Public Petitions Committee – a template for public petitions

Should you wish to submit a public petition for consideration by the Public Petitions Committee please complete the template below. Please refer to the Guidance on submission of public petitions for advice on issues of admissibility before completing the template. You may also seek advice from the Clerk to the Committee whose contact details can be found at the end of this form.

Details of principal petitioner:
Please enter the name of person and organisation raising the petition, including a contact address where correspondence should be sent to, email address and phone number if available

Debbie Scott
To Play Or Not To Play

Text of petition:
The petition should clearly state what action the petitioner wishes the Parliament to take in no more than 5 lines of text, e.g.
The petitioner requests that the Scottish Parliament considers and debates the implications of the proposed Agenda for Change legislation for Speech and Language Therapy Services and service users within the NHS

We call on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to adopt a Play Strategy that recognises the right of all children in Scotland to a safe, accessible and challenging play environment.

Additional information:
Any additional information in relation to your petition, including reasons why the action requested is necessary, should not be included here. However, it may be appended to the petition and will be made available to the Public Petitions Committee prior to its consideration of your petition. Please note that you should limit the amount of any additional information which you may wish to provide in support of your petition to no more than 4 sides of A4.
Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition:

Before submitting a petition to the Parliament, petitioners are expected to have made an attempt to resolve their issues of concern by, for example, making representations to the Scottish Executive or seeking the assistance of locally elected representatives, such as councillors, MSPs and MPs. Please enter details of those approached below and append copies of relevant correspondence, which will be made available to the Public Petitions Committee prior to its consideration of your petition.

- ‘To Play Or Not To Play’ are a group of parents from North Glasgow. We ran a participatory investigation into play and environmental issues that resulted in ‘A Waste of Space?’, a report that drew attention to the amount of derelict land and lack of good play space locally.
- In March 2005 we hosted ‘Not a Waste of Space’, a community conference linking play, health and wellbeing attended by decision-makers and workers from the fields of health, childcare and community regeneration and addressed by Phil Hanlon, Professor of Public Health at Glasgow University.
- Since then we have been making contact with other interested people, trying to create child-friendly spaces in our own community and, through the CHIP project (a partnership between Barnardos and Stepping Stones for Families), have engaged the support of Barnardo’s Scotland in preparing this petition.
- Parliamentary Questions tabled by Sarah Boyack MSP (S2W 16583 – 16586, 17765, 17766) indicated that the Executive have no plans for a Play Strategy.
- A campaign by Play Scotland last year, calling on the Scottish Executive to develop a Play Strategy, has not been successful.
- The 1999 partnership agreement “Making it Work Together” committed the first Executive to “providing children with a stimulating environment for playing, developing and learning” but no policy on this matter has been produced.
- Discussions with a range of Barnardo’s services around Scotland have highlighted that this is a national concern.

Petitioners appearing before the Committee

The Convener of the Committee may invite petitioners to appear before the Public Petitions Committee to speak in support of their petition. Such an invitation will only be made if the Convener considers this would be useful in facilitating the Committee’s consideration of the petition. It should be noted that due to the large volume of petitions it has to consider, the Committee is not able to invite all petitioners to appear before the Committee to speak in support of their petition.

Please indicate below if you do NOT wish to make a brief statement before the Committee when it comes to consider your petition.

I do NOT wish to make a brief statement before the Committee

Signature of principal petitioner:

When satisfied that your petition meets all the criteria outlined in the Guidance on submission of public petitions, the principal petitioner should sign and date the form in the box below. Other signatures gathered should be appended to this form.
Signature ...

Date 5/12/05

Please note that any additional information, copies of relevant correspondence and additional signatures should be appended to this form and submitted to:

The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee,
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 5186    Fax: 0131 348 5088
e-mail: petitions@scottish.parliament.uk
Play in North Glasgow: a Parents’ Perspective

Poor people: poor environment

North Glasgow postcode areas have been near the top of the Scottish Area Deprivation Index\(^1\) and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation\(^2\). A large proportion of its families live on low incomes and the environment is of very poor quality.
In other words, a lot of families in our communities are short of money and our children have a very harsh, inhospitable play environment. Recent research suggests that across Scotland people affected by poverty tend to lack access to green space.\(^3\) We understand that our particular circumstances are not shared by every community in Scotland, but we believe that play is important for children wherever they live.

What parents say

Parents we have spoken to have identified the following issues in relation to children’s play:

Accessibility

- *The cost and expense of having to go out with where we live as there is very little available locally.*

In a low-income area parents find it difficult to afford to buy access to good play environments and activities (car trips to the country etc).

Play Environments: not just Playgrounds

- *There needs to be space for children not just chutes and swings.*

Fenced off play grounds with fixed equipment are not a bad thing, but they are only part of the solution. They tend to be used mostly by pre-5s accompanied by children in the day time. Their night time use by teenagers is often seen, rightly or wrongly, as a problem by older residents.

Safety

- *You can’t just send children out to play any more: it isn’t safe now.*

Children’s Health

Without access to safe, clean and green play environments a generation of children are growing up without the necessary stimulation they require. In light of all the recent evidence concerned with obesity levels in children, we feel this is completely unacceptable. If children have nowhere safe to play how can they take the necessary exercise that would keep them healthy? And why would parents take the risk of letting their children play in sites that are unsuitable for their children’s needs?

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1 Scottish Office 1998
2 Scottish Executive 2004
3 Investigating environmental justice in Scotland: links between measures of environmental quality and social deprivation (2005), a report produced by SNIFFER for the Scottish Executive, Forestry Commission, SEPA and Scottish Natural Heritage
Some images of play environments in Possilpark, North Glasgow

What we want to happen

We believe it is totally unacceptable for children to play in these conditions. As there are currently very few alternatives for these children, we are calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to adopt a play strategy that recognises the right of all children in Scotland to a safe, accessible and challenging play environment. This should ensure that our children and the rest of Scotland's children will have their right to quality outdoor play experiences recognised.

We want those responsible for the provision of spaces for children to provide areas to the highest specification. And finally we want children's play to receive the recognition and importance it is due.

To Play Or Not To Play Parents' Group, October 2005
A Play Strategy for Scotland

November 2005

Barnardo’s Scotland fully supports the call for a Play Strategy in Scotland. Now more than ever play provides a targeted and effective response to the needs of our children and young people:

- The open-ended learning through play has been linked to psychological and personal development, building crucial skills (physical, language) and attitudes (concentration, tolerance, perseverance).
- Play has a social dimension, and the interaction, negotiation and teamwork promoted by group play can play an important part in developing children’s social skills.
- With 33 per cent of 12-year-olds in Scotland classified as obese or overweight, the physical exertion involved in most play provides exercise, promotes physical co-ordination and develops motor skills.

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states: “State parties recognise 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.”

If the Executive is to realise its vision of children as “confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners, responsible citizens” (and the vision document explicitly recognises that “Children and young people should be active with opportunities and encouragement to participate in play and recreation, including sport.”) then it needs to support opportunities for children to play.

Defining “play”

Defn.1) “For the purposes of the review, play meant what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons…….Play is essential for children’s social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development. Play is the way children express their impulse to explore, experiment and understand.” From “Getting Serious About Play”.

Defn. 2) “Play is first and foremost the process of a child’s own, self-directed learning and as such is a process that has a validity for all ages of children. It is such a vital component of a child’s life that the child’s capacity for positive development will be inhibited or constrained if denied free access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.” From “Best Play”.

Play provision – the current situation

In a study carried out for National Play Day in August 2005, the National Children’s Bureau found that children said that poor provision of play spaces, and the fear that the outdoor world is unsafe, leads them to stay indoors. Other supporting facts and figures produced at this time include (UK figures):

- Although the UK still has the highest child road-death rate in Europe, the volume of accidents is decreasing so that, in 2003, 186 children were killed and 4,000 injured. Incidences of child abduction have remained virtually unchanged since 1950. Despite these trends, fears for children’s safety are on the increase. The radius around the home in which children are allowed to roam has shrunk to a ninth of what it was in 1970. In 1971, 80% of seven- and eight-year-olds walked to school alone, in 1990 the figure had fallen to 9%.
- For every acre of play space there are 80 acres devoted to golf courses.
- Playing fields have been lost at a rate of one a day in the last eight years.

Barnardo’s Scotland would add that lack of access to play space also deprives children of important opportunities to socialise and risks leaving them bored and frustrated. A recent Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration report stated that “A lack of structured leisure activities was cited in social work reports as a factor contributing to offending behaviour for 59% of the sample.”
Detailed figures on play provision in Scotland are hard to come by. Responding to recent Scottish Parliament questions requesting the sums spent on play provision by local authorities and the amount of play space provided, the Executive stated that such figures are not held centrally. The Executive also indicated at this time that they had no plans to implement a Play Strategy for Scotland or to implement the recommendations of the recent “Getting Serious About Play” report.

The Scottish Executive currently funds Play Scotland as the lead agency for play in Scotland. However there is no Executive staff team devoted to play, which comes under Early Years provision. The Executive has published a physical activity strategy, which is welcome but does not specifically relate to children – and of course physical activity is only one part of the play agenda.

In the 2001 General Election the UK Government pledged that £200 million of National Lottery money would be earmarked for new and improved children’s play facilities. It has been confirmed that England’s £155 million share will be distributed to play projects via a designated Big Lottery Fund scheme. The Big Lottery Fund will be announcing it’s funding criteria in Scotland on November 22nd, indications are that it is unlikely to have a designated fund for play.

The Welsh Assembly has now published a comprehensive Play Policy and the associated Implementation Group has produced a series of detailed recommendations.

Barnardo’s and play

Barnardo’s and the Children’s Play Council have recently completed a partnership project to administer Better Play - a four year £10.8 million England wide grant programme resulting in 225 local schemes bringing better play opportunities to an estimated 80,000 children. Evaluation of the programme has provided a wealth of information on producing local play strategies, inclusive play provision, play in public space and environmental play. It is now clear that a significant body of best practice with regard to developing local play space now exists – if the political will and funding are in place.

In May 2004, Barnardo’s was a project partner in a new report from The Green Alliance and Demos. “A Child’s Place: why environment matters to children”. The report showed that outdoor play improves children’s health, well being and personal development. However children living in areas of high deprivation have restricted access to such opportunities. Barnardo’s therefore called on ministers and policy makers to provide more safe and accessible green play spaces for all children, particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and provide the funding to enable local authorities to adequately supervise and maintain play areas.

The Children’s Inclusion Partnership (ChIP) project in Glasgow, run jointly by Barnardo’s and Stepping Stones for Families, has supported local parents campaigning for increased play space in their communities. A number of Barnardo’s services around Scotland, particularly those supporting disabled children and their families, see play provision as a crucial element of their support.

What are we calling for?

Barnardo’s Scotland agrees with the statement in Best Play that “a body of knowledge has accumulated which allows the fundamental need for children’s play to be asserted”. Every Scottish child should have somewhere safe, accessible and challenging to play and we want to see Scottish Executive action on play in pursuit of this policy goal. Elements of such a strategy should include:

1) Lessons from the Better Play project;
2) Opportunities to increase the funding available for play provision;
3) Recommendations from the Dobson Report, Getting Serious About Play, which was based on an extensive UK-wide consultation with children and young people, communities and the play sector; and
4) Lessons learned from the Welsh Assembly Government’s Play Policy and review of provision.

For further information, please contact: John Watson, Parliamentary/Policy Officer, 0131 314 6665 john.watson@barnardos.org.uk

References available on request.
Dr James Johnston  
Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
TG01  
Parliamentary headquarters  
Edinburgh EH99 1SP

30 March 2006

Dear Dr Johnston

**Consideration of Petition PE913**

Please find enclosed Play Scotland's response to the above petition. Play Scotland pays tribute to Debbie Scott and the 'To Play or Not to Play project' in their endeavours to have the Child's Right to Play recognised for the children.

It is clear that local and national organisation's are gaining momentum in their campaigns for more public awareness of the importance of free play and the policies to provide for it to all children as part of mainstream public services.

We look forward to following the progress of this petition and hope that it will result in a positive outcome for children's play in Scotland.

Yours sincerely

/ 

Margaret Westwood  
Chair  

Marguerite Hunter Blair  
Development Director  

Encs
Play Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Public Petitions Committee. Play Scotland is the lead organisation for children’s play, campaigning to make the **right to play** (*UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*) a **reality for every child in Scotland**.

**BACKGROUND**

Play Scotland works to promote the importance of play for all children and young people, and campaigns to create increased play opportunities in the community.

Play Scotland was formed in 1998 to support the Child’s Right to Play and make children’s play rights a reality in Scotland. It is a membership organisation and registered charity funded by the Scottish Executive.

Together with Barnardo’s, sportscotland, SkillsActive and Moray House School of Education, Play Scotland is actively engaged in:

- political lobbying for a Play Policy and a Strategic Approach to Play in Scotland
- developing strategic resources to support the Play Sector in Scotland
- workforce development of the Playwork Sector
- research into Play Provision in Scotland (space to play, time to play, funding for play)

**CURRENT POSITION**

Play Scotland held a National Play Seminar in November 2005, *Prioritising Play – A Play Strategy for Scotland?* The urgent need for clear policy guidelines and a comprehensive Play Strategy for all children and young people in Scotland was strongly endorsed by all the participants from a wide range of sectors and providers: (private, public & voluntary). The main themes explored included:

- Promoting the Importance of Inclusive Play for all Children and Young People
- Need for Research in Scotland, creating baselines and measuring benefits of Play
- Consultation, Training and Innovative Investment
- Challenge, Managing Risk and Safety

In Scotland it is clear that current play provision is adhoc, there is lack of leadership and ownership of the Play Agenda and little evidence of good practice outcomes being celebrated and disseminated. There is a clear need to develop a strategic approach to play in Scotland that acknowledges the wider
value of play to child development, health, social inclusion and community safety, as well as its intrinsic role in the wonder and joy of childhood.

"Good Play opportunities are crucial to the development of happy and healthy children."
Stephen Dunmore, Chief Executive of the Big Lottery Fund. February 2006

POLICY


Articles 31, 2, 3, 12, 23, 24 & 28

All Children without discrimination have the:
♦ Right to Play; Right to be Safe; Right of Disabled to Full and Active Participation; Right to Participate in Decision Making; Right to Health; Right to Effective Education

Article 31 - State Parties recognise 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.

OUTCOMES OF POOR PLAY PROVISION IN SCOTLAND

♦ Lack of Play Space and Mobility of Children
♦ Childhood Obesity, Mental Health Problems and Bullying
♦ Young People Unable to Assess and Manage Risk
♦ Young People with poor Social Skills and lack of ability to handle Conflict and Cultural Difference

PLAY IS PART OF THE HEALTH SOLUTION

"Children learn though play .... It is very important that children can just enjoy playing together ........ they also have the right to a childhood with all the things and more that we enjoyed as children"
Jack McConnell, First Minister. Children in Scotland Interview re Improving the Health of our Young People, March 2006

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has been asked by the Department of Health (England) to develop ‘Guidance for the Highways Agency, local authorities, primary care, pharmacists, health visitors and community nurses, schools, workplaces, the leisure industry and sports clubs to meet the Chief Medical Officer’s physical activity recommendations.’ NICE recognises the value of play as a form of exercise for children. The Children’s Play Council is part of the stakeholder group and Play Scotland is a member of the wider reference group.

The Mental Health Foundation, Bright Futures report, states that the opportunities for risk taking in unsupervised play helps children build self-confidence and resilience – key protective factors for mental health. Given the decrease in opportunities for playing out unsupervised, the report also recognises the importance of supervised opportunities for play and the role of these services in supporting children’s mental health.
Play Scotland's Response to the Public Petitions Committee PE913

- One third of twelve year olds in Scotland are obese or overweight
- Children burn more calories "just playing" than they do in PE or sport
- It is predicted that one in three children born in the year 2000 will die from obesity-related illness

(Research BMG Vol 322 The Childhood Obesity Epidemic Feb 2001,

"...the shift from unstructured to structured events for children is one of the causes of their decrease in walking .... letting children go out to play is one of the best things that parents can do for their children's health: outdoor play uses more calories than clubs and tuition."—Centre for Transport Studies, UCL, 2004

POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR PLAY

In January 2006, Mr Kenneth McIntosh tabled a motion on the importance of Play in the Scottish Parliament. 81 MSPs signed up to the Play Motion prior to the Debate on 15 March 2006. The Play Motion has made history in terms of the overwhelming support it received from elected members. The Debate reflected that a significant number of MSPs were well informed on the barriers to Play and the need for Play opportunities for children and young people in Scotland. The Deputy Minister Robert Brown undertook to work with Play Scotland and others in considering options for taking the request for a Play Policy and Strategic Approach to Play forward.

S2M-3890 Mr Kenneth Macintosh: The Importance of Play—That the Parliament welcomes calls from Play Scotland and Barnardo's for a play strategy that recognises the right of all children in East Renfrewshire and across Scotland to a safe, challenging and accessible play environment; is aware of the public and political concerns over levels of obesity, mental health problems and anti-social behaviour amongst children and young people; notes that lack of opportunity to play is a contributing factor to these problems; is concerned that traffic growth, loss of open space and fears over safety are further restricting play opportunities, and therefore believes that play should be supported with a vigour that reflects its importance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A clear policy statement supporting Play is required, underpinned by a strategic approach to providing for children's play needs throughout Scotland.

2. Full consideration should be given to the Frank Dobson Play Review recommendations (Play Scotland facilitated the Scottish response to this consultation on behalf of the Scottish Executive). The Dobson report was launched in January 2004 and was designed to provide recommendations to the Government regarding dedicated Lottery funding for new and improved children's play facilities.

The full report can be accessed by email: Tiffany.Denny@culture.gsi.gov.uk. See also the Welsh Assembly Government's Play Policy Implementation Plan www.learning.wales.gov.uk. In Northern Ireland Playboard has been commissioned on behalf of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister to draw up a Play Policy. In England, for the Big Lottery Fund Children's Play Initiative of £155M see www.playengland.org.uk

3. Academic research needs to be commissioned to establish baseline information on play.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities."

The Play Safety Forum

- Lack of play opportunities and "things to do" (SCCYP Children's Consultation 2005, 16,000 votes) are a major concern for children and young people.

- Issues such as insurance, funding, parental fears about children's safety, the changing nature of children's play and an increasingly less child friendly environment, need to be addressed in Scotland. Scotland is lagging behind in this respect.

- The Benefits to children and young people and the community from a Strategic Approach to Play are profound. Children will:
  - Enjoy better physical, emotional and mental health
  - Develop social skills and responsibility
  - Appreciate the environment
  - Understand risk and challenge
  - Grow identity and self esteem
  - Participate in sports, arts and culture
  - Be less likely to offend and engage in anti-social Behaviour

"Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child....Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary words and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter."

From Best Play – what play provision should do for children NPFA/PLAYLINK/Children's Play Council (2001)

NEXT STEPS ......

Scotland's children and young people need a clear policy statement endorsing the Right of the Child to Play in Scotland. This statement should be supported by a strategic implementation plan. This should involve all the departments of the Scottish Executive and key Play Champions and Play Organisations, recognising the contribution and value of play in building a sustainable future for Scotland.

March 2006

For further information please do not hesitate to contact Marguerite Hunter Blair, Development Director and Margaret Westwood, Chair of Play Scotland.

Email: info@playscotland.org Tel: 0131 440 9070
Address: Midlothian Innovation Centre, Pentlandfield, Roslin, Midlothian EH25 9RE
The long-awaited debate on the Importance of Play, welcoming calls from Play Scotland and Barnardos for a play strategy, took place at the Scottish Parliament's temporary home at The Hub on Wednesday 15th March. Kenneth MacIntosh's Motion on The Importance of Play had attracted an unprecedented amount of support, with 81 MSP's signing up to the motion prior to the debate.

Ken MacIntosh (Labour) thanked colleagues and organisations that had shown their support for the debate. He made the case for the importance of play, its importance in children's development and its role in tackling obesity and tackling anti-social behaviour. Although links were made to play and education, Mr MacIntosh made the important distinction between play and PE, and the need for unstructured play.

Mr MacIntosh pointed out play benefits in developing resilience and self confidence and the increasing evidence that depriving children of play can have severe consequences, and the dangers of "battery children". He referred to the play strategy published by the National Assembly for Wales, and noted that it places statutory duty on local authorities to provide for children's play needs, which could learn from.
Ken MacIntosh noted that Barnardos and Play Scotland have shown the way to develop a play strategy, and was struck by how many organisations including Skills Active, Capability Scotland, Save the Children and the Scottish Pre-School Play Association had taken the time to contact members on the subject of play. He paid tribute to the Glasgow community group 'To Play or Not to Play' petition to the Parliament, and commented that the overwhelming support given to the motion by MSP's suggested that this was an idea whose time had come. It is time for play.

Adam Ingram (SNP) noted that our policy development was lagging behind comparable nations in particular Wales who have produced an action plan to implement its policies, and thought that one of the main reasons was our failure to listen to what our children have been telling us. He referred to the Commissioner for Children & Young Peoples consultation, where a plea for more things to do topped their list of priorities.

He recognised that parental fears about child safety have been growing and the availability of local open space has been shrinking, particularly for children living in poverty. He stated his belief that play deprivation is a key factor in the rising number of children who arrive at primary school with social, emotional and behavioural problems.

Eleanor Scott (Green) began by linking play to physical activity and the obesity debate, then spoke of the other side effects of a lack of play opportunities that relate to motor skills, stress and the ability to manage risk. She related this to a family friend with two teenage boys who were healthy and physically active, taking part in organised activities, yet on holiday at a croft in Scotland with only the sea and mountains for boundaries, they did not run off to explore. This, she said
Hamilton noted that the motion called for new statutory rights with corresponding duties on local authorities and wished to know what the consequences would be, without detracting from the principal of focusing in on the issue. He commented that Executive initiatives such as physical activity strategy and health promoting schools were to be commended, but that a more flexible and creative approach is required to secure informal outdoor play.

Christine Grahame (SNP) reminisced on the fun that children used to have playing in the street which were their playground, and stated her belief that parks were not a cure-all. She agreed that we must protect our children, but that a more balanced approach was required.

Robin Harper (Green) believed that it was easy for opportunities for play to be designed out of school buildings, school grounds and the community, and highlighted the fundamental necessity of incorporating play opportunities into the curriculum, school design and the way community space is planned. He called for quality green, informal and wild spaces to be a key feature of all new developments, meeting the need of the whole community with an emphasis on play to ensure that children were not deprived of an essential part of their development.

Robert Brown, the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People responded that play was a key topic for the Scottish Executive and is central to the approach to nurturing and developing young and not-so-young children. He said that the Executive support play by funding a development worker to promote the play@home scheme; published guidance that stressed the central role that play opportunities should have in young children’s experience of early education and childcare; the curriculum review; national care standards; active schools programme and out of school care provision. He noted that local provision is a matter for the elected local authority.
Dr Sylvia Jackson (Lab - Stirling) interjected to put on record the fact that the referred to cuts in Stirling Council budget "will not harm the high standard of play facilities that the council provides".

The Deputy Minister then pointed out that "the Big Lottery Fund has named play as one of its priorities in Scotland for 2006 to 2009, which means that projects that support and promote play will have access to significant funding that is likely to be around £35 million". He stated that he was aware of the Welsh play strategy and of the English report on the review of children's play, and although both documents highlight various useful points, most of the suggestions he felt paralleled approaches already introduced in Scotland.

He stated that strategies on play are only of use if they act as a driver of public policy and administrative action that make a difference. He continued that a policy statement on play might be more influential if it was located in the wider context of child development rather than as a stand-alone strategy. The Deputy Minister concluded that the Executive would continue to engage with Play Scotland and others as they consider options for taking matters forward.

*Margaret Westwood
Chair*
The full minutes can be viewed on the Scottish Parliament website.

A DVD of the event is being held at Play Scotland should you wish to see this please contact Sharon Forrester. Email: sharonforrester@playscotland.org

Isn't it wonderful to have intelligent debate on such a wide range of play issues for Children and Young People in Scotland today, in our Parliament!

A final thank you to everyone once again for ensuring that our elected members were so well informed on the Importance of Play.

What you can do now

Play Scotland is delighted to be sponsored by Alex Fergusson, MSP to have a stall in the Lobby Garden on 16, 17 & 18 May 2006. We are looking for volunteers to help us provide cover at the stall. If you would like to volunteer please contact Sharon Forrester who will take your details and respond to you nearer the time.

If you would like to provide us with play information from your organisation to have on display at the stall please forward this to us as soon as possible.

Thank you again for all your support,

Marguerite Hunter Blair
Development Director

Midlothian Innovation Centre, Pentlandfield, Roslin EH25 9RE
Telephone 0131 440 9070
Email: info@playscotland.org    Web: www.playscotland.org
Managing risk in play provision: A position statement

Play Safety Forum

'We consider Managing Risk in Play Provision to be an important document that will contribute to the debate on the provision of children's play.'

Health and Safety Executive

INTRODUCTION

The Play Safety Forum, a grouping of national agencies involved in play safety, has produced Managing Risk in Play Provision to support the work of those involved in play provision of any kind (for example play areas, playgrounds, adventure playgrounds, play centres and holiday play schemes). These include local authorities, voluntary organisations, play equipment manufacturers and inspection agencies. The statement has relevance to other settings and environments in which children play, such as childcare provision, schools, parks and public open spaces. It will also be of interest to those involved in insurance and litigation in relation to play provision.

The statement has equal relevance to children and young people of all ages from 0 to 18, and it uses the term 'children' to cover the whole age range. It focuses on physical injuries resulting from accidents. However, the overall approach, namely that a balance should be struck between risks and benefits, is also relevant to agencies concerned with other issues such as the personal safety of children.

The statement is in two forms: a summary and a full statement. The summary aims to state the key points of the full statement in a more accessible form, for a non-technical audience.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.

Context

There is growing concern about how safety is being addressed in children's play provision. Fear of litigation is leading many play providers to focus on minimising the risk of injury at the expense of other more fundamental objectives. The effect is to stop children from enjoying a healthy range of play opportunities, limiting their enjoyment and causing potentially damaging consequences for their development.

This approach ignores clear evidence that playing in play provision is a comparatively low risk activity for children. Of the two million or so childhood accident cases treated by hospitals each year, less than 2 per cent involve playground equipment. Participation in sports like soccer, widely acknowledged as 'good' for a child's development, involves a greater risk of injury than visiting a playground. Fatalities on playgrounds are very rare – about one per three or four years on average. This compares with, for instance, over 100 child pedestrian fatalities a year and over 500 child fatalities from accidents overall.

In response to this situation, and in order to ensure that children's needs and wishes are properly acknowledged, the Play Safety Forum has prepared this statement.
FULL STATEMENT

Acceptable and unacceptable risk

In any human activity, there is an element of risk. Three factors are central to determining whether or not the level of risk is acceptable or tolerable:

- the likelihood of coming to harm
- the severity of that harm
- the benefits, rewards or outcomes of the activity.

Judgements about the acceptability of risk are made on the basis of a risk assessment. Risk assessment and management are not mechanistic processes. They crucially involve making judgements about acceptability based on an understanding of the balance between risks and benefits. Even where there is a risk of fatal or permanent disabling injury, this risk may sometimes be tolerable. For instance, going paddling at the seaside involves an unavoidable risk of fatal injury, but this risk is tolerable for most people because in most circumstances the likelihood of coming to harm is very low and there are obvious benefits. Social and psychological factors are also important in risk assessment. Risks that are acceptable in one community may be unacceptable in another, and policies should take this into account.

Almost any environment contains hazards or sources of harm. In many cases the existence of hazards can be justified, perhaps because they are impossible to remove or perhaps because their removal would have undesirable consequences or be too costly. Where the existence of a hazard can be justified, measures should be in place to manage it. In a controlled environment such as a workplace or a playground, those responsible are required by law to identify, and make informed judgements about, the hazards to which people are exposed. They must take steps to ensure that the risks are managed and controlled so far as is reasonably practicable while allowing the potential benefits to be delivered.

Children and risk

All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury. Children with disabilities have an equal if not greater need for opportunities to take risks, since they may be denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers.

It is the job of all those responsible for children at play to assess and manage the level of risk, so that children are given the chance to stretch themselves and develop their abilities without exposing them to unacceptable risks. This is part of a wider adult social responsibility to children. If we do not provide controlled opportunities for children to encounter and manage risk then they may be denied the chance to learn these skills. They may also be more likely to choose to play in uncontrolled environments where the risks are greater.

Any injury is distressing for children and those who care for them, but exposure to the risk of injury, and experience of actual minor injuries, is a universal part of childhood. Such experiences also have a positive role in child development. When children sustain or witness injuries they gain direct experience of the consequences of their actions and choices, and through this an understanding of the extent of their abilities and competences. However, children deserve protection against fatal or permanently disabling injuries, to a greater degree than adults.

Children have a range of physical competences and abilities, including a growing ability to assess and manage risk which adults arguably tend to underestimate. However, children typically have less experience than adults of assessing the broad range of risks and hazards that they may encounter. So it is important to give them appropriate controlled environments in which they can learn about risk.

Play provision and risk

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision, and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. In the words of the play sector publication *Best Play*, play provision should aim to 'manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm'. While the same principles of safety management can be applied both to workplaces generally and play provision, the balance between safety and
Managing Risk in Play Provision: A Position Statement

benefits is likely to be different in the two environments. In play provision, exposure to some risk is actually a benefit: it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about the real consequences of risk-taking.

Therefore it is acceptable that in play provision children may be exposed to the risk of minor and easily-healed injuries such as bruises, grazes or sprains. On the other hand, play provision should not expose children to significant likelihood of permanent disability or life-threatening injuries. However, it may on occasions be unavoidable that play provision exposes children to the risk – the very low risk – of serious injury or even death. But this would only be tolerable in the following conditions:

- the likelihood were extremely low
- the hazards were clear to users
- there were obvious benefits
- further reduction of the risk would remove the benefits
- there were no reasonably practicable ways to manage the risk.

For example a paddling pool, even if shallow, involves a very low but irremovable risk of drowning (even with parental supervision), but this is normally tolerable. The likelihood is typically extremely low; the hazard is readily apparent; children benefit through their enjoyment and through the learning experience of water play; and finally, further reduction or management of the risk is not practicable without taking away the benefits.

Providers should strike a balance between the risks and the benefits. This should be done on the basis of a risk assessment. Crucially, this risk assessment should involve a risk-benefit trade-off between safety and other goals, which should be spelt out in the provider’s policy. Given children’s appetite for risk-taking, one of the factors that should be considered is the likelihood that children will seek out risks elsewhere, in environments that are not controlled or designed for them, if play provision is not challenging enough.

Another factor is the learning that can take place when children are exposed to, and have to learn to deal with, environmental hazards. Play provision is uniquely placed to offer children the chance to learn about risk in an environment designed for that purpose, and thus to help children equip themselves to deal with similar hazards in the wider world.

Good practice

Clear, well-understood policies, together with procedures that put these policies into practice, are the key to good practice in risk management in play provision. Policies should state clearly the overall objectives. Procedures, including risk assessment, should state how these policies are put into practice, giving guidance but also recognising the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and other goals. Such judgements are clearly multidisciplinary in nature. For example, while they may contain an engineering dimension, of equal or greater importance is likely to be a knowledge of child development and play itself. The Children’s Play Information Service (see References below) has information on sources of authoritative, relevant guidance on good practice.

One valuable approach to risk management in play provision is to make the risks as apparent as possible to children. This means designing spaces where the risk of injury arises from hazards that children can readily appreciate (such as heights), and where hazards that children may not appreciate (such as equipment that can trap heads) are absent. This is particularly useful in unsupervised settings, where the design of the equipment and the overall space has to do most of the work in achieving a balanced approach to risk.

Conclusion

Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play provision is first and foremost for children, and if it is not exciting and attractive to them, then it will fail, no matter how ‘safe’ it is. Designers, managers and providers will need to reach compromises in meeting these sometimes conflicting goals. These compromises are a matter of judgement, not of mechanistic assessment. The judgements should be based on both social attitudes and on broadly-based expert opinion informed by current best practice. They should be firmly rooted in objectives concerned with children’s enjoyment and benefit. And they should take into account the concerns of parents. Ultimately the basis of these judgements should be made clear in the policies of the play provider as written down in policy documents. These policies should in turn be understood and embodied in practice by all the key stakeholders.
Managing Risk in Play Provision: A Position Statement

"We consider Managing Risk in Play Provision to be an important document that will contribute to the debate on the provision of children’s play. It articulates the balance between the benefit and the need for children to play against the duty of play providers to provide safe play. It makes clear that the safety must be considered at all stages of play provision but that, inevitably, there will be risk of injury when children play, as there is risk of injury in life generally. We must not lose sight of the important developmental role of play for children in the pursuit of the unachievable goal of absolute safety. The important message is that there must be freedom from unacceptable risk of life-threatening or permanently disabling injury in play."  

Health and Safety Executive.

References

British Standards Institute (1998) BS EN 1176-1 Playground Equipment - Part 1, British Standards Institute  
Information on these and other relevant publications, and contact details for Play Safety Forum members, can be obtained from the Children’s Play Information Service, National Children’s Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7OE (tel: 020 7843 6303, e-mail cpsis@ncb.org.uk, website www.ncb.org.uk/library/cpsis)

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NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU
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The Play Safety Forum

The Play Safety Forum brings together the main national organisations in England with an interest in safety and children’s play. Members include representatives from providers, regulatory bodies and expert agencies. The aim of the Play Safety Forum is to build consensus on issues around risk and safety in relation to play provision. It is an independent body hosted by the Children's Play Council at the invitation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Play Safety Forum members

Association of Play Industries
Child Accident Prevention Trust
Children's Play Council
Health and Safety Executive
Institute for Sport and Recreation Management
Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management
Kidsactive
Local Government Association
National Early Years Network
National Playing Fields Association
National Family and Parenting Institute
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
PLAYLINK
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

Adviser: David Ball, Centre for Decision Analysis and Risk Management, Middlesex University

Observer organisations: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Play Wales

August 2002
Making the Case for Play: Building policies and strategies for school-aged children

'Play is what I do when everyone else has stopped telling me what to do'

This briefing summarises Making the Case for Play: Building policies and strategies for school-aged children, a report written by the Children's Play Council with funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The report argues for improved public funding and strategic planning for the development, support and maintenance of good play opportunities for children and young people in England.

In the last few years there has been a surge of interest and activity in children's play in England. Money for local regeneration and from the New Opportunities Fund has been used to develop and promote local play provision. At the same time, a skilled and committed play sector has been developing a more strategic approach to planning and delivering good local play opportunities, while central Government has shown an emerging commitment to more strategic planning in the future.

However, a two-year research and policy development programme completed by the Children's Play Council in 2002 has found that play opportunities for children of school age in England are still often restricted, despite optimism in many areas. This denies children one of their fundamental human rights. It also limits their ability to enjoy themselves and socialise with their friends, to be as physically active as they would like – especially outdoors, and to benefit from the excitement and challenge that play offers them.

In over 50 detailed recommendations, the Children's Play Council (CPC), calls for the following actions:

- Government departments should work together, in consultation with the play sector, to develop a national strategy for play, based on agreed values, principles and desired outcomes for children, that identifies targets for local play provision and is based on the needs and wishes of children and their communities.
- Central Government should lead an urgent and comprehensive review of national funding for children's play, with a view to developing long-term funding for local authorities and agencies.
- Government should work with the play sector to establish and support a national agency, or a unit within Government, to guide and develop the play sector in practice development, research, evaluation, policy development and information dissemination, with a brief to include all types of play opportunities for children and young people.
- Local authorities should work with partners to develop and promote corporate play policies and strategies which take into account the needs and wishes of children and young people, especially those who have the most restricted play opportunities.
- Where there is currently no play development officer, local authorities, partnerships and other local agencies should work with the local play sector to agree a process and timetable for the resourcing, remit and appointment of a post with this responsibility.
- Those with an interest in play at local level should work with budget-holders and fundraisers to develop sustainable funding for the development and implementation of play policies and strategies.
RESEARCH FINDINGS
Play is good for children, families and communities:
'I like running around and stuff and also love making frogs. They make you think and I am pleased when I finish them.'

The CPC research programme found convincing evidence that there are wide-ranging benefits to ensuring good play opportunities for all children:
- Children are able to meet and socialise with their friends and enjoy themselves.
- There are benefits to children's physical, emotional and mental health.
- Children have the chance to learn about themselves and the world around them, in their own way and at their own pace.
- Parents feel their children are safe and cared for whilst they have the opportunity to work or train.
- Communities know that children are safe, enjoying themselves and are no threat to themselves or others.

A number of factors restrict play opportunities for many children and young people
'We don't play out because we have not got anywhere to play – mum says we can't play on the road.'

Despite the emerging acknowledgement of the value of play and the need to provide good play opportunities, many children are not getting the play opportunities they need and deserve:
- The range of play opportunities provided for children varies enormously, depending on where they live. Mapping research commissioned by CPC found that some local authorities were spending ten times as much per play area and over four times as much per child as others.
- In many areas play opportunities are restricted by parents' fears for their children's safety, children's own concerns about safety and the state of their play spaces, and a reduction in the number of play spaces available to them.
- At the same time, in some areas, free open access play provision has been replaced by childcare services where parents have to book and pay for their children's place. This has particularly affected children whose parents have low incomes.
- Children frequently seek and benefit from excitement and challenge in their play, but they are often denied this because providers are concerned about accidents and liability.
- Involvement of children in decisions which affect their play needs is far from universal.
- Too often the needs of different groups of children are overlooked. Older children, children who are disabled or have specific needs, children from black and minority ethnic communities, children in families with low incomes, children in rural areas, and those in traveller and refugee families, often have fewer play opportunities than others.
- Strategic planning and support for children's play at local level is far from universal. CPC's mapping found that fewer than four in ten local authorities have play policies or strategies.
- Although much supervised play provision is inspected by Ofsted and unsupervised provision is subject to regular health and safety checks, the implementation of quality assurance schemes is relatively low, with only about one in three children's play settings employing quality assurance.
- Staffing issues are a major concern within the supervised play and school-aged childcare sector, with wide variations in the way local providers support and develop their playwork workforce.

Children want and need a good range of places to play
'My favourite game is skipping. I like the beach. I play down my street. I go to the woods.'

For children and young people to have and make use of the best possible play and free-time opportunities, they need to have places near
their homes and schools where they can:
• enjoy themselves and play with or without supervision from adults;
• choose and take control of their own play activities;
• play by themselves or with others;
• experience varied and interesting environments;
• challenge and extend the limits of their physical, mental, emotional or creative abilities;
• feel safe from environmental and human dangers.

These places can be indoors or outside, may or may not be specifically designed for children’s play and may be staffed or unstaffed. The essential elements are that there are a number of such places in any locality and that they are accessible and available to all children who might want to use them. There should also be sufficient variety to ensure that there are plenty of opportunities to attract and satisfy the play and free-time needs of children of different ages, abilities, cultures and interests and with different home and family circumstances.

The support of parents and other community members is vital
‘I’m only allowed in the garden – my dad says cannot go out ‘cos I might get run down.’

Opinion polls and consultations show that parents are concerned about play. Even if good play opportunities do exist in neighbourhoods, children and young people can only enjoy them if their parents and carers allow them the freedom to play away from their homes and if other members of the community allow them to share and use public space. Parents and carers need to be confident their children are enjoying themselves and will come to no serious harm. Other community members need to accept children and young people playing as an important part of a healthy, vibrant community.

Local government, partnerships and voluntary sector agencies are the main providers
‘The swings are missing, the council came and took them away; we don’t know where to.’

For the most part, the provision of play opportunities falls to local agencies. In the past, this has primarily been local government, including metropolitan and unitary authorities, district councils and town and parish councils, and the voluntary sector. More recently, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships and local regeneration partnerships have had an increasing role in providing for children’s play, and Local Strategic Partnerships will have a vital role. However, involvement of local agencies and partnerships is wider than provision and also includes strategic planning, resourcing, infrastructure development and support, and the monitoring and maintenance of standards.

Central Government has a key strategic leadership role
‘There are no things for teenagers to do after school – there is nowhere to go, you just hang around the street.’

Although central Government is not involved in direct provision of play opportunities, its actions are more influential than those of any other player. Central Government alone can ensure universal provision by promoting and supporting the provision of local play opportunities. By doing so, it will tackle the variation in provision across England and ensure the needs of those children and young people currently missing out can be met. This will help to meet the UK’s obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31, the right to play, leisure, rest and culture.

Government extends its influence to local provision through legislation, policy development, direction and guidance, national standards, resources and infrastructure support. Infrastructure support includes the development of a strong, well-trained workforce, research and dissemination of good practice and support for national, independent agencies. This might be best achieved through the development of a national agency, or a unit within Government.

‘Please do something about our area because we are all classed as delinquents but we are not. We want somewhere to go. Thank you’.
The Children's Play Council research and policy development programme

Making the Case for Play: Building policies and strategies for school-aged children outlines the main findings of the two-year research and policy development programme. It proposes a set of recommendations aimed at national and local government, policy and campaigning groups and play professionals.

New research
The report draws on four pieces of new research, described below, and on other relevant publications. The new research is published in full in a companion book, Making the Case for Play: Gathering the evidence.

Something good and fun: in summer 2001 the Children's Play Council collected over 100 reports of consultations with school-aged children and young people and parents about children's free time activities. These reports came from Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership audits, Best Value Reviews, Education Action Zones, Children's Fund applications and other local consultations. Common themes emerging from the consultations were analysed and reported.

The value of children's play and play provision: throughout the summer and early autumn of 2001 the New Policy Institute, an independent research and policy development organisation, undertook a major review of the most recent literature on play and school-aged children. They also contacted relevant Government departments, specialist play and leisure organisations, national charities, university departments and independent play consultants.

The planning and location of play provision in England: also undertaken by the New Policy Institute; a three-tier mapping process described play policy, development and provision in England, examined how the extent and nature of play services and provision varied in one English region and explored, in depth, play provision in four local authority areas.

The state of play: in autumn 2000 the Children's Play Council received 200 completed questionnaires from readers of Play Today, a free, bi-monthly newspaper for professionals with an interest in play and play provision for school-aged children. The questionnaire was aimed at those managing, providing and supporting local play services and provision in England and asked for their views on the importance of play and links between play provision and other areas of local policy development.

Consultation
The findings and recommendations also draw on consultations with the play sector. During winter 2001/02 the Children's Play Council ran seven seminars across England attended by over 170 play professionals. Each group discussed the findings of the four research projects and, informed by these and their own experience and expertise, identified key issues for change and proposed recommendations.

The Children's Play Council thanks the Department for Culture Media and Sport for the opportunity to undertake this work.

All quotes from children are from local consultations reviewed in Something good and fun.

Details of reports

To order copies contact NCB Book sales on 020 7843 6029 or visit www.ncb-books.org.uk

For further copies of this briefing, please contact the Children's Play Council on 020 7843 6016, or e-mail cpc@ncb.org.uk.
More than Swings and Roundabouts: Planning for outdoor play

This briefing gives a summary of the publication *More than Swings and Roundabouts: Planning for outdoor play*, written by the Children's Play Council and published by the National Children's Bureau.

For many local children and young people and their families, play spaces are a vital, valued and daily part of the built environment. *More than Swings and Roundabouts: Planning for outdoor play* aims to help local people come together to create sustainable, exciting and attractive places to play. It also aims to stimulate some radical new thinking at all levels about how neighbourhoods as a whole can become more friendly and fun for children and young people.

The guide is for:
- local authority staff, elected members and local partnerships whose work has an impact on children's and young people's outdoor play opportunities, or who are interested in the issues;
- people involved in providing outdoor spaces including developers, housing associations and voluntary sector providers;
- parents and community activists;
- policy makers involved in developing relevant government policy.

**CONTEXT**

Play is what children and young people do when not being directed by adults. As children get older their need to play and have choice and control in their free time remains, but they may use words other than 'play' to describe their activities. Most children and young people enjoy outdoor play, although some may need persuading of its pleasures and benefits. Outdoor play is good for children and young people, their families and the wider community. But their access to the outdoors has become increasingly restricted in the last 20–30 years. Long-term trends in land use and planning have left children and young people with less access to public open space.

As partnership initiatives and funding streams open up opportunities for outdoor play, the driving force for new and re-developments should be children and young people’s needs and wishes rather the existing spaces and provision. In the past the response to the loss of outdoor play opportunities has been limited, and sometimes 'quick-fix' solutions have led to longer-term problems.

One fundamental principle of the guide is that children and young people are legitimate users of the whole of the outdoor environment. Another is that change demands the widest possible involvement, particularly the active involvement of children and young people themselves. The guide proposes some key principles, techniques and approaches, complementing other published material.
Play space checklist

Whether planning to refurbish or develop a small
eighbourhood play area, or improve outdoor play
space throughout a neighbourhood, the process
and principles remain the same. This checklist,
taken from the publication, should help ensure
agencies make the most of the resources
available in developing effective, sustainable
outdoor play space.

GETTING STARTED
Are you involving the right people?

These include:

1 Local authority
departments,
officers and
members whose
decisions and
actions might
affect the outdoor
play space, including
those with
responsibility for:
✓ developing community
strategies;
✓ developing cultural strategies
and services;
✓ supporting regeneration and renewal;
youth and educational provision;
✓ tackling social exclusion;
✓ granting permission for new residential
developments;
✓ planning and developing residential areas;
✓ developing town or parish plans;
✓ ensuring quality social housing;
✓ promoting community safety and harmony;
✓ managing highways, traffic and transport;
✓ maintaining ‘open spaces’;
✓ providing dedicated services for children and
young people.

2 Partnerships and initiatives that may
have an interest in developing outdoor
play space, including:
✓ Local Strategic Partnerships;
✓ Early Years Development and Childcare
Partnerships;
✓ Community Safety Partnerships;
✓ Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships;
✓ Children's Fund and Sure Start Partnerships.

3 Voluntary sector and other local organi-
sations with an interest in services for
children and young people and open
spaces.

Are all those involved working together
to agreed values and principles?

Are you involving children and young
people and getting maximum benefit from
their involvement?

You can achieve this by:
✓ employing methods appropriate
to the situation;
✓ ensuring the adults involved
have the right skills and
attitudes to children
and young people;
✓ recognising and using the
basic principles for any
participative work;
✓ involving children and
young people at the outset
or in the early stages of
planning;
✓ giving targeted attention to
some groups where needed.

Are you developing clearly stated
SMART objectives?
✓ Specific: clearly defined and easy to
understand.
✓ Measurable: so you know whether or not
you are successful.
✓ Achievable: within the timescale you
anticipate.
✓ Resourced: achievable within the resources
available.
✓ Timed: with a clear and realistic timetable.

Are you identifying and addressing
potential barriers to success?
These include:
✓ concerns about potential safety issues;
✓ difficulties with insurance cover;
✓ conflict between different groups;
✓ problems over land use.
How do you intend to establish exactly what needs to be done?
1. You will need to carry out an outdoor play audit to find out about:
   - ✔️ children and young people in the locality – who they are, where they play and why they play in those places;
   - ✔️ existing plans for the development of local spaces;
   - ✔️ costs, funding and other resources involved.

2. You will need to compare the supply of and demand for play space, in order to:
   - ✔️ identify where needs of different groups currently being met and not being met;
   - ✔️ establish ‘what works’ now;
   - ✔️ identify problems with existing provision.

Are you identifying both capital and revenue funding if necessary?

MAKING CHANGES
Are you ensuring that the space/s you are developing follow the general principles for sustainable outdoor play spaces? Check they are:
   - ✔️ going to actively attract children and young people;
   - ✔️ located in sites which are:
     - reasonably close to home
     - within sight of main travel routes
     - in spaces where there is ‘informal oversight’;
   - ✔️ easily accessible and usable by children who are disabled as well as those who are non-disabled;
   - ✔️ felt to offer personal security;
   - ✔️ accessible to all who may wish to use them;
   - ✔️ flexible enough to allow for changing play fashions, interests and needs;
   - ✔️ frequently cleaned and well maintained.

Do the spaces you are developing follow the essential design principles of a good play environment?
These include:
   - ✔️ both simple and complex environments to play in;
   - ✔️ play opportunities accessible to all those who might want to use them, in line with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
   - ✔️ creative and stimulating environments.

Have you considered all the possible types of dedicated play space you might provide, bearing in mind the ages and interests of the different groups of children and young people?
These include:
   - ✔️ playgrounds;
   - ✔️ skateboard and skate parks;
   - ✔️ bike tracks and jumps;
   - ✔️ hangout or youth shelters;
   - ✔️ adventure playgrounds;
   - ✔️ other open access play projects;
   - ✔️ city farms, woodland spaces and nature reserves;
   - ✔️ multi-use games areas;
   - ✔️ fun trails and activity courses;
   - ✔️ school playgrounds.

Are you looking at ways of improving other places where children and young people play?
These include:
   - ✔️ parks, green spaces and commons;
   - ✔️ residential streets;
   - ✔️ other open spaces.
ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE
Practical work to improve play space is affected by policies, strategies and initiatives at national and local level. *More than Swings and Roundabouts* concludes with a discussion of some key emerging policy debates and Government initiatives concerned with open space, planning and children and young people, including a discussion of the pros and cons of standards such as the Six-acre Standard promoted by the National Playing Fields Association, which many local authorities use to plan provision.

There is an ongoing debate about the usefulness of quantitative spatial standards. It is likely that standards of the right form could play a part in planning and protecting play space. But the guide argues that more work is needed to explore the use and effectiveness of existing standards.

Advantages of standards
- provide a starting point for determining levels of provision;
- easy for planners, politicians and the public to understand;
- set clear targets for space that allow comparisons and measure improvement;
- can improve quality;
- can help to protect spaces from development threats;
- can support equitable allocation of funding and resources;
- support provision of play space in new developments.

Disadvantages of standards
- may discourage creativity;
- may have a weak theoretical basis;
- may be inflexible and unable to take account of local circumstances;
- application is difficult in areas where land uses are largely fixed;
- may be applied automatically without checking against local needs or wishes;
- may work against local participation;
- can be difficult to capture some important factors (such as location);
- may take little account of quality;
- it may be unclear whether there is a minimum, desirable or optimum standard.

The guide also considers the policy implications of some of the concerns raised in the rest of the guide:
- planning strategically for local needs;
- involving children and young people;
- research;
- funding; and
- encouraging good practice in design.

CONCLUSION
By making sure all children and young people have access to good outdoor space, we as a society will be:
- responding to their stated needs and wishes;
- supporting their healthy physical, social and emotional development;
- contributing to a reduction in their feelings of exclusion;
- contributing to the promotion of safer, more harmonious and more cohesive communities.

If we do not offer children and young people good access to attractive, engaging outdoor spaces where they can enjoy themselves, we should not be surprised if they seek out other, more problematic places and activities.

Details of the publication
For more information or to order a copy of *More than Swings and Roundabouts* contact NCB Book sales on 020 7843 6029/8, e-mail: booksales@ncb.org.uk or order online at www.ncb-books.org.uk

For further copies of this briefing, please contact the Children's Play Council on 020 7843 6016, or e-mail cpc@ncb.org.uk

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making a difference

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31 March 2006

Dr James Johnston
Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Dr Johnston

Petition PE913

Thank you for your letter of 22 February, inviting sportscotland to comment on Petition PE913, which relates to the development of a Pay Strategy for Scotland.

Play in and of itself does not fall within the remit of sportscotland as the national agency for sport in Scotland. Whilst our comments are made with that in mind we do welcome the opportunity, however, to contribute to the debate, albeit in a limited fashion.

The definition of play is one we support and is one we consider encapsulates well the view most people would have of children's play. This differs, of course, from sport, which is by definition a more structured activity.

sportscotland is clear that people of all ages, but in particular children, are more likely to participate in sport if they are physically active. Participation in sport is, we consider, a natural progression for children involved in enjoyable play. In addition, sport is much more likely to be enjoyed by participants if they have the necessary levels of physical literacy. There is no doubt that involvement from a young age in play helps develop the necessary skills, which will allow a person to be a lifelong participant in sport.

By way of example, the Scottish Executive supported Active Schools programme, which sportscotland manage, concentrates in the early years of Primary School on fun and games, which are intended to give children the necessary skills to be able to participate in sport in later years. Games involving running, jumping, throwing, catching and kicking are the focus of early year activities where the children learn life skills without being particularly aware that they are doing so. Crucially, the children have an enjoyable experience whilst learning.

Of course, many of the activities organised by Active Schools co-ordinators can be done by the children without any adult supervision, for example playground games and much of what is learned can be transferred by the children to informal play activities outwith school.
Taking the above into consideration sportscotland considers it wholly appropriate to support measures which allow children to be able to freely enjoy physical activity in the form of play and much of what is proposed by the petitioners and in the submission from Barnardo’s Scotland has our support.

However, we do wish to highlight comments made by Barnardo’s in relation to playing fields. The common definition of playing fields would imply the presence of sports pitches. If this is the definition used by Barnardo’s then the comments in their submission that ‘playing fields have been lost at a rate of one a day in the last eight years’ is, to say the least, so far from reality as to be unrecognisable. If true, this would represent more than half the stock of Scotland’s playing fields.

sportscotland, in its role as statutory consultee where development is proposed on playing fields, prepare annual monitoring reports which highlight the effect of development on Scotland’s stock. In the last ten years the net loss of pitches in Scotland is a little over 100, from a total of approximately 5,500, whilst in the last two years there has actually been a net gain in pitch provision. We do not, therefore, recognise Barnardo’s statement.

sportscotland hope the above has been helpful but if committee members require any further information please do not hesitate to get in contact.

Yours sincerely

John Duncan
Public Affairs Manager
Hi James

Please find below an email from Barnardos relating to the figures quoted in their submission on playing fields lost that was included in their submission to the Public Petitions committee as part of Petition PE913.

You will note from sportscotland's submission that we make reference to the validity of their figures and we queried them direct with Barnardos.

You will see from their response that they (Barnardos) admit the figures relate to England only, 'clearly don't reflect the trend in Scotland' and that they will not be using the figures in future. In effect, their submission was wrong in relation to playing fields or pitches lost.

I should be obliged if you would draw this to the attention of committee members as part of our submission.

Can you please confirm if this as acceptable.

Regards

John

John Duncan | Public Affairs Manager | sportscotland

Hi John,

Sorry for the delay in replying, but I've tracked down the mysterious figure you queried. It was a bit of a task because my notes said that it had come from the information produced for Play Day last August, but the folk behind Play Day said they weren't familiar with it.

It seems that it was sourced from Parliamentary responses given by Westminster Sports Minister, Richard Caborn MP, which are quoted in the following from the National Playing Fields Association.

http://www.npfa.co.uk/content/newsarticle/102/index.html

This information came out at the same time as the Play Day research, although not specifically produced by the National Children's Bureau like the other figures. It was therefore part of the wider discussion around Play Day, which is where I found it, although I failed to note its different provenance.
As you'll note Richard Caborn is giving an English figure. Given that the change figure in Scotland was much smaller, then strictly speaking these figures are still roughly accurate for the UK, which is how I found them and hence how we presented them in our briefing. Nevertheless this relates to formal "pitches" and given that it clearly doesn't reflect the trend in Scotland we'll not be using this figure any more.

Of course for the debate around Play our interest isn't specifically in formally set out pitches but in a broader definition of playing "fields" that would include any suitable open space. We know, e.g. from the survey of PPP projects, that these are being lost but it's hard to put specific numbers on them. We'll need to give that some more thought.

Am dashing off to meet colleagues in London today but let me know if you want to discuss this further.

best wishes

John

John Watson
Parliamentary/Policy Officer

Barnardo's helps over 120,000 of the UK's most vulnerable children and young people have a better start in life, and the chance of a better future. You can help us continue our vital work by supporting in a variety of ways. Click here for details: www.barnardos.org.uk.

[] An alliance of national and regional voluntary organisations, local authorities and partnerships researching and promoting children's play since 1988
http://www.ncb.org.uk/cpc/index.asp

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07/04/2006
Consideration of Petition PE913

COSLA welcomes the opportunity to comment on Petition PE913 brought by Debbie Scott on behalf of To Play or Not to Play, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to adopt a Play Strategy that recognises the right of all children in Scotland to a safe, accessible and challenging play environment.

It is COSLA's view that the decision to introduce a national Play Strategy properly lies with the Scottish Executive. However, should the Executive agree that such a Strategy should be adopted, COSLA would be supportive in contributing to its development and implementation.
4 April 2006

Dear Dr Johnston,

Thank you for your invitation to comment on the issues raised in Petition PE913, which calls on the Scottish Executive to adopt a Play Strategy for Scotland.

I enclose our submission, which I trust will be helpful to the committee in its deliberations. I also enclose for your information a copy of our Manifesto of Community Investment, which sets the Big Lottery Fund’s forthcoming investment plans for Scotland, and a summary report of the consultation that shaped these plans.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information or clarification. We are submitting this response electronically and in hard copy.

Yours sincerely,

Unarmendra Kanani
Director, Scotland

Enc:
1. Big Lottery Fund submission to Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee for Petition PE913
2. Manifesto of Community Investment
3. Phase 2 Consultation Summary Report
The Big Lottery Fund submission to Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee for Petition PE913

1. Introduction
This submission is in response to an invitation from the Public Petitions Committee to comment on issues raised in Petition PE913. In doing so we will provide:
- Information about the establishment of the Big Lottery Fund
- Background to our new investment portfolio, Investing in Communities
- Detail of our interest in and potential support for children’s play in Scotland from our new portfolio
- Clarification on the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport’s position on the funding of play through National Lottery resources

The invitation to comment on the petition asks for ‘further details surrounding the decision by the Big Lottery Fund not to divert funds towards play in Scotland.’ In fact, the Big Lottery Fund’s new investment plans for Scotland have the potential to both strengthen the capacity of the play sector and substantially increase play provision in ways that genuinely meet community need.

2. The Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund is the joint operating name of the New Opportunities Fund and the National Lottery Charities Board (which made grants under the name of the Community Fund). The Big Lottery Fund, launched in June 2004, is responsible for distributing half of all National Lottery good cause funding across the UK. The Big Lottery Fund will be formally constituted by a new National Lottery Act. It is expected that this legislation will be fully implemented by autumn 2006.

There are three themes that underpin the Big Lottery Fund’s work throughout the UK:

- Promoting well-being;
- Promoting community safety and cohesion;
- Community learning and creating opportunity.

3. Consultation

The Big Lottery Fund has carried out extensive consultation about its future direction. During February – May 2005 we consulted on suggested outcomes arising from the themes. These are:

- People have better chances in life;
- Communities are safer, stronger, and more able to work together to tackle inequalities;
- People have better and more sustainable services and environments;
- People and communities are healthier.
This is what we want to achieve with our funding and we see these outcomes as interdependent and that achieving one outcome would lead to others being achieved too. There was widespread support for these outcomes in our consultation and also for them to be reflected in broad grants programmes rather than narrowly focussed funding streams. We also consulted on suggested priorities most likely to achieve these outcomes. The suggested priorities were the result of feedback from earlier in the consultation process and of input from the Scottish Executive. Included in the suggested priorities was:

- “Developing good quality, accessible childcare and play provision for children of all ages”.

The following sections set out how we expect to support this priority.

4. Investing in Communities

In November 2005 the Big Lottery Fund announced its proposed new funding framework entitled Investing in Communities. This is a portfolio that sets out how the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland will invest £257 million over the next three years. It adopts an investor approach and it responds to strong consultation calls for broad, flexible investment areas that enable communities (of place, need or interest) to identify their own needs, respond to opportunity and achieve their goals. It should be noted that this was a particularly strong message in Scotland, and has duly been reflected in the investment portfolio we have developed. It is markedly different from the approach taken by the Big Lottery Fund in England. This distinct approach in Scotland is a positive consequence of devolution, and our increased ability to respond primarily to the needs, priorities and aspirations identified by and for Scottish communities.

Investing in Communities identifies four areas where we think our funding can have the most impact. These are:

- Supporting 21st Century Life
- Life Transitions
- Dynamic, Inclusive Communities
- Growing Community Assets

There is potential for children’s play to be supported in different ways through each of these investment areas. Section 5 below sets out where we believe our funding can have the greatest impact on play provision and the play sector. Funding for these investment areas will become available in late Spring of this year.

5. How Investing in Communities will support Children’s Play

Our investment in Supporting 21st Century Life is about recognising the rate at which our society is changing and the impact that population change, changing communities and evolving technology have on people’s lives.

Supporting 21st Century Life will fund many types of projects covering a variety of activities, but we have identified some projects that we think will best achieve the outcomes we want to see from Supporting 21st Century Life. Included among these are:
• informal, structured and outdoor play activities, especially where they help build and maintain relationships with others and encourage contact between generations
• health and well-being, especially projects that help build people’s self esteem, confidence and life skills
• encouraging people from different generations to spend more time together.

Thus, Supporting 21st Century Life will be able to respond to and support investment in children’s play in a variety of ways. We value, and want to support, the role that children’s play can have in enhancing children’s quality of life by improving physical well-being, building confidence and skills and encouraging better relationships between people and communities.

We believe that our investment approach will prove enabling for organisations and communities and will allow them to respond flexibly to their individual circumstances by designing projects that reflect their aspirations and needs rather than manipulating these to fit within the confines of a tightly prescribed programme.

Funding is available from Supporting 21st Century Life for up to five years, we can meet up to 100% of project costs and we can fund both revenue and capital costs.

In addition, the Dynamic, Inclusive Communities area of investment offers the potential to develop the infrastructure of the children’s play sector and may provide national, second tier and local play organisations with support to engage with the people and organisations making decisions that affect them.

Funding (up to £10,000) is already available from our small grants scheme, Investing in Ideas, for a wide range of organisations to assist them in developing ideas relevant to our four investment areas. These should be ideas that could eventually become projects we would consider funding. The main aim of Investing in Ideas is to fund groups and organisations to help them design better projects by improving their skills and knowledge.

6. Statement from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

The transcript of the Public Petitions Committee’s discussion on 8 February 2006 referred to £200 million of National Lottery money pledged for children’s play. The following may help to clarify this issue:

In February 2005 the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was asked to ‘make a statement on her policy of ring-fencing lottery funds for children’s play’. She responded, ‘We have made clear our commitment that the Big Lottery Fund will operate with much less Government intervention that its predecessor, the New Opportunities Fund. Within a framework of broad themes, outcomes and priorities agreed with Government, the Big Lottery Fund will be responsible for designing programmes, choosing delivery mechanisms, identifying partners and selecting projects. Like other lottery distributors, the Fund will not have Government defined, ring fenced programmes, but will engage more with local communities and respond to their aspirations and needs. We expect funding for children’s play projects to continue to come from across all lottery distributors, and to reach £200 million between 2006 and 2012’.
7. Conclusion

The children's play sector and projects supporting children's play will undoubtedly benefit from our Investing in Communities portfolio, which has been developed in response to extensive consultation in Scotland. We will continue to work with the children's play sector, and as with any important stakeholder group we will ensure that this sector is fully appraised of the opportunities available from lottery monies. By focussing on outcomes, we want to support communities and organisations to identify the changes they wish to make. We will work in partnership with the play sector to achieve positive social change for people and communities across Scotland.
Dr. James Johnston  
Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee  
TG.01  
Parliamentary Headquarters  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP  
March 1, 2006

Dear Dr. Johnston:

We received a letter from you concerning a recent petition, and asking for our comments.

We read with interest the petition offered by Debbie Scott, on behalf of To Play or Not to Play. As a charity that has worked with children's issues for more than twenty years, we are in full support of Ms. Scott and her petition. Play is the task of childhood, the focus of children’s daily existence, and the stimulant for their social, physical, emotional and cognitive growth. At a time when concern is raised about children’s access to outdoor playgrounds for exercise and exploration, it is remarkable that fewer and fewer safe and appropriate spaces are in existence. In the middle of a city, the suburbs or even in a village, such access is crucial; time spent in active play, with the learning activities and simple freedoms that that encourages, is critical to any child's healthy development. Planning a playground carefully, so that it can serve children of different ages and abilities, is the lynchpin to so much that is good in childhood. Advances are made here, both the tangible ones—mastering ball play or simply aerobic exercise—and in the equally important social skills that underpin children’s development—learning to share, to lead and follow, to learn in a group or entertain oneself while alone. There are positive knock-on effects for the adults who bring their children together in a playground. Such places can become the very centre of the community, where friendships that sustain mothers, fathers and carers are forged.

We support this petition to the utmost, and look forward to a time when Scotland’s children all have access to a safe, secure, stimulating and attractive playground at the heart of their daily life.

Sincerely

Catherine Calvert  
Children’s Special Projects
CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE913: PLAY STRATEGY

Thank you for the Committee’s letter dated 22 February 2006, giving the Executive the opportunity to comment on petition PE913 from To Play or Not To Play, which calls for a Play Strategy that recognises the right of all children in Scotland to a safe, accessible and challenging play environment. I am responding as the Minister with responsibility for this area of policy.

The Executive fully supports play and is aware that play is an integral part of childhood and is vital for children’s emotional and physical development. This is reflected in our Partnership Agreement commitment to “… provide opportunities for our children and young people at all ages to grow and develop through the provision of safe places for our children to play and leisure activities that will excite and stretch our young people.”

There are a number of existing Executive policies that support play, and I have provided a brief summary of some of these in the annex to this letter. I hope that this will demonstrate the breadth of action that we are taking in this important area.

A specific point raised at the Public Petitions Committee meeting on 8 February 2006 was the issue of lack of open space due to development, and the need to consider planning laws. As you will appreciate, primary responsibility for development planning and ensuring that there are adequate spaces to play at the local level lies with local authorities. However, the Executive has recognised that it has a role to play in this area and there is a partnership agreement commitment to issue minimum standards for open space. A draft Scottish Planning Policy 11, which will provide guidance on this issue to planning authorities, will be issued shortly for consultation. As well as including national minimum standards, the draft policy will address the necessity for local authorities to prepare an audit of open space to inform their strategy for local provision.
At the Committee, there was also some discussion around using vacant and derelict land to improve the environment for children. The Executive has made available Community Regeneration funding and Quality of Life funding, which are being used to meet a range of priorities, including improving the local environment, improving community well-being and building strong, safe and attractive communities. In addition, the Executive has recognised that some local authorities face particular challenges with vacant and derelict land and has provided additional funding to Glasgow, Dundee and North Lanarkshire to help them address this. One of the objectives of the fund is to promote environmental justice and improved quality of life.

The Greenspace for Communities Initiative promotes green space and environmental improvements in urban areas. Scottish Natural Heritage has committed funding of £2.4 million over five years from 2002 to this initiative. The Scottish Executive allocated an additional £1 million to Greenspace Scotland in 2005 for 50 green space projects.

Concerns over the method of Big Lottery Fund (BLF) distribution for play in Scotland were also raised with the Committee. BLF has agreed with Ministers a priority of "Developing good quality, accessible childcare and play provision for children of all ages". Projects which support and promote play will therefore have access to a significant source of funding, and I am optimistic that communities across Scotland will take up this opportunity to develop play facilities. I note the Committee has written to the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) for its view, and I will leave it to BLF to respond in more detail. However, one point I would make is that we support the need to avoid too strict a segregation of funding streams in Scotland to allow BLF to fund projects in a flexible way which does not require projects to fit within tightly defined silos.

The Committee has specifically asked me to comment on developments in Wales in relation to their play strategy. While we do not have a separate play strategy in Scotland, I hope this letter will give a strong sense that there is action underway across Executive Departments to support play. We have also created a powerful mechanism through Integrated Children’s Services Planning for policies related to children to be co-ordinated and considered strategically at the local level. I believe this mix of policies already puts us in a strong position.

In deciding whether we wish to move towards having a Play Strategy in Scotland in future, one of the points that I have to consider carefully is the extent to which Government can address some of the key underlying societal issues such as our attitude to risk as parents. Another factor is that I would be keen to locate play firmly within the context of child development and childhood more generally.

Therefore, while I remain open minded about whether a strategy or policy statement on play might add value in future, the Executive has not set any firm plan to develop a specific play strategy in the short term. We will, however, continue to engage with Play Scotland, Barnados and others in considering the options for supporting this important area.

ROBERT E BROWN
Michael McMahon MSP
Convenor
Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

14 March 2006

Dear Mr McMahon

PE913 calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to adopt a Play Strategy

Save the Children fully supports To Play or Not to Play’s call for a Play Strategy for Scotland. We welcome the Committee's decision to pursue this matter further by writing to key stakeholders and await with interest their responses. Save the Children would like to see Scottish Executive action on play to ensure that every child in Scotland has a safe, accessible and challenging environment in which to play.

The importance of play
Evidence suggests that play is important for children’s mental, physical and emotional development and their well-being. It provides an opportunity for them to consolidate and absorb information learned earlier, and it helps them to acquire a general mindset towards solving problems. The physical activity involved in most play provides exercise, encourages co-ordination and develops skills for the growing child. Active play also reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety and contributes to increased self-esteem. Research by the Mental Health Foundation highlights the importance of children being able to play, take risks and use their own initiative. During social play, children acquire the basic skills needed to become 'emotionally literate', increasing their resilience to mental health problems.

The right to play
The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children and young people have a right 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.

The Convention also highlights three main areas that need to be addressed in terms of a child’s right to play. Save the Children believes that these areas form important elements of a Play Strategy for Scotland:

- the provision of space ie. the basic resource needed for play
- consultation with young people ie. their participation in planning play
- integration of all children ie. including those living in poverty.

The provision of space
Save the Children’s research has found that children’s playing out/ liberty to play is deteriorating. This is due to concerns about public safety (particularly traffic) and a trend towards more structured play. Evidence also suggests that the age at which children are allowed to play out is increasing, with a decrease of independent use of public spaces by 10/11 year olds. An element of healthy risk taking is part of play.
Play opportunities should not be reduced to the provision of organised facilities and services. Evidence demonstrates that most children express a strong desire for play areas, including green open spaces such as parks in order to spend unstructured time with their friends. It should also not be assumed that informal opportunities for children and young people to engage in play is beyond the scope of service providers. Service providers need to ensure children and young people have spaces (shelters, parks) and rights (to play space) which allows them the opportunity to partake in informal play.

The participation of children and young people in designing play spaces
Save the Children’s experience of children and young people's involvement in designing play spaces is positive and encouraging. The work was undertaken as part of the five year (2000-2005) Community Partners Programme. The programme set out to explore if active community participation was an effective means of countering children and young people's social exclusion. The work includes children and young people being involved in plans to build a play area in the East End of Glasgow, a new play area with skateboarding provision and a multi-spot court worth £250000 in Thurso and the refurbishment of a play park in Upper Achintore.

Integration of all children - supporting play opportunities for children and young people living in severe poverty
All children and young people, whatever their age, ability or background should be able to access local play environments. Reviews of children’s participation in leisure and social activities have consistently found lower levels of participation of children living in poverty. The growth of commercial playgrounds in the UK or pay-for-play leisure provision can contribute to and sustain the social exclusion of some children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Low income is a direct (cost of participation) and indirect (location of activities and availability of transport) barrier to participation in leisure and social activities.

Save the Children’s research Britain’s poorest children highlighted that children living in severe poverty were less likely to take part in social activities and lacked access to local services, with non-participation rates of 25%, compared to 7% for children living in [non-severe] poverty and 2% for children not living in poverty.

Save the Children acknowledges that accessing lower rates of participation in leisure and social activities is an objective of many Scottish Executive initiatives. However, at present, there is no systematic attempt to link this core concern with policies to tackle child poverty.

I hope these comments are helpful. If you would like further information on any of the points raised please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Telfer
Policy & Parliamentary Officer
Children in Scotland has been made aware that the petitions committee is consulting with a small number of interested parties who may have views on a possible play strategy in Scotland. Although we have not been formally asked for our input, we would like to express our strong support for this petition.

Children in Scotland is Scotland’s national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies, services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society.

We represent over 450 members, including all major voluntary, statutory and private children’s agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children’s services and are linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and the European Union.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency services a number of groups such as: the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People; the National Children’s Voluntary Forum; the National Early Years Forum and the Additional Support Needs Network. Children in Scotland also hosts Enquire, the advice service for additional support for learning.

There are a number of reasons why we believe that a play strategy is needed in Scotland:

- We believe that play is an integral aspect of a child’s healthy development. Structured and stimulating play is distinct to PE and contributes to a child’s mental, emotional and physical wellbeing in a holistic way.

- Play is also an important factor in a child’s social development. The interaction, negotiation and teamwork promoted by group play can make an important contribution to developing children’s social skills. This is also a real opportunity to tackle the issue of social inclusion from a young age.
- With 33 per cent of 12-year-olds in Scotland classified as obese or overweight\(^1\), we should encourage children and young people to participate in physical but also stimulating play.

- A play strategy would also address practical impediments to play including the lack of access to play space and activities for example, ensuring that the Scottish Executive's School Building Programme includes designs for high quality indoor and outdoor play spaces for children.

It is also worth noting that better leisure activities and 'things to do' were stated as the top priority among nearly 15,000 respondents to the Scottish Children's Commissioner's "Keeping Promises" consultation. We were extremely pleased to see the Welsh Assembly and the London Assembly have already adopted play strategies.

We hope that our position will help to inform your discussions in the Petitions Committee and would be happy to make any further more detailed responses where appropriate.

Yours sincerely

Paula Evans
Policy and Parliamentary Officer

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\(^1\) Early years play and learning, developing social skills and co-operation. BROADHEAD, Pat.

\(^2\) Obesity rise sees children suffer same diseases as middle-aged.
Scotsman, 3\(^{rd}\) July 2005
http://news.scotsman.com/health.cfm?id=605902005
Dr Jim Johnstone  
Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP  

28 February 2006  

Dear Dr Johnstone,  

Petition PE913, Play Strategy for Scotland  

The NPFA in Scotland fully supports petition PE913 calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to adopt a play strategy for Scotland.  

Play plays a vital part in both the development and fitness of children and the adoption of a play strategy would be a recognition of that.  

A play strategy for Scotland would also be the first step in ensuring that the play needs of all children throughout the country are met.  

Scotland has the unenviable reputation of being the 'sick man of Europe' with appalling levels of childhood obesity, encouraging the protection and development of play facilities would go some way to combating this increasing problem.  

The adoption of a play strategy for Scotland would also place the Scottish Executive at the forefront of Europe in recognising the importance that play has on physical, mental, social, emotional well being and fitness of young children.  

Yours sincerely,  

Colin Rennie  
Development Officer for Scotland
Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee
Petition PE913 – To Play or Not to Play

Comments by Kathleen Marshall

Scotland’s Commissioner for Children & Young People

20 October 2006
What this is about ...

On 5 December 2005 Debbie Scott laid a petition before the Scottish Parliament on behalf of To Play Or Not To Play. The Petition called for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to adopt a Play Strategy that recognises the right of all children in Scotland to a safe, accessible and challenging play environment.
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1 The Commissioner's Role

The office of Commissioner was established by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2003. The general function of the Commissioner is to "promote and safeguard the rights of children and young people." In particular, the Commissioner must review law, policy and practice relating to the rights of children and young people with a view to assessing their adequacy and effectiveness. Specific regard must be had to any relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially those requiring that the best interests of the child be a primary consideration in decision-making, and that due account be taken of the views of affected children and young people.

The Commissioner must exercise this responsibility towards all children and young people in Scotland who are under 18 years of age, or under 21 if they have at any time been looked after by a local authority or in their care.

2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was passed by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by the UK in 1991. Ratification commits the UK to bringing its law, policy and practice into line with the Convention. Whilst not directly enforceable in UK courts in the way that the European Convention on Human Rights now is, it should be noted that the European Court of Human Rights increasingly makes reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in its judgments, as a common standard amongst member states. Section 2 of the Human Rights Act obliges UK courts to take account of European jurisprudence in making their own decisions.

The UNCRC sets out the fundamental human rights that all children around the world, without discrimination, are entitled to. It sets out minimum benchmarks in rights for children rather than "best practice"; countries are thus encouraged to exceed the standards laid out in the Convention, but should not fall short of its basic requirements.

When the UK ratified the UNCRC, it made promises to the children and young people in this country that it would make life better for them by respecting and promoting the standards set out in the Convention. The promises relevant to the inquiry include the four basic principles of the UNCRC:

- Non discrimination, i.e., the rights in the Convention would be respected, no matter what the race, colour, sex, ethnic origin, or status of the child or the child's legal guardians (article 2);
- The best interests of the child would be at least a primary consideration in decisions made by legislative bodies or administrative authorities (article 3.1);
- The state would ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the survival and development of the child (article 6); and
- The views of the child concerned would be given due weight in all matters affecting the child (article 12).

The article most closely connected with the inquiry are:

- Play (article 31) "States Parties recognise 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... States parties shall respect and

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\(^1\) For example, in A v United Kingdom, 23 September 1998, No. 100/1997/884/1096, para 22, and in the prior Commission report - Comm Rep 18.9.97, para 49.
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 activities”

3 General Comment

Play is a right guaranteed to children and young people under the UNCRC as is the right to be consulted on issues which affect them. One of the key roles that the Parliament gave to the Commissioner was to provide a voice for children and young people. In late 2005 I contacted all Scottish schools and approached youth groups in every local authority area in the country to find out what children and young people thought was most important for them. I paid particular attention to marginalised groups of children and young people, such as those with disabilities, from ethnic minorities, in care and in secure accommodation. Almost 16,000 children and young people aged between 5 and 21 responded with the highest number of young people, some 26.5%, saying that having more “things to do” was their biggest concern. They wanted activities that were affordable and accessible to all, including those with disabilities, and that were designed by young people themselves in co-operation with trusted adults. Young People said they wanted to be recognised as an integral part of their communities, and to have access to community facilities. They also wanted more opportunities to meet with people of all ages in their communities, to break down negative stereotyping.

I note that this petition calls for recognition of the right to a safe, accessible and challenging play environment. This links in closely with the things that organisations that work with and for children and young people have been telling me about the need to promote proportionate protection for our children. The concept of proportionate protection is central to my Safe, Active, Happy workplan for the next two years. It is important that we keep our children safe, but we must be proportionate so that we do not allow fear to unduly restrict the rights of our children to a stimulating and challenging play environment.

I would like to acknowledge the significant amounts of work done by Barnardo’s and Play Scotland in leading the campaign for the development of a play strategy. It is important that society understands children’s right to play and the benefits of play. Play is an essential for social, physical, emotional, intellectual and creative development. It encourages independence, confidence and self esteem, helps develop social interaction, and life skills. Play is a key part of a healthy and active lifestyle which will help to address concerns about obesity in children, and associated health problems, relating to sedentary lifestyles.

Their right to be able to choose what to do in their free time should be recognised by government/policy makers, funding bodies, parents/public. Members of the Scottish Parliament from all of the parties represented in the Parliament spoke in favour of the development of a play strategy when the issue was debated in March 2006. Children and Young people indicated their support through our consultation with them. I add my voice to that call and urge the Executive to adopt a Play Strategy that recognises the right of all children in Scotland to a safe, accessible and challenging play environment.

I support the call for a national strategy for play.