



PlayAction Guide

FORMULATING A LOCAL PLAY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Children's rights and needs to play, for recreational, leisure, cultural and other rest-time activities are guaranteed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Fair Play for Children exists to promote that right to Play.

Local authorities provide a wide range of service to their communities, and all include some level of play and other rest-time provision for children, ranging from fixed-equipment playgrounds through e.g. summer playschemes, out-of-school clubs to children's theatre, arts, museum, sports and other activities. Fair Play believes it is good practice for all local authorities to adopt, monitor and review regularly a Local Children's Play and Recreation Policy so that children's needs and rights are met in a consistent and fair manner.



WHO CAN CREATE A PLAY POLICY?

Creating or working towards creating a Play Policy is not the preserve of local authorities. In many areas, Play Councils or Forums have been established, and indeed are seen by local authorities as the natural focus for consultation and sharing of information and resources. Therefore, a natural extension of that is for such bodies to initiate or be a central part of the policy creation process. Any local Council wishing to initiate such a Policy should consider the part such Play Councils/Forums should have, and may wish to suggest such bodies have a role in drafting.

In areas where a Council refuses to acknowledge the importance of having a Play Policy, the local Play Council or Forum may itself be the body which is setting the standards.

INTER-AGENCY WORKING

Another sound reason for involving a Play Council or Forum (and indeed for creating one) is that it not only can ensure involvement of its member bodies (such as local playschemes, after-school clubs etc), it ought also to be the focus for joint action and planning between different statutory authorities in an area. Some areas now have a single local authority (London Boroughs, Metro Districts and new Unitary) but within them there are departments which need to talk - Planning, Housing, Education, Leisure, Social Services etc - where Play is concerned. In other areas, there are two or three levels of local government, such as Parish/Town, District and County. They too need to be encouraged to co-ordinate policy formulation, and indeed to adopt Play Policies which are consistent within one geographical area, and to adopt joint strategies and working together.

There are also other statutory agencies which might well have an interest in Play and who can become involved - for example, Health and Police - there is growing interest in Police Authorities in policies aimed at persuading children into activities which avoid offending behaviour, and at any early age. Inter-agency working is a prime objective of the Children Act 1989.

THE BASIS FOR A POLICY

Fair Play for Children recommends that a first step is to seek the adoption by the local authority or the Play Council/Forum of Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- 1. States Parties recognize 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.**
- 2. States 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 activity.**

THE RIGHT TO PLAY

The adoption of this Article as the basis for a Play Policy ought not to be an idle gesture. The implications are quite far reaching. For example, "appropriate to the age of the child" is key and is not restricted to "No over-12's on this equipment" at play areas - what about their needs to play? In some areas, there is recognition that such young people also need outdoor play equipment, but equally that a toddler-sized slide does not fit the bill. Or we can examine A31.2, and the commitment to "appropriate and equal opportunities" for children for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity, and the onus is on the encouragement of provision, which may mean direct provision or working with



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and to encourage others to provide, but certainly is no mandate to do nothing.

RELATED RIGHTS

There are other very crucial and relevant Articles in the Convention: A2: non-discrimination; A3: best interests of the child; A4: maximum use of resources; A12+13: the right to express opinion and to be heeded; A15: freedom of assembly and association; A18: provision of child-care; A19: protection from abuse; A23: rights of disabled children; A24: right to health; A27: standard of living; A28+29: right to and aims of education; A30: rights of minorities; A31: right to Play; A32/33/34/35: freedom from exploitation. All and any of these may have weight and relevance in a local area, and there is no case for the notion that the Convention affects only "foreign places". Britain has not been adjudged as anywhere near perfect by the international monitoring system put in place for the Convention. A recent report shows major deficiencies in the UK's implementation.



THE CHARTER FOR CHILDREN'S PLAY

There is another standard for helping local authorities and others when formulating a Play Policy. **The Charter for Children's Play** was drawn up by the **Children's Play Council**, based on Article 31, and is now being adopted by many local authorities and other agencies as the basis for their policies relating to Play. Membership of the Council is open to national voluntary bodies with an interest in Children's Play - there are now some 31 such bodies including Fair Play for Children (from which organisation the idea for a national Council stemmed). Local authorities adopting the Charter also are able to take part in the Council's work.

A FAIR DEAL FOR OUR CHILDREN

Article 31.2 makes implicit that adequate resources must be devoted to children's rest, recreation, leisure and play. "Appropriate and equal" is not confined to e.g. making sure that male and female children have equal opportunities, nor just between children with disabilities and those without, or between children of various ethnic groups etc. It must refer to the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities between CHILDREN AND ADULTS, children also being PEOPLE. Therefore it is quite proper to be raising the extent to which children, in terms of Article 31.2, are able to access the resources and facilities provided by local authorities in terms of overall leisure and cultural spending in a local authority area. For example, a Fair Play study, based on statistics used by the Audit Commission, showed that in 1994/95, local authorities devoted £1.268 billion to public arts and recreation (excluding libraries), and in the same year £62.48 millions on children's play (including fixed area provision) or 4.9% of the total on arts and recreation.

CHILDREN - OUR POOR RELATIONS?

It might be reasonably asked, what proportion of the population locally do children form? If they form, as around the national average, 20%, then one might fairly argue, is 20% being spent on ensuring their appropriate and equal access to all cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity? At national level, when one considers that 20% of the population is under 16, and that on play Councils spend some 4.9% of their leisure and cultural budgets on Play, we are justified in asking whether another 15.1% of that £1.268 billions or more each year actually benefits children in terms of the "appropriate and equal" criterion of Article 31.2?

Fair Play doubts that this is so, and takes the view that, unless there is a proper examination of this equal opportunities aspect, a local Play Policy can be fatally compromised from the outset as it will fail to address a central issue, ever more relevant in an era of increasing competition for resources. If an authority's members, on having this challenge put to them, shake their heads sorrowfully and cluck sympathetically as if play workers will always automatically accept there are more pressing calls on resources, we need to be stating quite clearly the role of Play in ensuring the communities and environments in which children are growing up are fit for the task - the end result of failure to invest is, Fair Play argues, future loss of community, young people growing up knowing they have been cheated of childhood, and many problems which already confront communities today because of lack of foresight, fairness and investment in decades past.

APPROPRIATE AND EQUAL

Local authorities, in Fair Play's view, need to show that children are able to access fairly the resources devoted by local authorities to leisure - there may be ways to interest children in e.g. opera, but only a cynic would suggest it was pos-



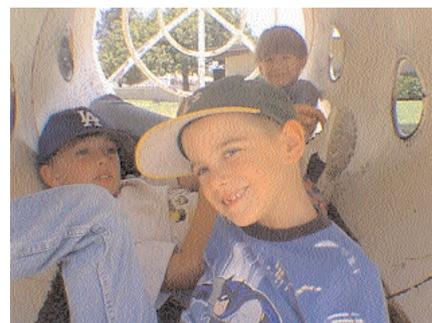
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sible or likely for most children to do so through the usual channels of access which are adult, expensive (and well-subsidised from the public purse), and quite simply, often inaccessible to many adults let alone children. We can debate whether opera, or any other activity, is "appropriate" and at what age, and there are questions of access within activities which providers and funders need to address. But there is also the question, very relevant in terms of equal opportunities and limited resources, as to the balance between various activities. For example, if a local authority places huge emphasis on prestige leisure centres strategically sited, then the question as to whether children, on a basis of accessibility through transport, cost etc, are being fairly served is a legitimate one.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

A. With the Main Dudes

The aim of involvement in children's play, from an adult perspective, is their welfare. But what are the views, ideas, wishes, aims, objectives, hopes etc of the children themselves? The commitment to genuine, and on-going/ constant consultation should be as great as to all other services - "listening to the customer" is a oft-promoted objective across all areas of public service. The need to consult and listen to children about their play is important. It is no use neglecting Play for years between a Review, and once every few years indulging in some window-dressing, usually for the benefit of councillors rather than to ascertain children's views.



B. The Voluntary / Community Sector

In formulating a Policy, a Local Authority would seem best advised to institute the widest-possible process of consultation taking in the voluntary sector (not only Play-based bodies but e.g. Councils for Voluntary Service, Rural Community Councils, special needs organisations, equal opportunities and community relations bodies etc), all Authority departments, other local and statutory bodies covering the area (e.g. health authorities), and any other relevant bodies.

C. The Statutory Sector

Consultation should be with other statutory sector bodies, such as County Councils, Parish Councils, Social Services, Health Authorities, Education Authorities, Housing Departments, Planning Authorities, Police, Youth Service and anyone else who may have an interest in some or another aspect of Play.

D. Others

Such as local Learning and Skills Councils, Further/Higher Education Colleges, other local networks (disability, out-of-school, under-8's, special education, parent, general voluntary sector, rural/community councils etc.)

ELEMENTS OF A POLICY

It should cover:

- * **the objectives and strategy underlying the Policy**
 - what we want, why we want it, how we will get it and support it, how it relates e.g. to Article 31, leisure strategies etc
- * **review of current provision and resources**
 - what is happening, where, how, quality, resources, community involvement etc
- * **what we want to provide/ why / how**
 - fixed equipment provision
 - organised activities (of all types)
 - access
 - informal neighbourhood resources
 - networking needs
- * **support processes and resources**
 - appropriate and equal opportunities
 - funding and resources
 - training and education (skills-based, NVQ-related, academic etc)
 - child safety and protection
- * **How are we doing?**
 - feedback from children, parents and neighbourhoods
 - monitoring and evaluation
 - interagency liaison

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF PROVISION

How does provision fit into the overall strategy of the local authorities

as regards leisure, culture and recreation?
What needs are being met/ should be met?



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What is the relationship with day care provision (as reviewed by the relevant Social Services dept. under Section 19 of the Children Act)?

Is current provision, in each category/type:

- adequate to the local community's needs?
- reflective of mobility and access within local communities?
- adequate in terms of children's play needs? - helpful/supportive to parental interests?
- contributory to sound community development objectives?
- able to sustain the interest, involvement and support of children?
- reflective of differing needs: age groups, gender, ethnic/cultural, disability acceptance?
- consistent with all requirements of safety - e.g. child protection, accident prevention?
- reviewed regularly?

Are resources:

- adequate to the needs of children and of the communities in which they live?
- fully reflective of the principle of Article 31.2 of the Convention, concerning "appropriate and equal opportunity" to access the local authority's cultural, recreational and leisure resources?
- directed to benefit children as a first priority (and not e.g. to justify maintaining or expanding establishments)?
- flexible as to their deployment to enable adjustment to changing circumstances?
- capable of expansion to redress existing imbalance?



- reviewed regularly?

Is Training Provision:

- child-centred? - adequately resourced?
- supportive of volunteers as well as employees? - inclusive of management needs?
- sensitive to community and voluntary sector requirements?
- able to absorb the views of those seeking/ needing training?
- reviewed regularly?

POLICY FORMATION AND REVIEW

A Children's Play Policy will include:

- * A Basic Statement of Aims to include incorporation of Article 31's basic objectives
- * The Position of Children's Play within the local context, including the Local Authority's leisure, cultural and recreation strategy.
- * Commitment to Article 31's "appropriate and equal opportunities" to ensure a "Fair Deal for Our Children"
- * Setting of Objectives and Targets for a defined Policy period:
- * Types of Provision to be achieved
- * Inter-agency working/liaison - and detailed plan for implementation
- * Resourcing levels
- * The mix (authority/community/private)
- * Training Provision and Development
- * Consultation Procedures (children/ parents/ community/ others)
- * Targets for new activities
- * Safety including Child Protection
- * Monitoring and Evaluation procedures
- * Equal Opportunities - Development

FURTHER INFORMATION AND HELP:

Fair Play for Children: Campaigns for The Child's Right to Play. Information, advice, publications, **Web site:** <http://www.fastnet.co.uk/fairplay/>. 35 Lyon Street, Bognor Regis, West Sussex PO21 1BW, Tel: 0845-330 7635. **email:** fairplay@arunet.co.uk. Publishes other PlayAction Guides on a wide range of play-related issues.

Children's Play Council: Co-ordinates the work of national voluntary agencies with an interest in play, formulated the Children's Play Charter, and is seeking adoption of this by local authorities and others. 8 Wakley Street London EC1V 7QE