



# Fair Play for Children

for the Child's Right to Play

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## Speaking our Mind

Dear (%First name%) (%Surname%)

You may not be aware of the existence of Fair Play for Children but, because we work to promote and support **The Child's Right to Play**, our purpose affects every child and family in the Constituency of (%Constituency%). The purpose of this occasional e-letter will be to put issues before you, also information, ideas and concerns.

**The Right to Play** is set out in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, ratified by the UK not long after its adoption in 1989. Its articles form the backbone of much UK legislation dealing with children and their needs, and the Right to Play, of course, only exists in any meaningful sense within the context of all the other rights.

Fair Play for Children was founded in 1972 by **Trevor Huddleston**, that remarkable and brave man who fought injustice all his life, and who was mentor to e.g. Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. His story can be read [HERE](#). Our current activity, work and ideas are concentrated in our [WEBSITE](#). We suspect that our daily news service, covering children, their play, rights, health etc around the globe, has few equals anywhere. You will see also that we provide a lot of free information and guidance.

In coming editions, we will raise in more detail various issues but in this first edition, we would like to give you some idea of our current trends and thinking. Fair Play has always seen itself as being a step ahead, and we are not afraid to ask people to think 'outside the box'.

Just before the last election, we asked Candidates to complete a survey on our [MANIFESTO](#) - over 500 responded and even the least supported idea scored over 50% support whilst the **Play Wise** proposal (which aims to get more parents active in promoting their children's play opportunities) and the support for community-based play provision scored over 90% each. We hope you will have a look at these ideas and ask yourself how they might improve the lives of children and families in the area you represent.

Now some immediate policy concerns - as I stated earlier, we'll come back with more detail in due course:

- **The Children's Play Information Centre** This excellent facility, which has a deserved international reputation, and is housed in the *National Children's Bureau* is currently under threat - over 600 organisations have signed our Online Petition to save it, and its loss would be unthinkable. We have sent Sir Paul Ennals the Petition details and results to date, and we hope you will look at this matter and raise the concerns many have with the Minister. [LINK](#)
- **The Vetting and Barring Scheme** Fair Play has been deeply involved in the issue of protecting children since a member children's play organisation brought to us a case where it had been sent a man as part of a job creation scheme and they had, in those days, not been able to access criminal records checks because they were a voluntary body. He was a convicted paedophile. We worked hard to gain access to a pre-CRB pilot which showed us the worth of such schemes and we fully supported both the CRB scheme and the VBS (Vetting and Barring Scheme). We have to say that we feel strongly that too much credence has been given to scare stories - e.g. the one when authors grumbled they would be forced to register - WHICH WAS NEVER THE CASE. I also want to direct your attention to a real case, of a children's author .... [William Mayne](#) Fair Play strongly believes that no system adopted by Parliament should allow such a person even to enter a school etc, and that schools and other employers should be **OBLIGED BY LAW TO CHECK**. It has been since 1933 and remains an offence for any such person to do so. We urge **NO CHANGE**. Our Report, published last June ahead of the Review, set out clear recommendations on the future, especially that **Barring** should be the main issue .... [Out with the Bathwater?](#) Our response to the 2 recent Review Reports can be read : [Has the Baby gone down the Plug Hole?](#)
- **The Mosquito Anti-Teen Device** This is a simple matter that at this time the Police, Local Authorities, Shop-Keepers, Neighbours etc can, without any regulation, install what is a **Crowd Dispersal System**, one which operates by causing distress, deliberately so, to young people. Home Secretaries, regrettably in our view, have failed to act, even given tacit personal support in one case, to the use of this device. Of course, its greatest effect is upon the very youngest. We ask you, as representing also the young in your Constituency, whether you would condone the police using e.g. water cannon to disperse kids hanging around, or be happy if a shopkeeper decided to use a high-pressure hose on them. We have laid a request with the Equalities Commission to mount an enquiry into this matter, they say they haven't the resource but are writing with advice to the Secretary of State who has expressed interest. We have to suggest to you that if this were any other group other than the over-demonised young, it would not be tolerated and would be regarded as discriminatory. It is not giving young people much of a good impression of Parliament or the Rule of Law. The 4 Nations Children's Commissioners oppose its unregulated use, even its inventor says he has raised this matter with government. We ask that you consider with other Members e.g. an [Early Day Motion](#) and other representation.
- **Acceptable Behaviour Contracts** We have no doubt ABCs can be and have proven useful with children and young people in many situations. But we have also come across clear and serious instances where their operation has caused injustice and cut across the rule of law. It is hard to get a purchase on the national picture - though promoted by the Home Office, there is no national intelligence about their

application, the groundrules being adopted, whether practices stand scrutiny against basic requirements of openness and accountability. Yet, even 2 years back, 19000 of these had been secured, mainly from the young. Our concern stems from actual instances - a mother receives a letter from housing dept saying there has been anti-social behaviour in her street and her sons are responsible. She was asked and strongly advised that she and the 2 boys should attend a meeting, at which a PC would also be present, and if they did not she might lose her council tenancy. I have seen the material, I also read an ABC signed by a 11 year old girl who when I asked her why she signed it, she said to me that her mum had told her they would lose their home if she didn't. That can under no circumstances be acceptable - the child signed things like she would not gather with more than six other children, she would not answer adults back, she would not play ball in the street, or bang dustbin lids at night - had she ever done the latter? No. This was all followed by warnings about ASBOs, prosecution, imprisonment and heavy fines. On this practice, alas, many such ABC schemes appear to have been based. Our current FoI survey of all England Police Forces is seeking some hard detail on practices and on how the ABCs are understood in terms of what they actually are. We will report further on this.

- **Cuts to Children's Play Services** Again it is not easy to tie down exactly what is happening at this time because such services are handled in very different ways by local authorities. The Play Partnership cuts were, for us, early and highly regrettable and we sense very much that at council level playschemes and the like are getting short-shrift also. Grant-aid cuts are adding to the carnage and talk about a Big Society may appear a little hollow to those who have spent years doing just that in their communities and now find even the modest grants they needed chopped completely or hugely reduced. The effects will be seen in coming holiday periods. Our previous researches in any case have shown the short-change given to children's play compared with the relative *largesse* handed out to adult leisure and culture at national and local level - we have found that it is quite common for that younger age group to receive under 5% of such budget sums even where the population under 16 may be more than three times that percentage. We need **A Fair Deal for Our Children.**
- **Fair Play's forthcoming Report on Access to Play** Many, including MPs, are worried about the lack of access by children to healthy, outdoor informal play. It's widely recognised there has been a decline in this over the past 3 decades and more. There has been some calculation of the extent of this, and much surmised in terms of exercise, diet etc. But we suspect that the true scale has not been fully appreciated and our current FoI and other enquiries are beginning to reveal a much more serious situation than we think has been appreciated so far. Certainly some of the figures we now have suggest a most thought-provoking scenario, one which society has arrived at without planning or forethought. More on this in a future edition.

Thank you for reading this, and for your interest. Please feel free to contact me as above.

Yours sincerely

*Jan Cosgrove Mr*  
**National Secretary**