

Play and Leisure Implementation Plan

Introduction

The Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) was created in accordance with 'The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order' (2003) to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

One of the functions of NICCY under Article 7 (2) and (3) of the Commissioner's Order is to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services provided for children and young people by relevant authorities. It is under this remit that NICCY staff have been involved in the three Play and Leisure Implementation Groups as observer members.

These comments outline NICCY's reflections on the work of the Play and Leisure Implementation Groups and highlight the areas of the Implementation Plan that we feel are pivotal in ensuring it delivers the vision of the Play and Leisure Policy Statement for Northern Ireland.

We hope these comments are helpful as the Department completes work on the draft Play and Leisure Implementation Plan in preparation for public consultation in Autumn 2010.

Implementation Group Membership and Process

We acknowledge the commitment made to play and leisure in the last number of years and recognise the time and resources that have been invested in the Implementation Plan process.

We welcome the approach taken to developing Implementation Plan group membership from both statutory and non governmental organisations (NGOs). This breadth of members offers a good basis for drawing on a range of knowledge and expertise in play and leisure.

We welcome the concurrent development of Implementation Groups considering the needs of children and young people aged under 11 years and aged over 11 years. This has been important to ensure that the needs of children and young people across age ranges have been central to the development of the themes and discussions from the beginning of the Implementation Plan process.



We would like to note the good organisation and flow of information from Playboard to Implementation Group members throughout the process.

NICCY also acknowledges the opportunities taken during Playboard's "Time to Play" conference in November 2009 to engage a broader audience with the Play and Leisure Implementation Plan at that point and to incorporate feedback from the conference into the Implementation Plan.

Implementation Plan Structure and Content

We welcome the structuring of the Implementation Plan around the three broad areas of Places and Spaces for Play and Leisure; Access to Play and Leisure, and Championing Play and Leisure.

NICCY is of the view that the following areas should be fully addressed within the Play and Leisure Implementation Plan:

- Ensuring that the high level aims of the Implementation Plan are translated into clear objectives and actions with timeframes, matched by resource allocation and performance indicators.
- Addressing the need to identify a lead department for play and leisure and ensuring that Government and public bodies who are duty bearers in the delivery of the Implementation Plan are differentiated from other partners in delivery, such as NGOs.
- Identifying how the aims and objectives of the Implementation Plan will be incorporated into duties and guidance for Councils who have statutory responsibilities for the provision of play and leisure.
- Ensuring the Implementation Plan is clearly linked to other relevant strategies, such as, the 10 year strategy for children and young people, the Community Safety Strategy and Fit Futures.
- Strengthening the rights basis of the Implementation Plan and referencing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2008 Concluding Observations, throughout the document.
- Ensuring equality of access to play and leisure for all groups of children and young people, including those experiencing poverty, children in rural areas and children with disabilities is a focus of the Implementation Plan and demonstrated through specific objectives and actions.
- Recognising and responding to the legacy of the conflict on play and leisure seen, for example, in the segregated nature of much school and community based provision and the barriers to children and young people accessing facilities and provision in geographic areas outside their own communities.



- Ensuring that children and young people’s participation in the development and evaluation of play and leisure policies and provision, including the Implementation Plan, reflects the obligations of article 12 of the UNCRC, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland 1998 and “Ask First!” The Northern Ireland Standards for Children and Young People’s Participation in Public Decision Making.

We are aware of the intention to provide a preamble to the Play and Leisure Implementation Plan and note the importance of this in setting out the purpose and key thematic concerns of the Implementation Plan. This would include, for example, clarifying what is meant by play and leisure, committing to a rights based approach and addressing inequalities in access to play and leisure. We would however observe that such thematic issues must also be mainstreamed within the detail of the Implementation Plan to ensure they are fully incorporated into the Implementation Plan as a whole.

In conclusion, we are happy to continue to advise on the development and implementation of the Play and Leisure Implementation Plan under Article 7 (2) and (3) of the Commissioner’s Order and look forward to seeing the completed draft Play and Leisure Implementation Plan and engaging in the public consultation process.

