



EASY AS ABC?

Fair Play for Children's National Organiser, Jan Cosgrove, reports on a disturbing case affecting children's basic rights in a major UK city. The names of the children and family have been protected which is why the name of the authority has been also disguised.

In recent months, readers will have gauged from articles in **PlayAction** that the Fair Play for Children Association (Fair Play's non-charitable campaigning arm) has major concerns over the thrust and detail of the Government's Crime and Disorder agenda as it affects children's rights to assembly, expression, consultation and play.

For example, the provisions of Sections 14 and 15 of the 1998 C&DA Act, as amended subsequently, makes it possible for child curfews to be imposed for up to 90 days (renewable) on children aged up to 15 years. We have queried the compatibility of this legislation with both the **European Convention of Human Rights** (now incorporated into UK law via the Human Rights Act 1998) and the **U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child** (adopted 1989 but not incorporated into our law as yet, and no sign of any move to do so).

It is perhaps interesting that the **UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** (whose report on the UK is covered in this edition) stated in its concluding observations that it "notes with concern that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced in England and Wales measures that may violate the principles and provisions of the Convention". The Act also contains provision to impose **Anti-Social Behaviour Orders** on individuals, via Magistrates Courts. These ASBOs are non-criminal but to breach one is.

Many local authorities are looking at ways of avoiding curfews, because the general consensus is that they are going to cause more trouble than they solve, and perhaps a few may also have qualms about the civil liberties aspect of restricting the liberties of a whole section of a population because of the misdeeds, alleged or proven, of individuals within that population. Fair Play has argued that this is poor jurisprudence at the very least.

Case study?

So it was with considerable interest that I received within the past few weeks a call from a parent living in a major authority in this country, seeking advice on correspondence received from her housing department (as she is a tenant of the authority). She explained she had tried to consult around 25 local solicitors firms but had had no calls back. "It was like they saw the words 'anti-social behaviour' and didn't want to know" she explained. She has also tried the local neighbourhood law centre, similar results, and also had gone to a number of national organisations



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dealing with civil liberties and children's rights and welfare. On reaching the office of the Commissioner for Children's Rights in London, she had, for some reason, been directed to Fair Play. Fair enough, I thought. Maybe a case of being in the right place at the right time

The mum (let's call her M) had received a letter from her local housing office, as follows:

Dear M

"Re: Anti Social Behaviour in the Park Street Area

"Over the past few months a number of incidents of anti-social behaviour have taken place in the Park Street area and elsewhere in the neighbourhood, involving a gang of youths. Yours sons have been identified as those responsible.

"This cannot be allowed to continue and the Housing Service and the Police are working together to take action against those responsible.

"We would like you to attend a meeting, with your sons, A and B, on [date] at the [Area] Housing Office [address] to discuss this matter further. Representatives from both the Police and the Housing Service will be present.

"I strongly urge you to attend, it is very much in your interest to meet with the relevant officers and talk about the problem. Failure to turn up could lead to action being initiated to terminate your tenancy.

"If the above time and date is not convenient, please contact me on [tel numbers] at the Area Housing Officer. Or leave a message in our absence. If the date and time is convenient, please can you confirm your attendance.

Signature]"

M explained that she had no previous intimation of any such problems, and had asked friends and neighbours, one or two of whom then revealed they had had similar letters and were also puzzled, and not a little perturbed, not least because of the threat of loss of tenancy. She told me that, so far as she was aware, her two sons had not committed any anti-social acts, and that the whole affair came like a bolt out of the blue.

When I heard that one child (C) had already been to such a meeting with her parent (N), and had signed a 'contract' [which was not mentioned in an identical letter to the one above] I sought a copy of the said 'contract'. In the meantime, I asked M to tell the Housing Office that the date was not convenient, as I suggested that she might want to meet me and also consider whether her sons could be represented at such a meeting. We agreed this course of action, she wrote and a new date was fixed.

In the meantime, both a copy of the 'contract' was obtained from the girl's mother N and M also relayed to me N's description of what had happened at the meeting. What emerged was any lack of clarity about the actual nature of her daughter's wrong-doing.



Ofsted early years director resigns

September 2002

The director of Ofsted's early years inspection services has resigned just weeks before the publication of a report on its first year of operation.

Maggie Smith blamed health and family problems for her resignation after less than two years in the job.

She had overseen 1,600 staff responsible for regulating child-minders, group providers of day care and out of school clubs and holiday schemes.

There have been reports of lengthy delays in the registration of new childminders, and complaints from some home-based inspectors about problems using Ofsted's computer system.

Owen Davies, national officer for social services for Unison, said: "Our members have reported serious problems within the early years directorate and have warned that the performance targets are completely unrealis-



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Already pressured by the tenancy threat, N permitted her daughter C to sign the following 'contract':

XYZ Council

Acceptable Behaviour Contract

This Contract is made on the nth day of month, year

Between XYZ Council, Park Area Housing Office

and (and name of youth and address)

Ms C of [Park Street]

Agrees the following in respect of future conduct:

1. She will not hang around in groups of six or more
2. She will not kick the ball around in the street
3. She will not bang on dustbin lids in the evening
4. She will not be abusive to other residents
5. She will not make excess noise in the street
6. She will be off good behaviour while in the area

Further, C enters into a commitment with the Council not to act in a manner which causes or likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not in the same household.

Breach. If C does anything which she has agreed not to do under this contract which the Council considers to amount to anti-social behaviour The Council will make an application to the Magistrates Court for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order to prohibit C from acting in a manner likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household. Further C acknowledges that where an Anti-Social Behaviour Order is made by the Court and breached she will be liable on conviction to a term of imprisonment not exceeding five years or to a fine or both.

Declaration. I confirm that I understand the meaning of this contract and that the consequences of breach of the contract have been explained to me.

Signed	C	[youth]	date
Signed	N	Parent/Social Worker	date
Witnessed	PC	Police Officer	date
	HO	Housing Officer	date"

I am sure readers will agree that, whatever the pros and cons of what the children had done, such letters and 'contracts' are very serious levels of response, especially where the children are aged 12-14 years.

One's first reaction was to wonder why M, if her children are 'tearaways' such as headlined by our popular press/media, bothered to contact Fair Play, umpteen solicitors and other agencies. Frankly, until I had had a chance to meet her, and more importantly, A and B, I could not make a judgement.

Obvious concerns were:

1. The threat of loss of tenancy as a means to compel attendance
2. The fact that the letter to M (and to N) stated that, apropos the alleged anti-social behaviour, 'your sons have been identified as those responsible'. Doesn't that sound a bit like "accused

An independent Commission-funded Consumers Committee calls for tougher laws to protect children from the influence of advertising. The Consumers Committee recently published its report on commercial practices aimed at children.

The commercial communications industry functions under the approach to children as an increasingly important target market. European rules and regulatory regimes have not kept pace with this development. There are very few if any rules in European legislation to protect children from undue pressure and exploitation and to achieve a proper balance between the rights of children and the rights of commercial communications to market products and services.

The Consumers Committee calls for a pan-EU law, which could be 'fleshed out' by self-regulatory initiatives such as codes of conduct, which carry enforcement instruments. Areas that should be covered by such a law are merchandising which 'exploits' children and parents, advertising in schools, internet marketing, collection and processing of children's personal data, sponsorship and public health requirements in the food sector.

In its annex, the report refers to Article 17 of the UN CRC, i.e. the right of the child to have access to appropriate information which is consistent with their moral well-being and knowledge and understanding among peoples,



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tried and convicted" before hearing the detailed charges and without being able to be present?

Justified Complaints about Children?

I did ask M why she thought such charges had arisen? She seemed at a complete loss, so, based on direct and long-term Fair Play experience, I asked her pointedly did she have any problems with one or more neighbours? On thinking this through, she suddenly realised that an individual neighbour had been behaving strangely towards her sons in recent weeks, taking photographs of them because 'they were playing in the rain' and this was 'evidence'.

It had been my experience that many parents have to contend with neighbours who become unreasonable about children playing outside. We have stories of constant harassment of children, incessant complaints to the police, local authority, housing association etc, quite commonly highly exaggerated allegations (some fabricated, others grossly distorted) etc.

A new date for the meeting at the Housing Office arrived and M and I agreed to meet, with her sons A and B, earlier in the day. When we first met, M had picked up A, the eldest, aged 14, from school, and she picked me up also, from a cafe near the station, and we proceeded to her home, in Park Street, where we also met her youngest, B, aged 13. Both boys seemed to me, as a long-in-the-tooth playworker, as being well-behaved, courteous and not at all likely to be anti-social. The houses were in fact not typical Council stock - more like well-sized Edwardian terraces on a pleasant street, leading to a Park at one end.

It emerged there is a problem with the Park - youths are said to congregate there and to undertake acts such as blowing up stolen mopeds. Some of them use Park Street to get there and sometimes make a lot of noise etc. Indeed, M does not allow her sons to go to the Park because of 'drugs, bullying, threats' and her sons were told by the youths the Park was not for under18s etc.

I spoke with A and B, asking what acts they feel they might have committed which could have led to this summons to a meeting. Both seemed genuinely non-plussed. A was very quiet, but explained the things they did in the street. Looking at C's 'contract', I asked if they had banged dustbins lids at night? No, but B, the younger, said he had on possibly two occasions played drums on an upturned plastic bucket he had found in the street. What about playing football? It turns out that B had been attending hospital for some time with a hip problem and was not outdoors very much. Such football as was played was mainly C kicking a ball against a street wall. Had it hit cars? Possibly, but not much. M made it clear she tended to be quite strict and supervisory with her children, and that A in any case attended out-of-school activities such as a computer club and was late home from school as a result.

and respects the child's cultural background. There is also a reference to the recommendations in the Euronet report 'A children's policy for 21st century Europe' concerning the education of children on consumer issues.

This report shows again the need for a legal base for children in the EU Treaty, which would enable that EU-legislation would be made to protect children from exploiting advertising.

Rise in number of children excluded from school

Almost 10,000 children in Britain were permanently excluded from school in 2000/2001, according to the latest statistics. This was a 10 per cent rise from the previous year, but the figure was still lower than in 1998/99 when around 11,000 children were permanently excluded. Nearly five times as many boys than girls were excluded in 2000/2001, the figures from the Office for National Statistics found. The 'Social Focus in Brief', which concentrated on children, found that nearly six per cent of all 16-year-old boys in England and Wales were found guilty of, or cautioned for, indictable offences in 2000, compared with 1.5 per cent of girls of the same age. The research also highlighted that more children are living in single parent families. Around 20 per cent of children lived in lone parent families in 2001 compared with 12 per cent 20 years earlier. In 2000/2001 57 per cent of children in lone parent households lived in social rented housing. Twelve per cent of children living in single parent households lived in overcrowded conditions compared to eight per cent of children in couple households.

Social Focus in Brief: Children is available from www.statistics.gov.uk
Community Care briefing, August 2002



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Did a large number of them hang around in the street? They had a few neighbourhood friends, perhaps 5 or 6, but they did not always 'hang around' in that number - often it was just 2 or 3, one boy hardly ever came outside etc.

We Meet At Last ...

I went to the arranged meeting not quite knowing what to expect, whether I was being 'duped' (though I was pretty sure I was not), and what indeed we were going to be faced with.

The Housing Office was a usual Local Authority set up - M spotted the Housing Officer, who came down the stairs with a camera and who then ushered M, A and B, and myself into a small office. HO and PC (housing officer and constable) were at one end of the room, we sat, A and B in the middle, flanked by M and myself. We made pleasant introductions, and then PC was introduced.

The following process was quite unbelievable. I was not expected so explained my role as representing A and B, which they agreed prior to the meeting on the basis they could dismiss me at any point. This put HO and PC off their guard a bit. PC repeated the anti-social behaviour bit, at which point I asked whether they were aware of the European Convention and its provisions about allegations - small matters such as detailed charges, evidence, cross-examination. PC explained that XYZ Council had found that, in such cases as these, it had been found helpful if the young people concerned signed an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC). This set out a number of points which the young person agreed to - it was not, he assured us, legally-binding (!) It had been found to be very successful and was the brain child of one of his station colleagues - the Home Office was apparently well aware of its success and supported its rolling out across the country.

Crucial questions from our side:

Q. Although we knew they would not say who made the complaint(s), how many complaints and from how many people?

A. No answers - bar there was more than one person.

Q. What were the exact complaints? Details, date,time etc?

A. Unwilling to give details?

PC began to get somewhat agitated at this turn of events. I read out the ABC signed by C - so, I asked, as there a law against 6 or more gathering together? Had these children done so anyway? When had dustbins been banged, footballs kicked etc. Footballs had been kicked at cars - A responded that they had kicked a ball against a wall and it had bounced onto a car - this was not a frequent occurrence. B described his drumming, again on a couple of occasions, perhaps as late as 8.45pm on one occasion. What was 'excess noise'? and so forth.

PC began to try to focus attention on the harmlessness of just



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signing the ABC.

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At this stage, A asked THE question - "what have we done wrong?" To this there was no actual answer 'you have done this/that etc'. Instead, a recurring insistence that all the PC wanted to know was, would they sign the ABC or not? A asked this question again more than once, calmly and politely and obviously deeply puzzled.

In the end PC gave up and said there was no point in going on - I even offered to talk further with the boys privately to see if they wanted to sign. We asked, what would A and B get out of signing the 'non-binding' contract if they had not, as they maintained, done anything wrong. The answer was that the Council would not then have to proceed to investigate the allegations, possibly bringing in 'professional witnesses'. So, the boys would sign an ABC agreeing to restrictions based on unproven allegations. PC said several times that the boys had not done anything wrong, an extraordinary statement when we recall the current hysteria about youthful anti-social behaviour and the tone of the summoning letter and C's ABC.

We even offered that A and B would agree verbally to consider amending any behaviour which might cause problems, within reasonable limits. Not interested was our PC - the only game on the table was 'Sign the ABC'. In the end, PC terminated the meeting and we left.

I met N and C when we got back to M's home in Park Street - N regretted allowing C to sign, C was equally non-plussed, and also quite evidently a well-behaved, normal child.

What is Going ON?

Readers will judge perhaps that this episode raises serious issues about our children's rights:

- * the right to freedom of assembly
- * the right to a fair hearing
- * the right to play
- * the right to non-discrimination
- * the right to be consulted.

The first, second and fourth are in the European Convention, now part of our law, the others in the UN Convention, to which we pay lip service at least.

What does this business suggest? That if there are complaints about children, they must always be in the wrong? That when a local authority and the police want a solution they devise a wholly objectionable, oppressive scheme which denies children basic human rights? That no one was interested in the truth, only in a cheap fix solution, made at the expense of the children's reputation (another 2-Convention Right broken) and of their basic

Charities Condemn Microchip Implant to Track Child aged Eleven

Children's charities have strongly criticised the decision by parents of an 11-year-old girl to implant a microchip in her arm so her whereabouts can be tracked. Danielle Duval is due to be implanted with the microchip at Reading University in the next few weeks. Cost approx £20

Tink Palmer, principal policy and practice officer at Barnardo's, said that she had "grave reservations" about the procedure, which she considers ill thought out.

"We need to think about the ethical issues and the psychological impact on the young person," she said. "I'd far rather this didn't happen. Surely we should be trying to teach children about being sensible and safe." Meanwhile, the **Children's Society** stressed that 'microchipping' avoids the "real issue" of how to ensure children are brought up in a safe environment.

For Fair Play for Children, **Jan Cosgrove** (National Organiser): "The whole notion of Childhood freedom and independence is compromised by such developments. It is an intrusion into a child's privacy also. The approach is one of 'restrict the child to keep it safe', rather than creating safer environments for



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liberties? Is this one of the proffered nostrums to 'youth disorder'?

Sweep The Kids Off The Streets?

We see a consequence here of the play-to-the-gallery mentality of national and local politicians - this device is a pre-ASBO contract, used in an insensitive, stupid and unacceptable manner. If our society is now turning to means of public control which amount to 'Sweep the Kids Off the Streets', we have indeed reached a serious position, one which Fair Play must now raise warnings about.

Many will read this and perhaps say, well, why not sign, for a quiet life? What harm if you're doing nothing wrong? If such a view holds in our society, that is condoning the oppression of a weak minority. The idea that it is acceptable to clear children from public spaces to satisfy complaints from people who do not have to justify their facts should be anathema in a civilised society.

This particular case is not at all resolved - M has provided the Council now with evidence about the person she believes may be behind all of this. We await any outcome from the Council as to the refusal to sign. M is keeping the boys indoors (half term) which she terms 'house arrest' for reasons she says are unfair and yet she fears loss of her home.

I am now seeking to contact the local authority at the seniormost level. Let's be clear - reasonable and fair measures to tackle proven anti-social behaviour are one thing. A procedure which pressures children to sign an agreement to limit their liberty in order to resolve what seems to be unproven allegations which are part of neighbourly disputes is a step too far. It is happening.

We might ask - what on earth do the children make of all this, of the heavy-handed threats of imprisonment, fines and in C's case at the interview, being told that if she had a criminal record she could not get the job she said she wanted when she was asked about this. A was just appalled at the whole shenanigans, and all three's sense of trust in adult institutions, especially the police, surely seriously dented. We maybe also should ask - if state institutions believe this is acceptable behaviour towards children, **who's next?**

**WE JUST LOVE GETTING
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Pact To Combat Youth Crime

**Mike Hornby: Liverpool Echo
(17/10/2002)**

with acknowledgements to The
Echo and Mr Hornby

A NEW scheme to combat youth disorder is being launched in Wirral. First-time young offenders will face the so called referral orders.

After appearing in court, the young person is referred to a **youth offender panel** which consists of two volunteers recruited from local community, alongside one member of Wirral youth offending team.

They discuss the details of the offence with the young person, parents and crime victim then agree a tailor-made contract.

According to **Kevin Miller**, director of Wirral social services, under this contract the offender could be made to write a letter of apology to the victim or remove graffiti or clean up estates and communities.

Referral orders are available at the youth court for 10 to 17-year-olds.

The programme will also include activities to prevent further offending, such as getting young people



UN Children's Rights Report Shows All Not Well In UK

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on 4th October issued its Concluding Observations on the second periodic report of the United Kingdom on this country's compliance with and performance regarding implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The UK submitted its report in September 1999 and the Committee held a number of hearings. Much media attention was paid to issues such as abolition of corporal punishment, the treatment of children in the criminal justice system, children who are asylum seekers etc. However, the Report and Conclusions covered a much wider remit.

Serious Concerns Not Addressed

When the first UK report was examined in 1995, the UN Committee found a number of serious concerns including:

- high level of violence against children including corporal punishment and sexual abuse
- extent of child poverty and children begging/sleeping on the streets
- high rates of teenage pregnancy
- low age of criminal responsibility
- lack of respect for children's views in education and other services
- discrimination in access to health and health services
- lack of effective government structures for children, including independent bodies to promote children's rights.

On this second enquiry, the Committee noted with concern that quite a few concerns above raised on the first report phase remained insufficiently addressed, although it welcomed progress in a number of areas. For example, re: our reservation to article 22 concerning children seeking refugee or asylum status, the Committee states that as our law is in compliance with the article, our government should withdraw its reservation. On Article 37(c) (child to be separated from adults if deprived of liberty), the Committee is concerned that children are still detained with adults despite



Opinion

This is your chance to 'shine'. Let's have your views on Issues-Play. After all, there's a lot that needs saying when it comes to ensuring our children can exercise their Right to Play

In the last edition of Play Action, Sarah Jewell commented on the state of local authority spending on children's play and on the general perception of children in Britain.

More often than not children are denied any voice. The media seems to see children and young people as either victims or potential victims or as anti social thugs hell bent on terrorising whole communities.

What is not asked is what about the commitment that the Government and society has in general in providing adequate play and recreational facilities for them.

Nor do the media in general ask why we spend so little on play and recreation and why when we do the facilities offered are bland, boring and poorly designed.



UN CONVENTION REPORT - UK

some efforts to reduce the numbers.

Time for a Children's Rights Act based on the UN Convention

The incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK domestic law (after 50 years!) via the Human Rights Act 1998 is welcomed, but surprise is expressed by the Committee that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has not been thus incorporated. The Committee also notes there is no formal machinery to ensure that new legislation complies with the Convention. The Committee argues that the UN Convention Rights are far broader and more detailed than the European Convention's. The implication seems to be that this is even more reason for such legislation.

Probably alone of UK organisations concerned with Children's Rights, Fair Play for Children has made this very same point in the past two years, for much the same reason. Jan Cosgrove, National Organiser: "The UN Committee is recommending the UN Convention is enshrined in our law in a Children's Rights Act, and whatever the blandishments about supporting Children's Rights Commissioners we hear from the domestic scene civil rights lobby, this surely must now be the major objective for all those convinced that we need to do more to protect and promote children's rights. No doubt it will appeal to our domestic media like a hole in the head - witness the scare stories about the Human Rights Act when that was under discussion - but one must ask, if we are prepared to sign a Convention about our children's rights, surely we should be prepared to give it the force of domestic law, testable in our courts in the last resort. That is now the position with the European Convention - or are we saying that children's rights are only for other countries to put in order?"

On Children's Rights Commissioners, the Committee welcomes the establishment of one for Wales but is concerned at its limited remit, especially on non-devolved matters, and welcomes also the proposals for Scotland and Northern Ireland. But there is concern that there is no independent children's rights institution of this kind for England.

Child Poverty and Need for a Fair Deal

There is concern also about the persistence of high degrees for child poverty, although the government target to halve it by 2010 and to eradicate it within a generation is acknowledged.

Children First Clubs secures partnerships to launch in 2003

Children First Clubs are now in planning stage with several sites in Central London and the South East for 2003. The group are funded by the Bank of Scotland and are planning four facilities over the next five years. The facility will be positioned next to a leading brand in the Health and Fitness market, a retail park, an NHS Hospital and a unique children's concept.

This innovative concept situated next to Health and Fitness operators, Leisure destinations and the childcare market has been in development stage for 12 months and has appointed Mace as Project Leaders with HCD Architects and Zynk Design.

As Managing Director, **Andy Baker** says:

"We have been working with Mace, HCD and Zynk over the last 6 months as the leisure industry has never seen a 20,000 sq ft facility solely for children. Our generic footprint is ground breaking and offers a real ethos of healthy children coupled with childcare solutions for parents".

Other specialist operators involved in this first ever health club for children include Swimming Nature, Crechendo, Kompan, Mini Kin, Triyoga, Premier Football, Instyle, Blakedown, Crown Fitness and



UN CONVENTION REPORT - UK

There are many other issues dealt with by the Committee, but there are two areas not much touched upon by other children's and civil rights agencies but which are of concern to Fair Play. Of course (and this is not cynicism, merely a true reflection of the true status of play, and one might argue, of children) there is no reference to article 31 (the Right to Play etc), but one aspect of our long-standing concern re: resources for children's play, leisure and culture is addressed.

Article 31.2 pledges this country, as a signatory, to 'promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity'. [In 1994-ish, Fair Play collated local government information about leisure and cultural expenditure by the sector, amounting to around £1.2 billion, but found that only 4.9% was spent directly on children's play and recreation, whereas population figures suggested there were around 18% children. In recent months, we have found it not at all easy to revisit this area of concern for lack of easily accessible statistics.]

On a broader front, but entirely relevant to the above, the Committee has identified a similar problem on a much broader front and recommends that the Government must ensure 'transparent analysis of sectorial and total budgets across the State Party and in the devolved administrations to show the proportion spent on children, to identify priorities and to allocate resources to the "maximum extent of available resources"'. Jan, for Fair Play: "We told you so. It's been clear that for decades children have had a raw deal, and this Committee's observations give that fact an international dimension. It says something to the world concerning our national attitudes to our children."

Change UK Laws not in Line with Convention

On criminal justice issues, the most serious concerns remain unresolved, indeed perhaps worsened - the age of criminal responsibility remains, at 10, far too low in the Committee's view, and it is especially concerned that, since the first report, 12-14 year olds are being deprived of their liberty. The concern is that increasing numbers of children are held in detention for lesser offences and that longer periods of detention are now available as a result of detention and training orders being available to the courts. Deprivation of

HCB Associates. All are involved in facility design, programming and operation.

Leading children's health expert, **Rachel Woodward**, and creative arts consultant, **Kirsten Weinstein**, have been recruited from Australia and the USA in order to develop innovative, new programmes in children's health and arts.

As **Rachel Woodward**, Health Director, says:

"In order to develop the best programmes in the world, we need the best operators and consultants in the market to work with us under one roof. Not only will this produce commercially driven programmes that children want, it will solve the family dilemma of driving their children around during afterschool, weekends and holiday periods. It will also enable both parents and non parents to then enjoy the separate adult facility next door in peace and quiet."

WELCOME FOR NEW TAX CREDIT

The launch of the new **Child Tax Credit** and **Working Tax Credit** will provide a simpler and more streamlined system to support families and make work pay. The new integrated Tax Credits will also include support with the costs of childcare but this will be paid directly to the main carer rather than through the wage packet.

Parents eligible for the childcare



UN CONVENTION REPORT - UK

liberty is not, in the Committee's view, being used therefore as a last resort and for the shortest time possible. Once detained, the Committee mirrors widespread national concern at the poor conditions and inadequate services and protection afforded to children.

The Committee expressed concern about measures in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which may violate the principles and provisions of the Convention - the UK is urged to review them to make them compatible with the Convention. Jan Cosgrove: "Nothing more aptly underlines the fuss we in Fair Play have been making about the 1998 Act provisions for Curfews, now extended to 15 year olds. We said the whole notion was incompatible with the UN Convention (and likely also the European Convention. These are not just daft provisions, they are anti-liberty and thus dangerous."

"On 24th September Cherie Booth, in a major lecture on children's rights in London, looked forward to the date of the Committee's publication of this report in the knowledge that, whilst some progress has been made, the Government and the UK would be found wanting. The concern and surprise is the serious extent to which this is true. Much more remains to be done. When we see a country where all children living here can fully claim their right to play, we will know then that the society and environment in which they live is adequate to all of their needs, as expressed by their entitlement to Rights as laid down in the Convention. And when Governments (and the Committee) recognise the true value of Play as an indicator of the general well-being of children, we will have arrived at a truly child-centred

element of the new Working Tax Credit could claim up to 70 per cent of their childcare costs up to £135 per week for one child and 70 per cent of childcare costs of up to £200 per week for two or more children.

Other features of the new system include extended eligibility of the Child Tax Credit to students and student nurses and a higher rate of Child Tax Credit that will be paid to parents with children under one year of age or with a disability.

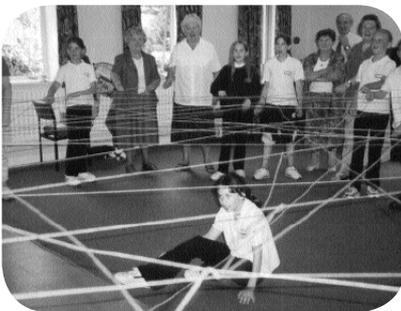
It will be a more transparent system for families to access and it is an acknowledgement by Government of the extra costs faced by families with very young children and children with disabilities. However many of the difficulties that face parents paying for childcare remain in this new system.

The typical cost of a nursery place for a child under two is now £120 a week or more than £6200 a year, up almost 10% in the last year. Working families on lower incomes who will get help towards their childcare bill through the new Working Tax Credit will still have to find 30% of the cost of childcare. The average award through the current childcare tax credit of £39.22 a week is less than a third of the typical cost of a nursery place.

At the same time, the vast majority of workless families will continue to get no specific help at all towards the cost of childcare. Three million children live

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PRINCIPLES AND VALUES OF PLAYWORK

The **National Occupational Standards for Playwork** describe the functions that competent practitioners should carry out at work. However, the standards are based on a set of principles and values that underpin good practice in Playwork. These principles and values are not unique to the National Occupational Standards. They summarise the outcomes of a number of studies of children's play and professional Playwork, most recently 'Best Play' and 'The First Claim' in Wales, and these update the earlier 'Assumptions and Values of Playwork' that accompanied previous editions of the National Occupational Standards.

The first principle is about children's play:

Children's play is for its own sake, not for a particular outcome. Play is about exploration, risk and challenge and is essential for children to develop. Children choose what and how they play.

The second principle is about the professional role of the playworker: The main role of the playworker is to ensure that their play setting offers opportunities for children to access and experience all play types

The playworker has unconditional respect for children and supports their play without controlling it.

The Values of Playwork:

Child at the centre of the process

The child must be at the centre of the process; the opportunities and the organisation which supports, co-ordinates and manages these opportunities should always start with the child's needs and be flexible enough to meet those needs.

Empowerment

Playworkers should empower children, consulting with them and supporting their right to make choices, discover their own solutions, play and develop at their own pace and in

in families where there is no working adult but only 20,000 children can access services paid for by their local authority. While childcare continues to be seen as an issue that concerns only those families in work millions of children in workless families will continue to miss out on the benefits of integrated childcare and early education while their parents are trapped in a low pay/no pay cycle.

The United Nations Local Agenda 21 and Young People

Adopted by the Plenary session of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio in June 1992, the Local Agenda 21 (LA21) stresses the vital role of local communities in taking steps towards "the fulfilment of basic human needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future."

Governments are therefore urged to "recognise, accommodate, promote, and strengthen the role of indigenous people and their communities."

Young people in particular are recognised as having a crucial part to play in this process "because it affects their lives today and has implications for their futures."

Governments are therefore urged to "establish task forces that include youth and youth non-



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their own way.

Children's rights

Playworkers respect children's rights and never try to control a child's play unless it becomes an obvious physical or emotional danger to themselves or others.

Risk and challenge

Playworkers should ensure that children have access to a rich variety of play environments that stimulate and provide opportunities for risk, challenge and the growth of confidence and self esteem.

Safety

Playworkers should recognise that children have the right to play environments which are free from hazard and in which children are physically and emotionally safe.

Children's individuality

Playworkers should respect children's right to be individuals, value their diversity and demonstrate a considerate and caring attitude to them and their families.

Equality of opportunity

Playworkers should acknowledge the importance of equality of opportunity for all children and families, and promote this equality through anti-discriminatory practice and positive attitudes to all.

New experiences

Playworkers should enable children to extend their exploration and understanding of the natural and wider world and therefore offer environmental, social and cultural opportunities beyond the child's immediate experience.

Positive role models

Playworkers should demonstrate positive role models for children, working co-operatively with them, their parents, carers, colleagues and other professionals, thereby encouraging children to be sensitive to the needs of others.

Reflection and continuous improvement

Playworkers should regularly reflect on, evaluate and improve their practice, seeking advice, support, information and/or training wherever possible or necessary.

Play Types

These play types are adapted from 'Best Play' (National Playing Fields Association, March 2000) and 'The First

governmental organisations to develop educational and awareness programmes specifically targeted to the youth population on critical issues pertaining to youth." These task forces are to use "formal and non-formal educational methods to reach a maximum audience" and "national and local media, non-governmental organisations, businesses and other organisations should assist in these task forces."

At the moment, however, a number of obstacles stand in the way of the regeneration of local communities. Local communities have declined in influence not only due to the centralisation of political authority but also to the centralisation and homogenisation of the media through which community is expressed and manifested.

So long as local people have little or no influence over the media through which their traditions, values and tastes and therefore needs are communicated, local communities will continue to decline at the expense of their larger, centralised counterparts. Young people, in particular, are deprived of outlets through which they can express their "unique perspectives that need to be taken into account."

Of vital importance to the LA21 is therefore to ensure that local communities and young people are provided with the opportunities and means to communicate their not only their hopes and needs but also their customs, values and traditions - the culture that informs their lifestyle choices.



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Claim...a framework for playwork quality assessment' (Play Wales/Chwarae Cymru and PlayEd, 2001) which in turn are adapted from earlier work by Bob Hughes.

Symbolic play

Play which provides opportunities for control, gradual exploration and increased understanding, without the risk of being out of one's depth. For example, using a piece of wood to symbolise a person, or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring.

Rough and tumble play

Close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, tickling, gauging relative strength, discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display. For example, playful fighting, wrestling and chasing where the children involved are obviously unhurt and give every indication that they are enjoying themselves.

Socio-dramatic play

The enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. For example, playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row.

Social play

Play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended. For example, any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols, i.e. games, conversations, making something together.

Creative play

Play that allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise. For example, creating something using a range of materials and tools for its own sake.

Communication play

Play using words, nuances or gestures, for example, mime, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, debate, poetry.

Dramatic play

Play that dramatises events in which the child is not a direct participant. For example, presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral.

The Agenda therefore takes care to emphasise the importance of not only "the dynamics of both the physical/biological and socio-economic environment" but also aspects of "human (which may also include spiritual) development."

To this end, governments are urged to "promote a co-operative relationship with the media, popular theatre groups, and entertainment and advertising industries by initiating discussions to mobilise their experience in shaping public behaviour and consumption patterns and making wide use of their methods."

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Deep play

Play that allows the child to encounter experiences that have a high level of risk (as felt by the child) so that they can develop survival skills and conquer fear. For example, jumping on to an aerial runway or balancing on a beam.

Exploratory play

Play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects. For example, engaging with an object or area and, either by manipulation or movement, assessing its properties, possibilities and content, such as stacking bricks.

Fantasy play

Play which rearranges the world in the child's way, a way which is unlikely to occur. For example, playing at being a pilot flying around the world or the owner of an expensive car.

Imaginative play

Play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply. For example, imagining that you are, or pretending to be, a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there.

Locomotor play

Movement in any and every direction for its own sake. For example, chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing.

Mastery play

Control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments. For example, digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires.

Object play

Play that uses potentially infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements. For example, examinations and novel use of any object e.g. cloth, paintbrush, cup.

Role play

Play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. For example, brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone, driving a car.

From: Hughes B. (2002) 'A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types

Children's Services Review

The Government has conducted a cross cutting review to examine best practices in local partnership delivery of integrated children's services and to identify barriers to better coordination. The Review, SR2002, also sought to establish key objectives for children's services, to identify obstacles to meeting those objectives and to assess departmental spending and priorities against those findings. SR2002 takes a three-pronged approach to strengthening preventative services:

- support existing local partnerships and pilot new models for joint working;
- target mainstream children's programmes to reach the most in need; and
- fill existing gaps in specialised services.

SR2002 provides resources to create at least 250,000 childcare places, including those provided directly within children's centres, in order to advance the Government's lone parent employment and child poverty objectives. Resources will be targeted through assistance to providers in areas of market failure.

There will be support for the creation and operation of children's centres in disadvantaged areas. These will build, where possible,



Come out to play

The article was written for the Guardian on this year's National Play Day. Only one problem: there are very few places where children can run about and have fun. Ken Worpole on the lessons we can learn from the Dutch
Ken Worpole

Guardian (Wed August 7, 2002)

Today is National Playday, for those who haven't noticed. The fact that we have to remind ourselves each year that children need to play (and in a predominantly urban society, this means playing outdoors, in streets, parks and other open spaces) is in itself cause for concern. Not only is Britain regarded as the "dirty man of Europe" for the shabby quality of its public realm, but it is also one of the least child-friendly countries in Europe.

"Boring" was how the majority of children described their local parks and playgrounds in a national survey by the Children's Society and the Children's Play Council. Further more, 45% said that they were not allowed to play with water, 36% not allowed to climb trees, 27% not allowed to play on climbing equipment and 23 % not allowed to ride bikes or use skateboards.

A combination of parental anxiety, local-authority penny-pinching and cuts in non-statutory provision is in danger of producing a culture of childhood which leapfrogs from play-school to chatrooms, bypassing street games, adventure play and the freedom of the city which comes with territorial independence.

There is other evidence of growing dissatisfaction among children and young people at what they are offered in terms of play and urban quality. Research published earlier this year by the government's Urban Green Spaces Task Force (of which I was a member) found that two-thirds of nine-11-year-olds in the UK are dissatisfied with the quality of outdoor play facilities where they live. For 15-16-year-olds this rose to 81%, higher than in any other European country. By contrast, 79% of 15- 16-year-olds in Switzerland

on existing SureStart facilities and other provision. By March 2006 an additional 300,000 children are expected to have access to health, education and other services as a result.

As well as joining up existing services, funding arrangements and targets will be streamlined. Local and national government will be supported to focus on delivering this vision by giving local authorities an enhanced role in supporting delivery and by bringing responsibility for childcare, early years education and Sure Start together into a single inter departmental unit. There will be a new integrated budget for children, childcare and early years learning worth £1.5 billion a year by 2005-06.

Greater funding and responsibility for delivery of childcare services will be devolved to local authorities. SR2002 found that local authorities were best placed to assess local needs.

The crosscutting review identified small residual gaps in service provision which SR2002 set out to address. For example, the Government is developing a national framework by improving the support that is available for parents and families at a local level.

Evidence shows that the voluntary sector is often best placed to provide these services but that where the sector is poorly resourced provision can be patchy. The Government has therefore made £25 million available to the voluntary sector to



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were satisfied with their local outdoor activities and facilities. And the oft-quoted study of childhood mobility across Europe by Mayer Hillman shows that children in Britain cycle less, travel independently on public transport less and are, in general, much more home-bound than their European peers.

It is not as though young people want a DisneyWorld on the doorstep. What they want is precisely what every other age group wants: parks within walking distance, with staff to look after them, clean toilets, a variety of play equipment that isn't broken and a bit of respect. Yet what they are offered, in their words, was "nothing... shit equipment for babies, rusty and crap, half a pipe in the middle of nowhere, rubbish everywhere, uncut grass, swings chained up or broken".

The main reason adults visit parks is to take children out to play. It was because of the strength of feeling among parents and young people that their needs were being ignored that the **Urban Green Spaces Task Force** chose to prioritise the interests of children and young people above all else. Unfortunately, its **Green Spaces, Better Places** report was presented to the government at the same time the Treasury announced its own review on public space and just before the parliamentary recess.

Largely informed by Home Office thinking, the Treasury's priorities turned out not to be more playgrounds and park-keepers, but more CCTV cameras and neighbourhood wardens; not more conviviality, but more convictions. **New Labour remains deeply ambivalent about the public realm: do they want towns and cities which are child-friendly or child-free?**

British politicians could learn a lot from the Netherlands. A good start would be a stunning exhibition, **Aldo van Eyck: The Playgrounds and the City** at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. It addresses this very issue: Van Eyck was an extremely talented architect who in 1947, at the age of 28, went to work at the office for public works in Amsterdam. The city had been badly ravaged by war, and in the "hunger winter" of 1944, more than 20,000 had died of starvation. Images of starving children scavenging for food in barren streets haunted the nation, and immediately after the war, politicians, artists and intellectuals called for a "newopen-heartedness" in social policy.

Van Eyck's first project was the construction of a small play-

expand its involvement in providing access to education in parenting skills.

By September 2004 there will be a free early years education place for all three year olds whose parents want one. All four year olds are now guaranteed a free place and 66 % of three year olds already have access to a free place.

The cross cutting review of children at risk underlined the need for mainstream services to work in a more integrated way, to focus on identifying problems early and to act more quickly to support children before difficulties become entrenched. Some of the extra spending in education will support the development of extended schools, particularly in disadvantaged areas, providing services such as health and social care, family learning and childcare.

It will also enable extension of programmes to address behavioural problems as early as possible. with multi-disciplinary Behaviour and Education Support Teams bringing specialist educational and health service support to clusters of schools; and will provide for learning mentors and learning support.

Mayor's Plan for London includes "fierce protection" of play spaces

The Draft London Plan, published in July by the Mayor and the Greater London Authority, includes specific commitments to



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ground (speelplaats) on the Bertelmanplein. Delighted with the popularity of the playground, he went on to design over 700 more in the city over the next 30 years. He not only drew the plans but designed the equipment, which was copied all over the world, not least by the planners of Britain's new towns.

Ingeborg de Roode, the exhibition's curator, says: "There is hardly anyone in the Netherlands between 20 and 60 who has not swung upside down on one of his somersault frames." Many of the playgrounds were established in response to letters from parents and tenants' organisations keen to provide somewhere for their children to play. There were also "Nimby"-type complaints at the time about sand from the sandpits blowing through open windows or girls exhibiting "their dirty drawers".

Although Van Eyck was already convinced of the value of play, he was also excited about the opportunities created by these new street-corner playgrounds for re-establishing community networks. He had been fascinated by the way that a heavy fall of snow in Amsterdam allowed children to become "temporarily lords of the city". In a memorable phrase, he asked architects and planners to conceive a way of designing city spaces which gave children a right to freedom which was "more permanent than snow".

Today many of Van Eyck's playgrounds have disappeared beneath development, though the commitment to public play provision in the Netherlands is still strong. On the aeroplane to Amsterdam, I read in the newspapers that the mayor of Paris, **Bertrand Delano**, had announced that this summer's ?1m scheme to close 3.4km of the Right Bank to traffic - in order to create an urban beach for families who can't afford a holiday - had attracted more than three million visitors in its first week.

Back in London, I was sent a copy of Ken Livingstone's new manifesto for the creation of 100 new public spaces in London. **Despite the worthiness of its 10 pilot schemes, the word "play" isn't mentioned once in the mayor's plan.** What is it about the British that makes the presence of children and young people in our streets, parks and public spaces, seem such a threat? Couldn't we do with an era of "open-heartedness"?

Ken Worpole's book on open-air planning in Europe, *Here Comes the Sun*, is published by Reaktion Books.



"vigorous action to protect and develop London's network of open space, parks, play spaces, and recreational grounds. Play spaces in particular are identified as assets that will be fiercely protected, enhanced and made more accessible". The plan - London's Spatial Development Strategy for the next 15-20 years - replaces central government planning guidance for Local Authorities' unitary development plans and went out for consultation and 'examination in public. All Londoners were invited to comment on the draft plan before 30 September. For copies of the plan or its summary, contact the GM at 020 7983 4100 or visit www.london.gov.uk

London Play, which has been lobbying the Mayor's office for the London Plan and other GLA strategies to take account of children's play needs, responded to the consultation.

Contact London Play, Unit F6/F7, 89 Fonthill Road, London N4 3JH, Tel: 020 7272 2464 (also textphone), fax: 020 7272 7670, email: enquiries@londonplay.org.uk, website: www.londonplay.org.uk



Courts to lock up child robbers:

Alan Travis: The Guardian (16/04/2002) NEW powers for courts to lock up hundreds of persistent teenage offenders aged from 12 to 15 while they await trial have been announced by David Blunkett. The move will put the already overcrowded prison and youth justice systems

under immense pressure as they struggle to find sufficient places to detain the young teenagers, including street robbers, in secure accommodation.

There is also scepticism over whether Treasury funds have been secured to fund the £13,000-a-month cost of a place in one of the local authority secure units where the young teenagers will be held.

A Waste of space: Mike George: The Guardian (03/04/2002)

AT a Labour party conference two years ago, Tony Blair announced an extra £750m government funding for school sports facilities. This extra money was welcomed at the time, as was the prime minister's recognition of the links between sport and recreation, and wider health and welfare concerns. But critics say that the joined-up thinking which the government espouses has not done anything like enough to stem the continuing loss of playing fields. Schools, colleges and the private sector are still selling off land used for play, sport and recreation – albeit at a less frantic pace than in the 1980s and 1990s. No one really knows exactly how many sports fields or recreation amenities are being lost in different parts of the country. But threats to open spaces, as reported to the National Playing Fields Association (NPFSA), are numbered in the hundreds. In Greater London over the past two years, at least 90 sites were reported to be under threat.

So, is this really a cure for our couch Potatoes? :

Deepa Shah: Evening Standard (26/03/2002) An examination of the latest fad to hit children in the fight against obesity and the effects that this is having on them. Increasingly in London children are joining gym's at a younger age leading to concerns about the effects this may have on their development later on in life. John Matthews, chief executive of the Physical Education Association of the UK said. "Children should not be treated like mini-adults. They are different physiologically and in their motivation."

Children at one in three schools don't do any sport:

Tim Miles and Hugh Dougherty: Evening Standard (23/06/2002) According to a survey recently carried out by the Evening Standard nearly a third of all schools in the capital play no competitive sport whatsoever and a similar number play less than once a week. This has caused concern amongst health experts who are worried over the growing levels of obesity amongst children. Teachers have blamed the increasing pressure to meet educational targets in numeracy and literacy, as well as spiralling numbers of exams for sports being crowded out of the curriculum.

Sport is magnet for child sex offenders: Max Daly: The

Big Issue: (17-23/06/2002) A recent report into child abuse by swimming coaches concluded that too often coaches who use their position to prey on young children often have too many chances to carry out their offences in private. The report entitled "In at the deep end" was carried out by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's Child Protection in Sport Unit based on its findings on 78 cases of abuse. The report drew some unpleasant conclusions. It concluded that sports coaching was not a breeding ground but a target occupation for abusers. The abuse was most likely to be carried out by coaches on elite athletes who work closely with coaches and in isolation, while children are away from home performing at competitions. The report stated "We see the sexual abuser as a person who choose the sport of swimming as a venue in which to abuse. Their power and status enabled situations to develop in which abuse could be perpetrated and go undetected for a considerable amount of time." The research also found that abusers often "groomed" swimmers, club officials and parents in order for the offences to go unnoticed and uninterrupted for many years. Research published last year in the British Journal of Sports Medicine found that as many as one in five young athletes may have experienced sexual victimisation by their coaches.

Tobacco ads will be banned in months:

Patrick Hennessy: Evening Standard (22/08/2002) Almost all tobacco advertising is to be banned in Britain later this year. New measures will outlaw ads in magazines, newspapers on the internet and on billboards in a move which the Government claims will save 3,000 lives a year. The legislation offers controversial exception to high profile sports including Formula 1 motor racing which rely on tobacco sponsorship for large parts of their income. All types of marketing will be outlawed, including selling shirts and other clothes which feature cigarette brands. Most sports will have to end all tobacco related sponsorship by July 2003. Formula 1 and international snooker will be given until October 2006 to find alternative sources of income.

Cherie Booth Attacks Government's Record on Children's Rights:

Clare Dyer: The Guardian (25/09/2002) **CHERIE** Booth criticised the government for being "half-hearted" about children's rights and failing to live up to its obligations under the UN convention of the rights of the child. She called on the government to set up a children's rights commission to safeguard the rights of vulnerable children and give them a voice. In her lecture to an audience of lawyers, child care professionals and politicians, Ms Booth said that children from the poorest families in the UK were among the unhealthiest in the developed world and that the UK had "one of the worst records in Europe for locking up children".



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