



PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF PE1440

Questions

- 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?
- 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

While COSLA supports the intention of Play Scotland and others to raise awareness of the importance of play to the development of children, COSLA is not in favour of the proposal for a statutory requirement to support play. COSLA's approach to statutory duties is they should only be used where there is a systematic issue across Scotland that needs to be tackled and which cannot be resolved effectively in any other way. A duty must also be clearly understood, precise in its meaning and be certain of delivering improvement. The duty proposed in the petition falls short on all of these measures.

We are not clear of what the duty is intended to achieve, or what would be legally required by local authorities and other public agencies. All local authorities are committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and already have a general power to support wellbeing, so we are uncertain as to what additional value the proposed duty would add.

COSLA also has concerns over the resource implications of the duty. It is impossible given the information available to quantify how much this duty would cost, but given the pressure on local government finance we would urge the careful consideration of the financial implications of any proposal – including those already outlined in the consultation on the children and young people Bill.

Local authorities are completely committed to improving opportunities for children to play. This is exemplified through the creation, and refurbishment of play areas within communities; the design of school playing fields and facilities; and the fact that play is a key feature of how young children learn and develop in pre-school and primary school. Local authorities are also interested in working with parents and communities to enhance opportunities for play.

COSLA does not believe that the commitment to play is any less strong at the local level than it is at the national level. However, local authorities are also committed to delivering a range of statutory and non-statutory services, and must balance the needs of everyone in communities. If there is any difference between the local and national level, it is that local authorities are more in tune with the needs and daily challenges of communities, and do not have the luxury of considering the needs one group in isolation from all others.

COSLA met with Play Scotland in the summer and had a constructive discussion on a variety of issues related to play and child development. This response reiterates the points we made to Play Scotland in that meeting. We remain happy to work with Scottish Government and Play Scotland to explore non-statutory ways of enhancing play in all its aspects at the local level.

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COSLA

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