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To: Children Families and Education Policy Overview Committee  
18<sup>th</sup> September 2009

Subject: Playbuilder Funding

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report sets out how Kent is managing the Playbuilder grant and how it intends to respond to the Government's play agenda

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) The Government announced its commitment to improving opportunities for all children and young people to access good quality public play spaces in every local authority in The Children's Plan in 2007. This was followed by its Fair Play consultation and the publication of The Play Strategy in 2008.

(2) The Strategy is backed by significant capital investment through the Pathfinder and Playbuilder programmes under which every local authority will receive a minimum of £1m to fund local play facilities by 2010.

## **Play England**

2. (1) DCSF has contracted Play England, an arm of National Children's Bureau, to deliver its play strategy and Kent has a named Play England link person who provides advice but who also provides DCSF with regular RAG (red, amber, green) monitoring reports on Kent's progress.

## **Strategic lead and responsibility**

3. (1) The government expects County Councils to take the strategic lead for play and, therefore, Kent County Council has nominated Marisa White, Head of Extended Services, as its Play Lead.

(2) DCSF clearly sees the wider play agenda as a responsibility of Children's Trusts and, therefore, Kent Children's Trust has asked the 8-13 sub group to oversee developments on its behalf.

## Playbuilder funding

4. (1) Kent County Council has been awarded £1,166,707 capital and £46,005 revenue funding to develop a minimum of 22 fixed play spaces for 8-13 year olds between April 2009 and March 2011. The funding will be provided as follows:

Year	Capital	Revenue	Minimum no. of schemes
2001/2010	£548,469	£27,603	11
2010/2011	£618,238	£18,402	Number to bring up to 22

(2) This funding must be spent within the year it is received. It cannot be rolled forward and any underspend will be lost.

(3) A steering group has been set up with members drawn from KCC procurement, city, districts and boroughs and a voluntary organisation representing children and young people's interests. It is chaired by Kent's Play Lead. Play England's link person sits on the steering group as advisor.

(4) In order to meet the timescales, the application process for year 1 had to be put in place before receipt of the final DCSF grant letter. A decision was taken that only city, district and borough councils should be invited to apply for grants for 2009/2010 as they are most likely to have schemes that are ready to proceed at short notice and complete within the deadline.

(5) DCSF require that sites selected must meet specific criteria (e.g. are available to the public 24 hours a day; have been subject to formal consultation with communities and young people; and are developed within Design for Play guidelines). However, DCSF also acknowledged that readiness to proceed was also a key factor in the first year. Kent's application process was designed to ensure that applications struck this balance.

(6) In addition, while no guarantees could be made, it was agreed that, if applications justified it, it would be desirable to allocate equal funding to each city, district or borough in year 1.

(7) 19 applications were received in total.

(8) A selection panel that included representatives from KCC, voluntary sector and an independent technical expert was convened to assess and make recommendations as to allocation of funding in year 1. Kent's Play England link indicated that she was satisfied with the robustness of the selection process.

(9) The recommendations of the selection panel were considered by the Playbuilder Steering group and subsequently endorsed by Kent Children's Trust Executive.

(10) 10 play spaces from 9 districts were considered to be strong enough to proceed.

(11) Applications from 3 districts did not quite meet the selection criteria and further work was undertaken to see whether they could be improved so that every city, district and borough could benefit from Playbuilder in year 1.

(12) One district withdrew its application during this process but has indicated that it will be submitting a new application in year 2 that will have match funding from the National Lottery. This application will be given preferential treatment as long as it meets the criteria.

(13) It is hoped that Kent will be able to proceed with 12 play spaces in 11 districts and districts are now in the process of submitting detailed plans that set out timescales and costs as part of the Partnering Agreement. This process also enables minor refinements to be made to the design process or to address issues identified during the selection process. Each successful district will receive £49,860.80p towards their scheme.

(14) Once the Partnering agreements have been signed there will be a joint press release announcing all the successful sites.

(15) Expressions of interest for Playbuilder Year 2 (2010/2011) are being invited to inform the planning process. A number of city, districts and boroughs included parishes and town councils in year 1 but some did not and it is planned to extend the application process to this group. In addition, discussions are being held to see whether the voluntary sector might also wish to be included. Kent Country Parks have also expressed an interest.

### **Kent's Play Partnership**

5. (1) As a 2 tier authority Play in Kent has been led and developed at city, district and borough level but Kent County Council is now expected to take a lead. However, it does not have experience of managing or providing play to any great extent. Therefore, it is in the process of setting up a Play Partnership with representation from a wide range of sectors. The Partnership will provide a consultative forum for Playbuilder, oversee the development of a county-wide Play Strategy and advise on its implementation.

### **Kent's Play Strategy**

6. (1) Local authorities are expected to have a Play Strategy that not only sets out their vision but also has an action plan on how they expect to deliver the government's agenda. Developing this strategy will be one of the tasks of the Partnership.

(2) All Kent city, district and borough councils already have play strategies in place and it is proposed that Kent's strategy will build upon these while at the same time addressing some key policy issues arising from the government's strategy, for example risk and play.

(3) The national Play Strategy argues strongly that children need challenging and exciting play experiences to help them develop the skills to manage risk and that overall management of risk needs to be more proportionate. Kent recently held a seminar on risk and play funded by SureStart Ashford to raise the profile of this issue and to identify underlying policy concerns. These essentially arose from the fact that

insurance companies and legal precedent will take some time to catch up with government policy.

### **Performance Indicator**

7. (1) The government introduced a new performance indicator (NI 911 which will become part of the APA from April 2009:- '*Good play opportunities increase children's satisfaction with their lives*' and it is expected that Kent's Playbuilder and the activities of the Partnership will contribute to good outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

Members of the Children Families and Education Policy Overview Committee are asked to endorse the proposals set out in the report above.

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### *Background Documents:*

- (LAC 3112080004) Play Pathfinding and Playbuilder Capital and revenue Grants 2009-2011

*Other Useful Information: None*