



**Local Authority
Play Provision in Scotland, 2006**

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
List of Figures	2
List of Tables	2
Acknowledgements	2
Executive Summary	3
1. INTRODUCTION	5
The Status of Play in Scotland and Beyond	5
Play and Scottish Local Authorities	6
About This Study.....	7
2. POLICY CONTEXT	9
Introduction	9
Child Population of Local Authorities in Scotland	9
Play as a Priority	11
Play Policies	13
Local Authority Play Strategy	14
Physical Activity Strategy	16
Conclusions	17
3. PLAY RESOURCES WITHIN LOCAL AUTHORITIES	18
Introduction	18
Budgets for Direct Play Provision	18
Weekly Play Spend Per Child on Outdoor Play	22
Facilities Free at the Point of Entry.....	23
Outdoor Facilities	26
Conclusion	31
4. STRATEGIC SUPPORT FOR PLAY	32
Introduction	32
Strategic Play Development Officers	32
CPD Opportunities	33
Play Day Event	35
Conclusion	36
5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS	37
Main Findings	37
Future Research Priorities	39
Policy Implications	41
References	43
Appendix 1: Questionnaire	44

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Is play a priority for your local authority?	11
Figure 2.2: Does your local authority have a play policy?.....	13
Figure 2.3: Does your local authority have a play strategy?	15
Figure 2.4: Does your local authority have a physical activity strategy, and if so, does it include children?	16
Figure 3.1: Estimated spend per child, per week, on outdoor play	23
Figure 3.2: Number of playgrounds in local authorities across Scotland.....	28
Figure 3.3: Number of children per playground in local authorities across Scotland....	29
Figure 4.1: Are CPD opportunities provided on an annual basis?	34
Figure 4.2: Are you holding a Playday event in 2006?	36

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Population of children and young people under 18 by local authority	10
Table 3.1: Activities and services included in total direct spend on play by local authorities in Scotland	20
Table 3.2: Direct spend on play by local authorities in Scotland	21
Table 3.3: Classification of local authorities in Scotland according to free access to leisure for children	26

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Executive Summary

1 Background

Play Scotland commissioned this research to gather baseline information on play in a local authority context. A two-page questionnaire (Appendix 1) was distributed to all local authorities in Scotland in 2006 to collect key information on play policy, funding and training. 27 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland responded before the survey end date (84% response rate).

2 Purpose

Play Scotland was also keen to determine the level of support, policy and planning for play within the local authorities in the absence of a statutory duty for play.

3 Play in Scotland

Local authorities fulfil a critical role in providing quality opportunities for children's play in Scotland. With one million children living in Scotland in 2006, this represents a significant challenge.

4 Key Findings

The survey highlights that good practice in play provision, support and management is commonplace among local authorities in Scotland. Most notably:

- ☺ Play is perceived to be a priority in 68% of local authorities (*85% of those responding authorities, for which an opinion was expressed*)
- ☺ More than two thirds of local authorities – 68% - have a physical activity strategy for children (*85% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)
- ☺ *At least* £7,816,497 was spent on direct play provision in Scotland by local authorities in 2006.
- ☺ There are, *at least*, 4,156 playgrounds in Scotland
- ☺ Three fifths of local authorities - 59% - provided opportunities for career development for playwork staff (*74% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)

On the other hand, for some issues, the majority position among local authorities in Scotland is negative. Most notably:

- ☺ Only 22% of local authorities have a play policy (*27% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)
- ☺ Only 31% of local authorities have a play strategy (*40% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)
- ☺ Only 38% of local authorities in Scotland have *either* a play strategy or a play policy and only 16% have *both* a play policy and a play strategy (*respectively, 46% and 19% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)
- ☺ Only 25% of local authorities offered children free access to leisure centres (*42% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)
- ☺ Only 41% of local authorities have at least one strategic play development officer (*54% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)

5 Future Research Priorities

Interpretation of the Play Scotland survey was hindered by evidence that some of the questions were not interpreted by respondents in a consistent manner, nor in a manner which the wider community of play professionals would consider to be valid. The most immediate research priority is to establish more robust baseline measures for play in Scottish local authorities.

There is a need for further research to better understand the grounds for judging 'play to be a priority' in local authorities. The high percentage of local authorities for which play was reported to be a priority sits uncomfortably with the low proportion of local authorities with play policies, play strategies, strategic play development officers, Playday events and free access to key opportunities.

Although references were made to play as a corporate service, it often seemed that play was understood only from a single service department viewpoint, typically Education or Leisure. There is a need to detail the ways in which play features – or should feature – in the remits of a range of departments (if not all departments) in Scottish local authorities, in addition to being a corporate matter.

6 Policy Implications

Five specific policy recommendations are made on the basis of the survey evidence.

The survey highlighted that free access to play was not commonplace for after school clubs, leisure centres and community buildings. Although it could be argued that free access is not essential to facilitate participation among children from low income households, there is a need for all local authorities to formulate a play strategy which would set out their approach to facilitating inclusive opportunities for play for all children.

The survey highlighted problems in establishing basic counts of playgrounds, playing fields and other spaces for play. Comprehensive national and local records of all spaces for play are required.

The survey highlighted an uneven approach to staffing issues across local authorities. There is a need for all local authorities in Scotland to recognise the value of playwork qualifications, playwork staff and to commit sufficient resources to ensure continuous professional development for all staff with a play remit. Furthermore, there is a need for local authorities to have a single point of contact – or play champion – to progress play development in a strategic manner.

There is clearly a wide variation in approaches to play across local authorities in Scotland. A National Play Policy statement underpinned by a Statutory Duty on local authorities (with ring fenced funding for Play) would be a progressive step in assisting local authorities to provide adequate opportunities and resources to support children's play in Scotland.

Children's play is primarily – although not exclusively – a neighbourhood matter. The survey provided little evidence of a 'local focus' for play. A new requirement should be placed on Community Planning Partnerships to develop and implement a Play Strategy for their area.

INTRODUCTION

The Status of Play in Scotland and Beyond

- 1.01 The objective of this report is to examine play provision, policy, support and staffing across Scotland's local authorities. Underlying this objective is the desire of Play Scotland to monitor compliance in Scotland with Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1990).
- 1.02 Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that:
- 1.02.1 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.
 - 1.02.2 Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities.
- 1.03 Play is treated seriously in other parts of the British Isles. The Welsh Assembly has developed a Play Policy (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002) as well as an implementation plan (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006). In England the Big Lottery (BIG) is providing substantial financial support for local projects and innovative ideas (Play England, 2006). Northern Ireland is working on a two-stage project to develop an overall play policy for children aged eleven years and under and a recreation/leisure policy for children and young people aged twelve to eighteen years (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2006). The Republic of Ireland launched a play policy in 2004 (Office of the Minister for Children, 2004).
- 1.04 Most significantly, the UK government acknowledges the importance of play. *Best Play*, the Department of Culture and Media commissioned report on 'what play provision should do for children', was published in 2000 (Playlink, NPFA and Children's Play Council, 2000). According to *Best Play*, the benefits to children and young people and the community from a strategic approach to play are profound. It is argued that 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 very wide range of physical, social and intellectual experiences for children
- ☺ 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

1.05 *Best Play* preceded *Getting Serious About Play*, a report to government, chaired by Rt. Hon Frank Dobson MP, which made recommendations about priorities for play provision (Department of Culture, Media and Sports, 2004). The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) is now investing £155 million through the Children's Play Initiative to develop play opportunities in England, including £124 million which is being allocated to local authorities in England to provide free, local and inclusive play opportunities (Play England, 2006).

1.06 There is no equivalent programme to Children's Play Initiative in Scotland. Furthermore, there is currently no statutory requirement for play provision (in accordance with Article 31 of the UNCRC) and no firm policy commitment to play in Scotland. However, at the time of writing, there is broad based cross-party support for a play strategy encompassing early years, education, healthy living and the environment.

Play and Scottish Local Authorities

1.07 Play Scotland considers that play is essential to enrich the lives of children and the communities in which they live. In Scotland, local authorities fulfil a key role in providing local opportunities for quality play.

1.08 Play is a cross cutting theme, which can provide positive outcomes for children and young people's health and well-being, their learning, physical literacy and risk literacy. As such, the remit for play tends to cut across local authority service departments.

1.09 Earlier Play Scotland research (in conjunction with sportscotland and Grounds for Learning) explored the use of school grounds as a site for play (McKendrick, 2005).

1.10 As a proactive approach to play development in Scotland, this report sets out to consider the state of play in Scotland in 2006. In the absence of National Statistics, this research

attempts to gather key baseline information to better inform our understanding of play in Scotland.

Focused on local authorities in Scotland, this report aims to provide an overview of:

- ☺ Play provision
- ☺ Policy context for play
- ☺ Resource support
- ☺ Play workers

About This Study

- 1.11 The report is based on findings from a survey of local authorities in Scotland. Delma Byrne designed the survey.
- 1.12 The survey was distributed to local authorities in May 2006. Twenty-seven out of the 32 local authorities responded by the return date of June 2006 (84% response rate). The sample of responding authorities was not skewed by non-responses; the five non-responding authorities included an island authority, an authority from remote rural Scotland, a centrally located rural authority with an industrial history, an affluent authority bordering a city and a small authority with a mixed economy. The responding sample broadly reflects the diversity of local authorities within Scotland.
- 1.13 There was, regrettably, significant response variation to particular questions within the survey. High non-response rates to the questions on direct spend on play, spend on outdoor play per child, free access to key leisure services, and the number of playing fields and 'other open spaces' necessitate careful interpretation of survey findings for these themes.
- 1.14 In addition to low response rates for some questions, analysis of the survey findings must also take account of variations among respondents in how some questions were interpreted and on the partiality of responses from some local authorities (some of whose return was completed on behalf of a service department, without reference to wider provision across the local authority). The significance of both issues is taken into account throughout the main body of the report.
- 1.15 Preliminary analysis of the survey returns was undertaken by Delma Byrne, with supplementary analysis being undertaken by Dr. John McKendrick. In the supplementary analysis, the survey returns were set against Registrar General for Scotland data for the

child population in Scotland to facilitate child-centred comparison across local authorities in Scotland.

- 1.16 The preliminary draft of the main body of the report was prepared by Delma Byrne and the draft of the Executive Summary was prepared by Marguerite Hunter Blair. The final draft of the report and Executive Summary was prepared by Dr. John McKendrick.

2

POLICY CONTEXT

Introduction

- 2.01 Chapter two focuses on the policy context for play within local authorities in Scotland. Four key issues are considered; the extent to which play is *perceived* to be a priority, the existence of a play policy, the existence of play strategy and the existence of a physical activity strategy (which pertains to children).
- 2.02 By way of introduction, the chapter describes the distribution of the population of children and young people aged under 18 across local authorities in Scotland.

Child Population of Local Authorities in Scotland

- 2.03 One million children live in Scotland, comprising one fifth of the total population (Registrar General, 2006, Table 2). Although the proportion of children among the total population has fallen by 10% since the mid 1990s (Registrar General, 2006, Figure 4), and although the proportion and number of children is set to fall in the first quarter of the 21st Century (for example, the proportion aged under 16 among the total population in Scotland is projected to fall to 85% of its current level – to 800,000 - by 2031, Registrar General, 2005, Table 3), children comprise a significant proportion of Scotland's population.
- 2.04 Table 2.1 summarises the number (column 3) and proportion (column 2) of the population within each local authority in Scotland who are aged under 18. Table 2.1 also summarises the number of children of pre-school age (column 5) and the number of children of pre-secondary school age (column 4).

Table 2.1: Population of children and young people under 18 by local authority

Council areas	UNDER 18 AS % OF TOTAL	Population Counts			
		Aged Under 18	Aged Under 12	Aged Under 5	Total
West Lothian	0.24	38,752	25,354	10,175	163,780
Aberdeenshire	0.23	53,073	33,618	12,763	235,440
East Renfrewshire	0.23	21,032	13,346	4,927	89,600
East Lothian	0.23	20,717	13,379	5,046	91,800
Midlothian	0.23	17,864	11,306	4,362	79,190
Shetland Islands	0.23	5,151	3,210	1,210	22,000
North Lanarkshire	0.22	72,472	46,883	19,005	323,420
Falkirk	0.22	32,130	20,670	8,367	149,150
North Ayrshire	0.22	29,412	18,302	7,130	135,830
East Ayrshire	0.22	25,689	15,809	6,243	119,400
East Dunbartonshire	0.22	23,248	14,261	5,091	105,960
Stirling	0.22	19,235	12,063	4,641	86,930
Moray	0.22	19,061	11,920	4,385	88,120
Clackmannanshire	0.22	10,817	6,727	2,584	48,630
SCOTLAND	0.21	1,059,027	671,038	265,200	5,094,800
Fife	0.21	75,606	47,711	18,976	356,740
South Lanarkshire	0.21	65,592	41,732	16,294	306,280
Highland	0.21	44,906	28,398	10,957	213,590
Renfrewshire	0.21	35,859	22,763	9,129	170,000
Perth & Kinross	0.21	28,641	18,110	6,949	138,400
Scottish Borders	0.21	22,898	14,563	5,632	109,730
Angus	0.21	22,784	14,562	5,667	109,170
West Dunbartonshire	0.21	19,343	12,012	4,656	91,400
Inverclyde	0.21	17,297	10,807	4,199	82,130
Eilean Siar	0.21	5,462	3,373	1,254	26,370
Orkney Islands	0.21	4,178	2,535	880	19,590
Dumfries & Galloway	0.20	29,772	18,538	6,913	148,340
South Ayrshire	0.20	21,935	13,568	5,150	111,780
Argyll & Bute	0.20	18,393	11,389	4,076	90,870
Glasgow City	0.19	112,758	71,998	30,567	578,790
Dundee City	0.19	27,678	17,360	7,229	142,170
Edinburgh, City of	0.18	80,558	51,612	21,247	457,830
Aberdeen City	0.18	36,714	23,159	9,496	202,370

Source: Registrar General for Scotland (2006, Table 2)

Note: The authors of this report calculated Column 3 by aggregating data for years 0 through 17 from Registrar General for Scotland source data. The authors of this report calculated Column 2 by dividing Column 3 data by the whole population totals from the Registrar General for Scotland source data (Column 6). The authors of this report calculated Column 4 by aggregating data for years 0 through 11 from Registrar General for Scotland source data. The authors of this report calculated Column 5 by aggregating data for years 0 through 4 from Registrar General for Scotland source data.

2.05 Although the number of children varies markedly across local authorities in Scotland (from over 112,000 in Glasgow to just over 4,000 in the Orkney Islands), this largely reflects the more general variation in local authority population.

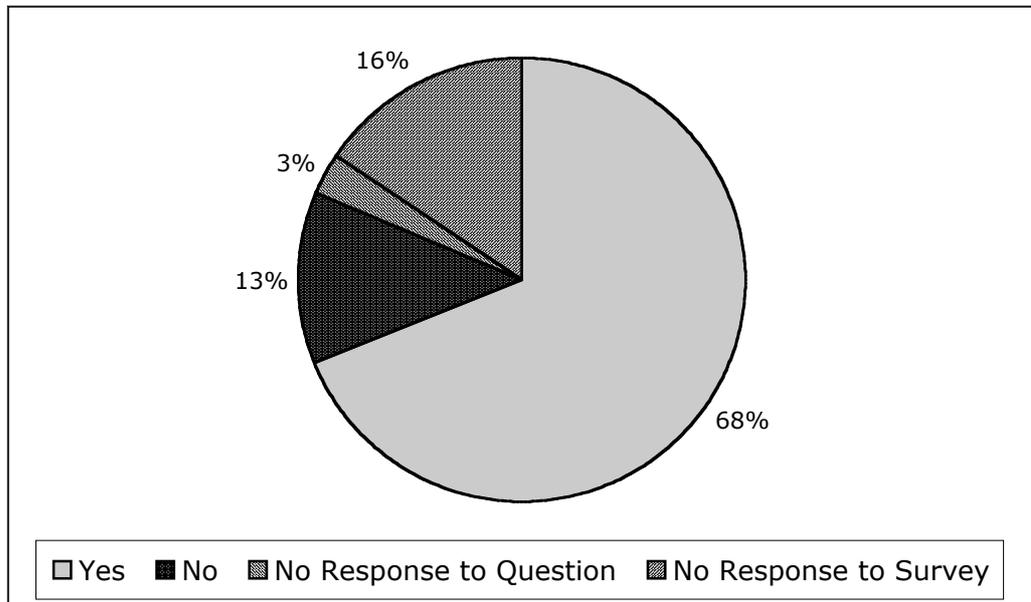
2.06 However, there is some variation in children’s population share across local authorities in Scotland; children comprise between 18% and 24% of the population in local authorities in Scotland, with the lowest share being evident in Scotland’s cities and the highest share being evident in the more affluent authorities bordering these cities.

2.07 There is more similarity than difference in the share of children among the total population in local authorities in Scotland. Children comprise a substantial minority population in all local authorities whose needs should not be overlooked.

Play as a Priority

2.08 Respondents were asked to assess whether play was a priority for their local authority. To assist respondents in interpreting this question, ‘Corporate Planning Integrated Children’s Service Plan’ was listed as one possible example evidencing play as a priority. Figure 2.1 presents the results.

Figure 2.1: Is play a priority for your local authority?



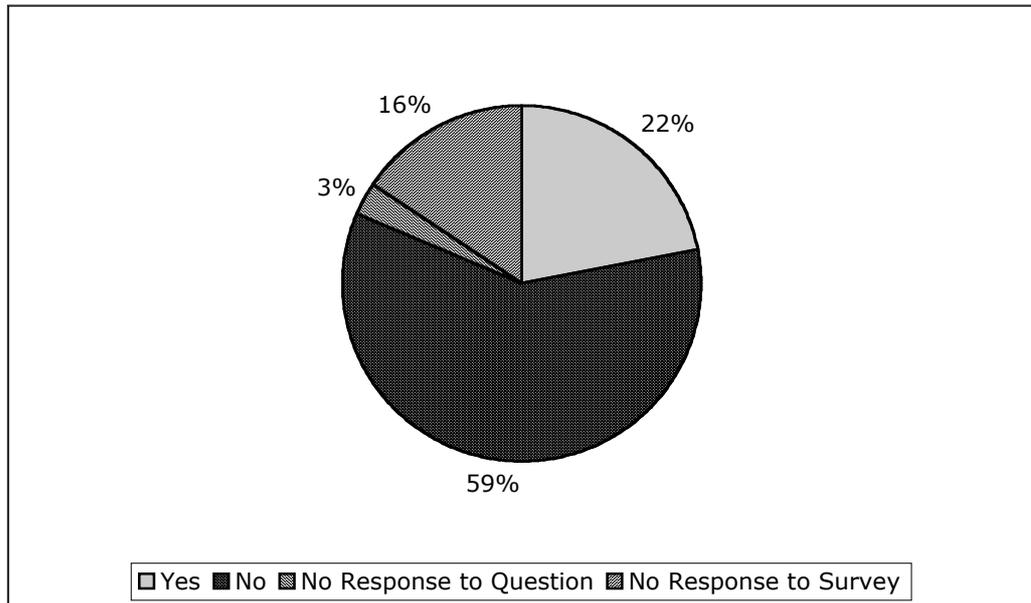
Base: All 32 local authorities in Scotland
Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006

- 2.09 Figure 2.1 demonstrates that the majority of local authorities in Scotland were perceived to prioritise play to some degree (22 of the 26 respondents to this question, answered 'yes').
- 2.10 Following the suggestion in the Play Scotland survey, support for the assertion that 'play is a priority' tended to be made with reference to a key local authority document that made reference to play, most typically:
- ☺ Integrated Children's Services Plan (eleven authorities)
 - ☺ Corporate Plan (three authorities)
 - ☺ Department strategy (three authorities)
 - ☺ Community Plans, (three authorities)
 - ☺ Sports and recreation strategies (three authorities)
- 2.11 Although play is perceived to be a priority in the majority of local authorities, some of the explanations provided in support of this judgement were suggestive of a more limited 'prioritisation' of play than might have been expected. On one hand, some authorities referred only to specific departments or initiatives therein (e.g. Leisure or Active Schools), which was not indicative of play as a corporate priority. On the other hand, some of those respondents who referred to corporate documents merely reported that within the document play was "mentioned" or, worse still, "alluded to".
- 2.12 Those respondents who indicated that their local authority did not prioritise play, accounted for their opinion in a range of ways. For example, it was explained that play policy was not a stand alone policy, there was a lack of local authority equipped play areas and play was not referred to directly in the current corporate plan.
- 2.13 Reservations over the strength of the commitment to play among those authorities which are reported to treat 'play as a priority', together with the outright assertion that play is not a priority (4 authorities) suggest that there is scope to strengthen the commitment to play across local authorities in Scotland.
- 2.14 It is important to ascertain the extent to which play is perceived to be a priority in local authorities. Future exploration of 'play as a priority' should continue to canvass perceptions, but should consider *the extent to which* play is a priority (with a wider range of options), rather than *whether or not* play is a priority.
- 2.15 Furthermore, these perceptual data should be complemented with direct questions on (i) whether play is specifically mentioned, and (ii) whether there are action points/objectives which pertain specifically to play in key Council documents, such as (i) Children's Service Plan, (ii) Corporate Plan, etc.

Play Policies

2.16 Respondents were also asked whether their local authority had a play policy (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Does your local authority have a play policy?



Base: All 32 local authorities in Scotland

Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006

2.17 More than two thirds of respondents reported that their local authority did not have a play policy (19 of 26 responses), although some of these local authorities were currently developing one (e.g. North Ayrshire, see quote below), while others were able to draw attention to positive activity in the field of play provision (e.g. South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire).

Our play policy will develop from the development of the forthcoming Play Strategy. (North Ayrshire Council)

Not within Education Resources. However, there is work in progress to develop a playground strategy as part of the Schools Modernisation Programme. (South Lanarkshire Council)

No. However, children have access to play equipment and activities both within and outwith the curriculum. (West Dunbartonshire Council)

2.18 Although comprehensive play policies appeared to be in place for some of the local authorities which were reported to have a play policy (e.g. Stirling, see quote below), there seemed to be limitations with the play policies of other local authorities (e.g. Dumfries and Galloway and West Lothian):

We have a public play areas plan and staffed play provision plan. (Stirling Council)

Yes, but it is specific to the pre-school sector. (Dumfries and Galloway Council)

Yes for equipped play areas. It was developed in the early 1990s and is due to be reviewed. We have also developed an Open Space Strategy. (West Lothian Council)

- 2.19 Only three local authorities were able to provide a copy of their play policy.
- 2.20 Local authorities in Scotland appear not to have fully embraced play policies as a means to articulate their current position and future intentions. However, other evidence from the Play Scotland survey tends to suggest that this does not reflect disinterestedness or reticence. Rather, the commitment to play among local authorities in Scotland tends to suggest that either the particular value of a play policy needs to be demonstrated, or that there is a need for guidance and support to assist local authorities in developing such policies.

Local Authority Play Strategy

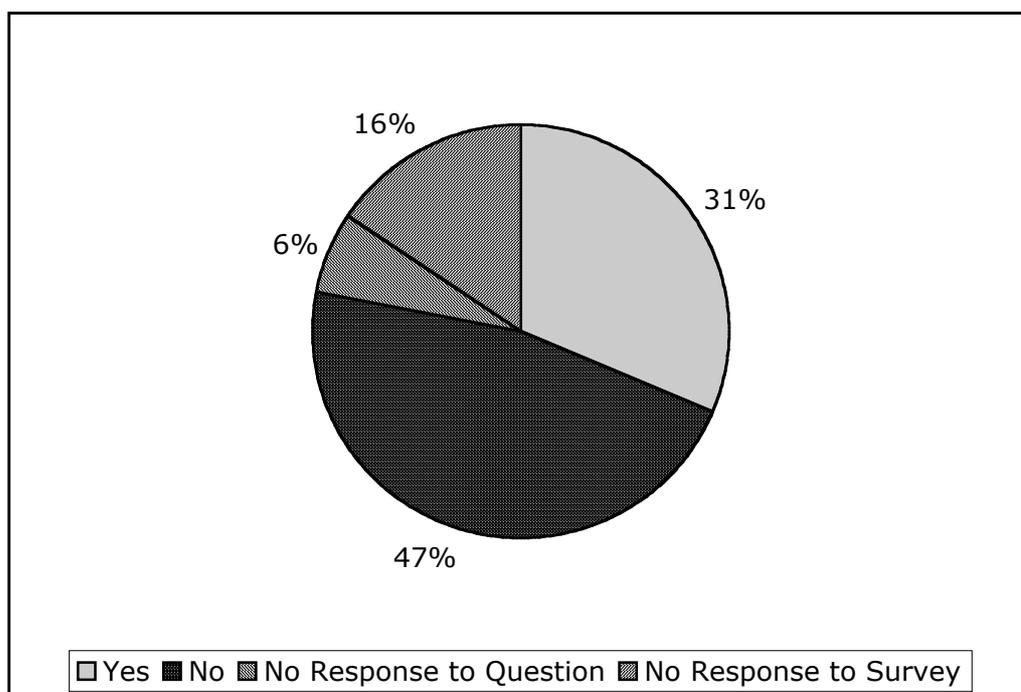
- 2.21 Respondents were asked whether their local authority had a play strategy (Figure 2.3).
- 2.22 As with play policy, the majority of local authorities were reported not to have a play strategy (15 of 25 responses, Figure 2.3).
- 2.23 Strategies for play – as opposed to a fully blown play strategy – were evident in some of the local authorities without a play strategy (see quotes below):

No, the Leisure and cultural strategy and community plan incorporates play with a specific action plan. (East Ayrshire Council)

No, we are commencing work on a draft Playground Strategy. (Falkirk Council)

No, however, the Active Schools Implementation Plan features the development of Active Playgrounds for primary schools. A Playground Development Plan relating to facilities is in place. (West Dunbartonshire Council)

Figure 2.3: Does your local authority have a play strategy?



Base: All 32 local authorities in Scotland

Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006

2.24 The approach taken varied markedly among those local authorities with a play strategy (see quotes below):

Yes, a multi agency steering group was set up last year in order to draw up a Play Strategy for North Ayrshire. We have newly completed the consultation on the draft strategy and are about to finalise the strategy and formulate the action plan resulting from the strategy. (North Ayrshire Council)

Yes, we are at the final consultation stage of our Highland Play Strategy which we hope to launch by the end of 2006. It will then be made available on our Highland Council website. (Highland Council)

Yes, as part of the Active Schools plan. (Shetland Council)

Yes, for equipped play. It was developed in the early 1990s and is due to reviewed. We have also developed an Open Space Strategy. (West Lothian Council)

Yes, We have an outdoor play strategy. (Clackmannanshire Council)

Yes, but not as a stand-alone item. (Dumfries and Galloway Council)

2.25 Only five local authorities were able to provide a copy of their Play Strategy.

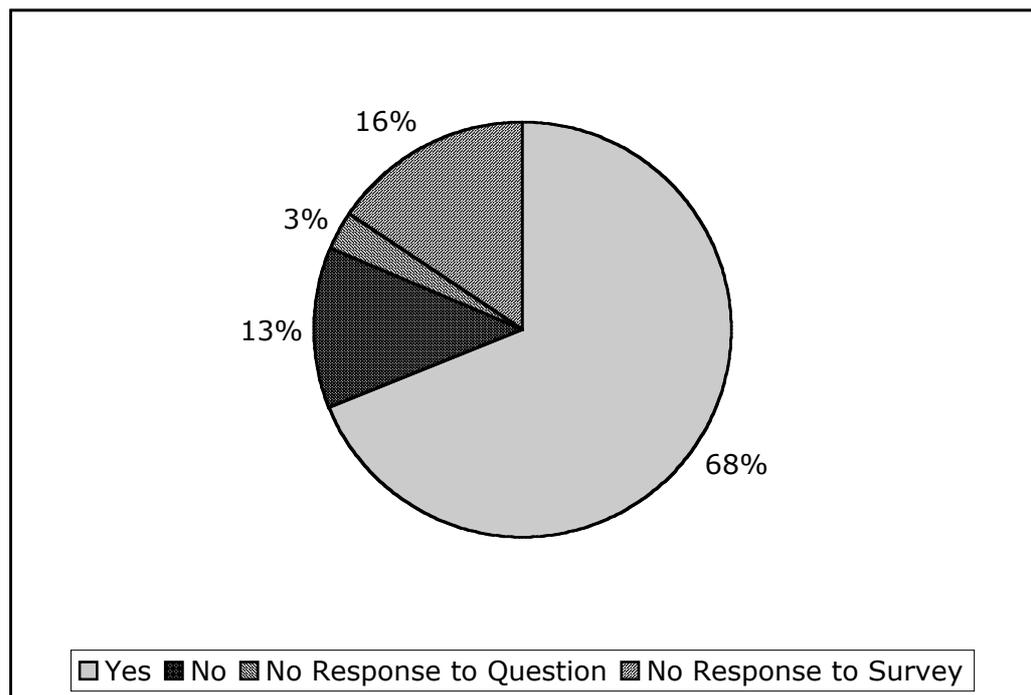
2.26 Although it is to be welcomed that almost one in three local authorities were reported to have a play strategy, there would appear to be significant variation in the nature of these strategies. Future work should seek to explore variations in play strategies across local authorities in Scotland with a view to identifying best practice.

2.27 However, it is lack of play strategies that is the most significant finding; as for play policies, there is either a need for the value of a play strategy to be demonstrated, or there is a need for guidance and support to assist local authorities in developing play strategies.

Physical Activity Strategy

2.28 Respondents were asked 'do you have a physical activity strategy and if so, does it include children?' (Figure 2.4)

Figure 2.4: Does your local authority have a physical activity strategy, and if so, does it include children?



Base: All 32 local authorities in Scotland

Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006

2.29 The majority of local authorities were reported to have in place, be developing, or to just be about to implement a physical activity strategy (20 local authorities).

2.30 The framing of the question left open the possibility that a local authority could be reported to have a physical activity strategy which did not include children. However, no differentiation was made between both parts of the question and so it is assumed that each respondent interpreted the question as meaning that the local authority had a physical activity strategy which pertained to children.

2.31 Once more, there was considerable diversity in approach among those local authorities with physical activity strategies. Some local authorities had physical activity strategies from the early years onwards (Clackmannanshire, West Dunbartonshire, Dundee), while

others had developed a physical activity strategy through schools (South Lanarkshire, Dumfries and Galloway). Others had a physical activity forum (Glasgow City) or had a physical activity strategy through wider Sports and Active Recreation Plans (Perth and Kinross) or Landscape and Parks and Public Open spaces recreation strategies (South Ayrshire).

- 2.32 Future work should focus on the detail of the physical activity strategies of local authorities in Scotland to better understand how they pertain to children.

Conclusions

- 2.33 Play features on the policy landscape of local authorities in Scotland. At least one third of local authorities have play strategies, and at least two thirds are perceived to consider play to be a priority and to have a physical activity strategy for children. Play policies are not altogether unknown in Scotland.
- 2.34 However, there is potential to develop corporate approaches to play among local authorities in Scotland. The evidence presented to Play Scotland suggests that although the majority of local authorities are accorded to consider 'play to be a priority in their local authority' (68%), far fewer have play policies (22%) or play strategies (31%). It is not clear on what grounds play is judged to be a local authority priority.
- 2.35 Furthermore, there was considerable diversity in the nature of play policies and play strategies. Thus, there is a need for tighter specification of questions in future baseline surveys to ascertain more precisely their nature.
- 2.36 Of particular, and immediate, concern is to consider the status of play in the fourteen local authorities without both play policies and play strategies.

3

PLAY RESOURCES WITHIN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Introduction

3.01 Chapter three focuses on resources. Four key issues are considered; total spend on play, spend per child on outdoor play, facilities free at the point of entry and outdoor facilities.

Budgets for Direct Play Provision

3.02 Respondents were asked 'In the 2005/06 financial year, how much money will be spent on direct play provision?'

3.03 Extreme caution is required when interpreting data on spend on direct play provision among local authorities in Scotland. Eight issues are of note:

3.03.1 First, the non-response rate to this survey question was high; only 19 out of the 27 respondents answered this question.

3.03.2 Second, the difficulties in estimating direct spend on play are clearly evidenced by the responses from one local authority (which will remain anonymous) for which two survey returns were received, one of which estimated direct spend on play at £450,000 the other at £600,000.

3.03.3 Third, direct spend on play was interpreted differently across local authorities. Thus, the figure estimated for some local authorities did not include spend on playgrounds (e.g. Edinburgh, Midlothian), while the figure for others comprised *only* spending on playgrounds (e.g. Falkirk, East Lothian). Collectively, a wide range of activities and services were considered in reaching the total direct spend on play (Table 3.1).

- 3.03.4 Fourth, some authorities were only able to provide estimates, e.g. the figure for Aberdeen City was described as “*in excess of £150,000*”.
- 3.03.5 Fifth, the figure for some local authorities for 2006, seemed to misrepresent typical spend, e.g. Highland’s figure may have been inflated with what was described as a “*One-off [spend of] £900,000 on new play equipment for our community play areas*”, while on the other hand, West Lothian, reported an aim *for the next three years* of capital investment of £8.71 million.” Similarly, despite having reported the highest direct play spend per child in Scotland, Stirling Council noted that “during the year substantial budget cuts to staffed play provision were made”.
- 3.03.6 Sixth, the data on direct spend by local authorities did not provide scope for the local authority to report spending procured from external agencies, e.g. West Lothian reported that its’ direct spend on play included £45,000 secured from partners.
- 3.03.7 Seventh, respondents were often not able to report on levels of spending on play outwith their own department within the Council, e.g. the response for Glasgow City did not include spending from Land Services (who were responsible for outdoor spaces).
- 3.03.8 Finally, local authorities may have found it difficult to attribute a figure to spend on play for staff whose remit only partially pertained to play.
- 3.04 In effect, the data on direct play spend reported in the Play Scotland survey is highly variable and is not amenable to direct comparison. This, in itself, is a significant finding. At present, there is no agreed and systematic means of collecting data on direct spending on play in Scotland.
- 3.05 Notwithstanding the difficulties in gleaning robust data on direct play spend, collectively, among these 19 responding local authorities in Scotland, what can be said with certainty is that *at least* £7,816,497 was spent by local authorities in Scotland on play provision in 2005/06 (Table 3.2).
- 3.06 The aggregate figures belie considerable variation across local authorities. The range of spending reported ranged from £2,500 (Midlothian) to £1,282,299 (North Lanarkshire).

Table 3.1: Activities and services included in total direct spend on play by local authorities in Scotland

ITEM	COUNCIL AREA
Staff Budgets	Angus East Ayrshire Glasgow City North Ayrshire West Lothian
Operational Budgets, playgrounds	Angus Dundee City East Ayrshire East Lothian Falkirk Highland Inverclyde West Dunbartonshire West Lothian
Operational Budgets, other	East Ayrshire Edinburgh City Glasgow City Midlothian North Ayrshire West Dunbartonshire
Grants to partners in delivery	Angus Edinburgh City Glasgow City

Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006

- 3.07 These aggregate figures on total spend on play are interesting, but not without their limitations (3.03). However, even if it is assumed that these aggregate data accurately depicted direct spend on play in local authorities, there would still be a need to interpret the aggregate figures with caution given the variation in the size of the child population across local authorities in Scotland, i.e. there is a need to interpret these data as spend per child (Table 3.2).
- 3.08 North Lanarkshire Council was reported to have the highest direct spend on play (£1,282,299). However, Stirling Council was reported to spend the highest sum per child on direct play, i.e. £42 per child, or £66 per pre-secondary school aged child, or £172 per pre-school aged child (Table 3.2). The Scotland total direct spend (for the 19 local authorities which estimated direct spend) of £7,816,497 equates to a direct spend of £7 per child, £12 per pre-secondary school aged child and £29 per pre-school aged child (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Direct spend on play by local authorities in Scotland

COUNCIL AREAS	DIRECT SPEND ON PLAY	% £ SPEND PER CHILD		
		Aged 0-17	Aged 0-11	Aged 0-4
Stirling	800,000	42	66	172
Highland	1,000,000	22	35	91
North Ayrshire	527,121	18	29	74
North Lanarkshire	1,282,299	18	27	67
Angus	349,148	15	24	62
East Lothian	290,000	14	22	57
West Dunbartonshire	247,460	13	21	53
East Ayrshire	320,500	12	20	51
Aberdeenshire	600,000	11	18	47
West Lothian	401,149	10	16	39
Glasgow City	1,000,000	9	14	33
Inverclyde	149,800	9	14	36
SCOTLAND	7,816,497	7	12	29
Orkney Islands	26,000	6	10	30
Dundee City	132,520	5	8	18
Edinburgh, City of	378,000	5	7	18
Aberdeen City	150,000	4	6	16
Falkirk	100,000	3	5	12
South Ayrshire	60,000	3	4	12
Midlothian	2,500	0	0	1

Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006 and Registrar General for Scotland (2005, Table 2)

Note: Column 3-5 was calculated by Authors of this report by dividing Column 2 data (provided by respondents) by the whole population totals for the 19 local authorities reported in table as reported by the Registrar General for Scotland (Table 2.1). Extreme caution is urged when interpreting these data; refer to 3.03 for details.

3.09 Some of those responding on behalf of local authorities who did not offer an estimated total spend on play provision, explained that play provision was incorporated into other programmes such as the Schools Modernisation Programme which included new playgrounds and equipment and resources (South Lanarkshire Council). Others remarked on the difficulties of disentangling play figures from wider spending patterns, for example:

Information is not available as one figure for play, resources spent across departments on playgrounds, facilities, staff development, active schools, NoFPe and sport of which play is an element. (Renfrewshire Council).

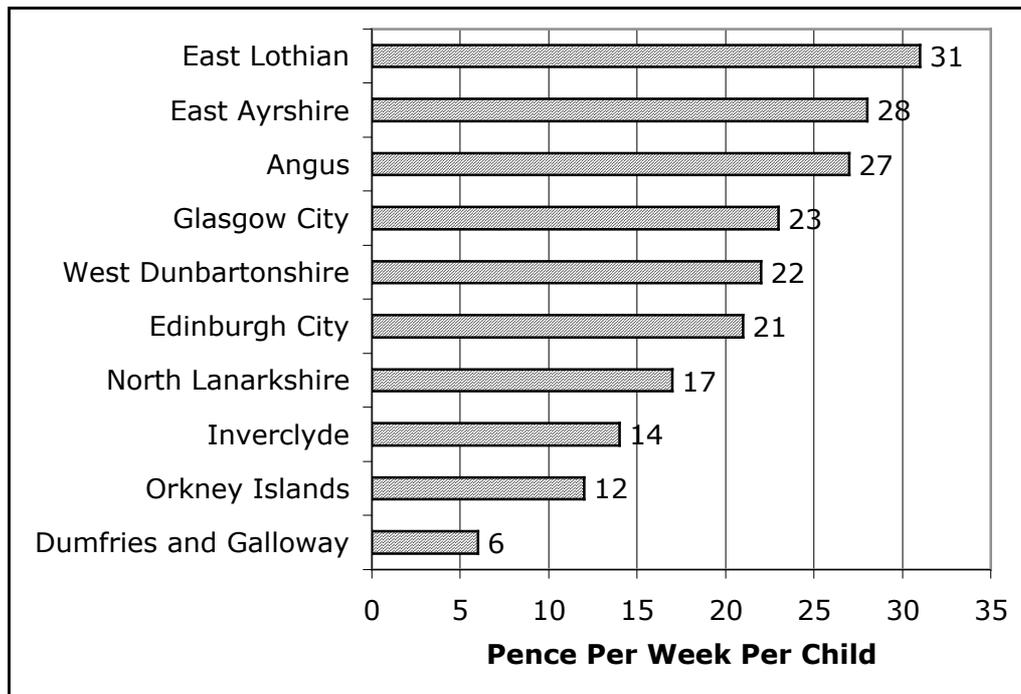
3.10 The reflections of Renfrewshire Council are telling. The extent of the variation across local authorities in reported spend would also tend to suggest that the key finding to

emerge from this review of direct spend on play is that more work must be undertaken before robust data can be generated to assist a direct comparison of local authorities in Scotland.

Weekly Play Spend Per Child on Outdoor Play

- 3.11 Respondents were asked to estimate ‘how much money is spent per child per week on *outdoor* play?’
- 3.12 As for data on direct play spend, extreme caution is required when interpreting estimates of weekly play spend per child on outdoor play for local authorities in Scotland. Four issues are of note:
- 3.12.1 First, the non-response rate to this survey question was very high; only 10 out of the 27 respondents answered this question.
- 3.12.2 Second, spend on outdoor play was calculated in different ways across local authorities. Thus, the figure calculated for Glasgow was based on the play service (which was not only concerned with outdoor play) and did not include playgrounds (which was the responsibility of Land Services). On the other hand, East Lothian and Edinburgh intimated that their calculation was based solely on playgrounds.
- 3.12.3 Third, and as alluded to above for Glasgow City Council, respondents were often not able to report on levels of spending on play outwith their own department within the Council, e.g. the response for Glasgow City did not include spending from Land Services (who were responsible for outdoor spaces).
- 3.12.4 Finally, local authorities clearly found it difficult to estimate spend on outdoor play per child; seven local authorities clearly stated that they “did not know” on their survey return.
- 3.13 Reported spend per child, per week ranged from 6p per week (Dumfries and Galloway) to 31p per week (East Lothian) across local authorities in Scotland. The average spend across the ten local authorities for which estimates were provided was 20p per child per week.
- 3.14 However, given the low survey returns for this question, it would be prudent to treat these figures with extreme caution. As for spend on direct play, the most significant finding to emerge is the paucity of data on play spend that is readily available to compare across local authorities in Scotland.

Figure 3.1: Estimated spend per child, per week, on outdoor play



Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006

Facilities Free at the Point of Entry

3.15 Respondents were asked 'How many of the facilities listed below are free at the point of entry?'

- ☺ After School Clubs
- ☺ Community Buildings
- ☺ Leisure Centres
- ☺ Soft Play centres
- ☺ Other

3.16 Three local authorities had no facilities free at the point of entry. However, this does not imply that these authorities were not sensitive to the need to facilitate access to leisure for children and young people. According to one such local authority representative:

None of the list is free at the point of entry. A number of subsidy schemes exist to reduce the cost of these activities in After School Clubs and Community facilities. (Inverclyde Council)

3.17 Eight respondents did not provide data for their local authority (in addition to the five local authorities who did not respond to the survey). Thus, with data not available for more than one third of local authorities in Scotland, data reported on the costs incurred at the point of entry to facilities must be interpreted with caution.

After School Clubs

- 3.18 Nine local authorities reported that access to after school clubs was free at the point of entry, nine reported that they were not, and one local authority reported that most after school clubs free at the point of entry. However, in some cases, *school* based clubs (after school hours) were free, but *after school childcare clubs* were not. In other cases, Active Schools offered free after school activities, or the premises were offered free of charge to organisations, which then had the discretion to charge children for participation.

Community Buildings

- 3.19 Once again, nine local authorities reported that access to community buildings was free at the point of entry for children, nine reported that they were not, with one local authority which provided details on access to other facilities not providing an answer for community buildings. However, while access to community buildings may be free, there may be a supplementary charge for specific activities. Other approaches to charging were evident such as entry to community buildings being free with a Kidz card, or reductions in cost being available for children's groups. Typical comments included:

There is a letting policy for all community buildings which provides a reduced let for children's activities and clubs. (North Ayrshire Council)

Community buildings are available for hire at a charge via the community learning and development service or from centre management committees where a council building is managed by a voluntary organisation. (Dumfries and Galloway Council)

Leisure Centres

- 3.20 Similar findings were reported for leisure centres; eight local authorities reported that access was free at the point of entry, nine reported that a charge was levied and one local authority did not respond to this specific question. It was more common for charges to be levied for activities after free entry for leisure centres than community buildings. Several authorities reported that they offered a reduced rate, or levied no charge for children for the use of swimming facilities.

Depending on who is delivering the activities within the facilities, some are free, some are heavily subsidised and some are pay as you play. (West Dunbartonshire Council)

Subsidised places are offered through access to leisure and out of school clubs. (Aberdeen City Council)

Free swims during school holidays for under 16 years at all swimming/leisure pools. (North Lanarkshire Council)

Soft Play Centres

3.21 No local authorities reported free access to soft play areas.

Soft play centres are usually commercial and so not free. (Glasgow City Council)

Leisure centres and soft play centres do not receive the same levels of reduction [compared to community facilities]. (Inverclyde Council)

Other play spaces

3.22 Local authorities noted a further range of 'play spaces' in the 'other play spaces' category, the majority of which were free at the point of entry. These included:

- ☺ Greenspaces
- ☺ Equipped play facilities
- ☺ Libraries
- ☺ Museums
- ☺ Summer Funtimes
- ☺ Play Day
- ☺ Mobile playground service
- ☺ Mobile skate park service

Overview

3.23 It is possible to classify local authorities according to the level of free access to local leisure facilities accorded to children (Table 3.3).

3.24 When aggregated, there appears to be clear differences in approach to facilitating access to leisure for children across local authorities in Scotland. Although some leisure services are the responsibility of independent third parties (e.g. leisure trusts, after school clubs and private companies), this has not precluded some local authorities from maximising children's opportunities to partake of free access to leisure.

Table 3.3: Classification of local authorities in Scotland according to free access to leisure for children

GROUP	LOCAL AUTHORITIES
1: Free access to After School Clubs, leisure centres and community buildings (with some charge for activities thereafter)	Scottish Borders Shetland Islands West Dunbartonshire West Lothian
2: Free access to leisure centres and community buildings (with some charge for activities thereafter)	East Lothian Edinburgh City
3. Variable approach, e.g. reduced access for some groups, subsidised facilities, etc.	Glasgow City Highland North Lanarkshire
4. Limited free access, i.e. generally only to after school provision <i>by schools</i>	Falkirk Midlothian North Ayrshire Orkney Islands
5. No free access	Angus Clackmannanshire East Ayrshire Inverclyde

Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006

- 3.25 Although free access to leisure has merit, it must also be acknowledged that reduced participation costs are also desirable. Furthermore, facilitating access through the provision of free transport to leisure (particularly for remoter locales) may be as important for encouraging participation as entry/participation costs. Further analysis is required to provide a more comprehensive account of the ways in which, and the extent to which, local authorities in Scotland are facilitating children's participation in leisure.

Outdoor Facilities

- 3.26 Respondents were asked 'How many outdoor facilities do you have in terms of'

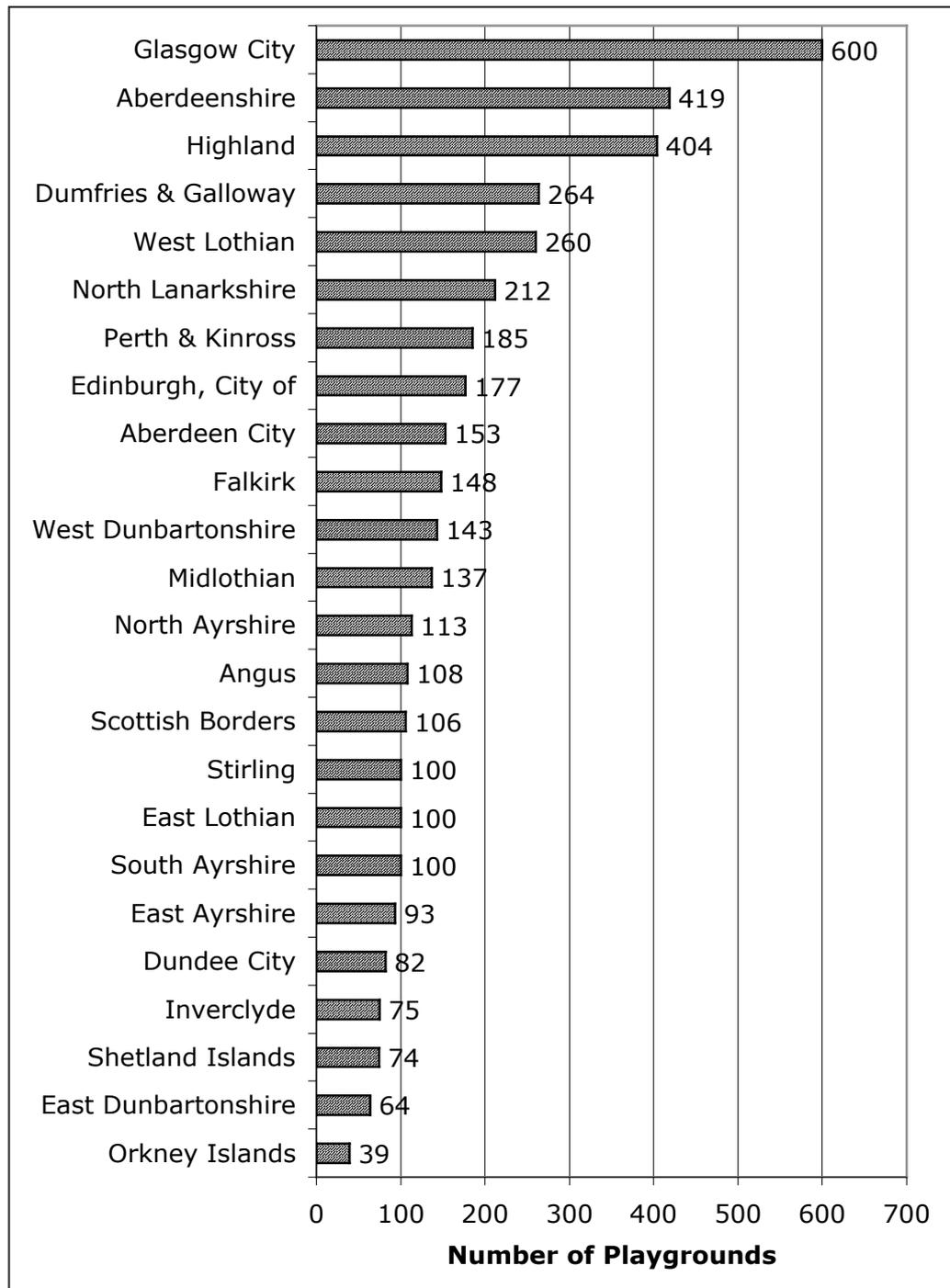
- ☺ Playgrounds
- ☺ Playing Fields
- ☺ Open Space Sites

- 3.27 The response rate to this question varied across the elements. Of the 27 local authorities which responded to the Play Scotland survey, 24 local authorities provided information on playgrounds, 17 local authorities provided information on playing fields and 13 local authorities provided information on 'other open space sites'.

Playground Provision

- 3.28 As for direct spend on play, caution has to be taken when interpreting these data. Five issues are of particular note:
- 3.28.1 First, some local authorities may have faced difficulties in estimating the number of playgrounds in their area; this was evidenced by the responses from one local authority (which will remain anonymous) for which two survey returns were received, one of which estimated the number of playgrounds at 419, the other at 417.
- 3.28.2 Second, some respondents did not seem to count playgrounds for which their own department within the Council was not responsible, e.g. the response of 64 playgrounds for East Dunbartonshire was described as being “through Education”. West Dunbartonshire reported that 64 playgrounds were attached to schools, while 79 were provided outwith schools.
- 3.28.3 Third, some authorities indicated that they had included data on playgrounds and multi-use games areas (primarily aimed at older children), e.g. Edinburgh City reported that it had 163 public play areas and 14 multi-use games areas. Similarly, Stirling Council counted two skate parks and multi-court areas in their total. It is unclear whether the data for other local authorities includes multi-use games areas in their total.
- 3.28.4 Fourth, not all playgrounds are the responsibility of local authorities. For example, North Ayrshire Council reported that it had 113 playgrounds, but that others were provided by local Housing Associations. Similarly, North Lanarkshire reported that it owned 212 playgrounds, maintained 7 playgrounds for other organisations, but that other playgrounds were the responsibility of those from private housing estates.
- 3.28.5 Finally, these aggregate counts on the number of playgrounds provide no insight into the quality of playground provision.
- 3.29 Notwithstanding the difficulties in gleaning robust data on playground provision, collectively, among these 24 responding local authorities in Scotland, what can be said with certainty is that there are *at least* 4,156 playgrounds in Scotland in 2006 (Figure 3.2).
- 3.30 The survey responses suggest that the number of local authority play parks available to children varies dramatically across Scotland. Number of playgrounds ranged from 600 in Glasgow to 39 in the Orkney Islands (Figure 3.2).

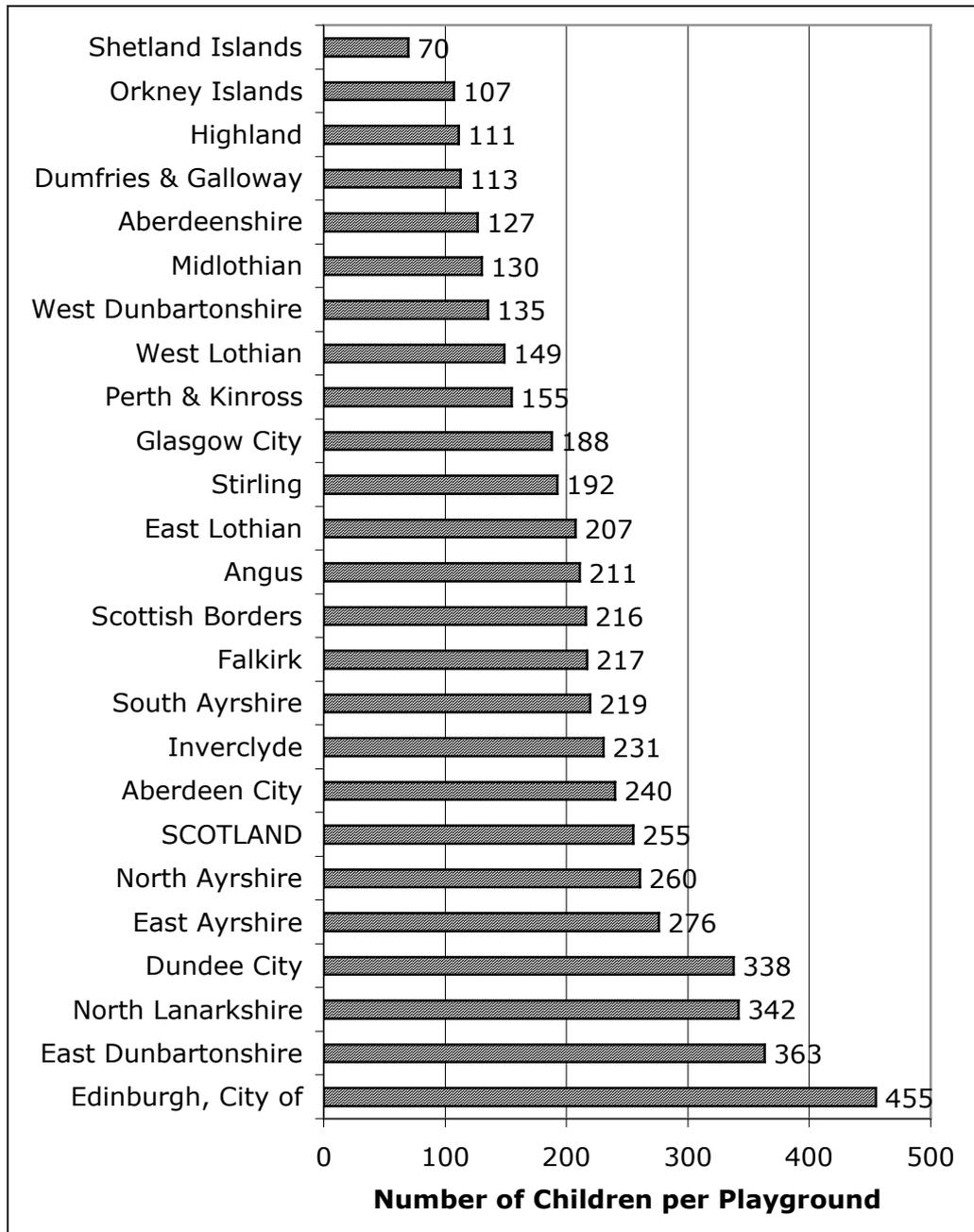
Figure 3.2: Number of playgrounds in local authorities across Scotland



Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006

3.31 Most importantly, given the variations in population size across local authorities, there is a need to interpret these data in terms of provision per child. Thus, Figure 3.3 expresses provision in terms of the number of children per playground.

Figure 3.3: Number of children per playground in local authorities across Scotland



Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006 and Registrar General for Scotland (2005, Table 2)

Note: The local authority totals were calculated by dividing the total number of playgrounds (from the Play Scotland survey returns) by the population aged under in that local authority (from Registrar General data).

3.32 Notwithstanding the possibility that these data contain discrepancies which limit their utility for comparative comment, Figure 3.3 suggests that there are significant differences the number of playgrounds which are available to children in Scotland. Taking these data at face value, the variation ranges from 455 children for every playground in Edinburgh to 70 children for every playground in the Shetland Islands.

3.33 Figure 3.3 would tend to suggest that there are fewer children per playground in more rural parts of Scotland and (conversely) more children per playground in the cities and the local authorities which are, or were, more 'industrial' in character. This is, perhaps, to be expected, with the need in more rural areas to provide more playgrounds given the greater dispersal of the child population across smaller localities. However, there are exceptions to the rule; notably Glasgow has fewer children per playground (188) than the Scottish Borders (216).

Playing Fields and Other Outdoor Spaces

3.34 As was reported above (3.27), 17 local authorities provided information on the provision of playing fields and 13 local authorities provided information on the provision of 'other open space sites'. However, the responses were difficult to analyse:

3.34.1 For playing fields, some local authorities responded with schools-only data, some responded with extra-school data only, while others aggregated schools and extra-schools data. Some only provide pitch data for one sport (football), others provided data for several sport types, while others 'double-counted' pitch provision (where several smaller could be played on a larger pitch). More robust data on playing fields provision (albeit only within an educational setting) is available from earlier Play Scotland research (McKendrick, 2005).

3.34.2 For open space sites, some local authorities provided a count of open space sites, others provided data on the total area given over to open space (expressed either as a percentage of total area, or a count of hectares or acres).

3.35 More precise specification of information requirements will be necessary to facilitate comparative analysis across local authorities in future studies.

Conclusion

- 3.36 The provision of adequate resources to support play is of fundamental importance. This research has progressed debate by attempting to gather key data, hitherto unavailable in Scotland. There would appear to be considerable variation across local authorities in Scotland in the extent to which play is resourced and the services and facilities which are provided.
- 3.37 However, the key lesson learned is that attempts to measure the resourcing of play in Scotland are fraught with difficulty. There is a need for the play sector to work collectively to resolve these problems to enable more robust measures of play investment and provision to be calculated in the future.

4

STRATEGIC SUPPORT FOR PLAY

Introduction

4.01 This chapter considers support for play in local authorities. Three issues are considered; the 'internal' issues of key staff resources (in the form of the strategic play development officers), and training/development opportunities for staff and the 'external' issue of participation in Play Scotland's *Play Day* event.

Strategic Play Development Officers

4.02 Respondents were asked 'How many strategic play development officers do you employ?' Almost all local authority representatives provided an answer to this question (24 out of 27 who responded to the survey).

4.03 Once more, there was considerable variation in practice across local authorities in Scotland. However, the most typical response was that there was no strategic play development officer in the local authority (13 of the 24 local authorities who responded). Five of the remaining eleven authorities with play development officers reported that they had either one or two officers.

4.04 East Ayrshire, Stirling, East Dunbartonshire and North Ayrshire had the largest number of play development officers.

[We have a] play development manager, play and recreation officer, 2 play and activity motivators (primary), play and activity motivator (early years), full time equivalent outdoor amenities (play parks)...[in terms of seasonal time] numerous sessional staff [are] used as and when required to support play initiatives. (East Ayrshire Council)

There are 3 full time staff employed in Children's Outreach Services on strategic play development. Strategic development of physical activity is also the role of the active school co-ordinators - this covers much more than play, however. Within

North Ayrshire there are 6 full time and 14 part time active school co-ordinators. The Fit Ayrshire babies co-ordinator is a full time post looking strategically at play for younger children. (North Ayrshire Council)

[We have] 1 full time service manager, reducing to 0.5 in October 2006, we have 3 full time other dedicated staffed play staff. [We also have] a large pool of sessional and seasonal staff, 6 full time dedicated public play areas staff plus 2 seasonals. (Stirling Council)

- 4.05 Local authorities which were operating without a strategic play development officer were often keen to stress that the work which would be undertaken by these officers was being undertaken in other ways:

We have no full time equivalent...but there are some in the voluntary sector. (Shetland Council)

We have no strategic play development officers, however, the role of play development is incorporated in active schools co-ordinators [which] equals 7.5 FTE plus 1 FTE sports development worker. (Moray Council)

Whilst there is no dedicated Play development officer(s), a number of staff have play development as part of their core remit, e.g. active schools co-ordinators, sports development staff, outdoor education instructors and leisure services staff. (West Dunbartonshire Council)

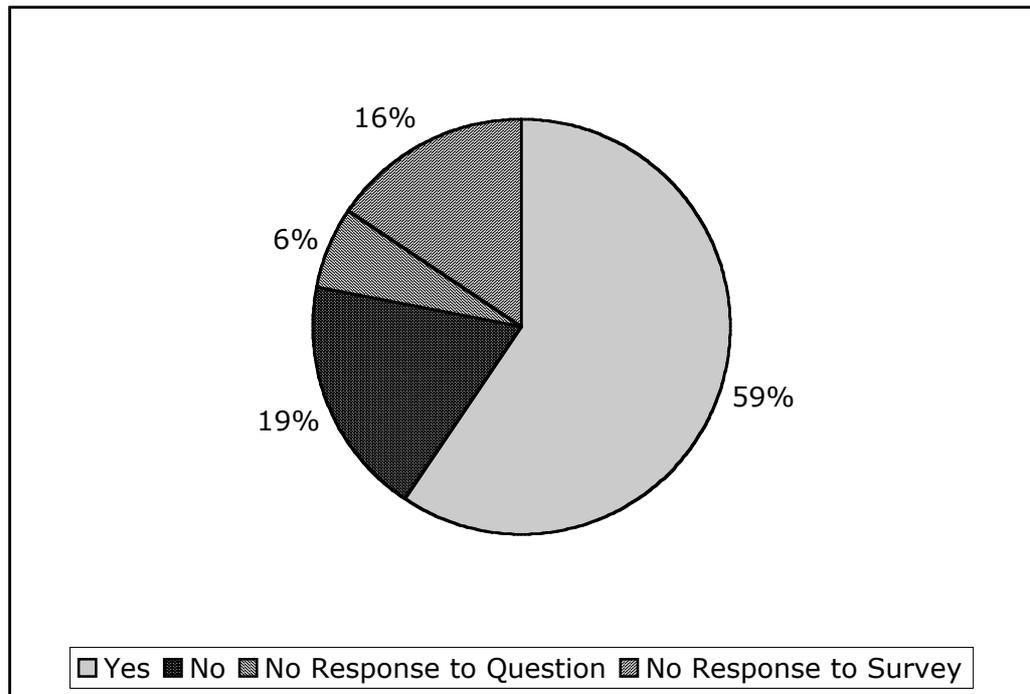
[We have] 10% FTE strategist (early years, family support, childcare and play). (Aberdeen City Council)

- 4.06 It cannot be assumed that local authorities without a strategic play development officer are not committed to play (nor should it be assumed that those with such an officer are fully committed to play). However, in the absence of such an officer concerns are naturally raised over the ability of the local authority to progress a coherent and strategic play agenda. There is both a need to further examine how play is developed in those authorities without a strategic play officer and a need to consider, in more detail, the responsibilities for play which are shared among the wider workforce.

CPD Opportunities

- 4.07 Respondents were asked 'What CPD opportunities do you provide annually?' Once more, almost all local authority representatives provided an answer to this question (25 out of 27).
- 4.08 The vast majority of local authorities reported that CPD opportunities were provided on an annual basis (Figure 4.1). This question was posed directly after the question on strategic play development officers (Appendix 1).

Figure 4.1: Are CPD opportunities provided on an annual basis?



Base: All 32 local authorities in Scotland

Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006.

4.09 Although the majority of local authorities in Scotland were reported to provide CPD opportunities, a significant minority of one in five (19%) were reported not to offer such opportunities (Figure 4.1). This may reflect the lack of provision of development opportunity for the high proportion of sessional and seasonal staff employed in playwork.

4.10 Collectively, a wide range of CPD opportunities were provided for those working in play, including:

- ☺ Degree study in BA Childhood and Youth Studies (by Distance Learning)
- ☺ SVQ training in Playwork
- ☺ Training for early years staff
- ☺ Training for primary school teachers
- ☺ Activity-specific staff development training courses

4.11 Perth and Kinross Council were particularly involved in providing CPD opportunities, providing details of ten CPD courses that were presented in 2005/06, including:

- ☺ Games to Play
- ☺ Cotton Wool Kids
- ☺ Baby Play
- ☺ Fun Ideas
- ☺ Skills Active
- ☺ Active Play on a Tight Budget

- ☺ Environmental Play
- ☺ Play and Learning Project
- ☺ Play and Learning in the Early Years
- ☺ Let's Play at Maths

4.12 Clearly there is much evidence of provision of CPD opportunities across local authorities in Scotland. However, provision appears to be uneven and there is much scope for using best practice to lever improvements in the provision of opportunity across Scotland.

Play Day Event

4.13 Playday is a UK-wide annual celebration of children's right to play. The 2006 event was the 19th annual Playday. It comprises local and regional events, which provide children with the opportunity to play.

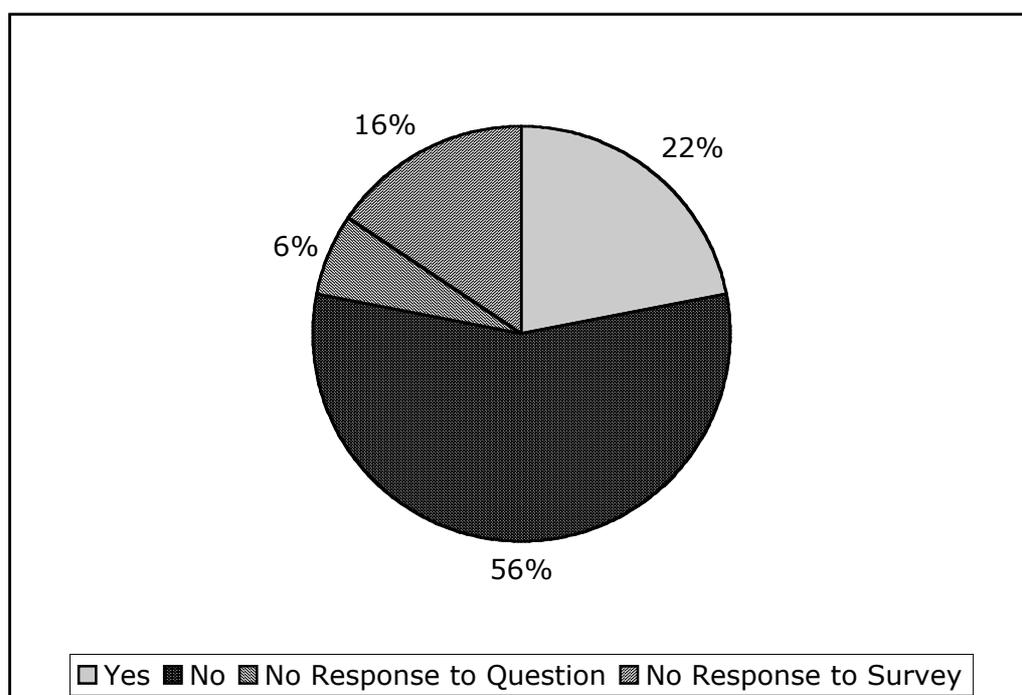
4.14 Respondents in the survey were asked 'Are you holding a Playday Event in 2006?' Once more, almost all local authority representatives provided an answer to this question (25 out of 27).

4.15 As Figure 4.2 reports, fewer than one in four local authorities in Scotland reported that at least one Playday event would be hosted in their area in 2006.

4.16 Although these findings are disappointing, three of the eighteen local authorities which stated that they would not be hosting a Playday event did nevertheless report that there would be activity to celebrate play in their area. Most notably, Falkirk drew attention to their hosting of an annual children's festival.

4.17 Furthermore, as Playday events can be hosted by organisations other than local authorities, e.g. local community groups, it is possible than Playday events would have been hosted in more than the seven local authorities in Scotland, which reported that an event would be hosted in their area.

Figure 4.2: Are you holding a Playday event in 2006?



Base: All 32 local authorities in Scotland

Source: Play Scotland Survey of Local Authorities, 2006.

Conclusion

- 4.18 Clearly, there is evidence of good practice in the promotion of play in Scottish local authorities. A key individual responsible for play can be identified in a significant number of local authorities, the majority of local authorities are reported to provide training opportunities for playwork staff and a PlayDay event was to be held in almost one quarter of local authorities.
- 4.19 However, support for play through key staff, development opportunities and hosting of a high profile play oriented event is uneven and there is scope for more local authorities in Scotland to bolster support for play in these ways. Indeed only five local authorities in Scotland could report that they supported play in all three ways in 2006, i.e. Edinburgh City, Glasgow City, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and Stirling.
- 4.20 Furthermore, and once more, there is a need to provide more detailed information on these issues. Thus, future studies should seek more detailed information on the staffing of strategic posts for play, more detail of participation rates in training opportunities and for information on, for example, whether Playday comprises a centralised event for the whole authority or a series of local events for neighbourhood communities.

5

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Main Findings

- 5.01 Local authorities fulfil a critical role in providing quality opportunities for children's play in Scotland. With one million children living in Scotland in 2006, this represents a significant challenge.
- 5.02 The survey highlights that good practice in play provision, support and management is commonplace among local authorities in Scotland. Most notably:
- ☺ Play is perceived to be a priority in 68% of local authorities (*85% of those responding authorities, for which an opinion was expressed*)
 - ☺ More than two thirds of local authorities – 68% - have a physical activity strategy for children (*85% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)
 - ☺ At least £7,816,497 was spent on direct play provision in Scotland by local authorities in 2006.
 - ☺ There are, *at least*, 4,156 playgrounds in Scotland
 - ☺ Three fifths of local authorities - 59% - provided opportunities for career development for playwork staff (*74% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)
- 5.03 On the other hand, for some issues, the majority position among local authorities in Scotland is negative. Most notably:
- ☺ Only 22% of local authorities have a play policy (*27% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided*)

- ☺ Only 31% of local authorities have a play strategy
(40% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided)
- ☺ Only 38% of local authorities in Scotland have *either* a play strategy or a play policy and only 16% have *both* a play policy and a play strategy (respectively, 46% and 19% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided)
- ☺ No local authorities offered free access to soft play facilities for children (although most reported that these services were not provided by local authorities)
- ☺ Only 41% of local authorities have at least one strategic play development officer (54% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided)
- ☺ Awareness of a Playday event in their area was only noted for 22% of local authorities (28% of those responding authorities, for which an answer was provided)

5.04 Furthermore, for other issues, the survey highlights that there is no dominant position among local authorities in Scotland. Highly variable experiences in play provision is most notable for the following issues:

- ☺ Free access to after school clubs was reported in 47% of those local authorities who responded to this question (28% of all local authorities in Scotland)
- ☺ Furthermore, free access to community buildings was reported in 47% of those local authorities who responded to this question (28% of all local authorities in Scotland)
- ☺ Similarly, free access to leisure centres was reported in 42% of those local authorities who responded to this question (25% of all local authorities in Scotland)

5.05 Interpretation of the key findings outlined above (5.02 to 5.04) is hindered by evidence that the questions in the Play Scotland survey were not always interpreted by respondents in a consistent manner, nor in a manner which the wider community of play professionals would consider to be valid: For example,

- ☺ Most respondents judged that play was a 'priority' in their local authority on account of a reference to play in a key local authority document. Different source documents were cited in support of this claim, not all source documents were corporate, and the nature of this reference to play was not critically scrutinised.
- ☺ Play policies, play strategies and physical activity strategies tended to be issue specific or partial, rather than overarching. Among the examples of play policies were, for example, a public play areas plan, staffed play provision plan, pre-school sector plan or equipped play area plan.

- ☺ Data on direct play spend sometimes included *only* spending on playgrounds, sometimes included all spending on play other than playgrounds and sometimes included spending on playgrounds and other modes of direct play spend.
- 5.06 Notwithstanding the challenges encountered in interpreting data (5.05), the survey has established baseline measures for the provision, management and level of support for play among local authorities in Scotland. The following baseline figures are presented in the 'positive', i.e. non-responses are counted as not positive responses; thus, these baseline figures are likely to slightly underestimate the positive in play provision in Scottish local authorities in 2006:
- ☺ Play is perceived to be a priority in 68% of local authorities
 - ☺ 22% of local authorities have a play policy
 - ☺ 31% of local authorities have a play strategy
 - ☺ 68% of local authorities have a physical activity strategy for children
 - ☺ At least £7,816,497 was spent on direct play provision in Scotland by local authorities in 2006.
 - ☺ There are, *at least*, 4,156 playgrounds in Scotland
 - ☺ 47% of local authorities provided children with free access to an after-school club
 - ☺ 47% of local authorities provided children with free access to community buildings
 - ☺ 42% of local authorities provided children with free access to leisure centres
 - ☺ No local authorities provided children with free access to soft play facilities
 - ☺ 41% of local authorities have at least one strategic play development officer 59% of local authorities provided career development opportunities for playwork staff
 - ☺ 22% of local authorities hosted a Playday event

Future Research Priorities

- 5.07 The most immediate research priority is to establish more robust baseline measures for play in Scottish local authorities.
- 5.08 Although the research has established some baseline measures against which change could be tracked (5.06), there would be merit in supplementing these basic baseline measures, with more tightly defined baseline measures, which would deliver a more precise understanding of the status of play in Scottish local authorities. For example, it would be more useful not to merely recognise whether a local authority has a play strategy, but to recognise whether a local authority has a single overarching play policy which pertains to all children across all realms of play. The experience gleaned from the Play Scotland 2006 survey provides a useful starting point from which to develop robust and unambiguous baseline measures. However, specification of these baseline

measures should be developed in conjunction with representatives of local authorities in Scotland and with reference to indicators being used beyond Scotland.

- 5.09 In particular, the survey generated weak evidence on the levels of financial investment in play across local authorities in Scotland. There is a need to improve response rates and to develop a more robust method for calculating play spend to inform understanding of play investment in Scottish local authorities.
- 5.10 The Play Scotland survey sought to collect baseline data for play in Scottish local authorities, as a whole. Future research should seek to explore differences among children within these local authorities. There is a need to ascertain whether the interventions of local authorities in Scotland are geared to provide all groups of children with the opportunity to partake of quality play experiences – Is play provision primarily for pre-school aged children or is it equally important to provide opportunities for primary-school aged children or secondary-school aged children? Does play provision acknowledge the particular needs of different age groups and the particular needs of different groups of disabled children? Are participation rates higher among boys than girls? Do local authorities provide equally for children from more affluent and less affluent neighbourhoods? Is provision concentrated in large centres of population (or in centralised locales) or is it dispersed across local areas? While it will remain important to present a local authority-wide summary, there is also a need to recognise that a local authority summary will not reflect the experience of play for all children living therein.
- 5.11 Improving the design of the Play Scotland questionnaire to elicit a less ambiguous understanding of play in Scottish local authorities is not the only research priority to emerge from the 2006 survey. Two substantive issues have emerged from the survey results which are worthy of further exploration.
- 5.12 First, there is a need for further research to better understand the grounds for judging ‘play to be a priority’ in local authorities. The high percentage of local authorities for which play was reported to be a priority sits uncomfortably with the low proportion of local authorities with play policies, play strategies, strategic play development officers, Playday events and free access to key opportunities.
- 5.13 Second, although references were made to play as a corporate service, it often seemed that play was understood only from a single service department viewpoint, typically Education or Leisure. There is a need to detail the ways in which play features – or should feature – in the remits of a range of departments (if not all departments) in Scottish local authorities, in addition to being a corporate matter.

Policy Implications

- 5.14 Although play features on the policy landscape in Scottish local authorities, the approach to play can appear disjointed and sector-specific. There is a need for local authorities to articulate more directly and more comprehensively an overarching strategic (i.e. corporate) approach to play.
- 5.15 Although there would appear to be commitment to provide for play and evidence that play is being taken seriously in local authorities, some of the key tools for articulating a play agenda - play strategies and play policies – are not commonplace in Scottish local authorities. There is scope for collective debate among local authorities to showcase and share best practice in these areas.
- 5.16 In addition to these general policy prescriptions, five specific policy recommendations are made on the basis of the survey evidence.
- 5.17 First, there is clearly a wide variation in policy, strategic planning, provision, support and resourcing of play across local authorities in Scotland. Although it is the right of each local authority to determine their own local priorities, it is also the right of all children to have access to adequate opportunities for play. A National Play Policy statement underpinned by a Statutory Duty on local authorities (with ring fenced funding for Play) would be a progressive step in assisting local authorities to provide adequate opportunities and resources to support children’s play in Scotland.
- 5.18 Children’s play is primarily – although not exclusively – a neighbourhood matter. The survey provided little evidence of a ‘local focus’ for play. Delivering the child’s right to play should be central to Community Planning in order to deliver strong, safe, stimulating, happy and healthy children and communities. A new requirement should be placed on Community Planning Partnerships to develop and implement a Play Strategy for their area.
- 5.19 The survey highlighted problems in establishing basic counts of playgrounds, playing fields and other spaces for play. Comprehensive national and local records of all spaces for play are required.
- 5.20 The survey highlighted an uneven approach across local authorities to staff development of playworkers and, in particular, that not all local authorities seemed to have a key individual with overarching strategic responsibility for play. There is a need for all local

authorities in Scotland to recognise the value of playwork qualifications, playwork staff and to commit sufficient resources to ensure continuous professional development for all staff with a play remit.

- 5.21 The survey highlighted that free access to play was not commonplace for after school clubs, leisure centres and community buildings. Although it could be argued that free access is not essential to facilitate participation among children from low income households, there is a need for all local authorities to formulate a play strategy which would set out their approach to facilitating inclusive opportunities for play for all children.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire



PLAY SCOTLAND PLAY PROVISION QUESTIONNAIRE

The Scottish Parliament confirmed that statistics are not available for the spending and provision of play resources for children and young people in Scotland. Play Scotland is trying to gather some baseline information on Play provision and its funding to enable us to lobby for additional resources for the Play sector.

GENERAL INFORMATION		
1	Name	
2	Local Authority	
3	Title of Post	
4	What Professional Bodies are you affiliated to? <i>(the organisation or staff on behalf of the organisation)</i>	
5	Population of Children and Young People under 18 in Local Authority? What is the % of these vis a vis adult population? <i>(If known)</i>	
POLICY		
6	Is Play a priority for your Local Authority? <i>(for example, in your Corporate Planning Integrated Children's Service Plan)</i>	
7	Do you have a Play Policy? <i>If yes can you make this available to us?</i>	Yes/No
8	Do you have a Play Strategy? <i>If yes can you make this available to us?</i>	Yes/No
9	Do you have a Physical Activity Strategy and if so does it include children? <i>If yes can make this available to us?</i>	Yes/No

PLAY RESOURCES		
10	In 2005/06 Financial year how much money will be spent on direct play provision? <i>Can you provide a summary of expenditure?</i>	£
11	Can you estimate how much money is spent per child per week on Outdoor Play (<i>in England in 2001 on average Council's were spending less than 8p per child per week on Outdoor Play</i>).	£
12	How many of the facilities listed below are free at the point of entry: After School Clubs Community Buildings Leisure Centres Soft Play Centres Other	
13	How many Outdoor Facilities do you have: Playgrounds Playing Fields Open Space Sites	
TRAINING		
14a	How many Strategic Play Development Officers do you employ?	Full Time Equivalent Seasonal Time
14b	What CPD opportunities do you provide annually	
15	Are you holding a Playday Event on 2 August 2006? If yes please can you supply us with details?	

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return by Monday 19 June to: info@playscotland.org / Subject: Play Questionnaire, then your Council name.

Please return questionnaire by email, followed by a hard copy with any supporting document in hard format to:

Sharon Forrester
Play Scotland, Midlothian Innovation Centre
Pentlandfield,
Roslin
Midlothian, EH25 9RE

Tel: 0131 440 9070 Web: www.playscotland.org

Our Vision

Play Scotland's vision is "to make the child's right to play a reality in Scotland".

Our Mission

Play Scotland believes in every child's right to play, and as the lead body for play in Scotland will actively promote this right by research, information giving and campaigning to keep the child's right to play on the national agenda.

Play Scotland's work is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 31 which states:

"State 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."

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