



Comhairle Cathrach  
& Contae **Luimnigh**

**Limerick** City  
& County Council

# LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL PLAY AND RECREATION POLICY

## Draft

October 2020



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## Introduction

Limerick City and County Council is committed to health, wellbeing and quality of life of all citizens of all ages. It recognises the valuable role of play and recreation in the healthy development of children and young people. Equally, it recognises that play, recreation and good quality, accessible play and recreation resources for children and young people makes Limerick an attractive place to live in and enjoy.

This policy will guide Limerick City and County Council's approach to play and recreation. It is not a strategy or an action plan but it does provide an overall aim and objectives and actions that will inform the development and delivery of many local authority-led services, strategies and programmes.

This policy supports the achievement of goals 3, 5 and 6 in the Corporate Plan for Limerick City and County Council, in particular:

- 3.6 Improve the public realm infrastructure to enhance accessibility for people with disabilities so that all people can live, work and access in a safe and friendly environment.
- 5.5 Promote health and well-being by supporting the implementation of relevant government strategies and through the implementation of a suite of Limerick City and County Council-led initiatives including Healthy Limerick and Age-Friendly Limerick.
- 6.1 Support meaningful and effective consultation and participation processes in the development of plans, policy-making and in service and project design and delivery.

## Overall aim of the policy

Limerick City and County Council aims to create a city and county that is child-friendly and that actively supports and encourages the development of a wide variety of good quality opportunities for children and young people's play and recreation.

## Policy objectives

1. Recognise and promote the importance of play for children
2. Recognise and actively support all children and young people to exercise their right to play and recreation
3. Create the conditions that facilitate play and recreation, not only in playgrounds but in the wider environment and public spaces, both indoors and outdoors
4. Provide a policy framework by which play and recreation provision for children and young people in Limerick can be incorporated into all relevant plans and strategies developed by Limerick City and County Council

## How Limerick City and County Council will achieve the policy aim and objectives

1. Coordination, partnership and consultation
2. A human rights and equality approach
3. A child-friendly environment
4. Play Provision
5. Inclusion
6. Review and learning

## Influencing factors on play and recreation

Based on consultation with children and young people in Limerick and the literature<sup>1</sup>, a number of issues impact on play and recreation in Limerick, including:

1. Children and young people are increasingly using social media, on-line platforms and games, smart phones and computers
2. Development and land use and increased traffic have an impact on children and young people's access to play and recreation opportunities
3. Having access to public transport – in both rural and urban areas – impacts on recreation opportunities for young people
4. More families are now living in high-density accommodation
5. Parents of children with disabilities speak of accessibility issues, including the unsuitability of playgrounds for children with sensory issues or children using wheelchairs
6. The changing nature of working life and family life has increased the number of children in a childcare situation and in more formal play settings
7. The maintenance of and play and recreation facilities and public common areas has been raised as an issue
8. The role of advertising and the marketing of toy companies may be seen to have changed the way play is understood
9. There is a stronger emphasis on protection, safety and risk and an increased perception of danger
10. Travellers describe halting sites as being overcrowded, with cars and built too close to main roads which prevent their children from playing safely and independently

## Policy background

The following international, national and local policies are relevant to this policy:

- *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*
- *Get Ireland Active! National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland (2016)*
- *Healthy Ireland. A Framework for Improving Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025*
- *Ireland 2040 Our Plan – National Planning Framework*
- *Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)*
- *Limerick City and County Council Corporate Plan 2020-24*
- *Limerick City and County Development Plan*
- *Making Great Art Work 2016–2025*
- *National Play Policy 'Ready Steady Play' (2004)*
- *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making (2015-2020)*
- *National Youth Strategy 2015 - 2020*
- *Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty*
- *Southern Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy*
- *The National Recreation Policy for Young People (2007)*
- *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*
- *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*

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<sup>1</sup> Research and consultations completed in 2018-2019 by Dr Carol Barron (2018) and Sarah Murphy (2019), in partnership with Limerick Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC), Limerick Youth Service and Limerick Childcare Committee and with funding from Healthy Ireland.

## Definitions

Limerick City and County Council endorses the following definitions of play and recreation:

### Play

Play encompasses children's behaviour which is *freely chosen, personally directed, spontaneous and intrinsically motivated*. It is performed for *no external goal* or reward, and is a fundamental and integral *part of healthy development* - not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live. The essence of *play is fun*. The more variety and diversity in children's play the better for the children's development. Put simply, play is what children and young people do in their free time. For example, playing ball informally in a kickabout situation is play whereas playing football in a team situation, organised by adults, is sport.

This definition of play is deliberately broad and includes, but is not limited to "any recreational activity" e.g. freely chosen and child-led play. This definition however also recognizes that children enjoy and benefit from taking part in a wide range of activities which can include youth clubs; leisure centre and sporting activities; cultural and arts activities; indoor play centres, play buses and events organized for children and their families (Barron, 2017).

Play is not just about the provision of facilities. It is also about *creating the conditions* that facilitate children's play not only in playgrounds but in the wider environment and public spaces (indoor and outdoor). In addition, facilities for children's play do not always have to consist solely of the traditional playground equipment—they can be an interesting and natural environment with features such as a sensory garden, bushes, and an interestingly placed tree trunk. Research has shown that for children, a playground is their base for play, somewhere from which to safely explore their neighbourhood. This places an emphasis on safe, enjoyable and attractive play environments. Neighbourhood spaces, estates, parks, streets, community centres, libraries, museums, galleries, gardens, and cultural venues, events and artefacts are as important as dedicated playgrounds.

### Recreation

Recreation is defined as 'comprising all positive activities in which a person may choose to take part that will make his or her leisure time more interesting, more enjoyable and personally satisfying' (adapted from Laidlaw Foundation, 2001). Recreation includes both organised activities for young people as well as the more casual activities that young people engage in during their free time. Recreation can include reading, recreational sport, art, music in a group, 'hanging out', camping, surfing the Net and many more activities.

Recreation can be distinguished from organised sport because it does not necessarily involve competition; it is subject to the starting and stopping wishes of the individual and is less constrained by rules. However, many activities that would normally be thought of as sport if they are done informally and non-competitively can be viewed as recreation (Smith and Therberge, 1987). The Irish Sports Council Act supports this idea by defining recreational sport as 'all forms of physical activity which, through casual or regular participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being and at forming social relationships' (Government of Ireland, 1999a). (From: *Teenspace: National Recreation Policy for Young People*, Office of the Minister for Children September, 2007)

### Play and recreation as a right

"The child shall have full opportunity to play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education: society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right...the rights of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts." (*UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 7 and 31*)

## In implementing this policy, Limerick City and County Council commits to:

### 1. Coordination, partnership and consultation

- Be proactive in working with communities and community groups, and all relevant stakeholders
- Encourage the development of partnerships between statutory providers and community groups in relation to the management of play facilities
- In line with best national and international practice, Limerick City and County Council includes the voices of children and young people in the development of all current and future Limerick City and County Council plans, policies and strategies. This may be done in partnership with Limerick Comhairle na nÓg, one of the 31 child and youth councils in the country and which give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies and Limerick Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC), a key local structure to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in Limerick so as to improve outcomes for children and young people.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. A human rights and equality approach

Limerick City and County Council has responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is a legal obligation, called the *Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty*, and it originated in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014. In the development of plans and strategies, and in its implementation of its Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, Limerick City and County Council will:

- 1) **Assess:** Incorporate an assessment of the relevant human rights and equality issues (there are two UN conventions relevant here: 1) rights of the child and 2) rights of persons with disabilities, and there are the nine grounds in equality legislation)
- 2) **Address:** Put in place a plan on how these issues will be addressed; and
- 3) **Report:** Report on progress in its annual report (from Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty)

### 3. A child-friendly environment

- Ensure parks and green spaces welcome children and minimise prohibited/limited access areas
- Ensure that play/child planning input is made into new residential, commercial and other large infrastructure or public realm developments at concept stage
- Ensure the following measures will be taken to ensure a safe environment: street calming; street closures; walls and driveways; grassy areas set back from the roads including small open spaces; a footpath network around and through estates, linking into public open spaces; cul-de-sac layout
- Ensure the provision of a varied and interesting physical environment – different levels; spaces of different sizes; places to hide; trees and bushes; places that inspire mystery and imagination
- Ensure the retention of the maximum possible features of the natural environment such as green spaces and woodlands including features such as trees and bushes
- Have regard to the fact that communities go through stages and their needs change over time
- Work towards the provision of a hierarchy of well-maintained parks, urban woodlands, appropriate and adequate green areas/spaces

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<sup>2</sup> The Department of Children and Youth Affairs supports the use of consultation practices with children and young people to facilitate them to contribute their views on issues of national and personal importance. Hub na nÓg – young voices in decision-making, is a national centre of excellence and coordination. It supports Government Departments, State agencies and non-government organisations to give children and young people a voice in decision-making on issues that affect their lives, with a particular focus on those that are seldom-heard. Hub na nÓg was established up by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as a key commitment in the first *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making (2015-2020)*.

- Ensure play and recreation of children and young people is incorporated into the delivery of services and opportunities provided by Limerick City and County Council's libraries, galleries, museums and cultural venues and programmes
- Ensure that play, recreation and creative expression of children and young people is fostered in public art and cultural artefacts across Limerick

#### 4. Play Provision

While promoting and facilitating play is not simply about playgrounds, Limerick City and County Council provides specific opportunities for play in the provision of playgrounds as well as play areas and indoor areas. In their development and planning, Limerick City and County Council will:

- Aim to provide adequate and appropriate hierarchies of open spaces for play as recommended in National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standards
- Ensure the provision of indoor children and young people's play and recreation opportunities in libraries, galleries, museums and cultural venues owned and managed by Limerick City and County Council
- Ensure adequate resources and that these resources are used effectively, efficiently and equitably
- Ensure consultation will be carried out with children and community groups on the design, siting, layout and equipment selection of playgrounds
- Ensure opportunities for environmental play in informal open spaces
- Ensure play areas will include enough space for equipment and general open space for games, tree planting and environmental enhancements
- Facilitate the organisation of a range of events on Council properties for children and young people to increase children's enjoyment of parks and open spaces, libraries, galleries, museums and cultural venues
- Ensure the option of natural playgrounds is considered in the planning and development of playgrounds

#### 5. Inclusion

- Ensure all children will be respected and valued so that they can play free from exploitation, bullying, violence or discrimination
- Ensure consideration is given to rural issues regarding play and recreation provision
- Ensure consideration is given to the needs of children with disabilities, from a minority ethnic background, or from a disadvantaged background

#### 6. Review and learning

The Community Development Directorate of Limerick City and County Council will undertake a regular review of aims, objectives and implementation of this policy in partnership with Limerick Comhairle na nÓg.