

## 2. Councils should make sure they fulfill their duty to provide play and leisure opportunities

The role of councils in delivering play and leisure is set out in legislation and means they are uniquely placed to ensure children and young people are able to access play and leisure.

Many councils have invested considerably in play and leisure and have worked innovatively in meeting their statutory duty. Yet, it must be acknowledged that this has been without clear guidance to support councils in fulfilling these duties.

A NICCY survey of 21 councils in 2008<sup>9</sup> outlines how practice across councils varied considerably.

For example:

- Not all had a play and leisure policy
- Not all consulted children and young people
- Some defined children as being under 16 years and some as being under 18 years
- Councils varied in the price reductions they offered

To make sure children and young people across NI can access play and leisure, forthcoming legislation establishing new council structures and duties as part of the Review of Public Administration should provide greater detail on their responsibilities in relation to this.

This should, for example, include the requirement that all councils have a regularly reviewed play policy and should promote consistency of practice by providing standards on a range of issues, such as, the definition of a child and the levels of provision that should be offered.

Duty Bearers: DOE and Councils

## 3. Children and young people should be involved in all aspects of the development and review of play and leisure policies and services

*“Planning for towns and leisure and play facilities should take account of children’s right to express their views, through appropriate consultations” Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006).*<sup>10</sup>

Making sure that the voices of children and young people are at the centre of community planning and play and leisure policy reflects the obligations of both the UNCRC and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Both these instruments require Government and public bodies to consult with children and young people when decisions affecting their lives are made. Section 75 requires this where an adverse impact on equality of opportunity may occur.<sup>11</sup>

The principle of consulting with children and young people - the main users of play and leisure - in the development of provision and use of public space in villages, towns and cities should also make sure that resources meet actual and not simply perceived needs.<sup>12</sup>

The publication of “Ask First!” the NI Standards for Children and Young People’s Participation in Public Decision Making is welcome and includes guidance on a range of areas, such as involving children and young people in the initial development of policies and services and ensuring the participation of vulnerable and marginalised children.<sup>13</sup>

All bodies who are duty bearers in the development of play and leisure policy and provision should adhere to these standards.

Duty bearers: relevant Departments, the Planning Service, Councils