Play England policy summary

Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy

All children and young people should be able to find places, near their homes, where they can play freely and meet their friends. They should feel confident and safe to play, both indoors and out, and in a manner that is appropriate to their needs and interests.1

Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy (DCSF 2008: 1)

Summary

On 3 April 2008, the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) launched Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy. The strategy sets out government’s proposals on play and is backed by funding of £235 million.

The investment, over three years, is to create 3,500 play areas and 30 staffed adventure playgrounds or play parks across the country. This will be accompanied by a range of other measures, all to be pioneered by 30 play pathfinders. Top-tier local authorities will be awarded funding to develop new play provision and embed child-friendly space within the plans and frameworks for their communities. In addition, the government has announced that from April 2009, the national indicator set that measures national priorities, will include an indicator on what children think about the parks and play areas in their local area.

Government’s aim as outlined in Fair Play is that:

- in every residential area, there is a variety of places for play, free of charge, supervised and unsupervised
- local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play
- routes to children’s play spaces are safe and accessible for all children and young people
- parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well-maintained and well-used
- children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours
- children and young people behave in a way that respects other people and property
- children, young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces, and
- play places are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, children of both genders, and children from minority groups in the community.

Introduction

*Fair Play* sets out the government’s proposals on play, structured around the priorities identified by research and through consultation with parents, and children and the play sector. Proposals are grouped under five main headings.

Supporting play throughout childhood

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which will become statutory for all early years provision from September 2008, is based on play. A key requirement is that early years providers should offer access to outdoor play areas, or go on outings on a daily basis to allow children to play outdoors. To ensure that early years provision enables quality play, the government has announced that DCSF and the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) will publish resources demonstrating good practice in play in early childhood provision. Government proposes to share this with Ofsted, the inspectorates of early years settings.

Children’s centres are encouraged to make maximum use of the outdoors, at all times of the year, particularly the natural environment and encourage physical activity through play. Through the pathfinders, government wishes to explore how parents can receive information from playworkers about good local play areas, facilities and the support they can receive from children’s centres.

The government has announced a wide range of proposals in order to improve play in schools. These include exploring the scope for schools to offer training to staff in playwork principles through the pathfinders programme, and ensuring healthy schools recognise that play benefits children and young people’s emotional health and wellbeing. Government has also announced that it will be reviewing extended schools guidance to ensure that appropriate content on play is included. The government also wants to see links made at local level between school sports partnerships, county sports partnerships and play providers, so that supervised play provision is one possible means of engaging reluctant groups of children in more physical activity.

The government aims to join up capital spending programmes and investigate opportunities to co-locate schools, children’s centres and play spaces, so that local infrastructure can be planned and delivered in a more coherent and efficient way. To achieve this, the government has proposed to work with Partnerships for Schools and other key agencies to raise the profile and better embed the planning and delivery of play facilities into the strategic planning process in every local area.

In many areas, the facilities on a school site may be the best available local play provision or green space. To make best use of this, the government will explore with head teachers and other key stakeholders how school facilities might be opened up outside of the school day core hours. Through the play pathfinders and playbuilders, government has suggested that they will collect and disseminate examples of the design, build and management of school play facilities that are available for wider community use. They also aim to make it easier for head teachers and governors to access examples of good practice, by publishing the relevant information in one place, to encourage all schools to further develop their play facilities.

More places to play

In order to create more high quality places to play, government is investing £200million over the next three years to develop up to 3,500 public play areas. Each local authority is expected to develop at least 20 play areas, by replacing old equipment or by building new play areas. The 30 play pathfinders will receive additional funding to test innovative approaches to promoting and supporting play spaces and to develop 30 adventure playgrounds or playparks aimed at 8–13 year-olds in disadvantaged areas. Responding to messages from *The Children’s Plan* consultation *Time to Talk*, government notes that

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some pathfinders will explore a model of ‘adventure playparks’ to better enable family use of parks and green spaces through sites where a range of adventure play, organised activities and wider facilities are on offer for children, young people and families to enjoy together.

The government has announced that they will be publishing, with Play England, detailed design guidance to help local areas make best use of the play areas and resources available to them. Fair Play also emphasises the importance of maintaining play spaces and will be exploring - through this consultation and play pathfinders - how children and communities can play a role in supervising and maintaining sites.

Playing safely

The DfT Child Road Safety Strategy 2007, The Children’s Plan and the Staying Safe Action Plan all encourage the wider use of 20mph zones in areas where children are present. To promote the benefits further, the government has proposed commissioning a new assessment of the implementation process and effectiveness of 20mph zones, and update good practice advice to local authorities. In addition, as set out in The Children’s Plan, the Department for Transport (DfT) will write to all local highway authorities, highlighting the need to have regard to children’s well-being and safety when implementing transport policy.

Government is also planning to increase the availability of supervised play opportunities. It will invest £1 million in the play pathfinders to test new local volunteer infrastructure to support play. Government is proposing to take the results of this work and use it to develop a national volunteering scheme.

The government will also be providing parents with information on the benefits of outdoor play and wants to work with partners in tackling the current perceptions of and barriers to freedom and play for children in our society. To achieve this, the government is proposing a communications campaign to endorsing freedom and play for children.

Government has also announced that it will take action to counteract negative perceptions of young people by generating a wider awareness of the positive contribution young people make to their communities. This is linked to their work to promote places to go and things to do for young people. The government will be encouraging local areas to consider developing of youth services and spaces alongside the investment in play to support these messages.

The government has announced that it is working with the Health and Safety Executive and the Play Safety Forum - a group of national agencies involved in play safety - to help play providers understand the importance of offering children opportunities to take risks in their play.

Child-friendly communities

It has been argued that children’s play needs are often marginalised in planning and design considerations. To counteract this, the government wants to issue a joint, Communities and Local Government (CLG), DCSF, DCMS and Department of Health (DH) letter to chief planning officers, highlight the importance of outdoor play for children and the critical role played by planning decisions in shaping environments.

The Planning White Paper: Planning for a Suitable Future sets out proposals for a planning review to identify where changes can be made, or additional guidance produced, to help tackle obesity and support healthy communities. DCSF, DCMS and DH will work with CLG as

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they carry out this planning review, and ensure that children’s play needs are considered appropriately.

CLG’s policy planning statement on housing (PPS3)\(^7\) requires the needs of children to be taken into account in housing developments. It also sets the quality standard for designated and informal recreational areas for children, including play areas and informal play space. To ensure that these spaces are well-designed, safe, secure and stimulating areas, the government has said it will work with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and CLG to engage with the housing industry to encourage wider adoption of this standard as a minimum in all new housing developments. This work will also be the starting point for the new good practice guidance on planning for open space, sport and recreation announced in *Fair Play*.

The government also wants to see DCSF and DCMS working with CLG in partnership with registered social landlords to improve the quality of play environments in some of the most deprived areas, and exploring how policies on social housing can be used to support better opportunities for play. CLG is also committed to improving the quality of parks and green spaces by developing an urban green space action plan.

Home zones are intended to change the way that streets are used in order to improve quality of life, for example through allowing scope for children’s play. DfT has published best practice guidance on home zone design, and the government encourages councils to support applications for home zones.

Government plans to develop, pilot and roll out a training programme that will bring together professionals who design public space with children’s delivery partners, including the play sector. They aim to offer this programme to every local authority and will pilot it with the play pathfinders in 2008-09. *Fair Play* states that involving expert organisations will ensure a strong emphasis on creating natural play environments. The training will also explore how to involve children, families and communities in planning, designing and managing public space.

The National Empowerment Partnership (NEP) is a government-led initiative that brings together key stakeholders to promote improvement in local community empowerment practice. Through this programme, government will encourage local authorities to engage and empower communities to create child-friendly public space, and disseminate their learning through regional consortia. Government has announced that they will identify local authorities, which are either pathfinders or playbuilders and involved in the participatory budgeting pilots, to encourage them to extend those principles to the planning of their capital investment. The government also plans to introduce a new duty from April 2009 that will require local authorities to inform, consult and involve local people in local decisions, policies and services.

The strategy also states that the new Grassroots Grants programme funded by the Office of the Third Sector will offer small grants, capacity building support and sustainable funding for small voluntary and community groups and organisations: ‘grassroots’ groups. The government will encourage local funders to work with local play partnerships and children’s trusts so that groups supporting play can be made aware of the programme.

**Sustaining and embedding play**

The government is proposing a range of measures to sustain and embed play. From June 2008, the priorities for a local area will be set out in its Local Area Agreement (LAA). Each area will agree up to 35 targets with government as part of their LAA and the government has acknowledged that the only way of measuring national priorities will be through use of this indicator set. Therefore, government has announced that from April 2009, the national

indicator set will include one on what children think about the parks and play areas in their local area. Information for the indicator will be collected via the TellUs Survey, which already provides data for a number of indicators for the national indicator set.

Government is expecting a top-tier strategic approach to planning and commissioning play and promoting children’s wellbeing for example, led by Directors of Children’s Services (DCSs) and children’s trusts. Government will be issuing updated statutory guidance on children’s trusts, which will promote the need for integrated services to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. As part of this government is proposing the DCSs will work closely with their Chief Executives to champion children’s environmental wellbeing. They expect DCSs to do this by securing and protecting play opportunities and work with transport and parks and planning to promote children’s environmental wellbeing.

The Department of Health is looking at the role of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and their specific contribution to promoting play. Government is proposing a pilot study commencing in 2008-09 to demonstrate how PCTs can help to promote physically active play, by working through local partnerships and the supporting community action. This will include targeted information and advice for families, delivered by a social marketing campaign.

Regional public health groups have a role in promoting physical activity and government recognises that encouraging play is an integral part of regional physical activity programme. The government has announced that it will encourage health sector workers to link with the play sector to ensure play is integral to regional physical activity programmes. In particular, regional play leads should be encouraged to engage with regional physical activity networks.

A recent survey of employers in the play sector found that while a large majority of employees held at least a level two qualification, over half (52 per cent) held no playwork specific qualification. To help tackle this gap, the government is proposing three key actions:

- Introduce measures to enable 4,000 playworkers to achieve a level 3 play qualification by 2011.
- Introduce measures to support the continuous professional development of leaders and managers in the play workforce, by developing a new playwork management qualification.
- The Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) will commission a research study to consider how graduates may be deployed most effectively within the play workforce.

**Evaluation**

The play pathfinder and play builder authorities will test out potential solutions to barriers to local sustainable play provision. Through the pathfinder programme evaluation, government will identify the impact of the capital investment on children’s wellbeing. It will also identify the most cost-effective way of implementing further national roll-outs of play areas and adventure playgrounds beyond the current funding term, which ends in 2011.

Lisa Davis, Policy Officer
ldavis@ncb.org.uk
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