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To whom it may concern,

Playing Out is a national organisation, set up by parents in 2011 with the aim of restoring children's freedom to play out where they live, for their health, happiness and sense of belonging in their communities. Particularly since the Covid pandemic, there is growing recognition amongst experts, policy-makers and the general public that free, outdoor play is an essential part of childhood.

From time to time, we are contacted by residents of private or social housing who have been told - by their housing provider, council, landlord or police - that children may no longer play outside in their own street/estate. This is usually in response to complaints from a small number of other residents, without fully considering children's needs. We would like to suggest a better way forward.

Until very recently, playing out near home was a normal part of children's lives. Most adults over the age of 40 played out as children, gaining huge benefits to their health, wellbeing and development. In recent years, children's lives have become far more restricted due to increased traffic and other factors. Parks and other formal play spaces are not always nearby, easy or safe for children to get to. Children need the opportunity to play 'on the doorstep', where they can be informally supervised, come and go easily, make friends and feel part of their community.

Children need and have a right to play out. This right is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 31. This is because, "Play is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as social, emotional, intellectual and physical development"
(www.playengland.org.uk)

Children's physical activity levels in the UK are abysmally low, with fewer than 1 in 5 children getting the recommended minimum of 1hr a day. One in three children leave primary school overweight or obese. Playing outside is an easy, free and natural way to address this – it's what children want to do. Studies have shown that children are up to five times more active when they have the chance to play out. Playing out also provides children with many other physical and emotional benefits and helps to build stronger, safer communities where people know each other.

For all these reasons, we believe that authorities and housing providers have a responsibility to protect children's right to play out where they live. Many councils across the country are now doing this, through supporting resident-led play streets and looking for other ways to make streets and estates safer and more child-friendly (see www.playingout.net for more info).

Where there are complaints about children playing, the response should not be to ban this activity with all the benefits it brings. Instead, there should be an attempt to understand and resolve any genuine issues (for example, about noise) through mediation - or simply asking residents to consider each other's needs. Any actual instances of criminal activity or ASB should of course be referred to the police – but these need to be clearly differentiated from children playing. Again, if there are genuine safety concerns then these should be addressed rather than simply stopping children from playing out.

As the national organisation supporting resident-led play streets in over 100 local authority areas across the UK, we are keen to work with councils, housing providers and the police to ensure that any complaints

about children's play are dealt with in a balanced way. Please do get in touch if you would like to talk this through.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Alice Ferguson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alice Ferguson
Co-Director
Playing Out CIC.

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