



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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**COMMITTEE  
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE  
FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY  
FIRST MINISTER**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(Hansard)**

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**Play and Leisure Implementation Plan**

23 March 2011

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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FOR THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND  
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

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**Play and Leisure Implementation Plan**

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23 March 2011

**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

The Chairperson (Mr Elliott)  
Ms Martina Anderson  
Mr Allan Bresland  
Mr William Humphrey  
Mrs Dolores Kelly  
Mr Danny Kinahan  
Mr Jimmy Spratt

**Witnesses:**

Mrs Martina Campbell                    )  
Miss Brenda Stevenson                 )       Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

**The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr Elliott):**

Good afternoon Martina and Brenda. For the record, the meeting will be reported by Hansard. I understand that you were here last week and gave a briefing to the Committee. Perhaps you will give us a few introductory remarks as there is no need for a full presentation. We will then move to questions. Is that reasonable?

**Mrs Martina Campbell (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):**

That will be fine, Mr Chairperson. Thank you very much for giving us a further opportunity to

talk to the Committee about the play and leisure implementation plan. The plan was approved at yesterday's meeting of the Executive, so we hope that it will be on our website within the next couple of days.

We gave a brief overview of the consultation analysis of the play and leisure implementation plan at last week's Committee meeting, and I think that most members were at the meeting. I am sure that they will not want to hear it again. I am happy to go straight into questions if that suits the Committee.

**The Chairperson:**

I do not have to declare an interest as I am no longer a councillor, but as regards co-operation and working together by the various organisations that will be involved in the implementation of the plan, I know from past experience that there is quite often difficulty making the links between local councils, statutory bodies and the voluntary and community sector. I am keen to know how links and co-operation can be established and maintained in order to implement the plan.

**Miss Brenda Stevenson (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):**

This year, we have put a lot of focus on partnership working and we have had a lot of engagement with councils. We asked them to form strategic partnerships in their local areas with the relevant people that they feel can bring something to the partnership. We have engaged with the Housing Executive, the PSNI, Health, and a range of people. They are working on a strategic basis to plan for play locally and to pool resources and try to make best use of what already exists.

We have had great commitment. We have engaged with 16 councils and are coming to the end of the stage in which they have formed their partnerships. They have drawn up terms of reference and have just produced audits for us, which we will be working on next year.

The commitment is certainly there. They want to deliver on the plan; they see great merit in it and they want to deliver on the actions in it.

**The Chairperson:**

OK, but you will appreciate, Brenda, that it is not only councils; there are other organisations and bodies. I know that you have put great emphasis on partnership working, but putting that into action is slightly different from identifying that ethos. Will there be monitoring opportunities, so that this can be followed up on each year? Is there a reporting mechanism?

**Miss Stevenson:**

Yes, there is. It is going to be reported on each year. It is going to live, in inverted commas, for the same length of time as the 10-year strategy, and it will be reviewed on an ongoing basis. The actions will be monitored on an ongoing basis and evaluated at the end, as each is completed.

**Mrs D Kelly:**

Thank you both for coming to the Committee. I would like to pick up on two or three points. The first is that I note that one of the respondents mentioned the use of school estates. I live in a rural area where the school playground is often out of bounds. How are you going to take forward that response on school estates, if at all, through collaborative working with the Department of Education?

Without wanting to denigrate the work of many of the organisations that are involved with children's play and leisure, I want to know how we can ensure that scarce financial resources work through the system, resulting in on-the-ground spending that will improve the well-being of children and young people, rather than it being caught up somewhere along the line in administration, maintenance and contracts.

My other question relates to the child poverty strategy, which we only recently received. The equality impact assessment in that strategy was very telling, but it went through almost unnoticed. There is no data on children from Traveller families or children from ethnic minorities. It shows that children in Catholic households and those living in nationalist areas are more likely to live in poverty. What cognisance has been taken of the outcome of the equality impact assessment on child poverty in relation to play and leisure?

**Miss Stevenson:**

Your first question related to school estates. We have engaged quite extensively with the Department of Education on that. One of our exemplar projects was in Armagh, where we put a playground on a piece of unused land in one of the schools and opened it to the public. The Department of Education has just carried out its report into the use of school estates, and it made a recommendation that schools should be opened outside school hours. That does not necessarily mean for play only; it can mean for other activities, but it is a starting point for us. The Department has at least agreed that schools are under public ownership and should be used. We

have discovered quite a lot of examples of schools already doing that. We want to build on that, and it is an action under the area of access to play and leisure. For a lot of people, particularly in rural areas, it is a great opportunity and it is a facility to be made use of. We talk about pooling resources and levels of investment that are not high, because resources are not there, and we want to focus on making better use of what already exists, so that is a perfect example.

**Mrs D Kelly:**

I want to pick up on a couple of points. First, insurance is often cited in relation to access to school estates after school hours. Secondly, what finance or budget are you attributing to that particular action?

**Miss Stevenson:**

We require the councils and the schools to work together on insurance. Obviously, the schools only have insurance for school hours, so, in the example in Armagh, the council picked up on the after-school aspect of the insurance. We have been in negotiations with an insurance company to try to find ways around that. We will not be financing it on an ongoing basis; we will be trying to explore ways to make it more accessible for the councils and the schools. Therefore, we will be acting as an intermediary to try to find a base from which we can work, but we will only provide funds for projects on a pilot basis, not on an ongoing basis.

**Mrs D Kelly:**

That is a bit concerning, because I believe that councils do not have a statutory obligation.

**Miss Stevenson:**

They do not.

**Mrs D Kelly:**

That is the danger in any financial constrained times, even at the level of rates. Surely there has to be a way to look at pump-priming. I am sure that the lottery could assist, but surely there must be some element of budgetary provision.

**Miss Stevenson:**

Under partnership working, all that we are looking at is sourcing funding and how to make funding streams accessible. We want to work with the councils to support and guide them. The

lottery is a perfect example. At the end of 2009, we gave a presentation on play and leisure to the Big Lottery Fund, and, last year, we were delighted that it had taken on board the places and spaces element and is to make available funding of some £15 million to Northern Ireland. Next year, we want to take forward that initiative with the councils. We want to work in support of them to try to make those funds available. The emphasis is on building child friendly communities and setting up local areas where the whole family can access the facilities together, so the initiative is inter-generational. Ideally, we want to guide councils on how to attain that funding. The use of the school estate is a perfect example, because it is simply a matter of enhancing the facilities already in place. We appreciate that there is no money to build and maintain further sites. Therefore, we simply want to make use of what already exists.

**Mrs D Kelly:**

I would like that information to be readily and easily available and part of an overall package of signposting.

**Miss Stevenson:**

As we move on, it will be. We are developing a plan that is still subject to ministerial approval. We will have a strong focus on that, because the councils still want to engage with us and take the partnerships forward. We want to spend a lot of time working with the 10 councils that did not engage this year. Ideally, if we could get 26 councils on board, we could work regionally. More detail will be made available, because it is an action for next year.

**Mrs D Kelly:**

OK. What about the other questions that I asked?

**Mrs M Campbell:**

We can look at the child poverty EQIA. However, as actions are implemented, it will be for the responsible Department to consider carrying out an equality impact assessment on the policy element.

**Mrs D Kelly:**

OFMDFM is already committed to the child poverty strategy being in its area of responsibility.

**Mrs M Campbell:**

One of our key actions is to ensure that the implementation plan joins up with the other strategies for which OFMDFM has overarching responsibility. The importance of that emerged strongly from the consultation.

**Miss Stevenson:**

Within the plan, we have an action to link to current and emerging strategies. We intentionally kept that action broad, because we did not want to limit ourselves to particular strategies. Every single strategy that is developed will impact on children in some way, and we want to try to build play into those strategies.

**Mrs M Campbell:**

Also, as part of the strategic partnerships, we asked councils to undertake an audit of provision in their area. Provision for children with disabilities, for example, was a major issue in the consultation responses. However, we expect that the level of provision for Traveller children, ethnic minority children or children with disabilities will emerge from the councils' audits. When we receive the results of the audits, we will analyse them. We will then compile a report that we will bring to the Committee, and, as Brenda said, we will develop an action plan for Ministers to take forward next year.

**The Chairperson:**

On the subject of play and leisure within the school framework, how good has been your interaction with the Department of Education and the education and library boards? I am conscious that they also play an important and active role.

**Miss Stevenson:**

The Department of Education and the Association of Head Teachers were part of the implementation group when we were drafting the plan. We realised that that is an area with a very great focus on play, especially in respect of younger years, and we have a commitment from them that they will embed the play and leisure policy and the implementation plan within the school framework. However, it is not easy to suddenly change the curriculum. We have looked at ways to gain easy wins, for want of a better term, whereby we can introduce play options and look at what different children want to do, at low costs. Interaction has been very promising; they realise the importance of the policy and they want to work with us on it.

**The Chairperson:**

That is good to hear.

**Mr Kinahan:**

I still see myself as quite new to the Committee. Are there timescales for audits or for when you think you will get the other 10 councils on board so that everything is working and it is being driven forward?

**Miss Stevenson:**

The deadline for the audit is 31 March, which is next week. As I said, 16 of the councils worked with us this year; we still need to engage with 10 councils. Ideally, we want to get all 26 councils on board. Of the 10 that did not engage with us, seven saw merit in the partnerships but they could not meet the deadlines. We want to start working with them straight away next year, when they will have more time. They will also be able to draw on what the other councils have already done and their experiences. We need to work towards that next year because we want to approach the Big Lottery Fund on a regional basis. The answer to your question on the other 10 councils is: as quickly as possible.

**The Chairperson:**

There are no other questions. You are getting off very lightly, Martina and Brenda.

**Mrs D Kelly:**

They did not answer one of mine.

**Miss Stevenson:**

Which question was that?

**Mrs D Kelly:**

It was about the principle of following the public pound to make sure that money is not caught up in administration, arm's-length bodies, and things like that.

**Miss Stevenson:**

There is not a lot of financial investment. Investment is more on a resource basis because the



emphasis is very much on making use of what is there. We are not injecting large amounts of cash. We will concentrate more on projects involving children with disabilities and children with a negative portrayal. Those projects will be very closely monitored, as they have been in the past. I hope that that answers your question. We will focus very closely on several particular projects, as opposed to just giving out money that groups will monitor themselves and that we will not have any control of.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you very much, Brenda and Martina, for your presentation, for answering questions, and for coming back for a second week. I wish you well.