



Fair Play for Children

for the Child's Right to Play

www.fairplayforchildren.org

32 Longford Road, Bognor Regis, West Sussex PO21 1AG

fpfc@fairplayforchildren.net

Administration: 0843-289 2638



ANNUAL REPORT To March 2012

Let's Make the World Fit for All Our Children to Play In

Founder: Trevor Huddleston

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STARTING POINT



You know, it's possible to **Have More Do Less** ... *and then there's Antithesis.*

Last year, we, along with Everyone and His Friend, found ourselves coping with the consequences of the global economic downturn. Redundancy of all staff, loss of major income source, blah blah, need we continue?

But, here we are a year on. Poorer, doing more ...

"And he said, 'Smile, it could be worse' and I did smile, and lo"

We hear (too much?) of The Big Society. I'll leave each to their private thoughts on that, but at Fair Play for Children, I think we realize that we've been involved in 'the little society' for as long as we've existed.

That's where anyone can get off the legendary posterior and do things which make a difference. Those are the people who make Fair Play tick, they have been and continue to and will be doing such things in the future, not mainly because OF government but usually DESPITE.

Another mantra is 'localism' but on our 40 year watch would it be churlish to wonder why children's play has had such a poor deal?

These ARE Hard Times, they continue, and our Report is a Curate's Egg, good in parts. Whatever anyone can say for the voluntary sector in Children's Play, it's not been for want of trying. The past year has seen many good projects go to the wall, good people discarded, many lost to the sector in terms of skills, experience, knowledge, commitment.

Children have a RIGHT to Play – at this time, we not only are failing to ensure this is given effect, things are getting worse.

Which is why Fair Play for Children will keep fighting (that's the word) to knock sense into the right (or wrong) people of the grave dangers of continuing to deny the Right to Play in the ways in which it means something to children – their Access to Play.

Jan Grogan

NATIONAL SECRETARY

THE YEAR



Overall, Fair Play has managed to consolidate its work in the context of reduction in financial resources, enabled mainly through use of volunteers and following an appropriate strategy of concentrating on communication through electronic means.

This year past saw us engage in key debates and processes, we maintained a uniquely independent position, and we informed on play, rights, health and other issues relating to children. We continued to provide an effective access to CRB disclosures for our members, introducing electronic access as well as paper application.

ACTIVITY



In 2011-12, Fair Play focused on policy issues such as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, Play Provision and Resourcing, on Communication with the field, and on Child Protection in Play issues. We were busy undertaking various Freedom of Information exercises, either investigating situations or building data on issues where information may have been lacking. This has given us a status of being an organization to follow, of one abreast and perhaps ahead on issues.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



Fair Play continued its concern re the use, or perhaps misuse, of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts by police forces and local authorities. Our survey of English forces showed worrying issues surrounding the denial of basic rights to children when faced with demands they sign an agreement which would inhibit their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights. The main concern for us was the failure of forces to have regard to Article 6.1 of the Convention, which deals with due process, independence of judgment etc. Most forces denied such a connection insisting the process is entirely voluntary.

Report: <http://www.fairplayforchildren.org/pdf/1325042991.pdf>

As part of this process, we also submitted an FoI to the Home Office who admitted that they had never sought legal advice on the status of ABCs, although they had been blithely informing police and councils it was purely voluntary in nature. Since then we have been conducting and collating a further FoI survey to English councils, and this will be reported in a third revision of the above publication in due course.

Still with ABCs, a case was brought to our attention in Tower Hamlets, concerning 5 young people and attempts by the police and housing association to impose ABCs on them for alleged anti-social behavior. Such was the concern that we represented the young people at interviews conducted for these ABCs by the Housing Association and Police, the whole story is told in **Acceptable Behaviour in Tower Hamlets?:**

<http://www.fairplayforchildren.org/pdf/1337828432.pdf>

This was a major piece of work, its results communicated widely within the area and to surrounding bodies concerning with reduction of anti-social behaviour. Tower Hamlets showed little interest, although the Housing Association said they would respond, this has not happened in many months. The intended targets did not sign their proffered ABCs. As this is written, Fair Play has taken Tower Hamlets to the Information Commissioner re its refusal properly to answer an FoI about the Borough's responsibility towards tenants it has nominated to housing associations.

During the year no progress on **Mosquito devices**, a disappointing situation. With recent ministerial changes it looks unlikely we now have anyone sympathetic to our views that they should be regulated or banned, but we will be continuing to monitor their use.

THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO PLAY



Our major pieces of work during the year related to playground provision in England, cuts in council expenditure, and street playspace.

There have been no reliable figures re provision of play areas until now, and this has come in the shape of our report based on Freedom of Information requests to English councils. This work shows there are over 16,000 play areas run by principle authorities, one for every 692 children under 15 or one acre for every 752. We calculated that to get to 1 acre for 100 children would require over 90,000 new play areas and cost at least £6.5 billion.

Report: <http://www.fairplayforchildren.net/survey1.htm>

A further FoI survey to Councils examined their expenditures over three years – 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12. They were asked to provide figures for various areas of expenditure including adult leisure, play and youth provision. It is clear from the results that play provision, especially run by the voluntary sector, has suffered heavier cuts than e.g. adult leisure and overall council expenditure.

Unfair Play for Children:

<http://www.fairplayforchildren.net/councils.htm>

A further major report was **Stolen Streets, Stolen Childhood** which examines the loss of $\frac{3}{4}$ million acres of street space by children, places where they played close to home, to the car, mainly in its parked, and sacrosanct private property persona. It calls for changes in the way residential streets are managed, for simple sharing measures, for play streets, and for new forms of parking charge and scheme.

Report: <http://www.fairplayforchildren.org/pdf/1319380454.pdf>

CHILD PROTECTION



A persistence with this issue over 2 decades has put Fair Play in a unique position, of being a play-based organization that has front-line experience of the issues facing local managements where play, recreation and leisure issues involving children are concerned.

During the year, we engaged in the procedures involving the passage of the Protection of Freedoms Bill through both Houses of Parliament. The Coalition made it clear they would review the Vetting and Barring Scheme adopted in 2006 legislation as a result of the Bichard Report into the Soham Murders. Ahead of the announcement of that review, we published in the previous year **Out with the Bathwater?** A review of the current situation, analysis of its likely effect, and proposals for a simpler, more robust system:

<http://www.fairplayforchildren.org/pdf/1281540226.pdf>

We engaged in reviews set up by the Home Office, we lobbied MPs and members of the House of Lords, and established with many of them the currency of "secondary access", or the common-sense notion that children may well meet people outside of regulated positions who made contact with them within these and thus who will have had opportunity to build a basis of trust with children. The Minister and Home Office would have none of this. The final enactment, as the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, undoes key safeguarding aspects of the original scheme, which was never tested or piloted in the first place. We published a follow-up report: **Has the Baby Gone down the Plughole?**

http://www.fairplayforchildren.org/index.php?page=HTML_News&story_id=7374

We also sent out occasional e-letters to MPs, *Speaking Our Mind*. The debate has been continuing into the next year, focusing on the interpretation of the Act by users and on the Statutory Guidance to be issued re the vexed issue of Supervision. For the new Act provides that those deemed to be supervised will not have their being barred communicated to their employers. **Lord Bichard** led criticism in the Lords that the Government was wrong to focus on supervision – the issue was always risk assessment.

We continued our CRB Service to members, introducing electronic access finally in collaboration with ProCRB as well as retaining paper access. The numbers being checked have fallen, mainly we think due to reduced budgets of member groups.

The web page we established in the wake of receiving a lot of enquiries re what to do about concerns about children gives day and out-of-hours phone contact, web page details and emails for every council in the UK, enabling people to contact the appropriate authorities for the area where they or the child lives. Identification is aided by a post code search. In the year under review it has been used over 1000 times. This is an illustration of a low-cost solution, quickly arrived at. There was no single place online where people could look. This shows the power of speedy innovation based on low resources in the voluntary sector

COMMUNICATION



The wish to reach more people with our aims and resources meant that we developed our online services even more than before. The **FPFCNews Service** provided a daily dose of news items culled from around the world, with emphasis on *Play Youth and Care* issues. Maybe 15-20 stories a day, all uploaded by our FPFCNews Volunteers, Becky, Matt and Nigel. This is an impressive resource, it's alone so far as we can tell, and it is being increasingly followed through e.g. Twitter (@FPFCNews).

We continued also to add to our Library online and our Publications including those mentioned already and also those not produced by us but by other sources.

A regular e-letter **PlayingUp!** has commenced, sent to thousands of recipients, and **Speaking Our Mind** has been mentioned already.

We used also the channels provided by What Do They Know? for some of our FoIs to departments.

We also have managed to answer individual queries from e.g parents, groups, councils etc. The online child concern web page has been another part of our service.

FINANCIAL



To quote Bugs Bunny, "My mother told me there'd be years like this"

What more can we say – members unable to afford fees, less CRB checks, fewer donations. So the trust raised £23,464 and the Association £5709.95. The accounts, plus statutory directors reports can be found at:

Association: <http://www.fairplayforchildren.org/pdf/1356142065.pdf>

Trust: <http://www.fairplayforchildren.org/pdf/1356142139.pdf>

These are for the period ending 31st March 2012.

We foresee no prospect of major improvement so we must continue to economise and also to sustain our work. No easy challenge.

MEMBERSHIP



Many of Fair Play's members, as charities, community groups, councils, companies etc have faced serious reductions in their funding, we have alas lost some to closure/winding up, but we have maintained a policy of letting members have a 'free pass' in order to help them and to retain their longer-term commitment.

New Members have joined, at a slow trickle. We are consulting all the time on affordability and on member priorities. On these, there has been consistency over several years, of promoting the Right to Play, Child Protection and Children's Rights, on providing free resources and access to criminal records checks.

NETWORKING



This is an urgent need, to work with our membership to ensure sharing and exchange, of knowledge, skills and experience. Training budgets are cut, formal links cutback, so informal networks count. Quite a few of our Members do such work – e.g. Grumpy in Manchester, Hackney Play and others in London (not forgetting London Play), MPAC in Liverpool etc – there is our work in Nottingham described below – of which we need to see much more across the country. We will need resources to help pay for e.g travel, phone etc in order to support this work.

POLICY



The Manifesto adopted by our membership in 2010 has proven durable as a basis for policy formulation and prioritization. We are able to base all our work on this brief but comprehensive statement of what we seek to achieve:

Manifesto: <http://www.fairplayforchildren.org/pdf/1271101351.pdf>

We shall be consulting on updating this in 2013, ahead of the 2015 General Election so that we can go to the parties and candidates with a credible statement of aims and policies.

PUBLICATIONS



As can be seen from the foregoing, this has been a full year as far as publications have been concerned. Policy matters to the fore, important reports on issues not well researched until now, and a distinctive, detailed approach to issues, based on clear analysis.

RESOURCES & VOLUNTEERS



Yes, we lacked money, but we have instead benefitted from a great deal of volunteer input. **Ethel Swann**, undertaking a huge workload as Network Coordinator in the East Midlands, organizing events, training and collaboration with many local groups, all oppressed by cuts in the current climate. **Her work remains an invaluable example of what should, and CAN be done, in order to sustain local activity.**

Nigel Warren has continued dual roles undertaking trust appeals and also as a PFPCNews uploader. In the latter task joined by Becky Harding and by Matt Cosgrove. We owe them a huge debt of thanks, and we need more like them.

THE FUTURE



At this time, we can say there is an active and meaningful Fair Play for Children, one which has a distinctive future and which is managing a difficult period on minimal financial resources. 2012-13 is our 40th Anniversary Year, there is a huge amount to be done, and most importantly to fight for Children's Play as its services are decimated by stupidly short-sighted decision-making.

