

4th March 2009

Clerk of the Committee
Children and Young People Committee

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Children and Young People Committee's Inquiry into Children's Budgeting in Wales

Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play. We are the charity that provides advice, support and guidance for all those in Wales who have a concern or responsibility for any environment where children and young people might play. We uphold children's right to play. Freely chosen play is critically important in the healthy development of all children and young people. All children are entitled to quality play provision within their communities and we work strategically to achieve this goal on their behalf. We have been closely involved in drafting the national Play Policy (2002) and in providing recommendations for Play in Wales (2006) the Welsh Assembly Play Policy Implementation Plan.

Play Wales welcomes the opportunity to comment on Children and Young People Committee's Inquiry into Children's Budgeting in Wales. Play Wales welcomes the commitment made by the committee to respond to the recommendations of The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding budget analyses. Our responses to the questions asked are as follows:

1. **To what extent do you think that budget setting and allocating resources for children and young people is transparent at national and/or local level?**

It is the experience of Play Wales that budget setting and allocation is not transparent at national/local level. Play Wales believes that a better understanding of how public expenditure is set and allocated is crucial to monitoring the ways in which national policies and strategies are put into practice at local level.

Recently, regional partnerships across Wales completed an audit exercise to map and audit play provision that will help identify gaps in each local authority area. The audits have contributed to the identification of gaps and local priorities in play provision, and they provide a strategic evidence of need for the development of provision. It is our experience that ascertaining information regarding budget setting and allocation of resources for children's play was difficult to ascertain from most local authority areas in Wales. These audits would be enhanced by the inclusion of information regarding funding and allocation. This information would further support a review of current allocation and possible pooling of resources to better support children's access to play provision.

One day Wales will be a place where we recognise and provide for every child's play needs

Un dydd bydd Cymru'n wlad ble y byddwn yn cydnabod ac yn darparu ar gyfer anghenion chwarae pob plentyn

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Awarding funds from

2. To what extent do you think children and young people taken into account in budget setting and allocation decisions in policy areas not obviously related to them, e.g. transport, housing, planning?

Although the Assembly Government has adopted the UN Convention of the rights of the Child as the basis for all its work with all children and young people through the 7 core aims, allocation decisions in policy areas that have traditionally not considered children and young people's needs discretely or specifically remains poor. The disregard to children's rights, particularly in terms of children's access to play, is evident, both in terms of policy and budget setting. Play Wales is concerned that decisions made in policy areas that are perceived as 'unrelated to children and young people' continue to address children's needs from a pathological point of view, rather than from a rights based approach.

The Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy (2002) states that:

play is so critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills that society should seek every opportunity to support it and create an environment that fosters it. Decision making at all levels of government should include a consideration of the impact of those decisions, on children's opportunities to play.

It is the view of Play Wales that the commitment by the Assembly Government to proof its policies for their impact on children's play through its Policy Gateway is not appropriately broad enough to include budget decisions and allocations. Furthermore, guidance to local authorities regarding transparency in budget setting doesn't appear strong.

3. To what extent do you think that departments within national and local government are joined-up in terms of what they spend on children and young people? Do you have examples where this is or isn't happening?

Play Wales does not have evidence that departments within national government are joined up in terms of what they spend on children and young people.

Play Wales is optimistic that the development of local CYPP's will provide a basis for joint commissioning of services and sharing of funding and resources for services.

We have limited evidence of a more joined-up approach in terms of children's play. However, we are aware that in Powys, through the Strategic Management group for play, Cymorth allocation (for play) has been re-aligned and has been pooled with a resource of external funding (from the BIG Lottery Child's play grant). We are hopeful that this will enable partners to maximise limited resources and make meaningful, joined-up decisions.

4. Do you think there is enough forward planning about how funding is allocated to deliver policies and programmes for children and young people? Please give examples.

No. Funding from a national level is often perceived as ad-hoc and reactionary, rather than underpinned by significant forward planning and accompanied by clear, coherent advice.

For instance, in 2006 an additional £1m was made available to Framework Partnerships to provide additional facilities for disabled children. Play Wales conducted an informal exercise to determine the impact of that funding.

Findings suggested that:

- the allocation via the traditional Cymorth formula failed to support smaller local authority areas to spend the money meaningfully
- there was an interpretation that this funding was a 'one off', and the inference was that there wasn't a need to establish new or innovative projects
- where existing play projects were in place the money was used in a limited way to extend the service
- the lack of specific guidance has meant that some areas used the funding to support other services (e.g. youth service) because there was no existing staffed open access play provision to make inclusive
- a few areas of Wales distributed the funding without involving a Play Officer or local play association, with the result that some of the funding was used to fund existing, segregated, closed access provision
- the time constraints on the planning and use of a "one-off" grant meant that there was no opportunity for a sustainable strategic approach both in terms of workforce development and extended play provision.
- the issue of providing additional facilities for children with disabilities is so emotionally charged, that very often, ill-informed decisions have been made with regards to appropriate provision, that rely on traditional models rather than objective evaluations of disabled children's play needs.

Additionally, Play Wales has no evidence that the local allocation of national funding is scrutinised effectively to ensure the Assembly Government's commitment to translate policy into practice.

5. **Do you have any examples of cost benefit analysis being undertaken on policies affecting children and young people (i.e. assessing the costs and benefits of the impacts of an intervention or policy)? Is this something you would like to see done more routinely and made more transparent?**

Play Wales does not have examples of such analyses. However, we feel that such exercises will better support a more consistent approach to joined-up planning, decision-making and allocation. Such exercises also potentially provide an evidence base to the importance that universal and preventative provision has on the well being of children and young people.

6. **Tackling child poverty is seen as a high political priority in Wales. To what extent do you think budget allocations reflect this high priority? To what extent is budget allocation and actual spend in Wales 'pro-poor'?**

Play Wales welcomes the political commitment made to tackle child poverty in Wales. However, we are concerned that with the overarching focus on those living in poverty, that the emphasis will be upon financial poverty, whilst poverty of opportunity for children to play in the 21st century, transcends economic boundaries and affects children from all classes and communities. Current budget allocation and actual spend on children's play to not address this issue.

7. **To what extent do you think children and young people are enabled to participate in budget setting and allocation decisions at a national and/or local level, and do you have any examples of this happening?**

Given that play is so important to all children, Play Wales advises that any participation they have in decision-making is meaningful and does not necessarily curtail their time and freedom to play. Playwork recognises that children's participation in decision-making is most effective when the issues for consideration have a direct relevance for them within their communities, rather than what can become a tokenistic involvement in the more abstract (for children) policy level.

Furthermore, it is recognised that playworkers possess a range of skills that enable them to both effectively elicit children's active participation, and if need be, act as advocates on behalf of the children and young people with whom they work.

8. What would you like to see change to make it easier to monitor spend on children and young people?

Play Wales would like to see clearer more explicit guidance in terms of spend of national funding at local level. Furthermore, we would like to see more robust and rigorous scrutiny of budget allocations and spend, and in particular, to seek clarity regarding equity and evidence of partnership working.

9. Are there any further comments you'd like to make about children's budgeting?

Play Wales welcomes the Assembly Government's commitment to the UNCRC. However, we advise that until all departments and divisions share that commitment and sentiment, children's budgeting will continue to be undertaken from a pathological, rather than rights based approach. Local partners need strong leadership and example if the ambitions of the Assembly Governments policies for children are to be realised by all children in Wales.