

**PE1440/B**

**EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**RESPONSE TO**

**PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF PE1440  
QUESTIONS ARISING FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

**TUESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2012**

**Scottish Government / Early Years Taskforce, COSLA, NHS Scotland,  
certain local authorities, ACPOS**

**Question 1:**

What is your view on the suggestion that there should be a statutory requirement for public services to support the whole wellbeing of children and that a child's right to play should be explicit in the duties of public bodies?

**Response 1:**

We support the Scottish Government proposal, through the Children and Young People's Bill, to embed the rights of children and young people across the public sector in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and support the move towards considering the whole wellbeing of children. We believe that in doing this and explicitly incorporating the SHANARRI understanding of wellbeing that the Government is already proposing to fundamentally secure the child's right to Play within both the Healthy and Active elements of this.

East Ayrshire Council recognise that, despite the challenging financial climate, the provision of sufficient play opportunities for all children and young people is integral to the culture of prevention and early intervention and locally view our Play Development Service as very much „spend to save“ helping to secure improved outcomes for children including, but not limited to, promoting healthy weight, improving confidence and resilience; and encouraging community capacity and spirit.

With support from the Big Lottery Fund and NHS Ayrshire & Arran, in East Ayrshire we are able to deliver a very innovative and inclusive range of Play opportunities across our communities as well as focus on providing intensive play programmes for specific target groups including: Children who are Overweight or Obese; Looked After and Accommodated Children and their families; and Children of Prisoners.

As demonstrated above, we believe that there is already a statutory obligation on local authorities to provide sufficient, stimulating and satisfying play opportunities and can clearly demonstrate how this is being delivered in East Ayrshire without further statutory measures.

**Question 2:**

It has been suggested that at the national level there is support for a social policy commitment to play but that this does not necessarily filter down to all local areas. Do you agree and if so what more could be done to improve the situation?

**Response 2:**

The Scottish Government and its associated agencies require to develop and maintain a clarity of view on the importance of play in early childhood development as distinct from, but balanced with, the imperative to hold establishments to account on measured outcomes related to progress in literacy and numeracy, for example. Action research undertaken in East Ayrshire by Professor Louise Hayward of Glasgow University determined that when children, including those in the early stages of primary education were given opportunities for play, they gained an enjoyment in learning with no detriment to attainment. Such a balanced approach, which requires to be carefully thought through, is likely to succeed in the better delivery of sustained long term outcomes not only in traditional educational measures but also in the health and well being dimensions integral to SHANARRI.

We do not agree that this is the case and particularly highlight the inclusion of *“Improve outcomes and children’s quality of life through play”* as one of the ten priorities for action within the Early years Framework.

This is filtered from the national level through locally to East Ayrshire’s Community Planning Partnership and Community Health Partnership (in particular the Officer Locality Group for Children and Young People and the appropriate sub group for Early Intervention). Actions and indicators to support this priority are specifically included within our published Children and Young People’s Service Plan

However, there is potentially more to be done in terms of filtering the specific message of the importance of Play through; but as outlined in response to question 1, the widening of the understanding of children’s wellbeing based on SHANARRI as proposed through the Children and Young People’s Bill could go some way towards achieving this.

In East Ayrshire the ongoing development of the Community Play Forum will continue to raise the profile and highlight the value of high quality Play amongst the community, third and independent sectors.