



*'a great green
place to grow'*



Midlothian Play Strategy & Action Plan 2025-2028

FOREWORD

With its beautiful country parks, rich cultural history and strong local communities, Midlothian is a great place for children to grow, have fun, explore and play. Creating environments, opportunities and circumstances which promote play is one way we work together as a Community Planning Partnership to support healthy, happy and nurturing childhoods, the effects of which follow children into adulthood.

On behalf of the GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) Board, I would like to thank the Public Health and Health Policy Directorate of NHS Lothian, Play Midlothian and Public Health Scotland for supporting the development of this plan, and all groups and individuals who contributed to it. I look forward to their continued contribution to realising its actions. This work ensures all children have opportunities to play every day and that our young people have the space and freedom to explore, create, and develop through the power of play.

Rebecca Hooton, Chief Officer Children's Services, Partnerships and Communities, Midlothian Council.



OUR VISION

“For children and young people in Midlothian to have the best possible start in life and live safe, healthy, active, happy, and independent lives.”

Midlothian GIRFEC Board Children and Young People's Services Plan (2023-2026)

Play is a building block of childhood. It matters both to and for children. In Midlothian, we will deliver opportunities for all children to play every day by focusing on the following priority areas:

Play at home



Play in the community



Play in childcare & educational settings



DEFINING PLAY

[Play is] an activity which is chosen and directed by the child and undertaken for enjoyment and its own sake rather than as a means to an end. Play is a fundamental part of the pleasure of childhood, as well as essential for children's physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development'

Scottish Government, Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030

Our work to improve children and young people's opportunity to play is informed by local data and evidence, this includes:

- listening to the voices of children and young people.
- working with the people and organisations who know them well.
- learning from assessments such as the Midlothian Play Sufficiency Assessment (2024) and local population data.

It is also informed by the national policy landscape including:

- Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision (2013)
- Play: vision statement and action plan 2025 to 2030
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)
- The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024
- The Promise
- The Infant Pledge (2023)
- Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026
- National Planning Framework 4
- My World Outdoors (2016)

These plans share common goals to improve the health, wellbeing and development of children, young people and their families.

CHILDREN IN MIDLOTHIAN

Midlothian has 22,017 children and young people (under the age of 20). This is an increase of 2,250 children and young people since 2011 (2022 and 2011 census data). We expect the numbers of children and young people living in Midlothian to continue to increase in the coming years. They are a diverse group. Here is a little of what we know taken from the 2022 Census and local data:

- 48% of people aged under 20 are female (10,663) and 52% male (11,348).
- 11% (2,280) of people aged 24 and under are from a minority ethnic background. This increases to 13% for people aged 16 and under (2,985).
- 250 children and young people have been identified as young carers.
- 22% of children are starting school at risk of living with overweight and obesity.
- 23.2% (4,592) of children and young people are living in relative poverty (after housing costs).
- 43% (6,632) of school pupils are recorded as having at least one additional support need. 953 of these pupils have multiple agencies involved for their support needs.
- 2% (342) of school pupils are family members of veterans or people serving in the military.
- 2.5% (372) of school pupils are recorded as being care experienced.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Play is an important part of how children develop and thrive, physically, socially, intellectually and emotionally. It helps build brains that are flexible, adaptive and creative. It underpins learning, relationship building, resilience and health and wellbeing.

Play is vital to both children's lives in the present, supporting healthy and happy childhoods, and to laying the foundations for their future health and wellbeing. The right to play, outlined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, was incorporated into Scottish Law in 2024.

Children and young people need environments, opportunities and circumstances that allow them to realise their right to play.



Play will differ depending on age, ability, and interests. There is no one right way to play but getting play right can support the realisation of other rights, such as the right to health (article 24), the right to life, survival and development (article 6) and the rights of children with a disability (article 23).

OUR SCOPE

This strategy is designed for children and young people from pre-birth to approximately 18 years old. Alongside play we have thought about the recreational needs of the older age group of young people.

We have focused on three areas where evidence shows we can make the greatest gains in supporting environments, opportunities and circumstances for play and recreation. These are outlined below:

Play at home

'In most cases, children's first environment for play is their home... Those closest to them are instrumental in providing an environment (for them to) develop and flourish through play'

Play Vision Statement and Action Plan (2025)

We want to support families to play at home both indoors and outdoors. Playing and being playful at home helps nurture development, resilience, and connectedness from the first days of life (Madigan et al. 2019). It is not only good for children but also for the wellbeing of the adults in their lives. Play does not have to cost money or be pre-planned or structured. In this strategy we want to support families to enjoy play from birth, and we want to support them to find ways to play even when lives are busy and contain modern distractions.

Play in the community

'I like the park because it has so much stuff.'

Local Development Plan Feedback from child aged between 4-11 in Penicuik (2024)

We want to encourage opportunities for children and young people to play in ways that are fun, challenging and stimulating because we know this helps growth and development and can support a sense of belonging (Gills, 2014). Play in the community, especially outdoors, can help children and young people to get moving, socialising and exploring with all their senses. Play can be on the doorstep, in parks and green spaces and even on the way to other activities. Wherever they choose to play or spend time recreationally we want all children and young people to feel included, welcome, and safe.

Play in childcare and educational settings

'When children are helped to actively explore nature themselves the dividends for improving outcomes are exponential.'

My World Outdoors (2016)

We want to ensure children and young people have opportunities to play freely in all learning environments. They spend a lot of their day in school, and childcare hours are increasing for the early years. Play can contribute powerfully and positively to learning, skills development and raising attainment, alongside supporting growth and wellbeing (Gill, 2014). Maximising play in the school day aligns with educational goals around supporting playfulness in the curriculum, outdoor learning and learning for sustainability.

School playgrounds are one of the best places to increase children's movement. They are also important spaces to meet diverse play needs, from calm spaces to challenging and risk promoting places; they should ensure every child can play in a way that suit them.

Inclusive play

Within each of these key areas we will consider the needs of particular population groups and communities in line with the Equality Act 2010. This places a duty on public authorities to consider how their functions affect people with different protected characteristics, and to eliminate discrimination and to advance equality of opportunity. We have also followed the Fairer Scotland Duty (2018), which places a duty on public authorities to consider how they can reduce inequalities caused by poverty and low income. We have prioritised delivering opportunities for play which are free and low-cost.

The evidence we have shows that there are differences in opportunities to play and experiences of play across different population groups and communities. We will prioritise and allocate our resources based on the evidence we have to support opportunities for all children to play every day. For example, evidence from local evidence gathering including the Play Sufficiency Assessment (2024) shows that:

- We have less age-appropriate formal outdoor play provision for young people aged 12 and over compared to that for children under the age of 12.

- Most of our formal play provision for young people is most likely to appeal to and be used by boys and young men and is less likely to appeal to and be used by girls and young women (Make Space for Girls).
- There is a difference in how safe children and young people feel playing outside depending on where they live in Midlothian.

We also have some work to do to reduce our gaps in evidence and understanding. For example:

- We need more information to know how well our formal outdoor play provision meets the needs of children and young people with disabilities and additional support needs.
- We need more information to know if we are meeting the needs of children from minority ethnic groups and for whom English is not their first language.



Challenge and risk in play

Children seek new experiences and uncertainty through play, undertaking challenges and testing and pushing their limits in the process. Children would not be able to learn to walk or ride a bike without this drive and willingness. Many aspects of everyday life, and many valuable activities other than play, carry a degree of risk. We will encourage risks to be supported and managed in a way that ensures the benefits of these risks are not lost.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

The evidence we have shows that we have diverse provision, opportunities and support for play across Midlothian; that outside play is popular in all areas of Midlothian, and we have staff groups across multiple organisations who have skills and expertise in supporting the right to play.

Our last Play Strategy (2017-2019) made progress across several areas including:

- making it Council working practice to:
 - restrict the erection of 'no ball games' signs only to locations where there is a safety hazard.
 - leave trees with their lower branches intact in public play spaces to allow children to climb if they wish.
- incorporating play in the development of the Midlothian Green Network.
- taking forward learning from the Play for All consultation about disabled children's access to play in Midlothian, for example through the creation of the Play for All service.

OUR GOVERNANCE

Overall governance for the Midlothian Play Strategy sits within our Community Planning Partnership. This brings key statutory and Third Sector organisations across Midlothian together to plan services with communities that will deliver better outcomes for people.

The GIRFEC Board (Getting it Right for Every Child), are part of the Community Planning Partnership and their Children and Young People's Rights GIRFEC Subgroup oversee the play strategy and the steering group who created it.

Midlothian Council's Sport and Leisure Service were a key partner in creating this strategy, and this

play strategy also forms part of the Midlothian's Physical Activity, Recreation and Sport Strategy.

The Midlothian Play Strategy Steering Group will:

- meet quarterly.
- co-ordinate progress on implementing the action plan.
- engage with action holders to support the implementation and development of actions.
- provide a quarterly progress report to the Children and Young People's Rights GIRFEC Subgroup.
- include membership from Midlothian Council's Sport and Leisure Service.

The Children and Young People's Rights GIRFEC Subgroup will:

- be provided with a quarterly progress report.
- monitor progress and support the implementation of the action plan.
- escalate any difficulties or challenges, as required, to the GIRFEC Board.
- celebrate and share success.

We hope to continue to make good progress on delivering opportunities for all children to play every day through this updated strategy. The next section of this document contains the actions we believe will enable us to do this.

PLAY AT HOME

Outcomes

- Play and playfulness is actively encouraged and supported from pre-birth.
- Families receive consistent messages and information about play at key developmental stages and ages.
- Key staff groups working with children and their families have opportunities to learn about the importance of play and how it contributes to a child's development, learning and good health and wellbeing.
- Key staff groups know how to connect families who need help to develop play with sources of help.



UNCRC	Action	Target	Timescale	Contributors
31, 2, 3, 5, 6, 24	<p>Increase expectant families' awareness of child development through play.</p> <p>Deliver an evidence based antenatal session which introduces responsiveness and supports speech and language development through play.</p>	<p>An additional ante-natal session is established. It is delivered by health visitors or nursery nurses.</p> <p>Promotion includes targeted efforts to address health inequalities.</p>	Year 1	NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Visiting, • Public Health, • Speech & Language Therapy, • Nursey Nurses
31, 2, 3, 5, 6, 24	<p>Increase promotion of play resources for children up to the age of five.</p> <p>Offer the Play at Home booklet at each key developmental stage through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Visiting (universal distribution) • Hawthorn Children & Families Centre • Sure Start Centres • Libraries • Home Link • Resettlement Team • Bright Sparks • Army Welfare Service • Play Therapy Base 	Play at Home booklets offered at all locations and distribution monitored.	Year 1	Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hawthorn Family Learning Centre, • Libraries, • Resettlement Team Public Health Scotland NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Visiting Midlothian Sure Start Army Welfare Service Home Link Family Support Bright Sparks Play Therapy Base
	<p>Promote and use the online Tiny Happy People resource through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Visiting • Early Years Settings 	All Early Years Settings and Health Visiting Teams are familiar with and promoting Tiny Happy People.		NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Visiting, • Speech & Language Therapy, • Public Health Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years Settings
31, 3, 5, 6, 24	<p>Increase promotion of play resources for children aged over five and young people.</p> <p>Promote the Parent Club, Play Scotland and Play Midlothian websites as a play resource to families, including those with children aged 5 and over through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools • Communities Lifelong Learning & Employability • Play Midlothian • Play Therapy Base • Y2K 	Promotion of Parent Club and Play Scotland resources is evidenced.	Year 1-2	Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, Communities Lifelong Learning & Employability • Play Midlothian • Home Link Family Support • Play Therapy Base • Y2K
	Include info. and resources on play for older children and teenagers in the family learning mapping exercise.	The Family Learning Mapping exercise incorporates play for older children and teenagers.	Year 1	Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Learning Co-ordinator

UNCRC	Action	Target	Timescale	Contributors
31, 3, 6, 23, 24	Assess the need for play related training.	Assessment completed.	Year 1	Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children Services, • Learning & Development, • Early Years
	Midlothian Council Learning and Development and Children Services to assess which staff groups in Children Services need training and how they will access it.	Recommendations implemented.	Year 1-2	

PLAY IN THE COMMUNITY

Outcomes

- Play spaces are inclusive and accessible so all children and young people can gather and play.
- Our children and young people feel safe when playing in their neighbourhoods, parks and formal play spaces.
- Play is included and supported in relevant public realm plans such as adopted planning policy, housing development, active travel, roads and landscape.
- It's easy for people to find information about outdoor play spaces in Midlothian.



UNCRC	Action	Target	Timescale	Contributors
31, 3, 2, 5, 6, 12, 15, 23, 24	Increase the accessibility of formal play spaces Undertake audit of inclusive play equipment and other inclusive features of the 62 council-maintained formal play parks to assess accessibility for children with mobility needs.	A baseline data set detailing which parks have accessible play equipment and accessible paths.	Year 1	Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Greenspace Service
	Consult with families and children with additional support needs to understand to what extent existing formal play parks meet the needs of children with additional needs.	A consultation has been completed with local families with children with additional needs.		NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Public HealthBright SparksSaltersgate
	Update the directory of council maintained formal play spaces with photos and accessibility information.	The Council website has been updated.		Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Greenspace Service,Communications Team
	Work with the Third Sector to circulate the directory information to people who are not online. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Sure startFamily Wellbeing ServiceHomelinkHome school practitionersPlay MidlothianBright Sparks	The directory information is available as a paper resource and Third Sector Partners are sharing it.		Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Greenspace Service,Communications Team; Sure start Homelink Family Support Play Midlothian Bright Sparks
	Identify and agree achievable material improvements based on the above results.	Achievable material improvements have been agreed and taken forward.		NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Public Health
	Improve the quality and maintenance of new non-council play spaces. Ask privately owned/maintained parks to display contact details to report disrepair.	All new developments are routinely requested to provide this.	Year 2-3	Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Planning,Children Services; NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Public Health
	Create housing development guidance as part of adopted planning policy on the requirements for play space. Include accessible/inclusive play requirements/age appropriateness.	Development guidance to be created under Midlothian's Local Development Plan 2.		Play Midlothian Y2K

UNCRC	Action	Target	Timescale	Contributors
31, 3, 12, 15, 6, 23, 24	Make play spaces/equipment more inclusive to teenagers, girls and other groups of people with a protected characteristic.	Policy documents and tender process documents have been reviewed and any amendments made.	Year 1	Midlothian Council: • Greenspace Service NHS Lothian: • Public Health
	Review Midlothian Council policy documentation and tender processes related to the design and provision of play spaces and equipment. Amend any language that may disadvantage play opportunities for girls or other groups of people with a protected characteristic.			
	As formal play equipment and spaces come up for maintenance / replacement consider opportunities to ensure they deliver an inclusive play space.	Consideration of delivering inclusive play spaces is evidenced.	Year 1-3	Midlothian Council: • Greenspace Service
	Where changes are proposed to make play spaces more inclusive engage with children and young people to make sure plans consider local needs and barriers.	Engagement and consultation is evidenced.		Midlothian Council: • Greenspace Service, • Communities, Lifelong Learning & Employability Y2K MYPAS
	Work with partner organisations to support more teenagers, girls and other groups of people with a protected characteristic to feel welcome in play spaces. E.g. promoting 'try it out sessions' for new play equipment.	Partnership working to support these groups of people, and the impact of this work is evidenced.		

UNCRC	Action	Target	Timescale	Contributors
31, 3, 2, 12, 15, 6, 24	<p>Increase play spaces where children and young people feel safe.</p> <p>Explore the reasons why some children and young people said they 'never felt safe' when playing outside in their local area and what would make a difference.</p>	Play sufficiency and other available data including the views of children and young people is analysed.	Year 1	NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Health Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities, Lifelong Learning & Employability Greenspace Service Third Sector organisations; Police Scotland
	If we identify achievable improvements agree actions to address these.	A plan has been established and implemented to address identified local needs.	Year 1-3	
	Work with communities and third sector organisations to identify informal play spaces which over time have become unmaintained. Bring them back to life in ways that benefit local communities and the environment.	<p>A process exists and is promoted for communities to tell Midlothian Council about informal play spaces that have become unmaintained.</p> <p>Improvements have been agreed and taken forward with communities on a space-by-space basis.</p>		Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenspace service Play Midlothian
	Create guidelines and promote opportunities for communities to organise 'playing out' sessions - informal neighbourhood-led short road closures, creating a safe space for children to play.	<p>A process exists and is promoted for neighbourhood-led playing out sessions.</p> <p>Impact is monitored.</p>	Year 1	Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads and Transportation Play Midlothian
	Explore which residential areas would most benefit from 'safe streets' - permanent street closures to prevent traffic short-cutting and promote safer doorstep and neighbourhood play. Pilot and promote 'safe streets'.	Analysis and engagement has been carried out to determine priority streets. Demonstrator safer streets have been established and promoted. Impact is monitored.	Year 2-3	Homelink Family Support, NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Health
31, 3, 6, 24	<p>Promote play in local public strategies e.g. physical activity and active travel.</p> <p>Promote this strategy and work with partners to consider and where possible and appropriate embed play in strategy and planning documents.</p>	Relevant strategies likely to be in development in the next 3 years have been scoped. Opportunities to engage in the development of these plans have been sought/responded to.	Year 1-3	NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Health
31, 3, 6, 24	<p>Encourage play in the local community.</p> <p>Raise awareness and share resources on providing play opportunities for children to undertake challenges, test their limits, and judge and manage risk with staff in children's services.</p>	<p>Play Midlothian has compiled a document of useful resources.</p> <p>Children's settings including uniformed organisations and community children's groups have received the document via Midlothian Council or Play Midlothian as relevant.</p>	Year 1 Reviewed in year 2	Play Midlothian Play Midlothian Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education

PLAY IN CHILDCARE & EDUCATION SETTINGS

Outcomes

- Staff working in childcare and education settings support and encourage free play.
- Childcare and education settings promote and provide play opportunities in natural, challenging, and engaging environments.
- School playgrounds are an inclusive and accessible parts of the community.



UNCRC	Action	Target	Timescale	Contributors
31, 3, 5, 6, 24, 29	<p>Share information with families about outdoor play and play spaces.</p> <p>Ensure schools have information they can share on school websites, via social media and in take-home information.</p>	The updated directory of council maintained formal play spaces with photos and accessibility information is shared alongside other relevant information.	Year 1-3	Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, • Communications, • Greenspace service Play Midlothian NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Health
31, 3, 6, 24, 29	<p>Scope the options for school grounds to be available for play out of school hours.</p> <p>Establish baseline data on the current practice across the school estate.</p>	A baseline has been established.	Year 1	Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, • Greenspace service, • Planning NHS Lothian: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Health Play Midlothian
	Identify barriers, enablers and options for more schools to participate.	Barriers, enablers and options have been identified.	Year 1-2	
	Propose a Midlothian approach.	A Midlothian approach exists.	Year 2	
31, 3, 6, 24, 29	<p>Increase the use of loose parts and open-ended resources for outdoor play in Early Years Settings, primary schools & the out of school childcare network.</p> <p>Establish baseline data on the current practice.</p>	A baseline has been established.	Year 1	Play Midlothian Midlothian Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, • Children's services
	Provide training for teaching staff including teaching assistants.	A training schedule has been established to meet the needs of existing and new staff.	Year 1-2	
	Offer mentorship from other schools who have embedded this in their outdoor play.	Mentorship is up and running.	Year 2-3	
	Provide an information resource which can be shared with: teaching staff, early years settings, out of school childcare, families.	An information resource exists and has been made available.		
	Scope opportunities to create a bank of loose parts play kit.	<p>A scoping exercise has been completed.</p> <p>An implementation plan has been agreed if a bank of loose parts play kit is considered feasible.</p>		

UNCRC	Action	Target	Timescale	Contributors
31, 3, 6, 24, 29	<p>Support primary schools, Early Years Settings & out of school childcare providers to deliver play opportunities for children to undertake challenges, test their limits, and judge and manage risk.</p> <p>Deliver workshops and share resources on providing play opportunities for children to experience, judge and manage risk.</p>	<p>Play Midlothian has compiled a document of useful resources</p> <p>Primary schools, early learning centres & out of School childcare providers have received the document via Midlothian Council or Play Midlothian as relevant</p> <p>Workshops material is developed and delivered as agreed with childcare and education settings</p>	<p>Year 1</p> <p>Reviewed in year 2</p> <p>Year 1-3</p>	<p>Midlothian Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Learning Co-ordinator, • Education, • Children's Services,



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Produced by Midlothian Community Planning Partnership.

