

Supplementary evidence on housing management to ‘Children, Young People and the Built Environment’ inquiry

Playing Out, May 2024

This submission is additional to evidence already submitted to this inquiry by Playing Out (ref. Playing Out’s main submission December 2023; Joint submission led by Playing Out Jan 2024; Supplementary evidence on children and equality law, March 2024; “How housing providers can support children to play out”, April 2024 and anonymous evidence from a parent on a housing estate in West London, April 2024), as well as by Clarion Housing Group.

In response to a recognition of the health and social importance of children being able to play out near home, and of their role in this, representatives from a number of major housing providers (including Clarion, Peabody, Sovereign and Hyde Housing, and Tower Hamlets and Lambeth Councils), have recently formed a ‘pro-play network’, supported by Playing Out. The aims of this network are set out in the terms of reference below.

An immediate aim of the network is to agree a joint statement and action on removing ‘no ball games’ signs from their estates. However, there are barriers to achieving this and getting agreement at a corporate level. These include entrenched ways of working and fear of negative reactions. There is also a false belief that these signs carry legal weight.

The network learned from Aberdeen Council – who made a corporate decision to remove all no ball games from their estates in 2014 – that these fears were unfounded and that complaints and conflict about children playing out had reduced – almost disappeared – since taking down the signs.

The network feels it would be extremely helpful for national bodies such as the National Housing Federation and DLUHC itself to publish clear guidance encouraging and supporting all housing providers to join the ‘pro-play network’, sign up to the pro-play charter (currently being co-developed by the network) and take steps to enable children to use the space around their homes and to better balance the needs of children and other residents. Specifically, this should include strong encouragement/direction to remove ‘no ball games’ signage, clarifying that such signs carry no legal weight yet make children feel unwelcome in the spaces where they live, cause community disharmony and encourage an anti-child culture.

Pro-play housing network - Terms of reference

Our purpose/aims:

- To share issues/barriers and problem-solve together
- To share ideas and best practice and encourage each other
- To share expertise and specialist support
- To develop pro-play policies and maximise children’s access to doorstep play
- To demonstrate the value of play within the housing sector and more widely
- To share good practice more widely with the housing sector
- To build a shared voice to lobby government
- To raise value of play within our own orgs and secure high-level support
- To assess our own orgs current delivery on play sufficiency (inc talking directly to children)

Our immediate outcomes:

- Improved evidence base about play provision and need within housing (inc work with children)
- Strong/clear 'case for play' aimed at HAs
- High level commitment within housing organisations to address children's access to play
- Co-created pro-play charter that we all and other HA's can publicly sign up to
- Shared communications about our work and the value of play
- Co-created resources and templates for all HA's to use

And long-term, this work to result in:

- Children's right to play out is valued, prioritised and protected in housing management practices
- New developments designed/built according to best practice child-friendly principles
- No Ball Games signs a thing of the past
- Clear and widely understood distinction between ASB and play
- Children's voice / consultation incorporated into practice
- Children playing out near home is normal, welcome and safe
- Happy, healthy children and parents, safe, connected, friendly communities