children freely choose to do which can be fun or serious and takes place through a range of activities and behaviours.³
- 8.11 The objectives of play as seen by 'Best Play' should be to create a varied and interesting physical environment which challenges a child's capabilities and provides opportunities for movement. Play should also enable experience of the natural elements, using natural and fabricated materials such as cooking and tools and stimulating all the senses. Opportunities for play should also enable children to experience changes in the natural and built environment such as outdoor play in all seasons and transforming the environment. Play provision should enable children to interact with others in different ways and for different reasons. Through play provision children should also be able to play with their own identity and experience different emotions.
- 8.12 Play is an important feature of the cultural life of children. Through play children express their values, language and physical culture and, by interacting with other children, they also learn the appropriate behaviour for adulthood.
- 8.13 When the child is playing, play:
- "Provides children with opportunities to enjoy freedom, and exercise choice and control over their actions".
 - "Offers children opportunities for testing boundaries and exploring risk".
 - "Offers a wide range of physical, social and intellectual experiences for children".⁴
- 8.14 Play has the following benefits over time:
- "Fosters children's independence and self-esteem".
 - "Develops children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction".
 - "Supports the child's well-being, healthy growth and development".
 - "Increases children's knowledge and understanding".
 - "Promotes children's creativity and capacity to learn".⁵
- 8.15 Depending on the type of play that a child is lacking, play deprivation has the following effects on the child:
- Poorer coordination
 - Lower levels of physical activity
 - Poorer ability to deal with stressful or traumatic situations and events
 - Poorer ability to assess and manage risk

³ 'Best Play' page 6

⁴ 'Best Play' page 11

⁵ 'Best Play' page 11

- Poorer social skills such as dealing with conflict and cultural differences.⁶

- 8.16 A lack of good play opportunities can also affect families and communities. In communities where play opportunities are limited families are less likely to be involved in social networks and, for example, find it more difficult to arrange informal childcare.
- 8.17 Play provides children with an opportunity to develop a positive attitude to the UK's racially and culturally diverse society.
- 8.18 Play services and play spaces are important for children who have a deprived home environment. Play can be a way of bringing marginalized communities and families together to find ways to improve their quality of life.
- 8.19 By offering variety and choice in play provision, public bodies can ensure the diverse needs of children and families are met and also help tackle segregation of children within communities.
- 8.20 'Making the Case for Play: building policies and strategies for school-aged children' was published by the Children's Play Council in 2002 and is the culmination of two years of research into play provision and is based on four pieces of new research. This research included an audit of consultation carried out with school aged children and a mapping exercise of play provision and play services. Two other pieces of research – a review of research into the value of children's play and consultation with play professionals – give the most information about the value of children's play and the following are the key points from these two pieces of research.
- 8.21 Play contributes to the health of children by providing opportunities for physical exercise which is important given the increase in the rate of obesity in the UK. Play also enhances mental health through independent thinking, building self-confidence and learning how to interact with others which is important given the increased rates of mental health problems in young people in the UK.
- 8.22 In terms of a child's education play helps develop cognitive and problem solving skills and, as a break from school lessons, play helps increase levels of concentration and improves classroom behaviour.
- 8.23 Play can also have social benefits that affect the wider community. By using local community facilities for play communities can develop greater cohesion and build community networks. Providing opportunities for play can help reduce anti-social behaviour and juvenile offending. Using the local area for play creates a sense of ownership in the community particularly for children and young people.

⁶ 'Best Play' page 13

- 8.24 The value of play is demonstrated in projects aimed at supporting children and families and engaging older teenagers. The review of research as part of 'Making the case for play' includes the following case studies:
- Playing for Success is a national initiative established by the DfES in partnerships with the FA Premier League, the Nationwide League, and LEAs aimed at raising educational levels in pupils in Year 6 to 9 (10 to 13 year olds) who are underachieving. The partnership has created Study Support Centres in professional football clubs where children can go to work on literacy, numeracy and ICT.
 - Children in Temporary Accommodation Project (TAP) established by Sheffield City Council in 1998, aims to reduce stress amongst families living in temporary accommodation by providing play opportunities for children. TAP has provided holiday playschemes, parent and toddler groups and Christmas parties. Alongside promoting the emotional and health development of children who have limited opportunities to play, TAP has helped families socialise and provided laundry facilities and access to health visitors at the play activities.
 - Well-Being, Creativity and Play is a national project run by the National Children's Bureau and funded by the Children and Families Unit, Department for Education and Skills, which promotes the health and well-being of children looked after, by providing local authorities, foster carers and child care staff with a tool-kit and training programme to enable them to use play and creative arts to support healthy development, and promote attachment. The project aims to increase children's emotional resilience and provide a range of opportunities that promote self-confidence and self-esteem, social interaction and personal coping skills.
- 8.25 The Children's Play Council surveyed the views of 200 play professionals on the benefits of play activities for children and their families. Play professionals represented a variety of play provision from holiday play schemes to adventure playgrounds and included projects for specific groups of children.
- 8.26 Play professionals reported that the main benefit of play services for children was the opportunity to meet with other children and have fun. Other benefits given included health promotion and experiencing new activities.
- 8.27 Benefits for families mentioned were the opportunity to train and work at play services, and the knowledge that their children were happy and safe.
- 8.28 The wider community is also thought to benefit through the job opportunities created by play services and by providing activities for children which keep them occupied.

8.29 The main reason play professionals felt that individual play services were initially established was the availability of funding and resources. Children's needs, the central government agenda, parents' needs were given as other significant drivers for play services.

8.30 The Scrutiny Panel is grateful to Issy Cole-Hamilton, Policy Researcher from the Children's Play Council, for attending a meeting of the panel to discuss the value of children's play. Ms Cole-Hamilton was one of the authors of 'Making the Case for Play'.



8.31 During the meeting the panel discussed the broader picture of children's play and discussed different types of play and barriers to play.

The Panel discuss the value of children's play.

8.32 Information was also provided in the meeting about how the benefits of play can contribute to other council strategies including the Preventative Strategy for Children at Risk Community Strategy, Social Inclusion Strategy and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy.

8.33 Evidence received from the public health specialist, Tameside and Glossop Primary Care Trust stated that outdoor play opportunities are key in addressing inequalities. Children whose parents do not have gardens have very limited play opportunities, and a lack of quality playground provision leaves them nowhere to play that is safe from traffic and other dangers.

8.34 The needs of different groups of children need to be considered: children with special needs, children from black and ethnic minority communities, children in families with low incomes, children in rural areas, those from traveller and refugee families, often have fewer play opportunities than others.

8.35 Play does not feature in any of Tameside's high-level strategies as a way of achieving improvements in key areas nor is there a strategy for children's play. However, there is an action in the Recreation Service Business Plan 2003/04 to produce a 'Play as culture' Strategy and carry out a review of children's play provision.

8.36 The Panel heard how guidelines issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for local authorities to use in producing Cultural Strategies require that 'play' be considered. The Tameside Cultural strategy notes that "Play can add value to capacity building, regeneration and voluntary sector development, but this does not always happen in Tameside" (A Cultural Strategy for Tameside, 2003, page 14).

8.37

The draft 'Play as Culture' strategy recognises the value of children's play and the variety of forms play can take. Progression of the strategy is to include consultation with stakeholders and establishing a definition of play for Tameside.

Conclusions

- 19. Whilst there are many types of play provision it is clear that equipped play areas can provide an important opportunity for the benefits of play to be realised.**
- 20. That the planned number and location of play areas in Tameside in 2004 is unlikely to cater for children in all parts of the borough.**
- 21. The council does not have a criteria for establishing the need for play provision.**
- 22. The panel finds that the benefits of play may not be fully appreciated by the authority.**
- 23. The panel welcomes the sentiments of the draft 'Play as Culture' strategy.**

Recommendations

- 12. That the review of play provision being undertaken by the Recreation Service includes a thorough review of the distribution of play areas to ensure the needs of all children are met throughout the borough.**
- 13. That the council establish criteria for the distribution of well equipped play areas in the borough.**
- 14. That the 'Play as Culture' strategy be based on a thorough needs assessment.**
- 15. That the council takes appropriate measures to prevent further reduction of equipped play areas.**
- 16. That the council consider the contribution that play can make to achieving its high level priorities.**

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That 30 equipped play areas be the minimum number of sites and that the allocated budget be sufficient for this number to be developed and maintained to a high standard.
- 9.2 In view of the number of children per play area, in the long-term, 30 play areas is not sufficient and should be increased.
- 9.3 That provision is made for young people as well as children when play areas are introduced.
- 9.4 That the Council adopt the revised 1998 version of the Children's Play Council's Charter for Children's Play.
- 9.5 That in developing a strategy for children's play all organisations that can have an impact such as housing, transport, planning, Early Years, education, the voluntary sector and the commercial sector be involved.
- 9.6 That a single champion for children's play be identified within the Cabinet together with a dedicated identifiable officer co-ordinated by a single management structure.
- 9.7 That a community fund for development of equipped children's play areas be established, together with a clear and transparent system to enable funding received through Section 106 Agreements to be identified and monitored.
- 9.8 That the Council share and benefit from best practice of neighbouring authorities especially with regard to policy, provision and maximizing extensive funding fro children's play areas.
- 9.9 That funding for children's play is greatly increased to bring existing play areas up to an acceptable standard.
- 9.10 The views of all stakeholders need to be included in formulating policy particularly when identifying long-term solutions to problems.
- 9.11 The underlying causes of some of the most common problems of anti-social behaviour should be addressed working in partnership with other services.
- 9.12 That the review of play provision being undertaken by the Recreation Service includes a thorough review of the distribution of play areas to ensure the needs of all children are met throughout the borough.
- 9.13 That the council establish criteria for the distribution of well equipped play areas in the borough.

- 9.14 That the 'Play as Culture' strategy be based on a thorough needs assessment.
- 9.15 That the council takes appropriate measures to prevent further reduction of equipped play areas.
- 9.16 That the council consider the contribution that play can make to achieving its high level priorities.

APPENDIX 1

RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

REVIEW OF CHILDRENS PLAY (POLICIES AND PROVISION)

SCOPE JUNE 2003

AIM OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW EXERCISE

To review the polices and provision of children's play in the borough to inform policy development.

OBJECTIVES

- A. To produce accurate information on the provision of children's play areas – past, present and planned (to include, quality, quantity, location, comparisons with other local authorities etc).
- B. To clarify and assess past, present and future policy for the provision of children's play and the development of that policy (to include consideration of draft strategy for children's play included in service business plan, links to other strategies e.g. Housing Strategy, Youth Service, views of Cabinet Deputy and service providers).
- C. **To record user satisfaction and identify any improvements.**
- D. To assess need and whether current and planned provision will meet that need (to include demographic information, consultation with key groups, links to other strategies, views from Cabinet Deputy and service providers, models from other local authorities).

TIMESCALE

In order to be able to contribute to the development of Children's Play Strategy and the Best Value Review of Services to 0-19 year olds the Panel plans to produce its report by October 2003.

ACTION PLAN

The review consists of a number of activities designed to achieve the four objectives of the review. Many of these activities will contribute to more than one objective.

(Please note the column 'Action Ref' refers to actions in the detailed project plan that will be managed by the Scrutiny Panel.)

Objective	Action Ref	Action	Timescale	Monthly Update
Objective A To produce accurate information on the provision of children's play areas – past, present and planned	3	Sites visits to Tameside play areas.	10th July 2003 Feedback at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓ ✓
	4	Written data about quality, quantity, location of Tameside play areas.	Present briefing paper at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓
	6	Meet with Andrew Mason, Les Parker, and Daryll McGuire (DAs) and representative from the Recreation service to discuss provision, policies (including links to other service areas and private developers), user satisfaction and ways of assessing need	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓
	7	Site visits to other local authorities as identified to compare provision, policies, and ways of assessing need.	tba July-August 2003 Feedback Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓ ✓
	8	Written information about provision, polices of other local authorities as identified.	Present briefing paper at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓
	10	Consultation with ward members on experiences in wards (provision, user satisfaction, perceived need) and suggestions for policy development.	Feedback Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓
	16	Draft report	Present draft report at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 11 th September 2003	✓
	17	Final report	Agree final report at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 2 nd October 2003	✓

Objective	Action Ref	Action	Timescale	Monthly Update
Objective B To clarify and assess past, present and future policy for the provision of children's play and the development of that policy	1	Meet with Cabinet Deputy	Wednesday 25 th June Feedback at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	Attended by Cllrs Duffy and M J Smith, Head of Scrutiny, Panel Co-ordinator
	5	Write to Director of Public Health for views on the contribution of play areas to the health of the borough.	Information requested by 1 st August 2003	✓
	6	Meet with Andrew Mason, Les Parker, and Daryll McGuire (DAs) and representative from the Recreation service to discuss provision, policies (including links to other service areas and private developers), user satisfaction and ways of assessing need	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓
	7	Site visits to other local authorities as identified to compare provision, policies, and ways of assessing need.	July-August 2003 Feedback Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓ ✓
	8	Written information about provision, policies of other local authorities as identified.	Briefing paper for Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓
	10	Consultation with ward members on experiences in wards (provision, user satisfaction, perceived need) and suggestions for policy development	July/August Feedback Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓ ✓
	11	Meet with Nigel Allan (Planning), Huw Davies (Housing and Regeneration), and Sue Nathan (Youth Service) to discuss broader issues relating to Children's Play.	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓
	16	Draft report	Present draft report at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 11 th September 2003	✓
	17	Final report	Agree final report at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 2 nd October 2003	✓

Objective	Action Ref	Action	Timescale	Monthly update
Objective C To record user satisfaction and identify any improvements.	6	Meet with Andrew Mason, Les Parker, and Daryl McGuire (DAs) and representative from the Recreation service to discuss provision, policies (including links to other service areas and private developers), user satisfaction and ways of assessing need	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓
	10	Consultation with ward members on experiences in wards (provision, user satisfaction, perceived need) and suggestions for policy development	July/August Feedback Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓ ✓
	12	Panel members to accompany Quality Auditors on quarterly user satisfaction interviews in parks and play areas and ask additional questions	tba August Feedback Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓ ✓
	13	Written information on user satisfaction from surveys already carried out	Briefing paper for Scrutiny Panel 7 th August 2003	✓
	14	Consultation with community/interest groups	July/August Feedback at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 11 th September 2003	✓ ✓
	16	Draft report	Present draft report at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 11 th September 2003	✓
	17	Final report	Agree final report at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 2 nd October 2003	✓

Objective	Action Ref	Action	Timescale	Monthly update
<p>Objective D</p> <p>To assess need and whether current and planned provision will meet that need</p>	1	Meet with Cabinet Deputy	Wednesday 25 th June 2003 Feedback at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓
	6	Meet with Andrew Mason, Les Parker, and Daryll McGuire (DAs) and representative from the Recreation service to discuss provision, policies (including links to other service areas and private developers), user satisfaction and ways of assessing need	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓
	7	Site visits to other local authorities as identified to compare provision, policies, and ways of assessing need.	July-August 2003 Feedback Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓ ✓
	8	Written information about provision and policies of other local authorities as identified.	Briefing paper for Scrutiny Panel Meeting 10 th July 2003	✓
	11	Meet with Nigel Allan (Planning), Huw Davies (Housing and Regeneration), and Sue Nathan (Youth Service) to discuss broader issues relating to Children's Play.	Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓
	10	Consultation with ward members on experiences in wards (provision, user satisfaction, perceived need) and suggestions for policy development.	July/August Feedback Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓ ✓
	12	Panel members to accompany Quality Auditors on quarterly user satisfaction interviews in parks and play areas and ask additional questions.	tba August Feedback Scrutiny Panel Meeting 7 th August 2003	✓
	13	Written information on user satisfaction from surveys already carried out	Briefing paper at Scrutiny Panel 7 th August 2003	✓
	14	Consultation with community/interest groups	July/August Feedback at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 11 th September 2003	✓ ✓
	16	Draft report	Present draft report at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 11 th September 2003	✓
	17	Final Report	Agree final report at Scrutiny Panel Meeting 2 nd October 2003	✓

APPENDIX 2

ITEM NO. 9

REPORT TO :	CABINET
DATE :	19 JULY 2000
CABINET DEPUTY :	COUNCILLOR P WILKINSON
REPORTING OFFICERS :	PHILIP ROGERSON SERVICE UNIT MANAGER - PLAY, EVENTS AND TOURISM
SUBJECT : AREAS	A STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN'S PLAY
REPORT SUMMARY :	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A reduction in the number of designated play areas from 54 to 302. 20 of these locations to be decided by District Assemblies3. Any additional play areas and their maintenance to be funded by District Assemblies
RECOMMENDATION :	That the report be approved and District Assemblies be invited to nominate their preferred locations for play areas in accordance with this report.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In 1990 there were 99 sites designated as play areas in Tameside and most were poorly maintained or had no equipment at all.
- 1.2 In 1992 this number was reduced to 54 in order to attempt to match resources to what could be afforded and raise standards to British standards 5696.
- 1.3 Since that time a great deal of progress has been made but the money supply for building and particularly maintenance has almost dried up.
- 1.4 There is now a large shortfall in the money needed for maintenance of basic safety surfaces and standards are dropping as a result.
- 1.5 Children's play areas are a NON statutory service and no external sources of money are available other than occasional agreements with house builders to provide cash instead of putting new play areas on their estates.
- 1.6 It is now apparent that the target of 54 quality lay areas can n longer be afforded and a review is needed so that standards of safety can be kept within the spirit of the new European Standard BS EN1176.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The present policy allows for a maximum of 54 play areas made up as follows :
 - a. 10 strategic play areas made up of one per town plus Stamford Park, which is viewed as being of wider significance. These cater for children up to early teens.
 - b. Of these, 8 are complete and comply with our own standards which means having at least 4 types of play but none meet the most recent Audit Commission criteria.
- 2.2 44 local play areas spread throughout Tameside are for children up to about 8 years old.
 - a. Of these, 35 have some equipment and 15 meet our own standards.
 - b. 1 local play area meets the Audit Commission target.
- 2.3 Strategic play areas are mainly in parkland settings where there are usually other facilities.
- 2.4 Local play areas are on small pieces of land often quite close to houses and can be plagued with problems caused by teenagers gathering and annoying residents.
- 2.5 National guidelines about where to put play areas so that annoyance to neighbours is kept to a minimum reduces the number of places where equipment should now be sited.

- 2.6 For example, a strategic play area needs to be at least 30 metres away from the boundary of houses.
- 2.7 Allowing for the size of the play area this means having to use a space about 90-100 metres square just to build a play area
- 2.8 For a local site the distance is 20 metres and so a square of about 60 metres is needed.
- 2.9 The number of pieces of land this size is getting less all the time.
- 2.10 It is important to keep standards high so that anyone using a play area is relatively safe. Accidents can not be prevented but the Council is responsible for making sure that foreseeable hazards are solved.
- 2.11 Safety can be an expensive business and the issue becomes one of quality rather than quantity.

3. A NEW STRATEGY

- 3.1 New proposals aim to adjust priorities to reflect the cost of maintenance and also bring together wider issues of the role played by the Youth service and Sports Development in children's play.
- 3.2 Strategic play areas have been a success story. They are large, interesting and usually in a pleasant setting. These should be kept as the 'anchor' for children's play areas and fully developed so that every town has own of its own. Stamford Park will also keep a strategic play area and should be capable of accommodating the very large number of people who go there.
- 3.3 So many problems beset the local play areas and rather than catering for people's needs they very often cause problems for residents.
- 3.4 A new type of play area is now proposed which will be a scaled down version of the strategic sites. For ease of reference it is called a super site and is aimed at age groups up to the early teens. It may have things there that local teenagers want most, like basketball rings, a meeting place, or small football space etc.
- 3.5 In the main, these would be built where there are already small playgrounds which could be enlarged to meet local demand.

- 3.6 It is proposed that each town has one of these super site play areas where enough land is available.
- 3.7 Because this strategy is being developed with regard to existing play areas, some of which are relatively new, it will have to accommodate some anomalies in the early years.
- 3.8 In order to do this, it is proposed to keep 11 local sites spread unequally across the towns, either to meet demand or because they are fairly new and cannot be phased out easily.
- 3.9 As and when play areas not included in this new proposal are in need of maintenance they will be phased out and gradually eliminated thus controlling the cost of repairs which is becoming a major problem.
- 3.10 It should be noted that initially this will also affect the Audit Commission targets and some investment will still be needed to raise our performance to the required level.
- 3.11 Because building the 10 strategic play areas is so far advanced their locations are already set, but the remaining 20 sites split between the new super sites and local sites area matter which can be decided locally at District Assemblies so that people can influence these decisions.
- 3.12 This exercise of reducing the number of play areas to an affordable level needs to be controlled and if Assemblies want extra play areas they will need to consider carefully if they can afford the costs involved.

4. A SUMMARY

- 4.1 There will be 10 strategic play areas, ie 1 per town plus Stamford Park. The locations for these have already been decided and 8 have been built. (See appendix)
- 4.2 There will be 9 super sites with facilities for teenagers, ie 1 per town
- 4.3 There will be 11 local sites spread unequally throughout Tameside with facilities for children up to 8 years.
- 4.4 District Assemblies choose the location for their super sites and local sites.
- 4.5 If District assemblies want any more play areas than the 'core' of 30 in this policy, they must be paid for by the Assembly.
- 4.6 New play areas should be built to meet the Audit Commission criteria and the remainder upgraded where possible.
- 4.7 All play areas should be built and maintained to BS EN1176.

APPENDIX

Location of Strategic Play Areas

1.	King George V Playing Fields	Ashton	opening spring 2001
2.	Ryecroft Hall	Audenshaw	complete
3.	Victoria Park	Denton	complete
4.	Lees Park	Droylsden	complete
5.	Dukinfield Park	Dukinfield	complete
6.	Hyde Park	Hyde	complete
7.	Longdendale Recreation Centre	Longdendale	complete
8.	Mossley Park	Mossley	complete
9.	Cheetham Park	Stalybridge	needs money
10.	Stamford Park	Stalybridge	complete but can not cope with demand

APPENDIX 3

RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL
“To review the policies and provision of children’s play.”
Members’ Briefing Paper
Thursday 4th September 2003

Consultation Report

1. Methodology

1.1 As part of the review of the policies and provision of children’s play the Scrutiny Panel carried out the following consultation:

- A. Questionnaire to all ward members
- B. Questionnaires distributed as follows:
 - via direct mailing to over 70 community groups (Cubs, Brownies, crèches, and Residents Associations etc)
 - by panel members
 - completed by adults at the play schemes
 - through interviews conducted by Quality Auditors in parks
- C. Letter in the local press and information leaflet inviting comments
- D. Visits to six play schemes in the borough
- E. Meeting with the East Audenshaw Residents Association

1.2 The same issues and questions were covered through each method of consultation. This means that some comparison can be made between the responses from different groups.

1.3 The issues covered by the consultation were:

- Positive and negative aspects of play areas
- Location of play areas
- Priority for improvement
- Suggestions for improvements

2. Summary of findings

2.1 The top four places children said they play are at home, at a friend’s house, in the street and in play areas.

2.2 There was a general feeling amongst all those responding that play provision needs improving although some areas are better catered for than others.

2.3 All groups recognised some common problems in play areas including the condition of equipment, the extent of vandalism, and anti-social behaviour.

- 2.4 Suggested improvements to play areas in the borough included more and better quality equipment, a greater number of local sites, greater security, and something for older children to do to keep them from damaging the equipment meant for the younger children.
- 2.5 The reasons given for wanting to improve play areas included the need to provide something for children to do in their local area particularly if this helps reduce the likelihood of them going on to committing acts of anti-social behaviour themselves, and children wanted somewhere to play and have fun and to meet their friends.
- 2.6 There were some respondents who felt play areas did not need to be improved either because the provision was sufficient, that other issues are more important, or that they would simply continue to be vandalised.
- 2.7 Many comments concerned anti-social behaviour and letters received contained information about ongoing problems in some areas. Younger children too said they were put off from using the play areas because of older children using the play area as a meeting place. For one resident the removal of the play area seemed to be the only solution to these difficulties.
- 2.8 Children said they like to go to the play areas because they had favourite equipment they enjoyed playing on, to play games and have fun, and to meet friends.
- 2.9 Vandalism, broken equipment and graffiti were mentioned by most children as the worst aspect of play areas.
- 2.10 Although many arguments were given through the consultation for the importance of play areas, a considerable number of problems associated with play areas were mentioned which need to be addressed

3. Results of each consultation exercise

A. Questionnaire to all ward members

- 3.1 Views were received through the questionnaire from eighteen ward members.
- 3.2 Given the small number of responses it is not possible to draw any general conclusion about members' views on play areas in their wards. However some useful information can be found in the responses.
- 3.3 Ward members who responded were of the opinion that overall there is not a good spread of play areas with some areas having better facilities than others. There is certainly room for improvement.
- 3.4 The majority of respondents said access to play areas is fairly poor in terms of walking distance within the area. Only two respondents said that access to play areas is good in their ward.
- 3.5 There was a mixed response to the issue of safety and security in play areas. Ward members are concerned about broken glass, young people meeting in the play areas at night, and dog fouling.
- 3.6 Ward members who feel that play areas are safe still believe that further improvements can be made.

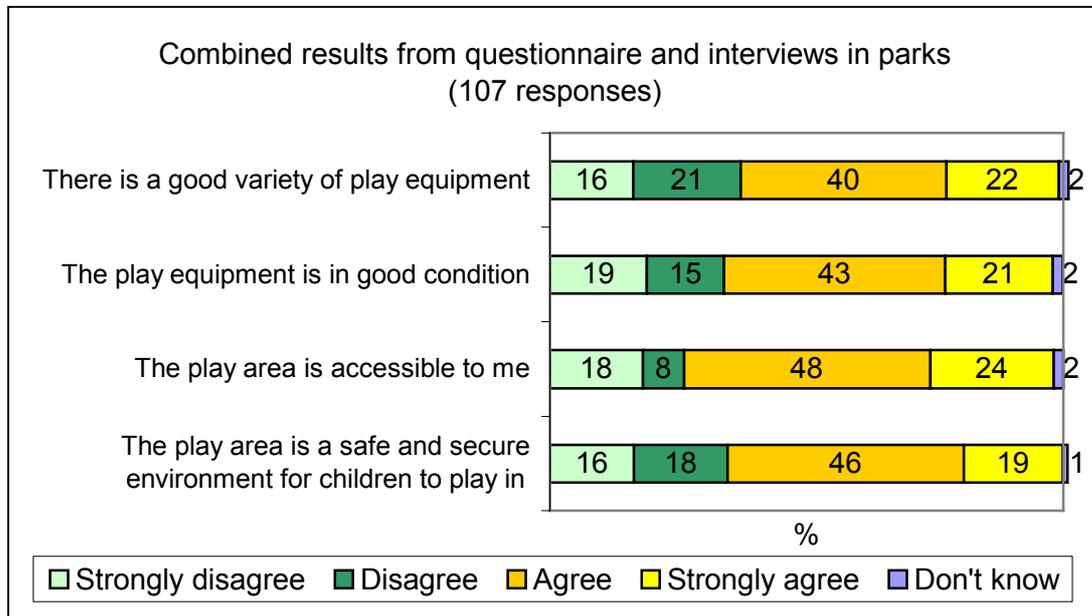
- 3.7 Ward members who responded feel that the play areas that do exist are in the right places but that there should be more of them to serve the whole community.
- 3.8 Suggested improvements to play provision included:
- A long-term strategy for investment and improvement
 - Greater and more equal spread
 - Local consultation
- 3.9 Play provision that is felt by respondents to be missing includes equipment for very small children, safety provision (e.g. fencing) and maintenance resources.
- 3.10 Measured against other services some respondents feel that children's play should be a medium to high priority especially because of its links to tackling crime and improving health. Others feel that it was a relatively low priority and would only be a high priority for those areas in need of more provision.

B. Self completion questionnaire and interviews conducted by Quality Auditors

- 3.11 Over 200 postal questionnaires were distributed to community groups, via panel members and at play schemes and 33 completed questionnaires were returned.
- 3.12 Throughout August the TMBC Quality Auditors (QAs) conducted interviews with visitors to parks about the play areas.
- 3.13 The QAs visited 5 play areas and interviewed 73 visitors.
- 3.14 Interviews took place at Ryecroft Hall, Mossley Park, Cedar Park, Hyde Park and Dukinfield Park.
- 3.15 These two methods (self-completion questionnaires and interviews) asked the same questions of respondent. Therefore all 106 responses have been combined to provide a useful snapshot of local opinion.
- 3.16 It could be argued that the relatively positive results can be explained by the fact that some of the parks visited for interviews can be considered to be amongst the best play areas in the borough. In order to get a more accurate picture of local opinion this exercise would have to be repeated for all play areas.
- 3.17 It is significant to note that despite returning to Cedar Park on a number of occasions the QAs only conducted 6 interviews at this play area – this is an indication of the level of use of this park even in the school holidays.
- 3.18 On average those who responded estimated that the nearest play area to them is 10 minutes away on foot and 6 minutes by car. The majority felt this was a reasonable distance to have to travel (in questionnaires 18 agree or disagree compared to 7 disagree or strongly disagree; in interviews only 6 people said it was not a reasonable distance to have to travel).
- 3.19 The graph below shows that of those people responding most are relatively satisfied with the different aspects of play areas. Two-thirds of those responding were consistently happy with each aspect of the play area.

Around two-thirds of people asked said they were happy with play areas – this still means a third of people are not.

3.20 However, there is a significant proportion of people who are not happy with current provision and around half of these said they 'strongly disagree' with the statements about play areas.



3.21 Of the 107 respondents all but 12 said they felt improving play areas needed to be a high priority in their area. Some of the reasons given included:

- It is important that children have a safe place to play
- Equipment needs to be repaired / replaced
- More interesting play equipment is needed
- Greater security measures (fencing, wardens) are required
- More local play areas are needed
- Toilet facilities would be welcomed
- Play provision is felt to prevent children from getting bored and I turn could help prevent anti-social behaviour

“Children have nowhere to go unless you spend money - it is expensive to entertain children in cinemas, zoos etc” (Interview, Cedar Park)

“These are the only areas now where a group of various aged children can have freedom of movement to do as they please in a safe environment” (Child minder attending play scheme, Hyde)

“To keep children off the streets and safe away from roads and getting into trouble” (Resident, postal questionnaire)

3.22 The reasons given for some respondents feeling that play provision did not need to be improved in their area included:

- Provision is sufficient
- Other priorities (e.g. roads, crime and disorder)
- Concerns that the equipment would continue to be vandalised

“TMBC have got this one right!”
(Ryecroft Hall)

“Sort out vandalism, crime and disorder first”
(Dukinfield)

C. Information leaflet and letter in the local press

3.23 A letter from the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel appeared in the local press from July and over 200 leaflets were distributed inviting comments on the issue of children’s play provision in the borough.

“There are many priority services this being one but for little outlay the benefits would far outweigh the cost.” (Resident, Mossley)

3.24 The Chair received five letters both from individual residents, organised groups including a Residents Association, and a Scout group responding to the leaflet distributed by the Panel.

“There are lots of open spaces tucked away that with a little thought and a little money could be utilised as children’s play areas.” (Scout Group, Ashton)

3.25 Issues raised in these letters include:

- lack of play facilities in some areas, particularly in areas with large housing developments
- equipment in disrepair
- antisocial behaviour and illegal activity
- adults hostile to children playing
- desire by children to play near their homes
- land identified as potential areas for children to play on
- dangers of children playing in the street
- lack of play opportunities contributing to children being bored and potentially leading to antisocial behaviour
- use of play areas as meeting points for young people and adults causing local residents to feel intimidated
- access issues – distance, location, barriers

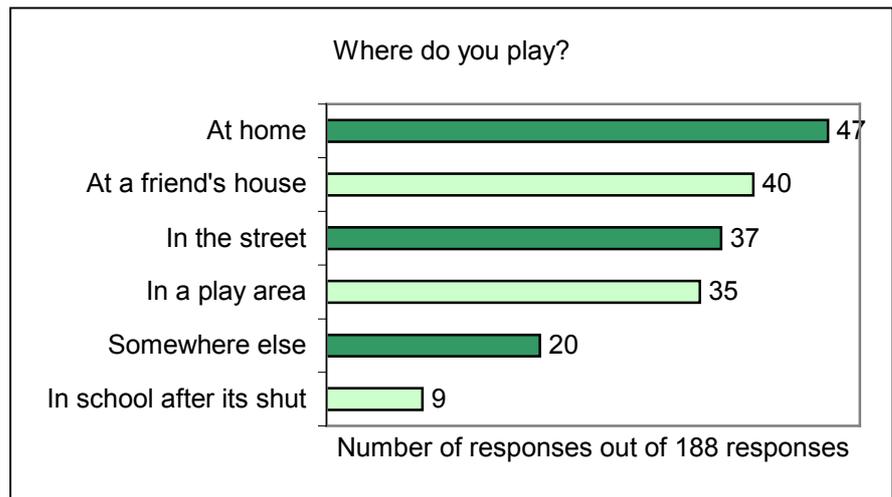
“We and our neighbours were subjected to gangs of up to 20 or more teenagers gathering almost every evening, drinking alcohol, damaging property...We were fed up of ringing the police, writing to our local councillor almost on a weekly basis. My wife was under the doctor from stress, we were contemplating having to move. Then a miracle happened, they vandalised the play equipment and the council had to remove it for safety reasons...Please, please don't consider replacing any equipment.” (Resident, Dukinfield)

D. Visits to six play schemes in the borough

- 3.26 During August Scrutiny panel members (Cllrs Duffy and Walsh) and Scrutiny Support Officers attended 6 summer play schemes organised by Tameside Council's Play Section.
- 3.27 The play schemes attended were held at:
- The Play House, Hyde Park (13th August)
 - Holy Trinity Church Hall, Ashton-under-Lyne (18th August)
 - Broadoak Community Centre, Ashton-under-Lyne (19th August)
 - Audenshaw Community Centre, Audenshaw (20th August)
 - The Young People's Centre, Haughton Green, Denton (21st August)
 - George Lawton Hall, Mossley (22nd August)
- 3.28 Each play schemes was attended by between 20 and 30 children, generally aged 6 to 14 although there were a very small number of under 5s and over 14 year olds (under 8s were to be accompanied by an adult or older brother or sister).
- 3.29 The consultation made it fun for the children (and organisers!) to give their views. Children were invited to use colourful post-its and use drawings to communicate their thoughts.
- 3.30 Just under 200 separate statements were gathered from the consultation covering four questions and 59 drawings were collected. Examples of completed exercises and drawings are attached at the end of this document.
- 3.31 Children were asked where they played (this question was added for the last four play schemes).

3.32 The graph below shows that the 188 responses to this question were spread quite evenly amongst the top four most popular places to play (note that this is not 188 children; children gave up to 6 responses). This shows that there is not one particular place children play.

Children said they play in a number of places including play areas.



3.33 Children’s views about play areas near to where they live varied considerably. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Children did not have a play area near them which lead them to make the most negative comments
- Children who did not use or did not have a play area near to them could not give a view so commented on the play areas they travelled to which were generally the better play areas (e.g. King George’s Playing Fields, Stamford Park) which made the comments more positive
- Children had very different opinions of the same park because they wanted and expected different things.

3.34 Generally children at the Broadoak play scheme were the most satisfied with the play area nearest to them – King George’s Playing Fields and Stamford Park.

3.35 The only real consensus of opinion was reached at Denton where the local park got one or two ‘thumbs up’ by nearly all children who responded.

3.36 Children were asked why they like to go to the play areas and what some of the best things are about the play areas they visit. Over 90 responses were collected.

3.37 Children’s top 3 reasons for going to and enjoying play areas were:

- Equipment (45 statements) – swings, tyre swings, slides and

<i>“Meeting my mates”</i> (Audenshaw, aged 11)	<i>“Something to do”</i> (Holy Trinity, aged 13)
<i>“Its fun”</i> (Denton, aged 4)	<i>“To play in the sand”</i> (Mossley, aged 10)

the 'spiders web' were particular favourites

- Playing games and having fun (20 statements)
- Meeting friends (7 statements)

3.38 Children were asked why they don't like going to play areas and what some of the worst things are about the play areas they visit. Over 90 responses were collected.

3.39 Children's main 3 reasons for not going to and not enjoying play areas were:

- Graffiti, vandalism of equipment and broken equipment (30 statements)
- The wrong type of equipment (14 statements) – either too small, too old
- Fear of other people – older children and strangers – and litter (8 statements each)

"The big kids wreck the climbing frame"
(Hyde, aged 10)

"Sometimes vandalised with glass so its not safe to play there"
(Broadoak, aged 13)

"The swings are too small"
(Hyde, aged 11)

"There's litter everywhere"
(Mossley, aged 8)

3.40 At the first two play schemes (Hyde and Holy Trinity) a question was asked of the children about the importance of play areas and how far all children should have a play area ear to where they live. Asking young children to allocate a level of importance proved too demanding and so the question was dropped for all remaining play areas.

3.41 However, some of the older children (aged 9+) did have some important opinions on the issue:

How important is it to have a playground to go to?

"[Very] Because lots of people don't have friends near them or a big garden"
(Hyde, aged 9)

Do you think everyone needs a playground near where they live?

"Yes! But none are built because they are destroyed"
(Holy Trinity, aged 11)

"Yes because they [children] will get bored. It will make them tired and it will also keep them fit." (Holy Trinity aged 9)

3.42 Children's views on play areas were also shown through the pictures they drew of 'really good' and 'really bad' play areas.

3.43 In the children's ideal play area there would be traditional play equipment, such as swings and slides, some more unusual play equipment such as zip slides, monkey bars, trampolines, and some sports facilities such as a basketball net and football nets.

3.44 This reflects the age group of children submitting drawing which tended to be age 7+ – older children wanted equipment more suited to their age.

- 3.45 A noticeable number of children included seating, water features, signs excluding dogs and vandals, and litter bins in their play areas.
- 3.46 The children also illustrated problems in play areas through their drawings. In the children's opinion bad playgrounds have glass on the ground, broken equipment and fences, graffiti, dog fouling and overflowing bins. Some also mentioned violence, vandals, fire damage and needles left by drug users.
- 3.47 These drawings reflect the statements made in the other exercises.

E. Feedback from the East Audenshaw Residents Association

- 3.48 Letters were sent to Residents Associations in the borough. The Chair received a letter from the East Audenshaw Resident's Association (EARA) and was invited to attend a meeting of the group on Tuesday 2nd September 2003, at Audenshaw Community Centre.
- 3.49 The meeting was attended by around twenty local residents including three boys who had come along with their parents specifically to talk to the Scrutiny Panel Chair about play facilities.
- 3.50 The Chair of the Scrutiny Panel gave a short presentation about the role of scrutiny, how it operates, what it means for local people and how they can get involved.
- 3.51 The children had a number of concerns about play facilities in the area. They were frustrated about how often they get 'moaned at by grown ups' when they play football in the street. In their opinion they are just doing what all children should be able to do – play. If they had an Astroturf nearby or if the local field was drained they would play there instead, away from people's houses. The children gave Oxford Park as an example of the kind of facilities they would like.
- 3.52 The children said that they would also like a youth club to go to where they could play safely and which was sheltered in bad weather. They had visited a youth club near to them and were disappointed that because of one isolated incident the youth club had been closed. The children also said that they really enjoyed the summer play scheme that was organised by the council and wished that this could be available all year.
- 3.53 Some resident's were concerned about the level of anti-social behaviour that they perceived to accompany any play or youth facilities. They felt that this was the main reason no facilities have been developed recently. In response to this the children said that this was exactly the reason they had never had the opportunities for play and sports activities that previous generations of children have had.
- 3.54 Parents were concerned that children cannot play safely in the area. Needles used by drug users have been found in areas where the children play football.
- 3.55 There was a perception that funding seems to be concentrated in Hattersley. The Chair explained that this was funding that was acquired through bids to external funds which areas of deprivation were able to access. Development funding is not available for areas like Audenshaw which are more affluent, but there are some pots of money which could be accessed – the 'Doorstep Green' bid for Haughton Green was given as an example.

- 3.56 The availability of land was also discussed. Local residents felt that there were places that could be developed for recreation.
- 3.57 The Chair thanked the group for its input which would be added to all the other evidence gathered for the review. The children gave their names and addresses so that they could be sent copies of the final report of the Scrutiny Panel.
- 3.58 It was suggested to the group that the issues discussed should also be taken to the next District Assembly meeting, the date, time and location of which was provided. The children were also invited to work with the local councillor, Cllr Karen Wright, on a design for play facilities in the area.

