



Ensuring that the Built Environment Enhances Child Well-being in Social Housing

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Children's Research Centre, TCD

- Established 1995 – initiative of Schools of Social Work and Social Policy & Psychology
- Mission & desired contribution to children's lives
- Much of the CRC's work guided by National Children's Strategy 2000-2010
- Undertakes multi-disciplinary & policy-relevant research
- Work to date
- Research strand – Children and their Environments

Why is children and the built environment an important policy issue?

- Children play everywhere
- Importance of play to child development and well-being
- Outdoor play particularly important
- Child safety and children's independent mobility
- Importance of public realm for the socialisation of young people

Why is children and the built environment an important policy issue?

- Use of street for leisure activities sometimes only option available to children and young people living in poorer areas
- Need to incorporate learning from past successes and failures in social housing
- Children live in the local
- Giving children visibility in the city/county development agenda and supporting children in participating in decisionmaking processes central in the Child Friendly City concept and National Children's Strategy

Aim and Objectives of paper

- National Children's Strategy 2000-2010 objective: to ensure that children benefit from a built and natural environment which supports their physical and emotional well-being
- PRI 2006 (Policy Strand) to explore how South Dublin and Galway City, as case studies, are supporting the NCS objective
- The paper:
 - Examines South Dublin's and Galway City's strategies and plans on planning for children and their built environment
 - Explores the mechanisms/structures in local government where planning for children on the built environment takes place

Aim and Objectives of paper

- Explores some of the barriers and enablers to children's interests being pursued in local policy on the built environment
- Selects interesting practice in Ireland and elsewhere in planning for children and built environment.
- Emphasis on learning from local policy development and implementation to move forward with National Children's Strategy

Focus of Analysis

- Social housing = existing & new social housing; Part V; RAS - reflects social and tenure mix policy
- Planning for children in policy on apartment living also considered – SDCC esp. increasing number of apartments
- Outdoor built environment (public realm) for play, leisure and children's safe mobility
- Built environment for children = outdoor public environment (green open spaces, streets, parks, playgrounds, play spaces); semi-private (shared courtyards/play spaces); private (gardens)

Information Sources

- Documentary review of key public Galway and South Dublin policy documents
- Interviews with local government staff and elected members to identify policy learning
- Interesting practice in other local authorities
- Challenges and Limits – identifying possible policy implementation gaps and tacit decisionmaking processes; functional divisions within and between departments; children can gain or lose from policies not specifically targeted at them – we do not undertake child impact statements to assess potential or actual impact of policy decision; scale of information available

Policy Context & Children

- *International Policy*
 - UNCRC
 - Child Friendly Cities
- *National Policy*
 - Children's Strategy (2000)
 - Play Policy (2004)
 - Housing & Sustainable Communities Policy (2007)
- *Local Policy*
 - 1990s Local Government reform (SPCs, CDB, community involvement, Comhairle na nÓg)
 - CDB policy, Development Plans, Housing Strategies, RAPID plans, Social Inclusion Policy, Play and Recreational Policies, Corporate Plans

Case Studies: Galway City & South Dublin

- Case study approach
- Similarities: New private housing development; existing social housing provision and regeneration; RAPID
- Differences: Scale of social housing provision and need, scale of poverty and deprivation, estate management issues; population size; SDCC more youthful population
- Interesting features: Galway as a Child Friendly City; South Dublin Co Co partner of CDI + pilot Children's Service Committee

Main Issues Arising in Planning for Children and the Built Environment Social Housing

Play

- Increase in number of playgrounds
- Importance of National Play Policy for putting play on the agenda
- Biggest difference between two local authorities is location of play facilities in social housing – Parks in SDCC v green areas in/beside estates in GCC
- Importance of Play funding – DoEHLG, OMC, RAPID
- Funding for play skewed towards playgrounds - play more people-intensive than anticipated in National Play Policy and subsequent funding framework

Main Issues Arising in Planning for Children and the Built Environment Social Housing

- May lead to future problems if inadequate maintenance + need for spending for wider child friendly initiatives
- LA performance indicators also skewing policy and action towards increasing numbers of playgrounds, not quality or play value for children
- Who pays for higher spec in housing ?
- Interesting learning from GCC experience of developing a homezone in social housing
- Question: how to encourage and work with private developers

Main Issues Arising in Planning for Children and the Built Environment Social Housing

- Conundrum: play provision before or after residents move in?
- LAs asked to develop 'safe risk' for play
- Current playground provision good baseline provision
- Early pilots in UK of auditing play provision, includes performance indicators

Main Issues Arising in Planning for Children and the Built Environment Social Housing

Recreation

- Despite awaiting national recreation policy for over 12's, LA's developing policy and provision
- Use of green open spaces in new and old social and private housing. Question: how best to use the space?
- Difficulties in meeting informal recreation needs of young people in social housing acknowledged by all, esp. hanging around in public – hard to discuss due to ASB: 'a political hot potato'

Main Issues Arising in Planning for Children and the Built Environment Social Housing

- Development of Youth Cafes evident, strong local support
- Interesting learning from SDCC development of 'youth shelter'
- Both cities have skateparks. Learning for SDCC relates to involvement of skaters, having a staff member in park, and has closing time
- Mobility Issues: safe access to play and social life

Issues arising in local planning for children

- CDB envisaged as driver of Children's Strategy locally (policy forum) – challenges
- But local support for integrated policy and provision
- Pilot Children's Services Committee in South Dublin (integrated provision rather than policy) (Towards 2016)
- What is a children's issue?

Issues arising in local planning for children

- Specific planning for children and apartment living not evident, as yet
- Support for consultation with children and young people in local authorities
- Children status as local policy stakeholders an issue
- Community consultation
- Objections made to local politicians by residents
- Resourcing and use of Comhairle na nÓg

Issues arising in local planning for children

- How to elicit views of younger children?
- Do children's voices get drowned out?
- Focus on consultation rather than participation in design

Issues arising in local planning for children

- Galway as a Child Friendly City document valuable – referred to and used, impacts on other policy documents/strategies. Still within consciousness of SPC Chairs
- CDI Tallaght developed and implementing a child-friendly neighbourhood plan for an area of West Tallaght in partnership with SDCC

Issues arising in local planning for children

- Important local documents for children = Development Plan (statutory). Need to ensure that children planned for within this document
- Support and leadership of County/City Manager important in progressing children's issues – considered strong in these LAs
- Role of attitudes towards children/status of children always relevant

Policy Implications

- What is appropriate national support for local implementation?
- Funding for staff for play
- Who pays for costs of higher specs in social/affordable housing
- How to work with private developers: guidelines v sanctions
- System for auditing play spaces from child perspective

Policy Implications

- Development of further LA play and recreation indicators for children
- Mechanism to embed children's rights and needs in policy- CDI piloting local proofing
- Further supporting children's participation in local decisionmaking and in design
- Increased focus on young people and the public realm – how we move past impasse?