

**PE1440/G**

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**Petition by Sharon McCluskie, on behalf of Play Scotland, on plans for the new Children and Young People Bill**

The Convener of the Public Petitions Committee at the Scottish Parliament asked two questions of a number of agencies as part of the Committee's consideration of Petition PE1440. Play Scotland is responding to the submissions received from The Minister for Children and Young People Aileen Campbell, Derek Feeley Chief Executive NHS Scotland and Director General Health and Social Care, Robert Nicol Chief Officer – Children and Young People COSLA, East Ayrshire Council. The responses anticipated from individual members of the Early Years Task Force did not materialise, although we are aware of a very interesting paper from the Culture subcommittee.

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?

Play Scotland warmly welcomes the proposed statutory duty on local authorities and health boards to improve the wellbeing of children and young people. By embedding play within the design and delivery of children's services the child's right to play can be strategically delivered across Scotland in a cost effective and locally relevant manner. However it is not absolutely clear whether the proposed statutory duty is within the wellbeing definition or would be expressed through a statutory duty as expressed within the petition.

The NHS Scotland reply outlined their commitment and practical response to recognising the importance of play in supporting the whole wellbeing of children. There is a clear connection between the play and health work stream which promotes healthy play in Scotland and a strong external health promotion message around play opportunities and physical activity. Therapeutic and other play intervention services play an important role in supporting the whole wellbeing of children within the NHS footprint however; it is not clear whether there is sufficient provision to meet the demands for these services.

The response from COSLA and East Ayrshire recognise the importance of play in children's lives and the benefits it gives to their health, happiness and wellbeing. However, in the absence of a statutory duty there is no formal commitment to providing a strong play foundation for every child to reach their full potential during their adult life. A legal duty would ensure that every child has a wide range of challenging and interesting opportunities to play and to enjoy their leisure time. With local authorities and health boards as lead agents working with many partners, full consideration could be given to the many aspects of community life that affect play opportunities. These include use of the environment, traffic and transport, play and leisure provision, planning, school design, parental and community involvement in play. This approach would allow a wide range of access to resources and funding opportunities and ensure no additional burden on local authorities.

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?

Play Scotland is delighted to learn of the Scottish Government's commitment to developing Scotland's National Play Strategy. We are committed to supporting the Government in developing this strategy and implementing their vision for play and supporting the actions to achieve this. We also support the universal programme Play@Home supported by NHS Scotland, and we recognise that the evaluation findings will ensure that more vulnerable families will benefit from the programme, which helps give children the best start in life, improves skills for parenting and supports positive mental health and physical development.

While some local authorities work effectively with community groups and external funders to support community play initiatives this tends to be quite limited and time bound. Examples of good practice such as the Community Play Forum in East Ayrshire could provide a useful model to guide other authorities and communities. However, without a strong national commitment to play it is understandable that some local authorities do not make play a priority.

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Play Scotland