All around the garden: A review of Irish local government policy on the built environment for children and young people in social housing

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Abstract

The Irish National Children's Strategy (NCS, 2000) includes the goal that children will receive quality supports and services. Fourteen objectives were developed in pursuit of this goal, including 'that children will benefit from a built and natural environment that supports their physical and emotional well-being'. It was envisaged in the NCS that policy implementation would happen locally. This paper assesses how this objective has been articulated in local policy on the urban built environment and how it supports children's and young people's play, recreation and mobility in their communities, particularly for those children living in social housing. A case study approach is adopted, exploring the policies of two Irish local authorities – Galway City Council and South Dublin County Council – and interviewing key stakeholders in both locations. After a discussion of the findings, implications for current policy, at national and local levels, are outlined.

Key words

Children, young people, social housing, local policy, child-friendly environments

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Abbreviations

AIT	Area Implementation Team (RAPID)
CDB	City/County Development Board
CDI	Child Development Initiative, Tallaght West
CFC	Child-friendly Cities
CSC	Children's Services Committees
DCRGA	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
DDDA	Dublin Docklands Development Authority
DEHLG	Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government
GCC	Galway City Council
GCDB	Galway City Development Board
LAPS	Local Area for Play
LEAPS	Local Equipped Area for Play
LGMSB	Local Government Management Services Board
MUGA	Multi Use Games Area
NEAPS	Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play
NCO	National Children's Office
NCS	National Children's Strategy
NCSIG	National Children's Strategy Implementation Group
NPRC	National Play Resource Centre
OMCYA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development
RAS	Rental Accommodation Scheme
SPC	Strategic Planning Committee
SDCC	South Dublin County Council
SDCDB	South Dublin County Development Board
SDCSC	South Dublin Children's Services Committee

1.   Aim, objectives and rationale

1.1   Introduction

The Irish National Children's Strategy (NCS, Government of Ireland, 2000) includes the national goal that children[1] will receive quality supports and services. Fourteen objectives were developed in pursuit of this goal, including 'that children will benefit from a built[2] and natural environment that supports their physical and emotional well-being'.

This paper assesses how this objective is being articulated in local policy on the urban built environment in public spaces, particularly in relation to children and young people living in social housing. A case study approach is adopted exploring the policies of two Irish local authorities: Galway City Council (GCC) and South Dublin County Council (SDCC), via interviews of key stakeholders and documentary reviews. The interviews, documentary and literature reviews were conducted in 2007and 2008.

Meeting the environmental objective in the NCS is the responsibility of both national and local governments.[3] It was envisaged in the NCS that the implementation of the strategy would occur locally, with national government providing policy guidance and managing change through new national-level integrative structures. Therefore local policy should reflect the NCS's aspirations, aims and objectives, and local government structures and processes are central to the successful achievement of the NCS objective.

Key local published plans and strategies are reviewed in this paper to assess the extent to which children and young people are visible within their goals, actions and anticipated

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[1] The term 'children' refers to people aged up to 18 years. This paper also refers to 'young people', specifically meaning those between 12 and 18 years of age, although the term is often used to refer to people up to the age of 25 years.

[2] The public built environment for children and young people can encompass: designated public play and recreational places like playgrounds, play areas, parks, community centres, youth cafés and sports grounds and amenities; corridors of activity such as streets, foot paths, cycle paths, open green spaces in housing estates and neighbourhoods; outdoor semi-public space in apartment complexes; public greenways and walkways; and civic spaces like town squares and commercial amenities.

[3] Local government is the term used for all County, City, Borough and Town Councils in Ireland and they have two main functions: delivering public services and representing the interests of its communities at all levels of government (Curley, 2006:10).

outputs and outcomes in relation to the public built environment, and to explore the kinds of policies being adopted.

The rationale for the inclusion of the environmental objective in the NCS was the recognition that the built environment influences child well-being, and that 'a high-quality residential environment can facilitate children's play and learning opportunities in a way which goes beyond the facilities offered by playgrounds and other dedicated recreational facilities' (Government of Ireland, 2000:78). The NCS expresses concern about the quality and safety of the outdoor public realm for children in Ireland:

> One of the outcomes of our current level of economic growth has been a perception that the built environment has become less safe and accessible for children. Increasing demand for new housing and busier lifestyles with increased levels of traffic in our major urban centres, have combined to limit access to green and other open spaces and reduce the mobility of children in their own communities. These developments have the capacity to reduce opportunities for play, recreation and social interaction with peers and friends (Government of Ireland, 2000:78).

The built environment actions proposed for local authorities in the NCS focus on improving outdoor public space, by enhancing the design of open space and improving safe access to it for children and by considering children's safe mobility in their communities. This paper responds to that concern, focusing on policy on outdoor public space and amenities for children.

Local government policy and action influence the shape of communities and residential areas for children through how they interpret and implement national housing and planning and development policy, and through their development and implementation of their own policies in areas such as housing design and management, roads and transport, and planning and development. Local authorities interpret and implement policies in the light of local needs, politics and resources and thereby influence the

quality and safety of communities for children and young people. Both local and mainstream policies that influence environments for children and young people are examined in this paper.

This paper was developed within the context of a dearth of Irish research and policy analysis on children's and young people's environments.

1.2   Aim and objectives

The aim of the paper is to assess how the built environment objective in the National Children's Strategy is being articulated in relevant local policy for children and young people, particularly in social housing.

The objectives are to:

1. **Assess the extent to which children and young people are considered stakeholders in high-level local policy on the built environment.**

To what extent do key policies include specific objectives and actions related to children and young people?

2. **Analyse local policy documents to explore the nature of the strategies and actions proposed.**

What kinds of strategies and actions are suggested, and neglected?

3. **Explore factors impacting on the local implementation of local and national strategies and plans that support outdoor play and recreation.**

What factors are impacting on the transmission of national policy at local level? What kinds of contextual issues are influencing local implementation? Which factors act as barriers and enablers to developing child-friendly communities?

The paper provides a series of 'implementation examples' from Galway city and south county Dublin to illustrate the issues arising for local authorities in planning and developing amenities and physical environments for children and young people,

particularly in social housing areas. This paper does not provide an audit of local provision. The learning achieved in other countries in developing environments and policy for children and young people that may be relevant to the Irish context is also described.

1.3   Rationale for examining local policy

The strategic focus of Irish children's policy is beginning to shift from inputs and activities to child outcomes, as expressed in the Agenda for Children's Services (OMCYA, 2007c) developed by central government to guide service providers in achieving better child outcomes. One of the seven national outcomes for children in the Agenda is that they be 'secure in their immediate and wider physical environment'. But it can be difficult to identify outcomes for children without having specifically planned for them (Simpson, 1997). Therefore identifying the extent to which local policy includes goals and targets for children is one step in understanding how local policy and services impact on child outcomes. One way of talking about children's inclusion in policy and practice is to think in terms of their *visibility*. In this context visibility refers to the extent to which children and children's issues are explicitly mentioned and taken into account in the drawing up of policies and in their implementation. Children's visibility in local policy is important because their needs and rights may not be met when policy, planning and resource allocation are viewed as benefiting a 'universal citizen', and a trickle-down effect is presumed when parents' or 'family' needs are seen to be met (Bartlett, 2005).

Children and young people in social housing are particularly affected by the quality of their neighbourhoods, and processes of community improvement are important for them (Chawla, 2002). They rely on and are more likely to use public spaces and amenities for play, recreation and social interaction, because access is free. Children and young people in Ireland do not equally share the opportunities for positive development and well-being that outdoor environments can afford. The safety and quality of environments in social housing can be compromised by inappropriate design, by the social problems present in some social housing developments, and, in the past at least, by inadequate statutory investment in improving and maintaining public amenities.

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While their immediate environments matter, children and young people in social housing also interact with and within spaces and places that are beyond the immediate confines of their social housing scheme. Children and young people share community spaces and amenities with children from other housing tenures and socio-economic backgrounds because their closest or most desired amenities may not be located close to home. Also, social housing is increasingly spatially dispersed to encourage tenure and social mix. Integrated play and recreation is important in fostering social inclusion, and is a national policy objective (DEHLG, 2007a; National Children's Office, 2004; OMCYA, 2007a). Therefore local policy relating to children's and young people's public built environments in other tenures is also examined in this paper.

1.4   Layout of the paper

Section 2 describes the method used to review local policy. Section 3 analyses relevant Irish governance and policy on children's environments. Section 4 discusses research evidence on urban environments for children and young people. Section 5 presents the findings of the policy review and interviews. Section 6 discusses some of the policy and research implications arising in this review.

Key points
- The National Children's Strategy (NCS) expresses concern about the quality and safety of the outdoor public realm for children in Ireland.
- The NCS includes the objective 'that children will benefit from a built and natural environment that supports their physical and emotional well-being'. NCS implementation occurs at local level and so local government policies, structures and processes are central to the achievement of NCS objectives.
- The aim of this paper is to explore local government policy to assess if and how this objective is being articulated in local policy on the outdoor built environment, particularly in relation to children and young people living in social housing.
- There is a dearth of Irish research and policy evaluation and analysis on children's physical environments.
- Children and young people in social housing are particularly affected by the quality of their neighbourhoods – they rely on public spaces and amenities for play, recreation and social interaction because access is free. They use outdoor spaces and places in the immediate environs of their communities and share community spaces and amenities with children from other housing tenures and socio-economic backgrounds because their closest or most desired amenities may not be located near to their homes and because social housing is increasingly spatially dispersed. Integrated play and recreation is a national policy objective.

2   Method

2.1 Approach

There are 29 county councils and 5 city councils in Ireland. Reviewing the relevant policies of all local governments is impractical so a case study approach was adopted examining the relevant policies of Galway City Council and South Dublin County Council.

These local authorities were chosen because:

- Both have substantial child and youth populations;
- Differences and similarities in policy and implementation might be observed between a city council and a large urban county council;
- Both local authorities have experienced rapid, large-scale physical development;
- Both local authorities provide and manage substantial stocks of social housing; and
- Differences in policy and implementation may be evident between a local authority, GCC, which has declared its intention to become a child-friendly city and a local authority, SDCC, which has not.

The methods used were a content analysis of relevant local government policies; interviews with key local actors in policymaking and provision; a review of Irish national policy on children's and young people's environments; and a review of Irish and international research evidence on children's environments.

An advisory committee comprising the Combat Poverty Agency and representatives from both local authorities guided the review. It benefited from their knowledge and familiarity with local government, and they were important for feedback and clarification.

2.2   Methods

Literature reviews

The literature reviews provided a context for the policy review, and informed the interview schedules and development of themes for content analysis. The reviews focused on finding books, book chapters, reports, and journal articles providing

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research evidence on children's and young people's interaction with their physical environments, good practice in developing child-friendly environments, local governance for children, and relevant Irish policy. Database searches were undertaken using: Web of Knowledge, Synergy, JSTOR, BioMed Central, Google and Google Scholar. The search words "children", "young people", "youth", "families" were used with words and terms like: "built environment", "environments", "child-friendly cities", "child-friendly communities", "home zones", "play", "recreation", "mobility", "local governance", "local government".

The websites of relevant Irish agencies were searched, including: Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs; Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Department of Rural, Community and Gaeltacht Affairs; Combat Poverty Agency; Institute of Public Administration; and the National Play Resource Centre. Relevant international agencies' websites consulted include: UNICEF's Child-friendly Cities; the National Children's Bureau; and the Children's Play Council/Play England.

Content analysis

High-level local plans were analysed for evidence of planning for children and young people in built environment policy. They guide decisionmaking and actions, and should include policy goals, actions, targets, and anticipated outputs/outcomes. The City or County Development Board's 10-year strategies were analysed – they were considered in the NCS to be the key vehicle for local implementation – as were local Development Plans, which are blueprints for local planning and development. Local authority Corporate Plans were also reviewed as they guide local authority departments towards meeting common goals.

Lower-level local government policies reviewed include:

- RAPID Strategies and progress reports;
- Social Inclusion Plan (SDCC only);
- Child-Friendly City Plan (GCC only);
- Children's Play Plan (SDCC only);

- Relevant annual and progress reports;

- Anti-social behaviour policies;

- Recreation policies;

- Recent annual budgets; and

- Action Plans for Social and Affordable Housing.

An in-depth search of GCC's (www.galwaycity.ie) and SDCC's (www.sdcc.ie) websites was conducted in spring 2007, and most of the key local documents were located there. Other documents were sourced from local authority staff.

A table describing the purpose of the local policies reviewed, their relevance to developing children's environments, and the key structures and actors involved in developing and implementing the policies is found in Appendix 1.

Reflecting the concerns expressed in the NCS and the themes arising in the literature review, the local policies were analysed under the following policy areas:

- Public leisure and recreation;

- Public play provision;

- Public space; and

- Children's and young people's mobility in their communities.

Evidence of planning for play and recreation in higher-density living was also sought, as some social housing complexes are higher-density and national policy encourages higher density living to meet sustainable development objectives (DEHLG, 2007a).

A template was developed to analyse the content of the documents using these headings:

- Statements;

- Mission/vision/values;

- Aims and objectives;

- Responsible departments/committees/agencies;

- Actions and targets; and
- Current activities.

Interviews

Telephone and face-to-face interviews were undertaken in 2007 with key local stakeholders from both Dublin and Galway. The names and posts of those interviewed are listed in Appendix 3. The interviewees were selected based on their roles and responsibilities in relation to, and knowledge about, national and local policy on the built environment, play and recreation.

The interviews sought stakeholders' perspectives on:

- the adequacy of local policy and implementation in supporting built environments for children and young people, particularly for those living in social housing; and
- enablers and barriers in developing local play and recreation opportunities and on including children's interests in local planning, particularly for those living in social housing**.**

Key points
- Given the large number of local authorities in Ireland, a case study methodology was adopted for this paper. This review analyses local government policy on children's outdoor built environments in Galway city and south Dublin.
- The research methods used were: a documentary review of relevant local plans and strategies; interviews with key local actors; and literature and policy reviews.
- The rationale for analysing local policies and strategies is that they are high-level plans that guide decisions and actions, and may include policy and social goals, actions in pursuit of goals, targets, and anticipated outputs/outcomes. Given that the NCS is to be implemented locally, it was expected that relevant local policy should reflect its aspirations, aims and objectives.

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3   National and local policy context

3.1 Recent planning and development in Ireland

Ireland has experienced rapid physical transformation since the early 1990s. Residential and commercial building output has been extraordinary by European standards (Fahey and Duffy, 2007). Urban development was strongly influenced by speculative activity in the housing market. Planning and development was housing-led rather than people-focused (Focus Ireland et al, 2002), with local authorities under pressure to meet strong housing demand. Social housing remains a residual part of the housing system, although there has been an increased focus on supporting the quality of the social housing stock and on the physical and social regeneration of high-profile social housing areas. The National Economic and Social Council (2004) describes Ireland's planning and infrastructure development as weak, and identifies problems with extensive low-density development and a lack of integration of housing with transport and social infrastructure. NESC suggests that the patterns of settlement, neighbourhood design and density adopted during the period of Ireland's economic boom are storing up significant social, environmental and economic problems for the future.

The impact on child well-being of planning and development over the boom period has yet to be investigated. It appears that the impact of development on children's lives was not high on the planning and development agenda. Planning and development have not traditionally been considered by policymakers to be a 'children's issue' or a children's service. Within this context, the inclusion of an objective in the NCS on children's environments and actions relating to local planning and development policy is a significant step forward in making planning and development of the built environment a children's issue.

3.2 National implementation of the National Children's Strategy

The NCS was described in a mid-term review of its implementation as 'a landmark in the history of Ireland's approach to supporting children' (Peyton and Wilson, 2006). Until the 1990s, there was little by way of policy explicitly for and about children. The NCS is based on three national goals: children's lives will be better understood, children will

have a voice in matters that concern them, and children will receive quality supports and services. Objectives include 'that children will benefit from a built and natural environment that supports their physical and emotional well-being' and another related objective, that 'children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood'.

While innovative measures were developed in pursuit of the goals and objectives on children's participation and research, some of the service-related policies and actions contained in the NCS were pre-existing. Certainly the actions to progress the built environment objective were pre-existing, broad and not child-specific. Little guidance is given to local government in the NCS on developing child-friendly environments, other than that local government should account for children in relevant policies. However, commitments were made to develop national play and recreation policies.

No specific funding was allocated to the NCS's implementation (Peyton and Wilson, 2006). But children and young people, when consulted in the preparation of the NCS, said that they wanted more play and recreation opportunities. The Government committed to providing additional resources to develop more opportunities for play, leisure and cultural activities, with particular attention to be given in resource allocation to disadvantaged communities (Government of Ireland, 2000). It is difficult to evaluate resource allocation to people under 18 years as neither national nor local government prepare children's budgets, which explictly set out spending and investment across all areas of government for children. Also Irish policies do not present the planned level of expenditure on actions for children, and budget estimates are too general to allow for the identification of spending on children (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2002).

Overall, little is understood in Ireland on the impact of policy decisions on children's lives. While the NCS suggested developing a children's rights impact assessment, a tool for examining a policy, law or decision and assessing its impact on children and young people, this element has not been implemented. A study commissioned by the government found that while impact assessment increases awareness to particular

groups and issues, the link between these effects and better policy-making is not yet known (Corrigan, 2006). The development of children's budgets is a building block in UNICEF's (2004) child-friendly cities movement.

A National Children's Office was established in the Department of Health and Children to support the implementation of the NCS, but the desired national-level integration and collaboration proved challenging, leading to the development in late 2006 of an Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). The OMCYA is an innovation in Irish governance in that it co-locates sections of key government departments concerned with children's lives – health, education and justice – although not the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) or the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA), two departments particularly concerned with policy and delivery on local environments and play and recreation. However, both departments are represented on the high-level National Children's Strategy Implementation Group (NCSIG), founded alongside the OMCYA, which is tasked with supporting integrated service delivery, cross-sectoral working and children's policy implementation. The NCSIG is chaired by the OMCYA and includes government departments, the Health Service Executive (HSE), and County/City Managers from some local authorities. The inclusion of the City/County Managers represents the first time that local authorities have been drawn into national-level governance for children.

Innovation in local service planning and delivery for children is being encouraged via the OMCYA's Prevention and Early Intervention Programme where three projects in disadvantaged areas of Dublin city are being financially supported to develop new services and reorient existing services to support better outcomes for children. One of these projects is the Child Development Initiative (CDI) in Tallaght West, south county Dublin. Initially led by the local community and voluntary sector, it is a multi-sectoral network that is implementing a10-year strategy for children. SDCC and the SDCDB have come on board as partners in its implementation.

The implementation and impact of the NCS has not yet been evaluated.

3.3   Local implementation of the National Children's Strategy

The NCS has yet to be comprehensively articulated at local level. The NCS did not require the development of local NCS implementation plans. The newly-formed inter-sectoral City and County Development Boards (CDB) were considered to be 'ideal vehicles for the local articulation of the National Children's Strategy' (Government of Ireland, 2000:88). CDBs are located in and supported by local authorities. The CDBs were to include NCS goals and objectives in their 10-year local economic, social and cultural strategies, and the plans of individual local agencies represented on the CDBs were to reflect the policies and objectives contained in the CDB strategy. However, a mid-term review of the NCS (Peyton and Wilson, 2006) found insufficient local integrated policy development and service provision. CDBs experienced challenges in keeping children's issues, including built environment issues, on the agenda due to the early stage of their own development and the broad array of social and economic issues that they were trying to progress.

Local coordinated strategy development and service delivery is challenging due to the increasing complexity of governance, the vertical nature of Irish public administration, and the relatively narrow range of functions entrusted to local government (Fitzpatrick Associates/ERM Ireland, 2002). Irish local authorities have a limited local funding base and are reliant on central government grants that are often centrally earmarked for specific services (Callanan, 2003). When compared with other countries, Irish local authorities have limited functions in children's welfare, since education, social welfare, and child protection and welfare are not within their remit. But the influence of Irish local authorities on children's lives should not be underestimated. They have responsibilities that may not immediately be considered 'children's issues', but that are vital to child well-being: housing, planning and development, roads/streets, social and recreational amenities, environmental services, and social inclusion.

To address continuing difficulties in local integrated working for children, the Government established four pilot multi-agency local Children's Services Committees (CSCs) in south county Dublin, Donegal, Dublin city and Limerick city in late 2007. South county Dublin's CSC is located in SDCC. The CSCs are accountable to the NCSIG and the OMCYA. The purpose of the pilot is to test models of best practice that promote integrated, locally-led, strategic planning for children's services. Supported by the OMCYA, the CSCs were developing local children's plans in 2007. Developing play and recreational opportunities will be included in these plans, although it is unclear the extent to which the CSC plans will primarily target children and families deemed 'at risk', or whether they will encompass the local child population more generally.

In response to the NCS, all local authorities developed a Comhairle na nÓg (Youth Council) to formalise and encourage young people's participation in local policymaking. Comhairles are supported by the CDBs and tend to mirror the adult Council, with local schools electing/selecting representatives to their county/city Comhairle. A Community and Enterprise Officer supports the Comhairle, although evaluations have identified insufficient financial and human resources (Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group, 2007; Murphy, 2005). The percentage of local schools involved in the Comhairles is the only youth-specific local government performance indicator monitored by central government. The extent to which young people and children are consulted on policy development and physical planning and development, their experiences of consultation and participation, the efficacy of the methodologies and methods used, and the outcomes resulting from participation have yet to be evaluated in Ireland.

3.4 Mainstream local integrative structures and processes

The previously described local integrative structures and processes developed to progress children's issues interact with a further complex set of mainstream local coordinating structures and processes, often stemming from local government reform and national anti-poverty policy.

Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) were developed to increase the role of elected Council members in local policymaking (IPA, 2006). SPCs are supported by local authorities, chaired by an elected Councillor, and their membership includes local sectoral interests, local authority Directors of Services and elected members. SPCs cover local policy areas like economic development, housing, recreation/amenity, transport and environmental services – all areas relevant to children's lives. SPCs have a key role in developing local policy on the built environment and in relation to play and recreation plans.

The national Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development (RAPID) programme co-ordinates investment and provision in disadvantaged urban areas. RAPID is implemented locally through a multi-agency Area Implementation Team (AIT) which develops and monitors a targeted strategy to address local need. Implementation is supported by a RAPID coordinator based in the local authority. RAPID designation for an area may mean prioritisation for national Government funding. Small-scale proposals from communities are funded through dedicated RAPID funds, while larger projects use mainstream central resources. The national evaluation of RAPID (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2006) found that 79 per cent of AITs cited physical environment objectives as priorities, 68 per cent crime and safety, and 53 per cent included services for children and families as a priority. Only 6 per cent of AITs had services for youth as a priority, indicating a policy gap.

Appendix 1 provides further details on key local policies, governance and actors relevant to policy development and provision on children's environments.

3.5   National play and recreation policy and implementation
National children's play policy
Developing and maintaining public playgrounds has been considered the way to facilitate children's play in Irish communities. Until 2004 public play provision was provided on an ad hoc basis by local authorities due to the lack of a national strategy and economic constraints. However, there has been substantial progress in

regenerating and developing public playground provision resulting from the publication of 'Ready, Steady, Play! A National Play Policy 2004-2008' (NCO, 2004).

The National Play Policy and its associated action plan are ambitious and innovative. Objectives include increasing playground provision and developing child-friendly communities that support safe and stimulating play. Actions for local authorities include: children's participation in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities; establishing pilot home zones (described later); improving playground/ play area quality and safety; developing cycleways/traffic calming; using creative landscaping for play opportunities; using levies paid by private developers for capital play costs; improving the evaluation and monitoring of play provision; and developing a local play plan and designating a Play Officer to implement it. National objectives include developing accredited play training and raising awareness of the importance of play. Specific social inclusion actions include that CDBs identify actions necessary to support play for children from marginalised groups, and that RAPID supports play in disadvantaged areas.

Peyton and Wilson (2006) suggest that Ready, Steady, Play! was a policy success because of the high level of interdepartmental and interagency working that was involved in its development. But has the policy been successful in increasing children's opportunities for safe, stimulating play in their communities? Evaluation to date has focused on counting the number of playgrounds per county and identifying the local authorities that have developed play policies and nominated Play Officers (NPRC, 2006). The number of public playgrounds has increased nationally, although the extent to which children in low-income areas have benefited relative to other economic groups has not been analysed. In 1999, 47 per cent of Irish local authorities did not provide public play facilities (Webb, 1999). By 2006 all local authorities provided at least one playground (NPRC, 2006). The national ratio of playgrounds to population was 1:23,317 in 2004 and 1:9,942 in 2006 (OMCYA, 2007b). The numbers of children's playgrounds directly provided and facilitated by local authorities per 1,000 of population (Local

Government Management Services Board, 2007) remains the only Irish measure of local authority performance on children's play.

Increased provision has been supported by central government capital funding made available to local authorities. A playground grants scheme is administered by the DEHLG and the OMCYA and a specific grant scheme for RAPID areas is administered by the DCRGA. These schemes provide fixed amounts to meet the costs of purchasing playground equipment and developing new or refurbishing existing playgrounds. Local authorities also provide additional funding for capital, maintenance and staffing from their operational budgets and through development levies.

An independent external evaluation of the National Play Policy's implementation was to have been undertaken upon its expiry in 2008 (NCO, 2004). The evaluation was intended to measure progress against the action plan, conduct in-depth assessments of the play value of measures implemented, and consider the extent to which play policy principles have been adopted. The focus on play value – where play spaces and objects have an essential value and encourage the child's involvement – is a welcome evaluation focus that should help identify the benefits to children arising from the implementation of the policy. The evaluation was also intended to assist in identifying priorities for the next phase of the National Play Policy. The extent to which local government has been successful in developing child-friendly environments has yet to be evaluated.

National youth recreation policy
Like the National Play Policy, Teenspace (2007), the national youth recreation policy, focuses on both providing recreational amenities and developing youth-friendly, safe communities. Young people's participation in local policymaking and implementation is central to the policy. Actions include making participation a condition of funding, utilising the Comhairle na nÓg structure, ensuring young people's participation on relevant local sub-committees and SPCs, and encouraging participatory planning methodologies such

as Planning for Real.[4] Young people's policy visibility is to be strengthened through the development of a youth proofing model for local authorities. Structured recreational opportunities are to be encouraged through the development of local Sports Partnerships.

Unstructured recreation is supported in Teenspace, which recognises that young people like to 'hang around' in community spaces and that their safety in their communities needs to be safeguarded. It is recommended that local authorities provide a space in local facilities where young people can meet and develop skateboard parks, youth cafés/drop-in centres, and multi-use games areas (MUGAs[5]). Youth-friendly public space is to be encouraged through home zones in new developments and the early identification in planning of quality open spaces and recreational facilities. An improvement in the evaluation and monitoring of recreational provision for young people is recommended. The policy objective for disadvantaged youth is to maximise the range of recreational opportunities available for them. Currently, Irish local authority performance indicators (LGMSB, 2007) do not include youth recreation indicators.

The policy has only been available to local authorities to implement from 2008. Young people's recreational needs may previously have been incorporated into wider city/county recreation strategies. Central government has provided funding for recreational provision in disadvantaged areas as it is perceived that such provision may channel young people away from anti-social behaviour. €106m has been made available by the DCRGA through the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund to develop facilities in disadvantaged areas (OMCYA, 2007b). The RAPID Playground Grants Scheme is now also available for the development of MUGAs in disadvantaged areas and a Skateboard Grant Scheme has been developed by the DEHLG. The national lottery-funded Sports Capital Programme funds projects directly related to the provision of sports facilities. In the consultations running up to the development of the

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[4] Planning for Real is a process of community participation in the physical development of their area using three-dimensional models. The aim is to form an action plan to implement decisions made during the process.
[5] MUGAs are large, surfaced, marked areas that allow for a variety of sports to be played – e.g. tennis, netball, basketball and football – for recreational purposes.

recreation policies, youth cafés were identified by young people as their greatest need. The OMCYA has undertaken a survey of 35 such cafés and is planning to launch a toolkit and guide to setting up youth cafés.

Since 2008, the National Play and Recreation Resource Centre (www.nprrc.ie) has been charged with promoting the play and recreation policies.

3.6   National guidance on developing environments for children and young people

Local authorities also have regard to national policies and guidance that can influence children's physical environments. These policies and guidelines are not mandatory and local authorities interpret them in the light of local politics, needs and resources.

Older policy

'Parks Policy for Local Authorities' (1987) has guided Irish playground development for over 20 years (NCO, 2004). It does not compel local authorities to provide playgrounds, but recommends that every neighbourhood park serving a population up to 10,000 should be capable of including one playground. Reviewing the policy is included as an action in the National Play Policy but there is no public sign of this review.

The DEHLG advises local authorities that 10 per cent is the desirable proportion of open space in housing schemes (Webb, 1999), although the criterion actually applied remains a matter for local authorities in accordance with their Development Plans (NCO, 2004). Open space in Irish social housing has not always been well planned. In Tallaght West in south county Dublin open space was 'the bit left over' by the builder following construction and was never developed into a usable amenity (Punch, 2002).

In the 'Guidelines for Residential Density' (DEHLG, 1999b), cited in the NCS as a key policy for local implementation, local authorities are to provide large open spaces for playing pitches adjacent to housing in new development areas, with larger recreational facilities to be located away from housing areas but easily accessible from them. Open

space in residential estates can include spaces for smaller children's play, informal kick about, and passive amenity. Suitable pedestrian linkage between open spaces and cycle lanes is recommended. In the 'Social Housing Design Guidelines' (1999), in force until 2007, play spaces for young children were to be provided within a one-minute walk from front doors. It was recommended that playgrounds for older children be developed in reasonable proximity to and overlooked by housing, and the minimisation of nuisance was recommended. Playground equipment was only to be installed where there was a clearly identified demand from residents. Young people's recreational needs were not mentioned in the guidelines, despite the policy's claim to design over the lifecycle.

The extent to which these policies have encouraged the delivery of child-friendly communities has yet to be evaluated. Overall, a significant deficiency in up-to-date and relevant national guidance on parks, open space and recreation facilities was identified in GCC's recreation audit (2007), although it was noted that where national policy exists, significant progress has been made in the delivery of, for example, children's playgrounds. The lack of national funding opportunities for parks, open space and recreation facilities was also identified as limiting recreational development.

More recent policy

In 2007 the DEHLG published 'Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities Policy Statement' and 'Best Practice Guidelines for Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities'. These apply to all housing tenures and replace the Social Housing Design Guidelines. The policy was not available to GCC and SDCC to implement in the local policies reviewed in this paper. However, while change is evident in this new policy, there are elements of continuity with previous policies. The 2007 guidelines stress place-making, designing for families using a lifecycle perspective. Private, secure spaces attached to the dwelling, like back gardens, are to be the primary play spaces for small children. The guidelines are the first to include a checklist for developers planning for children's play:

- Is there space for young children to play near a parent working in the kitchen?
- Does the kitchen window overlook the place where small children can play?

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- Is there somewhere safe for children to play (outdoors)?

The checklist tallies with research evidence about younger children's desire to play close to home and the value of passive surveillance. However, there is no equivalent guidance on outdoor recreation for older children and young people. Instead, a broad statement is made that consideration should be given to the needs of different age groups. As in previous guidelines, play areas are to be located close to homes to ensure passive surveillance and easy access, but again the guidelines are contradictory, stating that public play should not be located so it becomes a source of nuisance to residents. Again it is recommended that playgrounds be deferred until there is a clear demand from the residents and arrangements are made for management.

Historically, high-density housing has not been considered suitable for family accommodation, although generations of Irish children have been brought up in local authority flat complexes. The 'Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments' (DEHLG, 2007) explicitly supports accommodating families with children in apartment buildings. Dublin City Council and the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA) have provided play space guidance to developers and architects as they are eager to encourage family living in higher density development in the city (Dublin City Council, 2008; DDDA, 2007). It appears that some intervention in the design of higher density development for families is required. Residents in Dublin's Docklands objected to the development of a playground in the private internal area of a new apartment block (Norris, 2005), indicating the difficulty with adopting a policy of deferring planning for children until after housing schemes are occupied. There is some evidence that Irish apartment scheme design impedes outdoor play. Jordan's national study (2007) examining whether the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)[6] was improving living conditions for lone parent families found that many parents renting

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[6] The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is a Government initiative to accommodate households in long-term receipt of rent supplement with a long-term housing need. Local authorities source accommodation for these households from private landlords sector and enter into contractual arrangements to secure medium to long-term tenancies.

apartments did not have access to secure outdoor play space and could not let their children outside unaccompanied as the only available area was designated for cars.

The apartment guidelines state that children's recreational needs should be planned from the outset and that 'experience in Ireland and elsewhere has shown that children will play everywhere', not just in formal playgrounds. There is an emphasis on central communal open space for children's play, suitable landscaping, and the passive supervision of play areas from apartments. The play needs of young children in small schemes are to be met through small play spaces with suitable play equipment in private open spaces, and within play areas for older children and young teenagers in large schemes.

Key Points
- Ireland's physical transformation since the early 1990s was influenced by speculative activity in the housing market and a weak planning infrastructure.
- The impact on children and young people of planning and development decisions has yet to be investigated. Planning and development has not traditionally been considered a 'children's issue' in Ireland. The inclusion of an objective on children's environments in the NCS represents progress in this context.
- While considered a landmark in policymaking and innovation for children in Ireland, the NCS gives little specific guidance to local authorities in developing physical environments for children and young people. Local authorities are now required to develop youth recreation and children's play policies.
- There has been a substantial increase in playground provision in Ireland since 2004, but little evaluation of the national play policy's local implementation or impact has taken place. A national youth recreation policy was published in late 2007, requiring the development of local youth recreation policies by local authorities.
- Local authorities have regard to a series of national policies and guidelines that influence the extent of opportunities for outdoor play and recreation. These policies are not mandatory and local authorities interpret them in the light of local politics, needs and resources. The extent to which these policies have encouraged the delivery of child-friendly environments has yet to be evaluated. These policies give some guidance on planning for play but limited guidance on designing outdoor spaces for young people's recreational use.
- Multi-agency City and County Development Boards were to support local NCS implementation. An NCS evaluation found insufficient local integrated policy development and service provision in policy areas that included the built environment. Pilot multi-agency Children's Services Committees that include local authorities have now been established to progress local implementation using a child outcomes approach to planning and delivery.
- Local government also includes a complex web of integrative policy and delivery structures that impact on developing children's environments, the most relevant being Strategic Policy Committees, RAPID, and CDBs.

4   Children, young people and the outdoor built environment

4.1   Introduction

This section sets out key messages from research for policymakers, planners and designers in developing environments and communities with and for children and young people. There is a substantial volume of international research in this area, but very little Irish research.

4.2   Outdoor play and recreation is under threat

There was a time when children and outdoor play were synonymous. The outdoor environment now suggests risk to adults, and children are more likely to be prohibited from being free to roam (Burke, 2005). Opportunities for outdoor play are narrowing and children are less visible in their communities. The result is a loss of opportunities for unstructured play and the reduction of children's opportunity to engage in creative, self-directed and spontaneous play (O'Brien, 2003). Children's independent mobility range – the distance from their homes to the places they visit – is decreasing, and the age at which children are allowed to independently choose their range is increasing (NCO, 2004). Changing ideas on what constitutes a 'good childhood' and what it means to be a 'good parent' can result in the over-supervision and adult-structuring of children's time, leaving little time for free play and socialisation outdoors (Mackett et al, 2007).

Risk-averseness may also impact on children's play as adults fear children hurting themselves on playground equipment or surfacing. These fears exist despite the fact that public playground equipment and environments in Ireland must meet European safety standards, and are independently inspected annually for insurance purposes under Royal Society for the Prevention of Accident regulations. Risk-averseness displayed by local authorities can result in playgrounds providing insufficient stimulation or challenge, which can be counterproductive as children tend to add risk and challenge in ways not intended by designers or local authority officials. Limiting outdoor play may impact on child development, as through outdoor play they encounter specific physical, emotional, mental and social challenges, and they learn through this experience how to look after themselves and to manage new challenges (Children's Play Council, 2002).

4.3   Outdoor play is vital to child development and well-being

The importance of play to child development and well-being is widely acknowledged in the research literature (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005) and in national policy (NCO, 2004). Limiting outdoor play opportunities to equipped playground provision is critiqued for the way in which it mainly affords children the opportunity to engage in gross motor activities – walking, climbing, sitting upright – rather than a wider range of activities and experiences. Outdoor play affords children opportunities to engage in imaginative, physical, creative, social, solitary, and intellectual activities (Wheway and Millward, 1997), and decision making and problem solving, in ways that they do not experience when playing indoors (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005). Sights and sounds are different and activities that are prohibited indoors can happen outdoors, like running and shouting and manipulating and transforming the environment (Bartlett, 2006). The outdoors offers children material for exploration, contact with living things, raw materials for creative and constructive play, and greater opportunities for meeting children and adults than is possible within the private space of the home (Wheway and Millward, 1997).

4.4   Children play everywhere

When we consider opportunities for play in urban environments we tend to think of equipped playgrounds. Their provision has been central to Irish local and national policy and public play provision. Yet children do not discriminate strongly between play provision and spaces designated for play and those they actually use for play (Wheway and Millward, 1997). Roads and streets close to children's homes are the most important locations for play (Wheway and Millward, 1997; Elsley, 2004) and are particularly important social arenas for disadvantaged children who may be unable to afford to participate in other leisure or recreational opportunities (Cole-Hamilton et al, 2002). According to US play researcher and advocate, Moore (1986), the whole urban environment should be considered as a potential play space, thus incorporating multi-use community spaces, natural habitats, commercial areas and neighbourhood streets.

Moore recommends a move beyond the focus on the playground in childhood policy towards developing a diversity of resources and spaces.

If children play everywhere, why do we observe a trend in policy and provision towards corralling children's play into particular designated places? First, intolerance to children's visibility and audibility in communities appears to be developing. Scottish research with children in disadvantaged urban areas (Elsley, 2004) found that complaints from older people when children play on local streets and adjacent play areas are widespread, making it difficult for children to play near to home. As described previously, Irish policy recommends locating play opportunities where they are not a 'nuisance'. However, when play provision is built after residents move in, people may have become accustomed to a nice, quiet, grassed area in front of their property and find it difficult to accept and adapt to the impact of a play area located so close to them (Wheway and Millward,1997). Second, equipped playground provision can be considered an 'easy' approach to public play provision. Fixed play equipment can be picked from a catalogue and placed in an outdoor environment, provided that a suitable site is available. Playgrounds can represent an adult notion of 'good play', and respond to concerns regarding child safety. Third, easily accessed, staffed play provision is popular and well-used by children and parents (Children's Play Council, 2002) and features in children's reported favourite places to play (Wheway and Millward, 1997; Moore, 1986). Therefore, playgrounds do have a role in public play provision, although Wheway and Millward (1997) found that children only use them for around 15 minutes.

4.5   What works in supporting play in urban areas

There is little published Irish research on play and recreation in social and private housing developments, but we can learn from the UK experience. In Wheway and Millward (1997) the housing estates which enabled the highest level of outdoor play were those that provided spaces that were open and visible from nearby housing, and had the greatest variety of places suitable for play and the slowest traffic. The estates with the widest range of play activity and satisfaction amongst children had traffic calming measures, grassy areas set back from roads, footpath networks linking public

open spaces, a spinal footpath network and informal play areas. Travelling between places is an important feature of children's play on housing estates, with pedestrian and cycle paths popular locations for play. Children also value grass for ball games and to sit on, indicating the importance of well-designed green open space within housing estates.

Some of the best play environments marry built and natural environments. A diverse landscape meets children's need for a varied and stimulating play environment (Fjortoft and Sageie, 2000; Moore, 1986; Children's Play Council, 2002). Research with children and young people in a disadvantaged urban area in Scotland (Elsley, 2004) found that while children and young people valued the play opportunities provided by the built environment, they also valued wild areas in their community like woods, castle ruins and cornfields. Meeting children's and young people's preferences for wild spaces creates challenges for local authorities. Overall, research evidence suggests a need for diverse landscaping when designing for play and recreation. However, Moore (1986) questions how it can be facilitated in high density housing developments.

Easy and safe access to play opportunities is a feature of quality play (Children's Play Council/Play England, 2007). Public play provision has been described as developing hierarchically, ranging from city provision of spaces that are large in size but few in number and with a large potential population catchment, down to neighbourhood provision that is small and more numerous, catering for a smaller local catchment (Williams, 1995). Table 1 provides a classification of public play provision.

Table 1: Hierarchy of public play provision

Type of play area	Description	Accessibility
Pocket Parks	Small parks in public and semi-private space, particularly in higher density housing	Adjacent to homes, forms a 'pocket' amongst other buildings
Local Area for Play (LAPs)	An open space for younger children	1 minute walk from home
Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAPs)	Larger equipped play provision	5 minutes from home
Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAPs)	Play and recreation for children and young people	15 minutes walk from home

Source: Webb, 1999, and authors

All levels in the hierarchy have a role in public play provision. Increasingly, local, small-scale provision is being developed in the UK, US and Europe to provide easy access to play and recreation opportunities for children and adults, particularly in higher density areas. The trend towards developing 'pocket parks', developed on small or irregular pieces of land, is one example. While not suitable for robust physical activity, pocket parks provide usable public space in urban locations without major redevelopment. They can comprise a small playground, seating and landscaping. The DDDA encouraged the development of pocket parks in areas such as Chimney Park and Seán O'Casey Park.

Playground developers in other countries are moving beyond fixed equipment in playgrounds to include a diversity of play materials which can be manipulated, from sand and water to loose parts, encouraging creative and interactive play (Hudson and Thompson, 2001). Adventure playgrounds, generally supervised by play workers, have been developed extensively in the UK and Denmark, where children use loose parts like fabric, ropes, tyres, wood and tools to create their play environments. New York City has developed a playground in a former parking lot that replaces equipped provision with items that children can move and creatively engage with, such as sand and water and pulleys and ropes. Play workers maintain and oversee the playground and support children's play (Cardwell, 2007).

Play workers are a good practice feature of UK play provision. They are local authority employees and they work extensively in disadvantaged areas. Their role is not to direct but to facilitate and support safe, interesting play. Local authorities in the UK also employ Play Rangers who visit different places where children play outdoors – parks, housing estates, public spaces. They are equipped with ideas and equipment and reassure parents that it is safe for children to play outdoors.[7] Staffed play areas allow for higher quality play as a wider variety of equipment and materials can be used due to

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[7] Source: http://www.londonplay.org.uk/document.php?document_id=1161

constant maintenance and supervision. A framework of qualifications in play work has been developed in the UK to support quality play. While the development of play work and relevant qualifications was recommended for Ireland in the National Play Policy (2004) and by the Working Group on School-Aged Childcare (2005), we still have to see the widescale adoption of playwork in public play provision or the development of a qualifications framework.

4.6   The built environment provides opportunities for recreation

During adolescence young people go through different stages in their participation in recreation: from structured adult-organised activities to unstructured leisure and more commercial types of leisure (Hendry et al, cited in Office of the Minister for Children, 2007a). The outdoor built environment provides opportunities for all kinds of recreation for this age-group.

Structured recreation in the built environment tends to take the form of competitive and recreational participation in sport. Almost nine out of ten young people in Ireland play at least one sport (de Róiste and Dineen, 2005). Sport provides valuable opportunities for young people to acquire and practise social, physical and intellectual skills and establish a supportive social network (Byrne et al, 2006). Recreational sports participation can be facilitated through the provision of public Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs) which provide for games like football, basketball, volleyball and tennis.

Space and the opportunity for socialising with peers are important to older children and young people (OMCYA, 2007a; Byrne et al, 2006; Wheway and Millward, 1997). Ninety per cent of Irish adolescents said they enjoyed 'hanging around' with their friends (de Róiste and Dineen, 2005). Streets, civic plazas and commercial areas, and indoor spaces like youth cafés or local youth/community facilities are where they tend to hang around. However, adults often see this behaviour as a nuisance, or intimidating. Young people, particularly in disadvantaged areas, report difficult relationships with adults in their neighbourhoods, and are often asked to move on from public spaces by adults or the Gardaí (Devlin, 2006; Byrne et al, 2006; McGrath and Lynch, 2007). The issue is

further complicated when young people are engaged in public alcohol or drug consumption. Younger children in Tallaght West, south county Dublin, said they felt threatened by the presence of teenagers in parks and playgrounds, and that it restricts their use of these places (CDI, 2005).

Hanging around in a public space may not always be a preferred activity for young people, but can be symptomatic of a lack of safe spaces and recreation facilities in communities. Only 43.9 per cent of children and young people aged 10 to 17 years in Ireland report that there are good places in their area to spend their free time (OMCYA, 2006). Research with over 700 young people in East Cork on their recreational needs (McGrath and Lynch, 2007) found that they often hang around in parks because they have few places to go to. They expressed dissatisfaction with parks as places to socialise in as they are dark, cold and dangerous, with no toilets or cafés.

Teenspace (OMCYA, 2007a) supports young people's use of public space for unstructured leisure, provided that it is not anti-social. However, the line between normal youth behaviour, nuisance behaviour and anti-social behaviour can be blurred in both social and private housing areas. The design and characteristics of Irish social housing estates may not allow for the normal noise of teenagers in open spaces and on street corners, and can exacerbate conflict with adults (O'Higgins, 1999). While no Irish research has been conducted on the fate of public space as a youth amenity, it is possible that young people's interaction in public spaces is now being designed out in urban development, rather than accommodated positively.

Irish local government and NGOs are increasingly interested in accommodating unstructured recreation. As stated earlier, youth cafés are being developed in both low-income and mixed-income communities. These are free, youth-oriented alcohol- and drug-free indoor spaces where young people can hang around and socialise, and get information on services. The cafés are often youth-led, and are managed and financed through an inter-sectoral, multi-agency arrangement that may include local authorities. Teen shelters are recommended in Teenspace (2007) to support hanging around, but

as yet their provision is not widespread in Ireland. A teen shelter is a sheltered place to sit, but it can be open on all sides or partially closed off for visibility and user safety. Thames Valley Police in the UK have developed a good practice guide to their development (Hampshire and Wilkinson, 2002), based on the experiences of UK local authorities and police. Teen shelters in the UK have been found to benefit young people and communities. They were found to be most effective when young people are involved in their development, they are well-lit, can be passively supervised and supervised by the police, and form part of a mix of local recreation provision.

4.7   The right to play and recreation is based on safe mobility

To be able to move freely between the home and the outdoors is a crucial element in children's experience of autonomy (Bartlett, 2006). Their neighbourhood can function as an extension of their secure base of home (Rogers, 2006). Moving from place to place can be half the fun for some children and they spend more time on the move than in any one place in well-designed neighbourhoods (Children's Play Council, 2002). Children tend to remain close to home until about age 7 after which there is a ten-fold increase in the home range area, with bike-owning children having a greater home range (Wheway and Millward, 1997). The implication for developers and planners is that they need to design for play and recreation throughout the entire housing area and community.

A series of planning and design issues affect children's and young people's mobility in their neighbourhoods. US research has found housing density to be independently related to physical activity in children aged 4 to 7 years (Roemmich et al, 2006). The authors surmise that increased proximity between homes may increase children's ability and motivation and parents' willingness to let their children walk in the neighbourhood.

The permeability of housing developments and neighbourhoods – the extent to which journeys in and out of neighbourhoods and commercial areas are direct or impeded by buildings, roads or other physical obstacles – impacts on mobility. Permeable development encourages walking and cycling and generates higher levels of pedestrian

activity, social interaction and informal neighbourhood supervision. Street permeability independently predicts physical activity for 8 to 12 year olds (Roemmich et al, 2006). Other factors also affect children's and young people's mobility in their neighbourhoods and wider communities. Cars now dominate local spaces and places where children play. Over Ireland's economic boom, the number of private cars rose from 1 million in 1996 to 1.6 million in 2004 (NCB, 2006). The risk of injury for children increases with traffic speeds over 40kph and with high density kerbside parking (Lavin et al, 2006). The proportion of primary school children walking to school declined from 39.4 per cent in 1991 to 24.3 in 2006 (CSO, 2007a). Walking, riding bikes and playing on the street can be hazardous activities for children and young people in both urban and rural areas. Ireland's road collision statistics (NRA, 2005) indicate that in 2004, 2 child pedestrians died on our roads and 45 children were injured crossing the road; 33 as their crossing was masked by a parked car. Forty-five children were injured playing in the roadway. These statistics do not provide socio-economic data on the child or accident location, but an international literature review on social differences in traffic injuries in childhood (Laflamme and Diderichsen, 2000) concluded that mortality and morbidity are higher amongst children in deprived areas due to different exposures to hazard rather than child behaviour.

The green-schools initiative, supported by An Taisce, has had success in promoting walking and cycling to school and provides examples of many useful ways of persuading children and parents to try ways of getting to school other than by car. These include 'walkability audits', the Walking Bus and Walk on Wednesday promotions (www.greenschoolsireland.org).

Community safety and parents' perceptions of safety influence children's independent mobility and their opportunities to play outdoors. This is particularly true in low-income neighbourhoods. A study in New York (Weir et al, 2006) compared the degree to which parents of children in a poor inner-city neighbourhood versus a middle class suburban neighbourhood limited their 5- to 10-year-old children's outdoor activity due to concerns about gangs, bullying by other children, traffic, the crime rate, and perceptions of safety.

Parents in the more affluent neighbourhoods expressed low levels of concern relative to those in low-income areas and limited their children's outdoor activity less. Research with parents in social housing in Tallaght West (CDI, 2004) found that 7 per cent of children were not allowed to play outside the home due to their parents' fears about anti-social behaviour. Ninety per cent of children there experienced or feared anti-social behaviour. Children in Tallaght West were negative about the safety and appearance of their communities and wanted more quality, safe spaces for play and recreation (CDI, 2005).

4.8   What works in supporting safe mobility

Moore (1986) suggests that residential streets can offer a variety of opportunities for play, depending on traffic density, accessibility and physical characteristics. Streets can be made safer for children's play by limiting traffic flow, reducing speed limits, changing roadway alignments and giving pedestrians priority (Moore, 1986). Good practice includes 20 mph zones and inserting traffic calming and road signage before dwellings are occupied. A US review of 33 quantitative health studies (Davison and Lawson, 2006) on the association between the physical environment and children's physical activity found that children were more active when there were footpaths, they had destinations to walk to, public transportation was available, there were fewer uncontrolled intersections to cross, and traffic density was low. The majority of studies reviewed also supported the relationship between the availability of recreational facilities in neighbourhoods and higher levels of physical activity.

The development of home zones is considered good practice in reclaiming streets for residents of all ages. Their provision is recommended in the Irish national play and recreation policies. Home zones are streets in which design and other measures come together to create street spaces where social uses are primary and car uses secondary (Gill, 2007). They aim to increase the liveability of streets, with liveability indicators including positive changes in levels of social interaction, levels of children's play, perception of fear of crime, the satisfaction of residents with their immediate

environment and a positive shift in residents' perceptions of road safety (Clayden et al, 2006).

Home zone evaluations also suggest positive outcomes for children and communities, with parents feeling happier about giving their children greater freedom outside the home and higher levels of interaction between residents (Gill, 2007).

Key points
- Outdoor play is vital to child well-being and development. It has a distinct quality from indoor play and affords a wider variety of developmental opportunities.
- Outdoor play is under threat due to child safety fears relating to community safety, traffic, children hurting themselves, and 'stranger danger'.
- The right to play and recreation is predicated on children's and young people's safe mobility in their communities. This mobility is under threat due to safety fears and the loss of public space and the street as sites for play.
- Children play everywhere and use their entire community for outdoor play, although playground provision is the most common public response to play.
- 'Home zones', streets designed to make social uses primary and car use secondary, are being developed as a public policy response to the dominance that has been given to the car in urban design. They have been found to be effective in improving the liveability and playability of streets and communities.
- Young people use the outdoor built environment for structured recreation such as sports and unstructured recreation such as 'hanging around'.
- Young people hanging around in public outdoor space can be considered problematic by adults, particularly in social housing.
- The development of outdoor 'teen shelters' and indoor 'youth cafés' are positive responses to this recreation preference.

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5 Local policy on children and the outdoor built environment in south county Dublin and Galway city

5.1 Introduction

This section explores the extent to which children and young people are visible within key local government policies on the built environment and provides a thematic analysis of the content of these policies.

First, background information on Galway city and south county Dublin is provided to contextualise local policy and delivery there.

5.2 Demographic and social characteristics of south county Dublin and Galway city

Demography and household characteristics

Table 2 below indicates the scale of population increase in south county Dublin and Galway city from 1996 to 2006.

Table 2: Changes in population in Galway city & south county Dublin, 1996-2006

	1996	2002	2006
Galway City	57,241	65, 832	72, 414
South county Dublin	218,728	238, 835	246, 935

Source: CSO, 2007a

Galway city is one of the fastest growing cities in Europe and the third most populated in Ireland. In south county Dublin, Lucan had the largest population increase in the state (SDCDB, 2002a) from 7,451 people in 1996 to 21,785 in 2002. It is not the first time that south county Dublin has seen such increases. North Clondalkin experienced 65 per cent population growth in the 1970s, while West Tallaght's population grew by 200 per cent due to rapid local authority house building (Bowden, 2006).

South county Dublin is a comparatively young county, with 42 per cent of its population under 25 years old compared to 37.5 per cent for the State (SDCDB, 2002). Designated disadvantaged areas in the county have a younger age profile again. South Dublin's

birth rate is the highest in Dublin and the second highest in the state. Most of the population is concentrated in Tallaght and Clondalkin, areas with considerable social housing stock. In contrast, Galway city's young population is in line with the country as a whole, with 31 per cent under 19 years.

Housing

Both case study areas experienced considerable housing construction from 2002 to 2006. Over 15,000 new dwellings were completed in south county Dublin and 7,751 in Galway city (DEHLG, 2006) in this period, indicating possible opportunities for developing child-friendly communities, but also the potential diminution of safe play and recreation spaces and places for children and young people.

SDCC's and GCC's social housing provisions differ in scale, as does the overall housing stock, having implications for the need, provision and distribution of services and amenities for children and young people.

Table 3: Total number of dwellings and total number of social housing units in south county Dublin and Galway city, 2007

	South county Dublin	**Galway City**
Total no. dwellings	80, 358	25,423
Total social housing units	7,470	2,067

Source: (2007b)

Physical and social environment

High poverty levels are evident in social housing in SDCC's functional area, concentrated in North Clondalkin and West Tallaght (SDCDB, 2005a). Children and families there experience crime and community safety difficulties related to a local drugs culture (CDI, 2005). Punch (2002) describes Tallaght West as a low quality living environment, with the built environment considered by residents to be bleak – functionless open space resembling an abandoned building site, natural features removed and the design and layout of estates showing little variation. Social housing areas like Tallaght West and North Clondalkin lack local economies, are low-density

requiring car use, have poor public transport links, and lack basic services and amenities for adults or children.

Galway city's social housing areas receive less national attention than Clondalkin's or Tallaght's. However, the city's RAPID strategy (2002) indicates high levels of disadvantage, community safety issues, a lack of basic services, and a dearth of amenities and services for children and families. Galway city's social housing estates are smaller than those in south county Dublin and are more centrally located, within an 8-km radius of the city centre. Anti-social behaviour issues exist within GCC's social housing stock, but to a lesser extent than in SDCC, reflecting the differing scale of stock and the particular challenges that have beset some south Dublin communities.

5.3   Children's and young people's visibility in local policy

This section comments on children's and young people's overall visibility within local policy and governance relating to the built environment, and the extent to which key high-level policies include specific objectives, actions and targets for children and young people.

Local children's plans and children's and young people's visibility

Children's and young people's visibility in local policy and action can be encouraged by developing and implementing a plan specifically for them. By 2007 neither local authority had developed a specific children's plan to implement the NCS, which is not unusual in Irish local government as there was no requirement to do so. However, SDCC and GCC have responded to national policy frameworks that encourage local policy development for children, and ground-up innovation is also evident in SDCC and GCC in developing policies on children's physical environments.

South Dublin County Council

By 2007 the only specific children's policy developed by SDCC was their play policy, indicating the importance of national policy frameworks in encouraging local policy development explicitly for children. Central government leadership has also encouraged local planning for children and young people in south county Dublin, with SDCC centrally involved in developing and implementing a plan for children in the county as a member, joint Chair and host of one of the four pilot Children's Services Committees described in Section 3. Interviews conducted in the early planning stage of the CSC's work indicated that it was undecided then which policy and service areas were considered 'children's issues' for action through the CSCs, although child and family welfare are central to their objectives. Subsequently, the CSCs' work has been guided by five child outcome statements, one of which is 'children are physically and emotionally safe in their homes, families and community, and engage positively in their community through quality play, sport and recreational facilities'.[8]

While central government leadership supports local policy implementation and delivery, it is not the only driver, with ground-up innovation also mobilising local government. SDCC and the SDCDB have formed a strategic partnership with the Child Development Initiative (CDI), which began in 2003 as a consortium of local individuals (community leaders, residents, professionals) engaging in joint planning to support better outcomes for children in Tallaght West. The result was a 10-year children's strategy, with €15 million invested by the OMCYA and Atlantic Philanthropies to implement a plan for the 2007-2011 period. CDI responded to the SDCDB's strategy, developing the initiative 'A Safe and Healthy Place' (CDI, 2010) as it was clear from CDI's research (2004; 2005) that some of Tallaght West's social housing communities are not safe, healthy or child-friendly. This initiative, jointly agreed by CDI and SDCC, aims to improve children's living conditions and neighbourhoods. Actions include improving housing quality standards, traffic calming and developing additional playgrounds. CDI collaborate with RAPID in Tallaght and SDCC's Housing, Parks and Roads Departments to implement

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[8] http://connect.southdublin.ie/children/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=90&Itemid=140

the initiative. SDCC have appointed a Public Realm Designer to their Planning Department to develop a child-friendly urban village approach to regenerating Tallaght West as part of this initiative (CDI, 2010). Delivery involves an active partnership between CDI and SDCC, with SDCC also providing resources for delivery. The initiative supports the implementation of SDCDB's strategy. The initiative also improves the visibility of children's issues in local government as the CDI links with local government through: its own membership of the CSC, the approval of A Safe and Healthy Place by the CSC, and SDCC's membership of CDI's Safe and Healthy Place Committee.

Galway City Council

GCC's experience of policy and delivery on children's built environment indicates that local government can innovate and develop children's policy in the absence of central guidance. GCC's 1999 Development Plan contained the objective to work towards becoming a child-friendly city (CFC). This aim was innovative in Ireland at that time. Only Drogheda Borough Council and Dublin City Council have a stated aim to become CFCs, and only Galway and Drogheda developed written implementation plans in pursuit of the goal. GCC City Manager commissioned a report, 'Galway as a Child-Friendly City', from an Irish private play consultancy (Webb, 2000), which audited the quantity and quality of play and recreational provision and amenities in the city for children and young people under 18 years. Recommendations were made to improve the quality of existing provision, develop new provision, and support children's and young people's safe mobility. The report then formed an action plan for GCC to meet its objective to become a CFC.

GCC has a written CFC policy which it continues to implement. GCC did not develop a play policy in response to the National Play Strategy, preferring instead to continue to implement the CFC policy. The policy guides not just the work of the Parks Department, which has the responsibility for play and recreation in GCC, but also the Planning Department. It is located on the planning section of GCC's website, rather than social inclusion or community sections, as children's policies tend to be located on the sites of

other local authorities, thus indicating its status as a planning and development document.

The policy review indicates that the CFC policy has supported children's visibility in high-level local policies in GCC. Its influence can be traced through:

- GCC's Corporate Plan 2005-2009 (2005), which states its support for the CFC plan and aims. This is important given that Corporate Plans reflect the key objectives of the Council; and

- GCC's Development Plan 2005- 2011 (2005), which endorses the vision of Galway as a child-friendly city. The Development Plan adopts the CFC plan of a hierarchical and geographical approach to play provision. The Development Plan supports the vision of play and recreation provision contained in the CFC document, with outputs to include developing a child-friendly infrastructure and children's play facilities. Inclusion in the Development Plan is important given the Plan's statutory basis and its status as the local blueprint for planning and development.

The CFC's influence can also be traced through lower-level local policy.

- GCC's Parks and Amenities Strategy 2002-2006 (Galway City Council, 2007) supports the CFC's policy vision and objectives; and

- Galway's RAPID strategy (GCDB, 2003) cites the CFC policy and the intention to implement it through RAPID for social housing areas, and includes objectives and actions that mirror those in the policy. These include: regenerating specific existing playgrounds and developing new ones in social housing; taking a geographical and hierarchical approach to developing play and recreational opportunities in the city; focusing on safe access to play; and the development of home zones.

Objectives and actions for children and young people in mainstream local policy

The policy review indicates that mainstream high-level local policy does not always include specific objectives, actions and targets for children and young people in relation to their interactions with their environments. In SDCC:

- The Development Plan (2004a) contains broad statements and objectives rather than explicitly planning for children and young people's interactions with the built environment.

- The SDCDB strategy (2002a) includes a general action to develop play facilities and activities throughout the county, supported by the NCS, but contains no specific actions or targets regarding children and the built environment.

- SDCDB's strategy (2002a) does not contain specific actions on children's safe mobility, although it does include a general target to reduce the incidence and severity of injuries caused by road traffic accidents.

- SDCC's Corporate Plan (SDCC, 2005f) contains a specific objective on promoting safe routes to school for children, but no broader objectives or actions on children's and young people's mobility in their communities. The Plan does not contain any goals or objectives to support children's play.

Where key policies such as Development Plans, CDB Strategies, and local authority Corporate Plans contain specific built environment objectives and actions relating to children they tend to relate to the provision of playgrounds. Developing childcare provision also receives considerable attention. For example, SDCC's Corporate Plan (2005f) contains the objective to promote the provision of childcare facilities through the planning process and community development policies. There are no specific objectives or targets in high-level policies in SDCC on children's and young people's safe mobility in their wider neighbourhoods.

As described previously, Galway city's CFC plan has supported the inclusion of specific policies on children's environments in high-level mainstream strategies such as the Development Plan.

Specific objectives and actions to improve children's and young people's built environments are included in key lower-level action plans such as RAPID plans in Galway city and south county Dublin. Both contain headline objectives to enhance physical environments in disadvantaged areas and provide play and recreational facilities.

While pictures of children and young people are used extensively in SDCC's Social Inclusion Policy (2005), they receive very little policy attention. The only clear objective for people under 18 years is to promote and develop Comhairle na nÓg, which is contained in a section titled Connecting with Communities. The section containing policies related to supporting a high quality and sustainable living environment does not contain any reference to children and young people, or suggest any specific objectives or actions for them. GCC has yet to develop a social inclusion plan.

There are some policy issues that receive little attention in high-level or lower-level policies in SDCC and GCC. GCC's and SDCC's Development Plans, RAPID plans, Social Inclusion Plan (SDCC), Corporate Plans, and play and recreation strategies do not explicitly plan for play or recreation within the context of the shift towards higher density development. This is particularly surprising in SDCC given that its Development Plan (2004a) seeks high-density housing in new developments, with adequate complementary facilities, amenities and services and proximity to commercial development. SDCC's Social Inclusion Policy (2005b) includes actions to develop a mix of house types and sizes to cater for different housing needs, yet children's and young people's play, recreation and mobility requirements within this high-density policy are not named or specified. The performance indicator is general, related to neighbourhood planning. However, SDCC later developed planning guidelines on play in new

developments (2007) that provide specific guidance for future high-density environments

Specific policies supporting children's and young people's safe mobility in their communities and residential areas are not prominent in SDCC's strategies. There are also no policies, objectives or actions in SDCC policies on young people's use of public spaces for socialising.

Children's and young people's visibility in local governance
There are a number of ways in which children's and young people's visibility can be enhanced in local policy. Actions include: developing children's/young people's policies; their direct participation in policymaking, decision-making and evaluation; considering their interests within mainstream local policy fora and initiatives; establishing children's committees; and the application of specific tools that support children's and young people's visibility in local governance.

The development of local plans to improve children's environments in both local authorities was detailed previously. While local policymakers are including actions and objectives on children's play in children's and mainstream policies, there is a policy gap in both local authorities in relation to strategies for young people. Neither local government has developed a framework for the identification of young people's needs and preferences for services and amenities, nor have they developed youth strategies. Local youth strategies are required given the plethora of statutory and non-governmental agencies that deliver services to young people locally, particularly in relation to recreation. They would also serve to counter any possible lack of coordination and strategy that could result in overlaps or gaps in provision. Teenspace was not available for local government to implement until 2008, and so was not influential in the local policies reviewed in this paper, and there was no specific requirement for local authorities to develop youth strategies before its publication.

However, GCC's CFC policy includes actions related to youth recreation, as the policy spans ages 0 to 18 years, although it responds to needs identified 10 years ago. SDCC has not as yet developed a youth recreation strategy. Four central government departments are involved in supporting local recreation provision: Rural, Community and Gaeltacht Affairs; Health and Children (plus OMCYA); Arts, Sport and Tourism; and Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Other national and local voluntary, community and statutory agencies, including the local authorities, are also involved in planning, funding and delivering local youth provision. With this profusion of agencies and lack of specific, designated responsibility there is the potential for unmet service need, or the development services that may not be in tune with young people's preferences. This gap in needs identification and service integration has been identified by RAPID in Galway city for young people in social housing there, and a RAPID youth strategy was being developed in 2009 that includes measures to improve services to young people and their physical environments.

Overall, RAPID appears to be encouraging better play and recreation opportunities and safer mobility in social housing in south Dublin and Galway city, and it also encourages coordination between local agencies in planning and delivery. RAPID progress reports to the National Monitoring Committee provide examples of play and recreation amenities that have been developed in social housing areas through RAPID (see Appendix.2). Funding has been secured from a range of government departments for play and recreation provision, estate enhancement and traffic calming. Appendix 2 also highlights the important role played by the OMYCA and DCRGA in funding play and recreation facilities and improving local environments in social housing in SDCC and GCC.

The establishment of pilot Children's Services Committees in four local authorities, including south Dublin, marks the first time that a specific local vehicle has been created in Ireland to coordinate local responses and to support the local implementation of a national children's policy. Its early operation in south Dublin is discussed later. South Dublin's CSC has a full-time staff member assigned to supporting its work. SDCC also

has a part-time staff member supporting its Comhairle na nÓg and its operation of the Young People's Services Fund in south Dublin, a programme that supports recreational provision in disadvantaged areas. Neither SDCC nor GCC have appointed Play Officers, as required in the National Play Strategy. The Parks Department has responsibility for play policy and provision in both local authorities.

In relation to children's and young people's participation in policy and planning, high-level and lower-level SDCC and GCC policies contain a general commitment to supporting Comhairle na nÓg as the mechanism for youth participation. The play/CFC policies, rather than mainstream policies reviewed, are more likely to include specific objectives on children's participation. SDCC's play policy (2006) includes an objective on children's participation in developing playgrounds and facilities. A draft copy of the SDCC's play policy (2006) was presented to the south Dublin Comhairle na nÓg for comment (SDCDB, 2005b). However, the Comhairle comprises teenagers, and there is no indication that children, the target group for the policy, were consulted in its development by the recreation SPC and the Parks Department. Children and young people did not participate in the development of GCC's CFC document (Webb, 2000) – there was no national policy impetus guiding children's participation at this time – but children's participation in the design and maintenance of play areas was recommended. Neither children's nor mainstream local policies suggest children's and young people's participation in policy or delivery in areas beyond play provision, for example in urban planning.

As noted previously, the NCS suggests that local government should account for children in relevant policies on the built and natural environment. Overall, local policies do not indicate how children's and young people's interests are to be included in policy and decision-making. As child impact statements have not been implemented in Ireland there is no formal mechanism to prompt local decision makers to consider children's and young people's interests in local government policy development and decision-making, and then no process to support them in considering the impact of, for example, a policy statement in a Development Plan or a planning application.

Local, publicly available documents, including annual budgets, do not indicate specific spending on people under 18 years, or any social group, making it difficult to assess how much of the local budget is allocated to children and young people. It was possible to ascertain some spending on children using RAPID documents and local authority annual budgets when the spending was specifically allocated to tangible, child-specific provision like playgrounds, skate parks and games and sports facilities. There is also a variety of sources that can be used retrospectively to indicate the level of spending on children: Development Contribution Schemes, RAPID documentation, Corporate Plans, and CDB documents.

Comhairle na nÓg is a key process through which young people can represent their own interests, although there is no indication in local documents of the outcomes of their participation. In terms of outcomes resulting from consultation and participation processes with children and young people on specific provision, instances of children's and young people's influence in the design of playgrounds and recreation as discussed by local authority staff are cited in this paper.

5.4 Thematic review of local policy documents
Importance of playground provision in local play policy and delivery
As identified in the National Play Strategy (2004), the provision of fixed equipment playgrounds is often the most tangible evidence of a commitment to supporting play, and it is also the issue on which people under 18 years are most visible in local built environment policy. The play policies of both local authorities focus strongly on increasing playground provision.

GCC set a target to design and install at least one new public playground per annum, on foot of the Galway city's CFC policy document (Galway City Council, 2007). This target had been met by 2007. Some of the new playgrounds were developed prior to the advent of playground funding from central government. SDCC (2006) did not set playground development targets in their play plan (2006), but instead proposed to

prepare a 5-year Parks Works Programme to develop playgrounds and play spaces within regional and neighbourhood parks, and to develop a planning framework for play in new housing developments.

GCC and SDCC have further developed their public playground network over the period of the implementation of the NCS and the National Play Strategy, as set out in Table 4.

Table 4: Changes in playground provision in Galway City and south county Dublin

Local Authority	Year	Number	Playground: population ratio
Galway City	2002	8	1:8,222
Galway City	2006	16	1:3,460
South Dublin	2002	5	1:47, 977
South Dublin	2006	9	1:26, 654

Source: National Children's Office, 2004; National Play Resource Centre, 2006; www.galwaycity.ie

In 2002 Galway city had the second highest provision of public playgrounds per capita in Ireland while south county Dublin's provision lay 28th out of 34 local authorities (NCO, 2004; NPRC, 2006). The national ratio at that time was 1:23,598, only 43 per cent of the provision recommended by the Department of the Environment, indicating a serious gap in national provision. However, GCC's provision lay well ahead of the average national ratio at that time. SDCC's provision is below the National Parks Policy suggestion of one playground per 10,000 of population, and below the 2006 national playground to population ratio of 1:9,942.

The needs assessment of playground provision in Galway city conducted to inform the development of Galway's CFC policy (Webb, 2000) indicated that in 2000 there were insufficient playgrounds and existing provision was in need of repair. Some of the gaps in provision were in social housing areas. These gaps have since been met with the support of the RAPID programme in Westside, Ballinfoyle, Bohermore (Coole Park), New Mervue and Ballybane. This increase in delivery of new playgrounds has been attributed by GCC (2007) to its CFC plan. The inclusion of playground development in Galway city's RAPID plan and the funding provided and levered through RAPID also

supported the implementation of the CFC plan, targeting children in social housing and their need for play provision (see Appendix 2 for examples).

The RAPID programme has also supported the development of new playgrounds in social housing in south county Dublin, in Killinarden, Jobstown and Quarryvale (SDCC, 2005b). The playgrounds were developed prior to the publication of SDCC's play plan in late 2006, indicating the importance of RAPID for levering funding and for delivery.

Local authority and RAPID documents also indicate that existing playgrounds in Galway city and south county Dublin have been upgraded through the RAPID programme, the central government funding frameworks discussed previously, and the local authorities' own budgets (see Appendix 2).

In terms of identified future need, GCC's Recreation and Amenity Needs Study (2007) indicates that the (adult) public want more playgrounds and parks, although the study did not survey children and young people in this regard. The National Play Resource Centre's data (2006) on future national playground development indicates that a substantial number of playgrounds are planned by GCC. SDCC has yet to gauge public satisfaction with play provision and future needs, although its play policy (2006) does include an action to assess play facilities in the county to identify the level, range and standard of play facilities. The NPRC data (2006) does not include plans for future public playground development in south county Dublin.

Playground/play area location

As discussed in Section 4, easy, safe access to play is a feature of quality play and social inclusion. Access in this context refers to proximity to playgrounds and play areas and whether the provision can be accessed by children safely.

Table 5 indicates the location of public playgrounds in Galway city and south county Dublin.

Table 5: Public playgrounds developed and maintained by Galway City Council and South Dublin County Council, 2007

Council	No. public playgrounds	Location
Galway City Council	16	Millennium Children's Park; South Park; Toft Park; Cappagh Park; McGrath Field; Slí Burca; Westside; Mervue Public Park; Gleann Bhán; Lough Atalia Playground; An Sean Bhaile Doughiska South; An Sean Bhaile Doughiska North; Ballinfoyle; Henry St; Coole Pk; Lakeshore Drive.
South Dublin County Council	9[9]	Jobstown Community Centre; Killinarden Community Centre; Tymon Regional Park; Tymon Park junior; Corkagh Regional Park, Fettercairn Community Centre; Kiltalown; Brookfield; Quarryvale Park; Griffeen Valley park.

Source: www.sdcc.ie; www.galwaycity.ie

GCC's playgrounds are located hierarchically throughout the city in line with their CFC policy and Development Plan. Galway's Parks and Amenities Strategy 2002-2006 advocates a hierarchical approach towards the provision of parks, open spaces and amenity areas in order to ensure that residents have access to parks and recreational open space within walking distance of residential areas. When Galway city's CFC policy was developed in 2000, playground provision was generally located in the older inner city areas where the child population was then in decline, rather than the newer inner and outer suburbs (Webb, 2000). Table 6 indicates that GCC's provision is now located in larger city parks, smaller neighbourhood parks and small-scale local parks in the inner city and suburbs.

SDCC has taken a different policy position to GCC, developing public play provision within large regional parks rather than on a hierarchical basis. The favouring of regional parks pre-dates SDCC's play policy and is contained in SDCC's Development Plan (2005). Equipped play areas had been provided by SDCC, mainly in social housing developments, but by the 1980s they were vandalised and were cited as a source of

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[9] There is also a playground in Camac Caravan and Camping Park in Clondalkin which is not for public use and so is not included in these figures. There is a small equipped play area for play developed on green space in the private Hunter's Wood estate in Rathfarnham (SDCC, 2007). Such play areas are for use primarily by the children living in the housing estates, and so are not included in Table 6 on public play provision.

persistent complaints from the public and elected Councillors (SDCC, 2006). The decision to remove play provision from housing developments and place them in regional parks was based on the parks being strategically located to service large populations, that the parks were locked at night, and that they have park rangers and park depots for inspection and maintenance (SDCC, 2006).

The size of South Dublin's functional area and the vastness of its regional parks – Tymon, Griffeen and Corkagh – create accessibility issues. The parks cover vast areas; each park covers around 300 acres. Access requires parents driving to playgrounds. SDCC's Development Plan (2004b) identifies that public transport links around the county are poor. There is only one equipped playground in Lucan, recently up-graded, and it caters for senior and junior age groups. The regional park in which it is located includes a skate park and playing pitches for young people and large parklands. While this area does not have high concentrations of social housing, it is the closest regional park to children living in social housing in the Clondalkin/Lucan area. While SDCC's Development Plan's position is that public playgrounds should be located in regional parks, the Plan acknowledges that 'there are few play facilities within walking distance of housing areas', hinting that this is problematic. The issue of safety of access to playgrounds in social housing arose in south Dublin RAPID monitoring reports as a continuing difficulty, indicating that children's safe mobility is compromised in some social housing areas in the county.

However, more recently SDCC has adopted a policy of locating new playgrounds adjacent to new community centres in social housing areas on the basis that the centres are supervised and can be locked at night. SDCC's play policy (2006) provides for LEAPs adjacent to community centres. Recent RAPID-supported playground development in social housing areas in Fettercairn, Jobstown and Killinarden is located in community centres. However, the policy of building playgrounds on the grounds of or adjacent to community facilities in social housing areas appears to be reaching its limit for SDCC. There are no further potential playground sites in RAPID areas in Tallaght West (RAPID Progress Report, June 2007).

SDCC's planning guidance on play in new housing developments (2007) heralds a change in policy on public playground location as it seeks the provision of small equipped play areas close to home in new housing developments. The guidance implements SDCC's Development Plan (2004) which includes a policy to require developers to provide play facilities for children concurrent with new residential developments. The guidance relates to new developments, the majority of which will comprise private housing, although they may enter the social housing stream through mechanisms like the RAS. The guidance will not influence provision in existing housing areas.

Developing child-friendly cities

Local policy was reviewed to assess the extent to which it included actions and objectives on developing play spaces beyond the public playground and encouraging the development of child-friendly communities.

High-level policy in SDCC contains few specific objectives or actions for children and young people. While the SDCDB 10-year strategy (2002) includes few specific objectives or actions that support the NCS objective on children's built environment, it does, however, include a broad action 'to develop facilities and activities to support the NCS and the play policy' (meaning the National Play Policy). No specific actions or targets are included in the document. However, the SDCC Development Plan states that 'children use their whole environment to play, and it is possible through careful design and landscaping to provide play features that would not have the insurance, supervision, security or maintenance implications of traditional play areas' (2004a:74). This indicates that the Council is thinking beyond the playground and recognising that this approach could be beneficial to both children and SDCC. The Plan requires developers to provide neighbourhood centres within walking distance of housing developments, to encourage safe walking, cycling and play, and to provide open space, sports and recreational facilities and play areas. SDCC's play plan's (2006) objectives, actions and targets primarily focus on play in designated areas, i.e. parks, and focus on

outputs. The plan also includes an action to investigate the potential for home zone development. Home zones are associated with child-friendly environments.

GCC's aim is to make Galway city child-friendly. The vision is to create a physical environment that includes diverse opportunities for play and provides safe and accessible recreational areas (GCC, 2005). The CDB strategy includes the action to develop a child-friendly infrastructure and children's play facilities, indicating a commitment to play that moves beyond playground provision. GCC's Development Plan also includes broad actions on the development of sustainable communities and social infrastructure. Key outcomes will include pilot models of sustainable communities, including home zones, zoning for community facilities and consultation with communities. GCC's CFC document (Webb, 2000) recommends much that is considered good practice in developing child-friendly environments, e.g. the geographical and hierarchical approach to play provision using linked local spaces throughout the city, developing play opportunities that are not reliant on play equipment, and developing play space in full view of and integrated into development.

Developing play opportunities for children that do not rely solely on equipped play areas may also be facilitated by objectives in other high-level plans. GCC's Development Plan (2005) includes an action to link built and natural environments in open space to enhance its amenity value, using natural features such as trees, hedgerows, and rock outcrops. As is the case with so many of these policies and actions in local policy, implementation has the potential to benefit children and young people, even though they may not be specifically planned for.

In the policies of both Councils, open spaces are to provide play and recreational opportunities for children, young people, and people over 18 years of age. Both GCC's and SDCC's quantitative open space proportions are beyond the 10 per cent recommended by the DEHLG. SDCC (2005) designates a minimum rate of 14 per cent of site area in new development areas and 10 per cent of total site area in all other cases for open space. The only specific open space guidance relating to under-18s is

contained in SDCC's planning guidance on play in new developments (SDCC, 2007), which indicates that one-third of the 10 or 14 per cent is to be designed to facilitate play through equipped play areas. While SDCC's Development Plan (2005) emphasises the importance of focusing on the quality and adequacy of open space rather than specifying a set amount, it is unclear from the policy documents how judgements of adequacy and quality are made for children and young people. GCC's policy (2007) is that 15 per cent of residential space should be designated as communal recreation and amenity space. No guidance was located on the proportion of open space to be given over to the specific play and recreation space, or how the amenity is to be designed for younger people. An open space audit (GCC, 2007) found this proportion to be generally adequate, but recommended the development of enhanced standards for open space based on best practice, although no specific recommendations are made on how best to enhance open space for children and young people.

While streets emerge in research as a favourite close-to-home play venue for children, they do not generally feature as desired play and recreation areas for children and young people in the policy documents of either local authority. However, the home zone concept was introduced in GCC's CFC document (2000) as a means of encouraging safe play close to home, and GCC's Development Plan (2004) encourages the use of the street for general amenity. Overall, GCC's Development Plan encourages new development to be based on a network of spaces rather than a road-based layout. SDCC's (n.d.) street design guide for the new area of Adamstown also includes the provision of home zones, and SDCC's play policy (2006) includes an action to investigate opportunities for creating home zones.

Play and recreation quality/value

The National Play Strategy recommends that local play policy and provision should focus on the value of that provision to children. This value is an element of play quality. Other elements of quality might include accessibility and the array of developmental opportunities the provision offers children. However, as indicated in Section 3, central government's monitoring of local government performance on children's play is

quantitative, counting the number of playgrounds provided by local authorities. This approach does not provide us with a picture of public play provision in terms of its quality or value. Local documents were examined for evidence of a strategic approach to encouraging and monitoring play quality/value.

Objectives and actions in local high-level policies in both local authorities tend to focus on the quantitative aspects of play provision, i.e. increasing the numbers of playgrounds/play areas, rather than the qualitative. However, the local play policies provide some guidance on the qualitative aspects of play. SDCC's planning guidance (2007) on the provision of play facilities in new housing developments produced by the Planning Department, and Galway's CFC policy (Webb, 2000) to a less detailed extent, provide guidance on further developing the play provision hierarchy, minimum site areas, proximity to homes, numbers and types of play equipment. The CFC policy recommends ensuring that play equipment stimulates different senses and encourages different activities. Neither mainstream nor local play policies set out criteria for evaluating the play value and quality of play provision.

Criteria for evaluating the recreational value of facilities and amenities for young people are not set out in local policy documents. However, GCC (2007) conducted a recreation and amenity needs study that included a survey of open space users in five large city parks and amenity areas, and users of sporting facilities. There was a high level of satisfaction with these amenities. The survey did not interview users aged under 14 years. Women were found to the largest group using open space in the city. They may use these amenities with their children, and this may indicate that young children are benefiting from the city's amenities. A poverty/social inclusion focus is not provided on the data on open space use and so it is hard to judge the value of provision to children and young people in social housing. However, Westside Community Centre, a GCC facility that includes recreation provision for youth in this social housing area of the city, recorded a high level of usage amongst the 0-14 age group, with over a third of users in this age group. SDCC's play policy (2006) includes an action to assess play facilities to identify the level, range and standard of public and community play facilities available to

children of all ages, indicating that at least a once-off evaluation of designated provision is to take place. The development of open space standards is an action in GCC's recreation audit (2007), although developing standards for children and young people is not specified.

Meeting young people's recreational needs and preferences

GCC and SDCC documents and websites indicate that they provide a mix of passive and active public outdoor recreation amenities and facilities that young people can use. Youth clubs and services developed by voluntary and community bodies also provide recreational and socialisation opportunities and private facilities are also available but will not be reviewed in this section since it is concerned with local authority public provision only. While some of the facilities included in Table 6 are not located within social housing areas, they are in principle open to all young people to use, and access is generally free.

Table 6: Public outdoor recreation facilities provided/supported by local authorities, 2007

	Active & Passive	**Sport**
Galway City Council	Open space within the city and in residential areas 4 City Parks (large-scale) 12 Neighbourhood Parks 13 City Centre/Local Parks 2 Skate parks 1 Youth café 4 Organic gardens (incl. RAPID areas) Community centres	90 playing pitches (GAA, informal playing fields, rugby, volleyball, soccer) 53 hard/all weather pitches 2 running/formal jogging tracks
South Dublin County Council	1,600 hectares parks and open spaces 50 Local Parks	150 Playing Pitches for Gaelic pitches and soccer 8 centres for tennis

	5 Regional Parks (Tymon Regional Park, Tallaght; Corkagh Regional Park, Clondalkin; Griffeen Valley Regional Park, Lucan; Dodder Valley Park, Tallaght & Rathfarnham; Liffey Valley Park, Lucan and Palmerstown)	2 all-weather athletic pitches 15 all-weather pitches (11 in Astroturf, Tallaght, 4 Clondalkin Park)
	4 Youth Cafés (2 Tallaght, 2 Clondalkin)	Purpose- built baseball facility Corkagh Park, Tallaght Multi-Use Games Areas in Tallaght, Clondalkin, Collinstown, Firhouse, Kiltalown
	1 Skate park	
	Community centres	

Source: www.sdcc.ie; www.galwaycity.ie; South Dublin County Comhairle na nÓg newsletter, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2006; Galway City Council (2007)

Table 7 indicates recreation provision in both local authorities. It is not clear if provision is sufficient to meet children's and young people's structured and unstructured recreational needs and preferences as they are generally not involved in recreation audits. GCC's recreation and amenity needs study (GCC, 2007), which audited local provision and sought public views on the adequacy of provision, provides limited information on the preferences of children under 14 years. SDCC have yet to assess young people's recreational use and satisfaction. However, a seminar report from South County Dublin's Comhairle na nÓg (2006) identified recreational deficits in the county, particularly informal recreational opportunities such as night-time entertainment and social areas in youth facilities, indicating that provision in the county is not meeting young people's need for unstructured recreation opportunities.

Both local authorities have employed a Sports Coordinator, with the task of encouraging sports participation, including participation amongst people living in disadvantaged areas. Local policy documents support the development of sports facilities that benefit children and young people in social housing, particularly encouraging the development of playing pitches.

Youth cafés are increasingly part of recreation provision in south county Dublin and Galway city as a response to young people's desire for safe spaces in which to socialise and hang around. Galway city's 'Gaf' youth café in the city centre was the first youth café in Ireland and it is considered a model for provision nationwide (OMCYA, 2007a). It is run by the HSE West, Foróige and Galway Youth Federation, and remains Galway city's only youth café. By 2007 youth cafés had been developed in social housing areas in Mountain Park and Brookfield in Tallaght West and in Ronanstown and Quarryvale in Clondalkin. They are also statutory–voluntary sector partnerships. Following lobbying by south Dublin Comhairle na nÓg (2006), a café is to be established in Lucan south, an area of massive population growth containing mixed-tenure housing. A youth café is also proposed in the civic building in Adamstown, a new town being developed on the borders of Lucan which will include a proportion of social housing. Youth café development does not stem from any specific objectives contained in the local policy reviewed. Instead, youth cafés were developed in response to an identified need for safe indoor spaces for recreation and socialising. National policy has only explicitly sought their development since the development of Teenspace, indicating that local innovation may have influenced national policy.

Overall, the issue of young people's need for unstructured recreation and spaces for socialising receives little attention in high-level local policies. It is far less prominent in local policy relative to providing opportunities to play sports. However, GCDB's strategy (2000) seeks the provision of facilities for older children and teenagers in the city, namely skateboarding areas and ball courts. SDCC's Planning Guidance on the Provision of Children's Play Facilities in New Developments (2007) provides guidance for planners and developers in developing NEAPs that incorporate an area with a hard surface for ball games and equipment for older children such as games walls, basketball courts with hoops and areas for 'sitting, watching and talking with friends'. While the guidance will have little impact on existing housing areas, it does suggest a desire to accommodate young people's use of public space.

GCC's CFC policy (Webb, 2000) recommends the development of teen shelters to accommodate some young people's preference for hanging around in outdoor public spaces. While the CFC policy is endorsed in high-level GCC policy, this particular recommendation has yet to be implemented. On the other hand, SDCC's policies do not mention developing teen shelters, but they have developed one with some success. The reasons for these outcomes are explored later in the section on local policy implementation.

Community safety

Community safety concerns have influenced local policies on developing and designing public space and playground provision, particularly in social housing.

As previously discussed, the incidence and fear of vandalism and anti-social behaviour has resulted in SDCC's policy of restricting the development of designated play provision to regional parks and community centres in social housing areas. Both Councils are also 'designing out' opportunities for nuisance or anti-social behaviour that may be encouraged by the design of residential areas and public spaces. Policy documents in both local authorities indicate laneway closures in social housing areas. GCC's Development Plan (2005) specifies that no rear boundaries should face onto public open space and blank gable walls facing onto open public space should be minimised. GCC's CFC policy (Webb, 2000) also recommends siting play space away from gable-end walls or behind houses.

The issue of young people and anti-social behaviour is a particular concern evident in SDCC policy. SDCC's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy (2005) does not explicitly define young people hanging around in public space as anti-social behaviour. However, SDCC's Development Plan (2004a) describes one of the problems with the suburbanisation approach to development taken by the Council to date as being anti-social behaviour ranging from loitering to joyriding. Hanging around in public space can be considered loitering. The SDCDB strategy (2002a) includes strategic goals on crime prevention and community prevention initiatives that have a strong focus on issues of

juvenile justice and anti-social behaviour. SDCC's Housing Action Plan (2004b) also focuses on combating anti-social behaviour.

Community safety and children's safety is a concern for social housing residents in both Councils. Tallaght West's Child Development Initiative has developed a Community Safety Initiative in response to concerns expressed in their public consultation exercises. Residents, the CDI, the Gardaí, the local authority and other stakeholders are to develop a community safety contract and undertake activities that identify and address the factors that negatively impact on the community's experience of safety. In line with the CDI's outcomes-focused approach, the primary outcome of this initiative, which will be independently evaluated, is improved safety within the home, school and wider community environment (CDI, n.d.). This initiative, rather than focusing on young people as the source of problematic behaviour, takes a community-wide approach to making Tallaght West a safer place, consequently impacting on the safety of the outdoors for children.

The lack of amenity value, function and safety in open space in social housing in south Dublin was previously described. SDCC's Development Plan (2005c) now seeks the development of good quality, well-located open spaces. It is the policy of SDCC to develop infill housing[10] on open space in social housing estates where, the Plan suggests (SDCC, 2005c), large tracts of under-used and unsafe open space could accommodate extra affordable housing. There is no discussion in local policy on the impact of SDCC's infill housing policy on children or young people, and it is unclear if the public consultation on redevelopment of such sites included people under 18 years of age.

Children's and young people's mobility in their communities
The research reviewed earlier suggests that children play everywhere in their neighbourhoods and that they are increasingly mobile in their communities as they age.

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[10] The use of vacant land within a built-up area for further construction

The policies of SDCC and GCC were reviewed for evidence of explicit planning for safe mobility.

SDCC's play policy and GCC's CFC policy differ from each other in the extent to which they include objectives and actions relating to mobility. Galway city's CFC policy document (Webb, 2000) recommends ensuring children's safe access to community facilities when designing development, and locating play opportunities where they can be reached easily and safely. The policy includes much that is considered good practice: traffic calming (30kph) to allow children safe access to community facilities and schools, home zone development, footpath/cycleway systems in play and recreation spaces and amenities, and ensuring that provision is located where it can be reached safely. SDCC's play policy (2006) includes a general objective to facilitate and support the provision of appropriate, accessible and safe playgrounds and play areas for young people in south county Dublin, but does not contain any specific objectives or measures to implement the objective. It does, however, contain an action to investigate opportunities for developing home zones.

SDCC's play policy does not contain specific objectives on mobility, even though difficulties with traffic management and road safety have impacted negatively on access to playgrounds in some social housing areas in the county (RAPID progress report to National Monitoring Committee, November 2005). SDCC's Development Plan (2004) recognises that dependence on the private car in south county Dublin has impacted on the design character of the entire county, and that consideration for cars has dominated the shape and layout of housing developments. However, SDCC's Planning Guidance on the Provision of Children's Play Facilities in New Developments (SDCC, 2007) has responded to concerns about the predominance of cars in neighbourhoods and how this affects children's access to play. The guidance recommends locating LEAPs and NEAPs where they can be accessed by local children without having to cross a busy road. While this policy should support safe mobility in future housing developments, the guidance will not in itself alleviate difficulties in existing housing schemes.

SDCC's Development Plan (2004a) identifies that 29 per cent of households in their functional area do not have a car and that public transport provision linking areas within the county and with Dublin city centre is weak. However, the implications of this statement for children's and young people's access to play and recreation opportunities and facilities are not mentioned, nor does the policy contain specific measures to support access to play and recreation for young people and children. SDCC's Social Inclusion Policy (2005) does not suggest any goals or actions to tackle transport or urban design-based social exclusion for children and families, or for any other social group.

The Development Plans of both local authorities include goals and actions that have the potential to impact positively on children's safe mobility and provide them with opportunities to interact with natural environments. GCC's Development Plan's (2004a) goal is that the design of new housing should take into account the linkages between local facilities and community infrastructure, public transport and greenways, walking and cycling routes and parks. This approach, linking green areas in urban areas into networks running through and between communities and out to rural areas, is called green networks, or greenways. Greenways provide passive recreation and amenity in public spaces, establish a safe walking and cycling network, allow for interaction with the natural world, and provide a 'green lung' for cities. GCC is expanding Terryland Forest Park, linking it with Ballinfoyle, a social housing area with RAPID status undergoing regeneration, by a greenway which could potentially provide children and young people in the area with opportunities for play and recreation in natural environments. SDCC is also considering using parks and open spaces in the network of cycleways within parks for recreational and commuter uses (SDCC, 2004a).

SDCC's Development Plan (2004a) plans for links and thoroughfares that facilitate movement within and between existing and proposed development areas. They will also comprise networks that may include public transport routes, roads, streets, footpaths, cycle paths and linear open spaces. SDCC intends to connect a network of interconnected cycle ways, segregating cyclists from other traffic wherever possible,

throughout all developments in the county. SDCC's Architects, Parks and Planning Departments are working collaboratively to develop a green cycling and walking policy (SDCC, 2005b).

Galway city has become a member of the WHO Healthy Cities Initiative, alongside 80 other European cities, to enhance the health of the city, its environment and people through all groups and agencies working together. Actions include (GCDB, 2005b) developing initiatives to address childhood obesity and developing facilities for cyclists and pedestrians. Such plans mirror the kinds of actions required to make Galway a CFC.

Children and young people in higher density housing

As described earlier, national policy seeks higher density development to create sustainable communities. The trend in south Dublin is towards granting planning permission for apartment building. In 2002, 25 per cent of new residential units were apartments: by 2006 they represented 83 per cent of construction activity (SDCC, 2006). Given that children and families comprise a large proportion of the population of the county and that they are often housed in apartments under the RAS and in new social housing provision, it might be expected that local policy would specifically plan for play and recreation in these environments. However, no specific actions or recommendations relating to children and young people and their outdoor environments in higher density housing were found in key high-level local government policy in south Dublin. SDCDB's strategy (2002a) includes a general objective to 'support high-density housing developments in suitable locations with adequate complementary facilities, amenities and services and in close proximity to commercial development' and to 'encourage the development of alternative accommodation types to suit the needs of different types of family units', but does not include any child- or youth-specific objectives or actions in this regard. The policy does not suggest the need to consider families with children as a special group requiring policy or design attention in higher density developments.

SDCC's play plan (2006) does not mention play and recreation needs in high-density housing areas, nor does it suggest policies and actions in this regard. However, an action in SDCC's play plan was the development of play guidelines for new housing developments. The resulting guidance (SDCC, 2007) includes proposals to support children's play in high-density environments. Small play areas for young children are to be provided in blocks of 20 or more apartments or duplexes, in recognition of the smaller amenity spaces in these housing units.

GCC policies do not plan for children in higher density housing. Currently there are fewer apartment completions in Galway city than in south Dublin. In 2007, 235 apartments were completed in Galway city, as against almost 2,000 in south Dublin (DEHLG, 2008).

Key points

- Section 5 explored children's and young people's visibility in local government policies on the built environment and thematically analysed the content of these policies.

- In 2007 GCC and SDCC had not developed a plan to implement the NCS – they were not required to under national policy. However, they have instigated or are partners in local innovative strategies to develop child-friendly communities. These initiatives are described in this chapter. SDCC is also one of four pilot committees to support integrated, locally-led, strategic planning for children's services established by central government.

- In 2000 GCC published a Child Friendly Cities policy. It aims to make Galway city a CFC. It still functions as GCC's play policy. Its development was innovative at the time, and it remains the only written CFC policy in Ireland still being implemented.

- This policy has supported children's and young people's visibility in key high-level GCC policies such as the current Development Plan, Corporate Plan, and the CDB strategy. The CFC plan is cited as a key driver behind GCC's success in developing new playgrounds and wider initiatives on child-friendly physical environments. It is implemented by a number of GCC departments: Parks, Architects, Planning and RAPID.

- Mainstream high-level policy relating to the built environment in SDCC contains few specific policies, objectives or targets relating to children and young people's environments. Lower level plans, including RAPID strategies, are more likely to include specific policies and measures, in both local authorities.

- RAPID is a successful mechanism for supporting a targeted response to children's and young people's play and recreation needs in social housing in SDCC and GCC.

- Particular issues receive little or no attention in local high-level policies: play and recreation in high-density environments (although SDCC produced guidance in 2007 for new developments); the use of public space by young people for recreation and socialising; streets as play spaces (although home zone initiatives are considered in SDCC policy and are being pursued in GCC); and children's safe mobility in communities and residential areas (SDCC's mainstream and play policies do not contain specific measures in this regard).

- By 2007 SDCC and GCC had not developed policies specifically for young people, although GCC's CFC policy includes actions on recreation provision for young people. Recreation and development policies include some recreation recommendations for under- 18s, particularly relating to sports-related facilities. There is no strategic framework for ascertaining young people's needs and preferences in GCC or SDCC, although Galway city's RAPID initiative is to develop a young people's plan.
- Developing playgrounds remains the most tangible commitment to children's play within local policy. GCC's playground to population ratio exceeds the national average. SDCC's ratio falls considerably below it and does not meet national policy recommendations.
- Open spaces are to provide recreational amenity for all ages in SDCC and GCC policy. SDCC's and GCC's policies seek the development of a larger proportion of open space in residential areas than that recommended in national guidance. Local policies suggest the qualitative improvement of open space and the development of greenways to link green spaces to encourage healthier living, take people away from busy roads and provide new recreational opportunities. GCC policy seeks the development of improved standards for open space. The policy potentially supports meeting the aim of becoming a child-friendly city, although there is no mention of developing standards to support children's and young people's preferences and how they specifically use the space.

6   Issues affecting the local implementation of policy on children's and young people's built environments

6.1 Introduction

The previous section explored the extent to which children and young people are visible in local policy relevant to the built environment, and the kinds of objectives and actions contained in these policies. This section is based on the interviews conducted with key stakeholders in Galway city and south Dublin and identifies policy implementation issues arising for local government in developing amenities for children and young people and improving their physical environments.

6.2   Implementation issues

Children's and young people's visibility in policymaking

An independent evaluation of the local implementation of the NCS (Peyton and Wilson, 2005) indicates that CDBs in Ireland experienced difficulties in keeping children's issues on the policy agenda. SPC members and CDB chairs were asked whether or not they found it easy to keep children's issues related to the built environment on the agendas of their committees and were also asked to identify the kind of barriers and enablers they came across when trying to get children's issues onto the agenda and into implementation.

Galway City Council

None of the interviewees in GCC perceived it as difficult to introduce and keep children's issues on the agendas of their committees. However, two interviewees cited the pressure on local authorities to facilitate the speedy delivery of new housing as a barrier to adequately considering children and young people in planning and development in the city. Four interviewees cited the support of the City Manager as a key driver in championing children's issues within GCC. The development and public launch of the local children's CFC policy was viewed by an interviewee with particular responsibility for play provision in GCC as influential in both kick-starting the strategic focus on play provision in GCC and in the increase in provision that has been achieved.

It was further suggested by three local authority staff interviewees that the inclusion of GCC's CFC policy in two Development Plans gave it a higher status within the Council than might otherwise have been the case. An interviewee also suggested that the development of local master plans and local area plans by GCC and the inclusion of play and recreation provision in these plans have been beneficial to planning for children in GCC.

South Dublin County Council

The majority of interviewees in SDCC did not perceive it as difficult to introduce and keep children's issues on the agenda of their respective SPCs and the SDCDB. However, an elected Councillor participating in the SDCDB questioned the CDB's success in implementing the NCS, believing that children's interests have been inadequately represented in the CDB. It was suggested that additional support is required to ensure that local policymakers take children's interests on board, and that decision-making tools like child impact statements might support better local policymaking for children and young people.

Just under half of the SDCC interviewees believed that the pressure on the local authority to facilitate the speedy delivery of new housing acted as a barrier to adequately considering children and young people in policy and planning and development. Two interviewees also suggested that the support of the County Manager is a very important enabler in championing children's issues within local government, and has been an enabler within SDCC specifically.

Children's and young people's participation in local governance
Galway City Council

Children and young people are not members of mainstream local adult government committees, such as SPCs, in GCC. The primary means by which young people can participate in local policymaking is through South Dublin Comhairle na nÓg, located in SDCC and supported and coordinated by a Community and Enterprise Officer (CEDO). However, a GCC interviewee perceived an under-use of Comhairle na nÓg by GCC. It

was perceived that the Comhairle, rather than being a highly visible, integral part of local governance, found itself in a position of having to lobby internally to be noticed and heard. Additionally, it was noted that the CEDO worked part-time to support the Comhairle, having other responsibilities within GCC's Community and Enterprise Department. This had negative implications for the time that was available to work with young people to facilitate their participation in local policy.

Further examples of consultation and participation exercises with children and young people in relation to their environments were provided by GCC's RAPID coordinator and CEDO. These included once-off consultations by RAPID and local authority tenant liaison officers with children, young people and local residents groups on specific provision and potential plans in local housing areas.

South Dublin County Council
As in GCC, children and young people are not members of mainstream SDCC committees, with Comhairle na nÓg as the main mechanism for young people's participation in local policy development. It was indicated in an interview that, as with GCC, SDCC's CEDO worked part-time, stretching to find time to support the Comhairle. It was noted in an interview that much of the CEDO's time is devoted to renewing the Comhairle's membership and supporting new members. This is a constant job for CEDOs as young people continually age out of Comhairle na nÓg.

Further examples of consultation and participation with children and young people provided by interviewees included once-off consultations by the Parks Departments through local primary schools when developing local playground provision. SDCC's Parks Department perceives these consultation exercises as useful in playground design and equipment choice. Consultation takes place once the final location of the provision has been finalised and children choose from a pre-selected set of design and equipment options. SDCC's social housing estate management system has also faciliated the involvement of young people in designing recreational spaces and meets with them to discuss neighbourhood issues. Voluntary agencies and community-based

organisations working with young people in SDCC's social housing areas undertake consultations on specific issues, for example recreation provision.

Playground location and timing

Decision making on playground location and the timing of delivery arose as key issues affecting the implementation of local and national play policy in both local authorities.

South Dublin County Council

The feasibility of locating public play provision hierarchically in social housing arose in interviews in SDCC as a particular policy implementation challenge. SDCC's policy of locating playgrounds primarily in its handful of regional parks provoked much debate amongst interviewees. Not all elected and appointed local government officials said they agreed with this approach. An elected Council member and a staff member strongly suggested dotting play provision around housing developments and close to children's homes. It was considered that SDCC should develop these facilities as an additional tier in the play provision hierarchy in residential areas across all tenures. However, the position of the Parks Department is that developing playgrounds in social housing where they cannot be locked at night and supervised during the day remains problematic because of the threat of vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Interviewees were asked to give their opinions on the timing of play provision development in or close to new build housing, i.e. whether to develop provision parallel with development or after residents have moved in. There was support amongst all interviewees for providing play amenities parallel with development. It was recognised that when decisions are delayed to after residents move in public opposition can occur, blocking the development of appropriate play provision.

SDCC has experienced occasional opposition from vocal residents to some playground provision. The Parks Department perceived NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) as a key challenge in planning and developing public play provision. While local residents may agree in principle with playground provision, and consultation with local children may

have taken place, some adults may not want it located close to their homes. Instances were cited of Councillors being lobbied by residents and, as a result, intervening in the planning process.

An elected Councillor in SDCC drew attention to a substantial new area of higher-density social housing units in Balgaddy, a social housing area between Clondalkin and Lucan, as an example of SDCC not providing the required play provision in line with new build and need. Despite the fact that families were living in the first phases of the new social housing build in Balgaddy, there is a lack of playgrounds and play areas on or close to the site. The space around the development is primarily used for car parking. The scheme has won architectural awards. However, the dearth of play amenities in this housing scheme was raised in a newspaper article 'Daring social housing scheme – but no basic facilities' (McDonald, 2007).

Galway City Council

The challenge posed by public attitudes, or at least the attitudes of a vocal minority, to developing new playground provision also arose in interviews in GCC with elected Councillors and the Parks Department. While objections have not been raised in all developments, the Parks Department could cite specific examples where local adults, sometimes parents of young children, did not want a playground close to their home for reasons of aesthetics, the noise created by children playing, or increased traffic.

The challenge presented by some vocal residents to improving children's and young people's environments extends beyond playground provision. A GCC Councillor told of being lobbied in relation to local opposition to the development of greenways and walkways near private housing. Some residents did not want children and young people using these spaces and making noise.

The question of the timing of play provision development in new build areas was also discussed with interviewees in GCC. As in SDCC, support was expressed by interviewees for providing play amenities parallel with development.

Developing child-friendly communities

Efforts made by GCC and SDCC to develop safe local outdoor play and recreation opportunities that may include but look beyond equipped playgrounds, particularly in social housing, were discussed with interviewees.

Galway City Council

A visit by the first author to a social housing estate in Galway city accompanied by GCC's RAPID coordinator provided an example of an initiative to develop a child-friendly environment in an existing green space. This scheme aims to provide play and recreation opportunities and promote children's and young people's safe access.

Implementation example 1: Play and Recreation in Westside, Galway city
Westside is the name given to 12 local authority housing estates built in Galway city in the 1950s and 1970s. It is 3km from Galway's city centre and has a total population of 6,359 people. It has a large population of children and young people and is a RAPID area (Galway City Development Board, 2003).

A small, equipped play area, skate park and sports pitch have been retrofitted in the area through RAPID funding within an existing modest-sized local green space. A traffic calming scheme that reduces traffic to one lane was introduced between recreation area and the houses, creating safe access to the facilities for the children they are intended to serve.

The traffic calming measure reduces two-lane traffic to one-lane, with both lanes having right-of-way, forcing motorists to slow down. Local residents were initially unsure about the aim of the traffic-calming scheme and its implications for traffic in the area. RAPID found that public education on how the design reduced traffic speed and its benefits was required.

 It was also indicated in interviews that while the example above was adopted as one strategy to positively regenerate public spaces in social housing, GCC has also adopted another strategy to re-use public space considered problematic for public safety by infill housing. While understanding the impetus for the latter strategy, the preferred option for one GCC staff member was to regenerate and redesign these spaces to

provide functional, attractive communal amenities for all ages rather than eroding public space.

South Dublin County Council

A SDCC staff member and an elected official believed that some public green spaces previously developed by SDCC in residential areas, particularly in social housing, have suffered from a poor sense of place. They descibe spaces as functionless, with insufficient passive supervision and little sense of resident ownership. They recognised that these spaces have little amenity value for residents, instead becoming sites for nuisance and anti-social behaviour. Learning from these planning and design mistakes and developing local policy that encourages placemaking and sustainable communities were considered by an interviewee as key elements in developing child-friendly communities in the future.

However, SDCC also plans to re-use problematic public space as infill housing. There were diverging views amongst interviewees on the impact on children and young people of the infill housing strategy. In interviews, a staff member and elected official were concerned that public space was being eroded. However, it was recoginsed by interviewees that these spaces, due to poor design and an historical lack of attention, encouraged anti-social and criminal behaviour and that action is required. As in Galway, the prefered option was regenerating problematic public spaces as child-friendly spaces.

An element of the Tallaght West Child Development Initiative programme, A Safe and Healthy Place Initiative, described in Section 5.3, was the appointment by SDCC in 2007 of a Public Realm Designer to work with all relevant SDCC departments in developing child-friendly environments in Tallaght West, and to work on design issues in the wider county. This post was viewed by the CDI and an SDCC interviwee as a positive action to develop better environments for children, and was considered potentially supportive to regenerating social housing communities in Tallaght West.

SDCC's RAS initiative provided an example of the need to plan specifically for child-friendly communities in mainstream policies like Development Plans. According to SDCC's RAS Officer, over 95 per cent of RAS units in south Dublin contain families with children, with the most common type of RAS tenant being a lone mother with one or two children. South Dublin's RAS accommodation type is primarily 2-bed apartments and 3-bed houses. When considering the suitability of private accommodation for use as social housing, it is assumed that issues such as a family-friendly internal layout and outdoor play and recreation within the public and semi-public space in the housing development and wider community are addressed as part of the Development Plan and the wider planning regime before the RAS gets involved. In practice, the main criteria for matching a RAS dwelling and a family in need of housing are that accommodation must meet standards for rental accommodation, be well-decorated and furnished and be spatially adequate for the needs of the residents. Arguably the suitability of the accommodation in meeting play and recreation rights for children and young people housed through RAS is an issue that should receive attention in the first instance in the Development Plan.

Risk-averseness

The issue of real and perceived safety risks in play area design was explored in interviews with the Parks Departments in GCC and SDCC. As discussed previously, encouraging varied play experiences is considered good practice in play provision.

Galway City Council

GCC has found that developing playgrounds and play opportunities that respond to children's need for varied play experiences can cause tension between local residents, elected Councillors and local authority staff, sometimes leading to changes in design before and after playground installation.

The type of surfacing used in public playgrounds can cause safety concerns for parents. GCC's Parks Department is trying to move away from the traditional wet pour surface (often very colourful), towards the use of more natural, tactile materials – natural tree

bark, wood fibre/chip, sand and pea gravel – despite the fact that these materials require more maintenance than the wet pour. However, some parents view these materials as dirty and a safety hazard for children. The Parks Department cited an example where, when developing a new playground, they tried to move away from more traditional playground design, instead using mounding, woodchip surfacing and more imaginative play equipment. However, due to local opposition, which resulted in residents petitioning local Councillors, the scheme was modified. Some of the equipment considered dangerous by residents was taken out and the woodchip surfacing was replaced with the traditional wet pour surfacing.

Despite these safety fears GCC did not report a significant problem with accidents in playgrounds of any type or with insurance claims due to child injury.

South Dublin County Council

SDCC also reported similiar issues when experimenting with play area design. And likewise, SDCC did not report significant numbers of accidents or insurance claims. As in GCC, the gap between percieved and real risk was noted by those implementing play policies.

Funding issues

The availability of local and national funding for play and recreation provision, development and maintenance and the criteria for reciept of funding were discussed with GCC and SDCC departments implementing national policy.

South Dublin County Council

The Parks Department's staff interviewed had previously operated in an environment where specific playground and recreation funding was not available. They understood the valuable role that the funding has played in local authorities' capacity to meet play and recreation needs and appreciated the necessity of such funding for further development. However, funding available to local authorities generally is not adequate. This problem with the level of funding and the inflexibility of central government's criteria

for funding for children's play and recreation were identified as representing a risk to the sustainability of existing provision. As the current sceme only meets the capital costs of newly equipped/regenerated play provision it cannot be used to meet the ongoing operational costs of maintaining public play provision. The staff embargo in force in SDCC at the time of interview also challenged the ability of the Parks Department to maintain a growing network of play provision as new maintenance staff cannot be hired to meet demand.

Additionally, interviewees noted that as the national playground funding scheme is earmarked specifically for the purpose of developing equipped playgrounds, it has the unintended consequence of skewing provision towards equipped playgrounds and away from encouraging other ways of affording play opportunities.

Galway City Council

GCC echoed the view that the national funding scheme for play development has been very valuable in providing newly equipped provision and regenerating older provision. The Parks Department also shared the concern that the current funding scheme tends to skew provision towards equipped playgrounds at the expense of other possibilities. Overall, it was noted by a GCC staff member that higher specifications and standards coming from central government can increase the cost of developing new social, affordable and private residential areas. It was noted that central government funding to local govenment does not rise in line with increasing standards.

As in SDCC, concern was expressed in interviews that the national play funding scheme criteria coupled with a staff hiring embargo are impacting on GCC's ability to meet the maintenance workload generated through the national capital funding scheme.

The involvement of the private sector in play provision

The National Play Strategy's objective to encourage the involvement of the private sector in play provision was discussed with the Parks Departments. Both GCC and SDCC increasingly require private developers to provide for children's play in new

developments. Both local authorities say they enforce planning conditions related to play with private property developers. However, who should be responsible for insurance requirements and the ongoing maintenance of playgrounds in housing developments was still far from clear, particularly in south Dublin.

South Dublin County Council

SDCC's Development Plan (2004) includes the policy that where formal areas are provided with play equipment as part of residential developments, it will be the responsibility of the developer to provide for a specialist management company to manage and maintain the play area in question. Staff in the Parks Department illustrated some of the challenges they face in pursuing this policy. SDCC is driving the development of a new town called Adamstown which, it is anticipated, will eventually have 10,000 residents. The development of this area is regarded nationally as innovative because services and amenties for children and families are being planned from the early master planning stages. However, it was indicated that the issue of whether developers or SDCC will 'take charge' of playgrounds and play areas in Adamstown remains unclear. Insurance issues have arisen with one developer and SDCC has been asked to take charge of the play areas. SDCC's Parks Department believe that, at current operating levels, they do not have the financial and human resources to take on the management of these new parks and play spaces.

Recreation provision

Interviewees were asked to give their opinions on how best to provide for children's and young people's outdoor recreational needs. Most of them supported the policy of providing sports amenities and hiring Sports Partnership Coordinators. However, they also recognised the importance of unstructured recreation.

Galway City Council

The majority of GCC interviewees expressed support for providing unstructured recreation opportunities for young people in outdoor public areas. Some elected officials reported instances of being lobbied by the public who were concerned about young

people hanging around in public areas, particularly where young people were involved in drinking or drugtaking. One Councillor commented on the fact that young people hanging around in public had become an election issue in his area, describing it as an 'electoral no-no'. A number of recreation alternatives were discussed with interviewees.

There was widespread support amongst interviewees for the further expansion of youth cafés because they provide opportunities for young people to socialise indoors in a safe space, and also because young people in Galway city have been expressing a desire for more cafés. Interviews with RAPID and two elected Councillors indicate a shift, driven by young people themselves, towards the concept of mini-Gafs – a network of local youth cafés around the city. Young people want facilities closer to their homes rather than having to travel to the city centre to The Gaf. GCC and RAPID are considering this proposal.

GCC has developed two skate parks for young people, and there was widespread support for provision. GCC developed skate parks in the Millennium Children's Park in the city centre and adjacent to a small equipped playground in social housing in Westside (see implementation example 1).

As previously identified, GCC's CFC policy includes the development of teen shelters as an action to support young people's use of outdoor public space for recreation. However, an interviewee indicated that getting such provision off the ground has been difficult in GCC, despite the support of the local Gardaí and RAPID. There is a reluctance to be seen to encourage young people to hang around in public spaces.

South Dublin County Council
Young people 'hanging around' in public spaces is problematic in SDCC's area, a viewpoint that was voiced in all interviews with appointed and elected local authority personnel. Some councillors told of being approached by constituents requesting that Councillors act on the matter, particularly where young people are drinking in public. An

SDCC Councillor described the issue as a 'political hot potato'. Support was expressed for providing alternative, unstructured recreation opportunities.

There was strong support amongst interviewees to supporting the further expansion of youth cafés. On the other hand, teen shelters did not capture the attention of the majority of interviewees. While SDCC policy does not mention developing teen shelters, SDCC Parks Department has developed one in social housing. Implementation example two below, based on an interview with the Parks Department, provides further information.

Implementation example 2: South Dublin's Teen Shelter
South Dublin County Council's teen shelter is located in Kiltalown Regional Park, Tallaght West, an area of primarily social housing.

The teen shelter is a simple, sheltered, metal structure with seats. The park also contains a MUGA. SDCC's Parks Department highlighted that their teen shelter, unlike it counterparts in other countries, is not part of the Gardaí's regular beat as it is located in a large park away from civic spaces, with the implication that it is neither passively nor actively supervised. The area around the shelter requires frequent cleaning due to the prevalence of empty cans and other rubbish.

SDCC's Parks Department, responsible for the teen shelter's development and maintenance, and an SPC Chair recognise the advantages of a teen shelter as a casual recreational amenity for young people. The Parks Department believe that the shelter may encourage young people to congregate in the one place, and so keep them from hanging around in other public areas, such as housing estates, where they might be considered as a nuisance. However, the young people do use the shelter to consume alcohol and SDCC is concerned about their safety, particularly given the lack of supervision of the area.

In 2007 South Dublin completed a dedicated skateboard park in Griffeen Valley, Regional Park, Lucan. Implementation example three below, based on an interview with the Parks Department, provides information on its development and use.

Implementation example 3: Lucan Skate Park, south Dublin

South Dublin County Council's skate park in Griffeen Valley Regional Park opened in September 2006. It is Ireland's first concrete skate park, as opposed to provision based on modular equipment. SDCC's Parks Department, responsible for its development and maintenance, has identified the success factors as being the:

- process of consultation between the Parks Department and local residents, youth groups and representatives of Lucan Skateboard Club. The Parks Department believe that the participation of the young people and Club had a real impact on the final design of the skate park – what the young people wanted differed from the recommendations of the private company who supply the equipment. The result of having a design based on user participation, according to SDCC, is that the skate park is used by young people. They continue to participate in its ongoing development;
- effectiveness of a committee formed to develop and manage the skate park. It includes the young people from Lucan Skateboard Club;
- floodlighting which allows for the skate park to be used in the evening;
- security provided by CCTV and the skate park's location within a supervised regional park. The Parks Department found that these additions were important in allaying the fears of residents living in estates close to the park; and
- employing a dedicated worker to support the young people in the park.

There is no direct public transport from social housing in south Dublin to the skate park, so this resource is potentially chiefly enjoyed by young people living within walking distance of Griffeen Park or those using private transport.

SDCC's Parks Department also develop and maintain MUGAs. The Department viewed MUGAs positively as recreational provision for young people in social and private housing. Their disadvantage to young people is that their use tends to be seasonal, but SDCC intend to develop all-weather pitches to increase the value of the provision for young people and SDCC.

A voluntary sector interviewee with experience in developing services and advocating for children and young people in social housing believed that providing a teen shelter, a skatepark and games areas is a workable strategy for local authorities to adopt in supporting recreation in social housing.

Supporting safe mobility

Interviewees were asked their views on the barriers and enablers to children's safe mobility in their neighbourhoods, particularly in relation to their access to play and recreation opportunities.

Galway City Council

Interviewees stated that, in the face of housing shortages and the expansion of the roads network, local authorities may have seen providing for children and young people's play, recreational and safe mobility needs as secondary, with their priority being to get roads and houses built. A GCC Councillor commented that traffic-calming measures tend to be installed some time after residents have moved into housing developments and after roads have been built. Traffic difficulties are therefore identified after they have become a problem for residents, rather than being adequately considered early in the design process.

GCC is developing greenways as recreational amenities and as a means of moving safely within communities. However, in doing so, they are dealing with some legacies of previous planning decisions. The example cited by one GCC interviewee was the regeneration of Terryland Forest Park. GCC is developing this woodland as a recreational amenity for adults and children and is linking it up with other natural amenities in the city. The park is close to social housing and so provides further free outdoor recreational opportunities for these areas. However, it was noted that a national road bisects the park and users have to cross a busy thoroughfare to use the park and greenway. Overall, the relatively recent development of new access roads to and from Galway city, particularly the development of roundabouts, was cited by four interviewees as compromising safe mobility by bicycle and on foot.

The point was made by interviewees in RAPID and the Parks and Planning Departments that children's safe mobility in their communities is not just about local authority policy, planning frameworks and urban design. How people drive and the relative importance they place on their car is also relevant. A number of issues in this regard arose in interviews. The first issue identified was car parking. GCC policy allows

a parking allowance in new housing areas of 1.5 spaces per house. In the experience of GCC most houses have two or more cars. Any street space that could be used by children for play very quickly becomes parking. One option to reclaim the street is to remove off-street parking and parking on street kerbs in residential areas and create allocated parking areas away from but accessible to housing. This has been the approach taken in home zone development (discussed later), to encourage the amenity value of the street and give the street back to residents. However, GCC have found that people like to see their car outside their house, and so parking in allocated spaces slightly away from their home is disliked by some residents, and they try to park in front of their homes anyway.

Implementation example 4: Home zones in Galway City

GCC is developing new home zones and also retrofitting home zones in public and private housing. There is strong support for their development, although a series of issues and challenges have arisen for GCC in implementing this policy.

Home zone design in Galway city, including a home zone in a RAPID area, includes low kerbing, differentiating the footpath and road area. However, cars continue to drive over these rather than staying in the designated area in a home zone.

Residents in social housing are not always in favour of home zones because making the car secondary can mean less parking and they often view home zones as a strange road layout rather than something of wider value and amenity. Social housing residents are also conscious that having a home zone may give their area a different appearance from private housing.

A concern was expressed that home zones would simply become traffic-calming areas. Home zones can become cul-de-sacs resulting in a lack of permeability between the home zones and adjacent streets.

A lack of common design standards nationally and within GCC has meant that planners, architects, roads engineers, and developers may have different ideas about what is acceptable in terms of quality. This is a particularly salient issue in Galway city as the development of a home zone can count towards part of the amenity space requirements placed on developers, in line with the current Development Plan. GCC was developing a guide in 2007 for use in the design and development of home zones in the city to encourage a common understanding and design approach in the Council.

The understanding of home zones held not only by GCC but also by national bodies with responsibility for roads has impacted on their design and development. The roads standards under which local authorities operate are often determined nationally, and these standards were identified by GCC as a challenge in developing home zones.

However, GCC continue to develop home zones. GCC have developed several in social and private housing. Implementation example 4 details the learning arising for GCC from developing home zones.

A staff interviewee in GCC commented that policy in the Council in relation to mobility is underdeveloped. It was suggested that there is further scope for bringing Council departments and personnel with responsibility for transport and roads on board in developing child-friendly communities through mechanisms like RAPID and collaboration with departments responsibile for play and recreation.

South Dublin County Council

As in GCC, some SDCC interviewees highlighted the negative effect that traffic volume and speed have had on safe access to some playgrounds in south Dublin.

The Parks Department discussed their work in implementing SDCC's policy on the development of greenways. Alongside providing recreational provision and safe mobility routes, the Parks Department suggested that greenways increase the amenity value of existing provision such as parks. However, when the Parks Department tried to introduce cycle lanes through the parks both as amenities and as a means to encourage cycling and divert bicycles away from busy main roads they had difficulties accessing central government funding. The grounds for rejecting the proposal were that lanes in parks could not be considered as commuter routes.

Play and recreation quality/play value

Evaluating play quality and the value of play and recreation to children and young people, as suggested in national policy, was discussed with GCC and SDCC staff.

South Dublin County Council

Discussions with the Parks Department in SDCC suggested that measuring local authority performance on play by way of counting the number of equipped playgrounds

provided/facilitated by local authorities creates an incentive to target resources at playgrounds at the expense of other kinds of play opportunities in communities.

It was suggested that local authority performance indicators do not adequately reflect the range of local authority provision for play and recreation. They tell little about the level of equipment in the playgrounds, the range of equipment available, the quality and state of repair of the equipment, the age range to which it caters, or the extent to which it meets children's play needs. It was suggested that there is room for rethinking performance indicators, to include factors relating to recreational provision used by children and young people such as parks, woods and green networks.

Galway City Council

Additionally, a staff member in GCC recognised that as local authority performance is currently assessed, it does not reflect the qualitative aspects of open space provision in parks and neighbourhoods.

Children's policy and governance

A number of issues relating to developing and implementing children's policy in local authorities were discussed with interviewees, including the perceptions of staff of the extent to which the structures and processes available were successful in implementing local policy and in the delivery of appropriate play and recreation facilities.

Galway City Council

The 2000 CFC policy still functions as GCC's play plan and no new plan was developed in response to the National Play Strategy. There was no appetite amongst the majority of interviewees in GCC to develop a new play plan, as it was believed that the CFC document was still of relevance to the city.

Interviewees in Galway city were asked how useful they thought their CDBs were in progressing children's issues in an integrated way within local government. Generally, a feeling of distance from the CDBs was expressed for a number of reasons including the

perception held by some that the CDB was a 'talking shop' and that it is difficult to engage with. It was noted that CDBs operate at the policy coordination level and so had little or no contact with the local authority departments responsible for play and recreation. However, the CDB Chair was more positive about the role of the CDB in driving local integrated policy for children.

RAPID as a coordination and delivery mechanism supporting play and recreation provision in disadvantaged areas was considered effective by the majority of interviewees, particularly those responsible for directly implementing local and national policy. Nonetheless a gap in integrated planning and delivery to support children's and young people's safe mobility within their communities was identified. Integration between local authority Roads/Transport Departments and RAPID and Parks Departments was identified as an area where more could be achieved. People commented that roads tend not to be viewed as a children's issue.

GCC interviewees in relevant departments suggested that they sometimes have to enforce planning requirements relating to play and recreation with private developers.

South Dublin County Council

One Councillor in SDCC favoured mandatory instruction from central government, mainly to ensure that private developers were left with little option but to develop environments that meet children's and young people's requirements. The remaining interviewees saw a value in guidelines rather than compulsion.

There were positive attitudes amongst interviewees in SDCC towards RAPID as a mechanism for coordinating and funding targeted delivery that supports play and recreation in areas of disadvantage. The perception is that RAPID delivers efficiently in line with local need. RAPID was also judged to be sucessful in creating a mechanism whereby the range of sectors and service providers could 'link-in' and develop joint initiatives.

Interviewees in SDCC were asked how useful they thought their CDBs were in progressing children's issues in an integrated way within local government. Generally, a feeling of distance from the CDBs was expressed, for a number of reasons: the perception that the CDB was a 'talking shop'; that it is difficult to engage with; that what is required is strong local implementation and delivery, and that is not what CDBs do; and that business interests dominate over community issues. As in GCC, the CDB Chair was more positive about the role of the CDB in driving local integrated policy for children.

In relation to local governance for children, the Child Development Initiative in Tallaght West was mentioned by the majority of interviewees in south Dublin without prompt, all respondents indicating that the CDI holds promise to deliver on a range of issues for children in social housing in Tallaght West, including the built environment. It was early days for South Dublin's pilot CSC when those involved in it were interviewed, and the question 'what is a children's issue for the purposes of the CSC's work?' was still being considered by the committee members. The committee's role and purpose was unknown to most other interviewees at the time of the interviews.

Key Points

- This section identifies policy implementation issues arising for SDCC and GCC in developing play and recreational opportunities for children and young people and in improving their physical environments.
- Almost all relevant SPC members and CDB chairs in SDCC and GCC did not perceive it as difficult to get children's and young people's issues on the agenda of either structure. However, a CDB member in SDCC did believe that children's issues were inadequately represented in the CDB.
- Interviewees in GCC and SDCC indicated substantial difficulties in developing provision that supports outdoor play and recreation for children and young people. Adults may not always want playgrounds located close to their homes for reasons of noise or aesthetics, and may lobby the local authorities to prevent development. The issue of young people hanging around in outdoor public spaces was described by a SDCC Councillor as a 'political hot potato' and by a GCC Councillor as an 'electoral no-no'.
- The location of public playground provision arose in interviews in both GCC and SDCC. Not all stakeholders in SDCC agree with locating provision primarily in regional parks, and expressed a desire for an additional tier in the play hierarchy, dotting smaller play areas close to homes around the county.
- Many interviewees in SDCC recognised that green space/public space in social housing has been poorly planned and can be a draw for criminal and anti-social behaviour. There were diverging views on whether such spaces should be replaced with further social housing/closed off to the public – which is current local policy – or whether these spaces should be redesigned and redeveloped into a useful amenity for all. An emphasis on placemaking and sustainability in future planning was viewed as beneficial for children and young people.
- While central government funding for play is welcomed locally and has supported increased playground provision in both SDCC and GCC, the funding criteria was considered by stakeholders to over-skew local action on play towards the development of equipped playgrounds. Stakeholders identified that funding is also required to develop alternative play opportunities within communities. Also, the funding cannot be used to support the increased operational costs that come with increased playground provision, and sufficient funding may not always be available from local authorities' own budgets. A local authority hiring embargo is also creating difficulties with maintaining public amenities.

- The current set of national local authority performance indicators were perceived as influencing local authority action on play. Measuring performance quantitatively only, counting the number of playgrounds per head of population, encourages a focus on this type of provision, possibly at the expense of other kinds of play opportunities. They also do not recognise the variety of local authority provision that supports both play and recreation, such as parks and natural habitats.
- SDCC and GCC can meet local opposition in developing and upgrading play areas when they try to meet children's need for varied play experiences and incorporate alternative kinds of equipment, surfacing and landscaping.
- Examples of provision in SDCC and GCC that support the development of child-friendly communities are provided in this section. Examples provided include home zones (GCC), a skate park (SDCC), a redeveloped green space in social housing (GCC), and a teen shelter (SDCC).
- Tallaght West's Child Development Initiative, in partnership with SDCC, has developed an initiative to make an existing area of social housing which is currently a poor environment for children, into a child- and family-friendly community. A Public Realm Designer has been hired by SDCC to support this process.
- A key barrier identified by local stakeholders to the consideration of children's and young people's built environment interests in local policy has been the pressure on local authorities to develop new housing to meet supply and to build new roads.
- Factors supporting children's and young people's visibility in local policy on the physical environment identified by stakeholders include: the support of the county/city manager; the inclusion of specific policies and actions in the local Development Plan; the development of a clear planning scheme; and the development and public launch of a children's policy. The majority of stakeholders favoured support and guidance from central government on developing child-friendly environments rather than compelling them to do so.
- RAPID is perceived positively in both local authorities as a mechanism for coordinating and funding targeted delivery that supports play and recreation in areas of disadvantage in line with local need. It was viewed as sucessful in creating a mechanism whereby the range of sectors and service providers could 'link-in' and develop joint initiatives.
- Children and young people are not members of mainstream policy committees in either local authority. While both Councils have a Comhairle na nÓg, and it is regarded positively, there are issues relating to the operational resources available to the Comhairle in both local authorities, and also the extent to which the Comhairle is heard and utilised within the Councils.
- Other examples of consultation with children and young people on play, recreation and community provision in different housing tenures were provided by interviewees in GCC and SDCC. They tended to be once-off consultation exercises rather than ongoing participatory processes.

7   Conclusions and implications for policy: Ten key findings

7.1   Introduction

This paper assessed how local policy has articulated the objective contained in the National Children's Strategy that children will benefit from a built environment that supports their physical and emotional well-being. The paper takes a particular focus on children and young people living in social housing. It concentrates on the extent to which local built environment policy supports children's and young people's opportunities for play and recreation and their safe mobility within their communities. The policies of two Irish local authorities – Galway City Council and South Dublin County Council – were reviewed as case studies by means of documentary review and interviews with key stakeholders.

This section provides some conclusions and policy implications based on the findings of the local policy review, interviews conducted with local stakeholders in Galway city and south county Dublin, a review of relevant Irish policy, and a research literature review. The conclusions and implications are discussed bearing in mind the objectives of this paper, which were, firstly, to explore the extent to which children and young people are visible within local policy in relation to the built environment and, secondly, to examine the nature of the related strategies and actions contained in the local policies and the factors that are impacting on local and national policy implementation in support of children's and young people's play, recreation and mobility in their communities.

7.2 Children's and young people's visibility in local policy

Key Finding 1
National policy and funding frameworks have been influential in encouraging local policy development and provision on children's and young people's environments, particularly in relation to children's play. Such frameworks will remain important in the future in ensuring that local

government agencies develop specific local policy and provision for children.

The period of the National Play Policy expires in 2008. Its local impact and implementation requires evaluation to inform a second strategy. The following sections contain some areas for consideration by national policymakers. But, overall, it seems that national policy and funding frameworks have been locally influential, with local authorities developing policies that respond to their own particular politics and finances. National playground data indicate that since the publication of the National Play Policy and the introduction of central government's playground funding scheme, the development of new playgrounds by Irish local authorities has increased dramatically. By 2006 all local authorities had developed new playgrounds, although not all had developed local play policies as suggested under the National Play Policy. National policy prompted and supported SDCC to develop its own play policy (2006), and resulted in an increased emphasis in the Council on providing new playgrounds and refurbishing older provision. The implementation of GCC's Child Friendly City (CFC) policy from 2000 was also facilitated by the development of a national playground funding scheme. SDCC and GCC have developed targeted play and recreation provision for children and young people in social housing through their local RAPID initiative, using national funding frameworks, and levering other funding opportunities.

While it remains innovative in the Irish context, GCC's CFC plan is an example of the need to evaluate and up-date local children's plans. There was no great appetite amongst interviewees in Galway city to develop a new CFC plan or a play strategy, yet it seems that many of the needs identified when the review of provision was conducted in 1999/2000 have been met, and it may be that other needs have arisen. Some actions have not been implemented, for example teen shelters, and require review. The objectives of national policy published since the release of the CFC policy also require consideration.

SDCC and GCC have regard to national housing and planning and development policies that include play and recreation objectives, although local authorities are not obliged to implement them and implementation is affected by local issues, priorities and resources. In 2007 central government released new policy and guidelines on developing sustainable communities applicable to all housing tenures. They contain guidelines for developers in developing play facilities. These may have considerable influence in future housing developments, and may encourage the link between child-friendly communities and sustainable communities. However, as yet there has been no evaluation of the extent to which existing national policy frameworks have been successful at local level in developing environments that meet the needs and preferences of children and young people.

Key Finding 2
The development of local children's and young people's policies supports local action for children and young people and also their visibility in mainstream local policy and governance.

While national policy frameworks have driven local policy development and action for children, ground-up local innovation also occurs. GCC's policy published in 2000 to make Galway city child-friendly is an example of local authority innovation that precedes national children's policy. The CFC policy was cited by GCC as a key driver of the rapid playground development by the Council since its publication. South Dublin's Child Development Initiative and its 10-year strategic plan for children in Tallaght West, although initially driven by local residents and NGOs, is now firmly embedded in and supported by local government in south Dublin. Thus local initiatives and policies have facilitated children's and young people's visibility in decision-making on the built environment in both local authorities.

This paper provides examples of how the vision and objectives of the 'Galway as a Child-Friendly City policy' have been adopted in important high-level local government policies in the city, such as Development Plans, and examples have been given of its

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success in identifying and meeting needs and gaps in play provision. The CFC policy has also supported wider local strategy, including the hierarchical approach to play in the city, the focus on safe access to play, and the development of home zones in social and private housing areas. It is used in planning and development in GCC, indicating its implementation by GCC departments beyond the Parks Department. Reasons given for its success include the high-level support it receives in the Council and its association with two Development Plans. Having the support of the County/City Manager was viewed by interviewees in both local authorities as being a key factor in the successful implementation of children's policy in both areas. These findings indicate the importance for children of their inclusion in statutory Development Plans and of having high-level champions within the Council.

The partnership between the Child Development Initiative (CDI) and SDCC aiming to improve physical environments and safety for children and families in Tallaght West has led to the development of a children's plan with defined objectives, targets, timelines, and desired child outcomes. It includes a CDI initiative funded by SDCC that is directed towards improving the quality of the social housing stock, hiring a Public Realm Designer, and improving the outdoor design of some social housing areas in Tallaght West. Such an approach provides an agreed strategy for improving children's and young people's environments that all local authority departments and wider local government can work towards. The success of such initiatives may encourage local government agencies to consider child outcomes when developing policy.

Key Finding 3

With the exception of an emerging focus on play, particularly playground development, mainstream high-level local policies relating to the built environment contain few specific policies that support planning and improving the built environment for children and young people.

The local authorities in this paper have responded to national policy frameworks in support of children's play. However, Development Plans and Corporate Plans contain

few specific policies and objectives on the built environment for children. The CDB strategies and Development Plans reviewed in this paper were developed post-NCS, but prior to the development of the National Play Policy and Teenspace. However, as previously identified, the development of GCC's CFC policy was an action contained in a GCC Development Plan published prior to the NCS, and the CFC goals and objectives were endorsed in the subsequent Development Plan. The NCS contains little or no specific objectives or guidance to local authorities in improving children's environments, which may explain its lack of influence.

This policy review supports the National Children's Strategy's contention that the contents of local statutory Development Plans are central in providing child-friendly environments. As a legal document and the blueprint for planning and development, Development Plans must be observed by local authorities and developers. The review conducted here suggests that more attention should be paid to how local Development Plans include planning for children and young people, and that the contents of any child- and youth-specific strategies on the built environment should be reflected in these plans in order to have force. The contents of Development Plans are important to all children and young people regardless of family income or housing tenure. However, for children living in social housing but not in a RAPID area – an important group given Part V, RAS housing, and the purchase of private housing by local authorities – the contents of policies such as Development Plans, and more detailed master plans and local area plans, are central in developing safe and stimulating communities.

Key Finding 4
Partly due to the pressure on local authorities to meet housing and transport demands in the economic boom, children's interests have been inadequately considered in local policymaking and planning and development decision-making. Tools are required to enhance children's and young people's visibility in these areas.

A perception was held by some stakeholders that the pressure on local authorities to meet housing and transport demands may have impacted negatively on children and young people's environments and communities, and that their needs and interests were not always considered in policy and decision-making. The outcome is that some new housing developments and new roads are not child-friendly. How best to encourage children's visibility in local policymaking and decision-making is one of the concerns of the child-friendly cities movement. Child impact assessment, described earlier, is one of the building blocks of a child-friendly city (UNICEF, 2004).

While a feasibility study (Corrigan, 2008) expressed reservations about a national approach to the development of a child impact assessment framework, as recommended in the NCS, there is scope to consider their development at local level. The Children's Services Committees may provide an opportunity to develop an impact assessment tool. Impact assessments could be undertaken on Development Plans, on master plans and area plans, local authority annual budgets, and specific planning and development proposals. There is experience of 'proofing' in both local authorities as both undertake 'poverty proofing' on aspects of their policies, and GCC will be undertaking Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) as part of the WHO Healthy Cities initiative. The introduction of HIAs in Galway city is an opportunity to assess the impact of particular policies and planning and development decisions on the health of children and young people.

There is international precedence for child impact assessments that can serve as a source of learning. Edmonton City Council in Canada has adopted an Integrated Services Strategy and developed a Children Services Framework which seeks to align programmes, services and facilities to children's needs provided by the local authority and NGOs. A child impact assessment tool and process has been developed for the Council based on the Strategy and Framework (Yates, Thorn and Associates, 2005), called 'A Child-Friendly Lens', which not only assesses the potential impact of local action, but tries to feed into the continuous improvement of local initiatives, and includes a performance measurement system.

The extent to which children are considered stakeholders can also be gauged by the proportion of the local budget spent on them and their families. There is no way of identifying how much of the local budget is allocated to children in SDCC and GCC. This is not unusual: no Irish local authority develops children's budgets. While challenges exist in developing children's budgets, it is important that central and local government try to identify the share of resources devoted to children, and their families, and the outcomes achieved by such expenditure.

Key Finding 5

While an emerging stock of Irish research evidence on young people and recreation is available to local authorities and central government to inform policy and design, this is not the case in relation to children's play. Research is required on where and how children play in urban, suburban and rural locations.

The earlier literature review indicates that while we understand an increasing amount about where and how young people like to spend their free time and the barriers to recreational participation, there is a dearth of Irish research with children on where and how they play in the Irish built (and natural) environment. This kind of information is useful to policy formation, urban design, and planning and development. Such research would help us understand how the design of residential areas, housing estates and neighbourhoods influences children's play and their safe mobility in their neighbourhoods.

7.3 Strategies and actions in local policy

Key Finding 6

Local policy would benefit from an increased focus on child-friendly communities and on play value and quality, aiming to provide varied play and

recreation opportunities for children and ensuring their safe mobility within their communities.

The findings of this review indicate that SDCC and GCC have increased their stock of playgrounds: GCC's provision lies beyond the national average playground to population ratio, while SDCC's lies below it. The international research evidence reviewed suggests that while children use and value playgrounds, they require a far broader variety of play opportunities. Current playground investment and stock provide a good basis on which to build further and different play opportunities that are easily and safely accessed by children.

Local policy – for instance SDCC's Development Plan and Galway's CFC Plan – suggests developing play opportunities that go beyond the equipped playground and use landscaping and different play materials. Children's and young people's access to play and recreation opportunities in their neighbourhoods depends greatly on their safety in moving between their home, their friends' homes and wider spaces and amenities in their neighbourhoods. Yet high-level policies – Corporate Plans, Development Plans, CDB strategies – in the local authorities contain little discussion and few specific policy objectives or actions on the subject. SDCC's play policy does not suggest specific mobility actions. This is surprising given that SDCC policy, including the Development Plan, suggests mobility difficulties for residents due to the design of communities, which have catered for cars rather than people. RAPID progress reports indicate difficulties with safe access for children to playgrounds in social housing areas due to traffic – the RAPID strategy includes provision for traffic calming. However, SDCC's Social Inclusion Plan contains no policies or actions on alleviating design – or transport-based exclusion. The development of home zones in Galway city and their potential development in south Dublin is, however, an initiative with the potential to give streets back to children as safe spaces for play, and these can be spaces for recreation and community life for all ages. Designing residential streets with child safety in mind remains an issue for local authorities. Home zones are being developed without national guidance and support, and GCC's experience suggests that guidance is required in

setting minimum design standards to ensure that all stakeholders are working from the same understanding of home zones, and so that the home zone concept is not watered down by developers..

In both local authorities interviewees suggested that there is further scope for bringing Council departments and personnel with responsibility for transport and roads on board in developing child-friendly communities. They cite the potential in using mechanisms such as RAPID and partnership with departments with responsibility for play and recreation. In SDCC, the Children's Services Committee in South Dublin County Council may provide a mechanism for drawing departments concerned with roads and transport into children's policy, although it requires stakeholders to consider this policy area a 'children's issue'. The action contained in SDCC's Development Board Implementation Plan, 2006-2008 to create direct links between the South Dublin Development Board structures and the Transportation Strategic Policy Committee may provide an avenue for further integration.

While recent national housing policy links housing density with sustainable communities, none of the SDCC and GCC mainstream policies reviewed mention or provide guidance on supporting children's and young people's interactions with the outdoor environment within the context of higher-density development. This is particularly surprising in SDCC's case as south Dublin's new housing build is increasingly made up of apartments, and SDCC has adopted a policy of increasing housing density. The lack of play and recreation facilities in a new high-density social housing complex which has won architectural awards in SDCC's area was mentioned in the review. However, SDCC in 2007 published guidelines on developing new housing development that included guidance on designing play areas in apartments. The development of the guidance was an action in the SDCC play plan.

Central government could have a role in supporting local authorities in developing child-friendly communities, particularly given the challenges that persist for local government in developing child-friendly environments. SDCC and GCC have both made efforts to

guide their local authorities and developers in developing housing complexes, streets and communities that are child-friendly – such as SDCC's guidelines for Adamstown and guidance for developers on play in new developments and GCC's development of home zone guidelines. The Norwegian government (1995) has gone down the road of compelling local government to make provision for children and has introduced national policy guidelines to strengthen the interests of children and young people in the planning process. There may not be support in Ireland for making guidelines mandatory, but some guidance may be warranted.

There is a number of possible reasons why local government has been more focused on playground development than on taking a wider focus on child-friendly communities. Local authorities need to build up playground provision from a low base in many areas. Also, central government funding is specifically ring-fenced. It is also the case that the DEHLG approach to monitoring current Irish local government performance uses indicators that are readily amenable to counting, i.e. the number of playgrounds and swimming pools per 1,000 of population. This may have the unintended consequence of directing resources towards their development, possibly to the detriment of other kinds of play and recreation areas and facilities. Local authorities and the DEHLG and OMCYA could consider alternative indicators that relate to wider play and recreation amenities provided by local authorities from which children and young people might benefit.

An objective of the National Play Policy is to improve information on and evaluation and monitoring of play provision. The tools with which to judge quality from a child-centred perspective have yet to be developed. Local authorities and national government have yet to develop a framework for evaluating and measuring play value and the child-friendliness of specific environments – streets, neighbourhoods, cities and towns. Developing 'objective' quality indicators can be problematic; for instance satisfying play can be subjective and the development of indicators and scoring systems may skew provision in certain directions. Play England (2007) is piloting child- and youth-centred

performance indicators on how residential areas support children's and young people's safe and satisfying interaction with their environments.

Key Finding 7

While SDCC and GCC have considerable structured recreation provision for young people, there are policy and delivery gaps in both local authorities in relation to young people's unstructured recreational needs.

While the majority of young people in Ireland play sports competitively or recreationally, young people also like to 'hang around' with their peers. Some like to socialise in public places, particularly in social housing, and continue to do so despite being moved on. The question of how best to meet young people's desire for unstructured recreation activities is problematic in both local authorities, although SDCC and GCC have made some inroads, mainly through the provision of youth cafés, skateparks, and, in SDCC, a teen shelter. While the teen shelter can be considered a success in that it accepts the reality of young people's recreational choices and 'contains' young people in a particular area away from streets and houses, there are outstanding issues to do with youth safety and the lack of passive and Garda surveillance. Galway's CFC plan included the provision of teen shelters as an action, but the action did not receive sufficient support within the Council and has yet to be implemented.

Galway city centre's 'The Gaf' was the first youth café in Ireland and has been a model for this kind of provision. It provides another example of how local policy can influence national policy. Young people in Galway city are now seeking youth cafés closer to home. There are two cafés in SDCC's social housing areas, run by a national youth NGO. It can be expected that future local policy in south Dublin and Galway city will explicitly support such provision, particularly in disadvantaged areas, given that they provide positive, safe hanging-out spaces for young people in social housing, and provide a service access point.

However, the question of young people hanging around on streets and in other public spaces remains a fraught issue in both local authorities, arising frequently in interviews. Elected and appointed officals are under pressure to stamp out this behaviour. Overall,

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the area of unstructured recreation for young people is neglected in policy and provision. This may change with the implementation of Teenspace. Teenspace provides a mandate to, and a framework for, local authorities to support young people's structured and unstructured recreation needs and preferences, and also requires local authorities to adopt a social inclusion focus in provision.

The neglect in policy of young people's need for unstructured recreation may also be connected to the overall lack of policy on services for young people in Galway city and south Dublin. However, RAPID in Galway city is to develop a youth plan to address this situation for young people in RAPID areas. There is no local strategic framework in GCC and SDCC for the identification of young people's needs and the provision of services. Teenspace requires youth recreation plans, which will have to be closely linked with youth work plans developed under separate youth work legislation. Further coordination is required as there is a planning and coordination gap in local authorities, with four departments involved in providing funding and coordinating policy development and implementation: the Department of Rural, Community and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Health and Children (including the OMCYA), the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, alongside local government partners in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. For children in social housing in south Dublin, the siting of a pilot Children's Services Committee there may offer opportunities for integrated action and planning on youth issues, given the VEC, the HSE, the Department of Education and the County Council presence on the committee.

7.4 Factors impacting on local policy implementation

Key Finding 8
NIMBYism and fear of vandalism are negatively affecting the extent to which the local authorities are developing play and recreation provision, and are also impacting on the kind of provision offered and its accessibility for children.

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Overall, the provision of play areas in social housing in SDCC remains problematic. Due to past experiences with vandalism in playgrounds located in social housing estates, SDCC has adopted a policy of locating equipped playgrounds either in regional parks or, more recently, adjacent to new community centres in RAPID areas for ease of supervision and the ability to lock the provision. However, it seems that there are no more potential playground sites in the RAPID areas in Tallaght West, suggesting that this policy is in need of review by the Recreation, Community and Parks Strategic Policy Committee and the RAPID AIT. The outcome to date of the policy is that there may be insufficient playgrounds located close to children's homes. GCC, in line with its CFC policy, has adopted a hierarchical approach to playground location. In both local authorities there have been calls for another tier in the play hierarchy: pocket parks. Future play policy should consider locating playgrounds closer to home. However, this can be easier said than done for local authorities due to NIMBYism.

Elected and appointed officials cited NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard) as a challenge when developing play provision. While local residents may agree in principle with playground provision, and consultation with local children may have taken place in relation to what they want from the provision, adults sometimes do not want play areas located close to their homes. Elected Councillors have been lobbied by residents to prevent playground development, and they may intervene in the planning process. While objections have not been raised in all developments in GCC and SDCC, the Parks Departments' staff in both local authorities could anecdotally cite specific examples where adults, sometimes with children themselves, did not want a playground close to their home for reasons of aesthetics, the noise created by children playing or potential increased traffic. Given that providing opportunities for play close to home is a feature of national and local policy on play and developing sustainable communities, NIMBYism makes realising these policies challenging for local authorities.

South Dublin's play policy and Galway's CFC policy include an objective on public education on the value of play: it seems that such education is required. Promoting play may seem like a 'softer' objective of the national play policy, but without the public

having a understanding of play and a regard for the status of children, implementing play policies at local level can be difficult. Given that consensus on play spaces and their location can prove difficult, and children's voices and political rights are weak, whose voice is listened to? Callanan (2003) suggests that Irish local authorities, particularly elected members, need to provide leadership on these issues and should ensure that they do not blindly follow the arguments of the loudest protest group in an area.

Play provision is not solely about spaces and equipment. Play workers working with children on the ground are a feature of play provision in other countries. They could be employed in Ireland to support play in designated and non-designated play areas. They could also support different types of play and could provide supervision of children and of play areas.

Key Finding 9
The methods used for children's and young people's participation in developing and improving their communities may benefit from expansion beyond the current consultation models used by the local authorities.

A major outcome of the NCS has been an increase in the practice of consultation with children and young people on matters that affect them and their participation in local and national policy development and services. Enabling children's participation is a task that requires specialist skills and methodologies. SDCC and GCC have each established a Comhairle na nÓg (youth council), and the local authorities also undertake consultation exercises with children and young people. Consultation with children and young people appears to focus on specific issues – play policies or specific play and recreation provision – at a relatively advanced stage in the policymaking and planning process, rather than inviting children to engage in agenda-setting and early planning stages. Consultation exercises tend to be one-off, where the Council obtains the views of children and young people when planning play and recreation provision or asks for an opionion through Comhairle na nÓg. Children are rarely seen as partners in

decison-making and are not given the opportunity to engage fully in planning processes from inception to completion. They do not participate in local government committees alongside adults. The Comhairle runs parallel to the adult Council and its committees. This structure may be a contributing cause of the perception of an interviewee in Galway city that the Comhairle lobbys the adult Council, as opposed to being an equal stakeholder in decision-making. Teenspace recommends that young people become members of local government committees such as SPCs. In order for this to happen, both adult and youth committee members require support, and it may necessitate some changes to how committees operate.

There are many examples nationally and internationally of participative methods for involving young people in planning and design, which planners and adult community members can also be part of. Methods include: mapping exercises undertaken during preliminary design; walk-throughs and model building (such as Planning for Real used in some Irish local authorities); children accompanying planners on surveys in communities; and open planning days where children and young people take part in child-centred planning activities.

There are some interesting examples of young people's involvement in running youth services in the local authorities. For example, young people are involved in the management of the Gaf café in Galway city. They also serve on the management committee of south Dublin's skate park, and were perceived by SDCC as being highly influential in the design process of the park. However, there is no framework for evaluating the impact of children's and young people's participation in the planning and running of child and youth facilities and services.

Key Finding 10

While the national playground funding scheme has been a positive force in developing new playgrounds, it requires review and revision. Playground provision has moved on in Ireland, and there is a case for being less restrictive in how the funding is allocated.

Central government support for the development of playgrounds has been very beneficial to local play provision and has developed an unprecedented network of playgrounds around the country. Without this funding, local authorities would have struggled to develop new provision. It provided funding in RAPID areas through which other local and national funding streams could also be secured. However, as the funding is ring-fenced, it skews local play provision towards equipped playgrounds. It seems worthwhile for central government to consider how best to use this money to provide a range of play opportunities for children.

The funding scheme also cannot be used to meet the ongoing operational costs of maintaining public play provision. While it is understandable that the funding criteria have been strict, as there has been a need to boost provision nationally, it emerged in interviews that local budgets have not been sufficient for the constant maintenance and periodic up-grading that comes with increased provision. This issue requires further consideration in the development of the second national play strategy if the considerable public investment resulting from the first strategy is to be sustainable. It seems inconceivable to go back to the past where playgrounds became decrepit and unused. Local authorities have a limited local funding base and at the time of interview were experiencing staff hiring embargos. Resources, human and financial, are vital in supporting and ensuring the sustainability of current play and recreation provision in private and social housing.

The National Play Strategy seeks the involvement of the private sector in play provision. Private developers are developing play and recreational facilities in new developments as a result of planning conditions. Local authorities may not 'take charge' of the facilities, with developers employing management companies to do so. However, it emerged in interviews in SDCC that it is not always clear who will take charge of the play provision with neither developer nor Council wishing to or able to meet the costs. As the housing market sours, this issue will become even more important as developers' financial situations change.

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Appendix 1

Key Local Plans and Strategies in Planning for Children's Environments, 2007

Policy/ Strategy	Details	Relevance to children & environments	Key Structures & Actors
Development Plan	• Required under Planning & Development Act, 2000 • Blueprint for the physical development of a local authority area for a 6-year period. Include objectives for the use of particular areas, development objectives, road improvements, renewal of obsolete areas & improving amenities • The only local statutory plan/ strategy. Variations to plan agreed by elected Council • Has to be consistent with national plans, strategies and guidelines, regional plans, guidelines and strategies; adjoining counties' development plans etc.	• Overall strategy on types of developments • Roads, infrastructure & traffic • Land-use • Zoning • Planning requirements • Play • Recreation • Amenities • Social inclusion	• Elected Council members • All local authority departments • Private developers • National agencies, e.g., roads, housing, transport • CDB • Children's Services Committees
RAPID Strategies	• A Government initiative targeting 45 disadvantaged areas in the country. It aims to ensure that priority attention is given to these areas by focusing State resources available under the National Development Plan • Each RAPID area produces a plan for the implementation of the programme in their community containing a variety of proposals to Government departments and state agencies for the	• Play • Recreation • Regeneration social housing areas • Traffic calming • Safety and security measures • Consultation with children, young people & communities • Community Development	• RAPID coordinator • DCRGA • Area Implementation Team • CDB • All local authority departments • Children's Services Committee • Other local statutory and voluntary agencies

	funding of new projects and to improve local coordination of public service delivery	• Public services	
Social Inclusion Plans (SDCC only)	• Under the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy (2002), local strategies to address social inclusion are to be developed	• Child Poverty is to be a cross-cutting theme	• All local authority departments • City and County Development Boards • Children's Services Committees • RAPID
Corporate Plans	• Outlines Council's main objectives and strategies over 5-year period • Aim is to focus on results and clarity and consensus on the main objectives to be achieved • Provides framework for all work undertaken by the Council and for other strategies and plans and each local authority directorate takes it into account in developing its own work programme	• Department of the Environment recommend that social inclusion become a cross-cutting theme in corporate plans • Children's issues may be designated as a key objective	• City/County Manager • Local Authorities' Directors of Services • CDB • SPC
Local Play Policies	• Required under Ready, Steady Play! National Play Strategy • Developed in partnership with relevant SPC and local authority departments, e.g., Parks, Community & Enterprise and CDB	• Key guiding policy for local authorities on public play provision for children up to age 12	• Private developers • Local authority departments: transport/roads; planning; architects; housing; parks; community & enterprise • OMCYA • RAPID • Comhairle na nÓg • SPCs: recreation; housing; transport/

			• roads; economic development • Children's Services Committees
Local Recreation Policies	• Policies developed by local authorities for all age groups for active and passive recreation and amenity • Only required for young people since 2007's National Recreation Policy for 12 to 18 year olds	• Key guiding policy for local authorities on public recreation provision for aged 12 to 18	• CDB • Local authority departments: housing; transport/roads; planning; architects; housing; parks; community & enterprise • Comhairle na nÓg • Private developers • OMCYA • SPCs: recreation; transport/roads; economic development • Elected Council members • RAPID • Children's Services Committees
City and County Development Board Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development	• City/County Development Boards were established in 1990s - local government reform to bring about an integrated approach to the delivery of both State and local development services at local level. • Each CDB prepares and oversees the implementation of ten-year county/city strategy to bring coherence to the planning and delivery of services at local level.	• Play • Recreation and amenity • Built environment • Natural environment • Childcare • Social Inclusion • Local implementation of NCS	• Community & Enterprise Department • RAPID • Comhairle na nÓg • CDBs • Children's Services Committees

- CDBs were to be the primary vehicle for local NCS implementation

Action Plans for Social and Affordable Housing 2004-2008	• Multi-annual Action Plans prepared by local authorities to assist them in identifying priority needs and providing a coordinated response across all housing services. • Approved by the DEHLG	• Social and affordable housing provision	• Housing SPCs • Housing department • Elected Council members
Annual Budgets	• Budget for current expenditure which covers the day-to-day running of the local authority, including staff salaries and housing maintenance. • The adoption of the annual budget is a key function of the elected Council	• Council contributions towards new play, recreation and traffic calming and up-grading • Staff costs	• Directors of Services • County/City Manager • Elected Council members

Source: Curley (2006); www.environ.ie; www.galwaycity.ie; www.sdcc.ie; Callanan (2003)

Appendix 2

Examples of relevant projects delivered through RAPID in Galway city and south county Dublin 2005-2007

Year	Play/recreation/mobility project	Funding allocated (€)	Source of Funding
South Dublin			
2005	Brookfield, Fettercairn, Killinarden, Jobstown – Estate Enhancement	400,000	DCRGA, DEHLG, SDCC
	North Clondalkin – Estate Enhancement	100,000	DCRGA, DEHLG, SDCC
	North Clondalkin – Traffic Calming	44,617	DCRGA & SDCC
	Fettercairn GAA	180,000	Sports Capital (Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism) & DCRGA
	Brookfield, Fettercairn, Killinarden, Jobstown – Traffic Calming	135,000	DCRGA & SDCC
2006	Housing estate enhancement[11] North Clondalkin	100,00	DEHLG, Pobal & SDCC
	Housing estate enhancement West Tallaght	200,000	DEHLG, Pobal & SDCC
	Traffic Calming	100,000	DEHLG & SDCC
	Play Development Worker	40,000	SDCC
2007	Playgrounds and MUGA – Collinstown Park	66,000	Leverage
	Playgrounds West Tallaght West – 4 MUGAs	198,000	Playgrounds fund & SDCC
	Quarryvale Park Changing Rooms	350,000	Sports Capital
	Neilstown Boxing Club	350,000	Sports Capital
	Killinarden All Weather Pitch	100,000	Sports Capital
	Kiltalown Park – playground top-up and Youth Shelter	50,000	SDCC
Galway City			
2006	Ballinfoyle Neighbourhood Centre	200,000	Sports Capital
	Ballinfoyle Playground	33,000	Playground Grants Scheme (DCRGA)
	Coole Park Playground	33,000	Playground Grants Scheme
	Soccer/GAA clubs	245,000	Sports Capital

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[11] For example landscaping, paving, play/amenity areas, development of open spaces, seating areas, lighting, and boundary walls

	Bohermore Park and Community Centre	312,075	DEHLG
	Ballybane Organic Garden	29,000	RAPID, HSE, GCC, VEC
	Sports Development Officer	36,000	Galway City Council
	Traffic Calming	89,5000	RAPID Leverage
2007	Ballinfoyle CCTV	5,000	DJELR
	Ballybane CCTV	5,000	DJELR
	Westside Organic Garden Project	10,000	RAPID, VEC, HSE Health Promotion
	Estate Enhancement Programme	100,000	RAPID Leverage Fund
	Corrib Park Playground	66,000	RAPID Leverage Fund
	Bohermore Park & Community Centre	36,000	Dormant Account Fund (older people)
	Healthy Cities Initiative – Community Consultations	n/a	HSE, City Development Board, DAF

Source: Various RAPID Area Progress Reports to the RAPID National Monitoring Committee – Galway City & South County Dublin 2005-2007

Appendix 3

Interviewees

Name	Role	Organisation
Cllr. Marie Corr	• Chair, Housing and Social Strategic Policy Committee	SDCC
	• Member, SDCDB	SDCDB
Cllr. Mark Daly	• Chair, Recreation, Community and Parks Strategic Policy Committee	SDCC
	• Member, SDCDB	SDCDB
Cllr. Eamon Tuffy	• Chair, Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee	SDCC
	• Chair, SDCDB	SDCDB
Christy Boylan and senior colleagues	Senior Parks Superintendent	Parks and Recreation Department, SDCC
Judith Edmonds	Comhairle na nÓg Coordinator/Young People's Services Fund Coordinator	Community and Enterprise Department, SDCC
Suzanne Furlong	Public Realm Designer	Planning Department, SDCC
Patrick de Roe	Senior Architect	Architectural Services Dept., SDCC
Maria Finn	Social Inclusion Officer	Community and Enterprise Department, SDCC
Hilary Kendlin	Coordinator	Children's Services Committee, SDCC
Mick Fagan	Senior Executive Officer, Rental Accommodation Scheme	Housing Department, SDCC
John Quinlivan	Senior Executive Officer	Housing Department, SDCC
Cllr. Colette Connolly	• Chair, Housing Strategic Policy Committee	GCC
	• Member, GCDB	GCDB
Cllr. Daniel Callanan	Transportation and Infrastructure Strategic Policy Committee	GCC
Cllr. Donal Lyons	• Chair, Economic Development and Planning Strategic Policy Committee	GCC

	• Chair, GCDB	GCDB
Cllr. John Mullholland	• Chair, Recreation, Amenity and Culture Strategic Policy Committee • Member, GCDB	GCC GCDB
Stephen Walsh	Parks Superintendent	Parks Department, GCC
Gary McMahon	Community and Enterprise Administrative Officer	Community and Enterprise Department, GCC
Rosie Webb	Senior Executive	Architects Section, GCC
Liam Hanrahan	RAPID Coordinator	Community and Enterprise Department, GCC
Anne O' Brien	Play Development Officer	Dublin City Council
Eddie D'Arcy	Youth Work Service Manager	Catholic Youth Care
Katie Keogh	Coordinator	Child Development Initiative, Tallaght West