

The Alliance for Childhood London Forum

Notes from the Meeting held on 3rd October 2017 at City Hall, London

We held our second meeting of the London Forum at City Hall on 3rd October 2017. It was attended by 23 people including members of the Greater London Council, London Borough Councillors, people involved in play organisations and members of community groups.

Introduction

Marion Briggs opened the meeting by using the Native American example of their commitment to make decisions and policies which will not be harmful to children - establishing the children's fire in their council circle to remind them of this. In the forum we want to see how to put children first in all our considerations, not just for the next generation, but for generations to come.

News from the GLA

Susan Crisp compiled a list of GLA strategies, including Healthy Streets, Environment and Housing. See the attached file with an extra link to Housing Estate Design. Susan handed out the list with an invitation to respond to them. She reported that the Health Improvement Strategy was one of the most relevant to children, with the Mayor's focus on air quality. The London Plan will be open for consultation from around the end of November.

Questions

Roger Green from Goldsmiths University of London asked about social housing and how that would feed into the London plan. Asked that it be raised in housing strategy. Susan couldn't comment.

Presentations: What makes a City Child Friendly, with special reference to London?

Tim Gill - Rethinking Childhood

When people ask children their views on cities, their answers are fairly consistent. So instead of continually asking the same questions, it is time to act on what the children have indicated. Tim suggested that to focus on participation process is wrong. It is better to focus on children's experience in the city. The Mayor of Bogota says that Children are an indicator species. If we build a successful city for children we will have a successful city for all. Tim pointed out the benefits to families of dense developments using as an example the highly successful Stockholm dense development with playable spaces of different kinds proving families don't necessarily want or thrive in traditional ideal of private gardens with picket fence idea of habitation. He wants to make the Mayor a children's advocate.

Differences that child friendly cities make:

Reduction in NHS costs.

Emotional and mental well being is related to children's independent mobility.

Child friendly cities are the same as environmentally sustainable communities.

Children are the generators of community life.

It is worth focusing on new developments, regeneration and gentrification areas as more scope for child friendly change in areas where there is energy.

The necessary tools for change are accessible evidence, planning guidance, political leverage. Developers are transactional so they need clarity from city planners for what they want in exchange for their profits.

Adrian Voce - Chairman of the European Network of Child Friendly Cities

Adrian spoke about the UNICEF initiative Habitat 2, describing the role of local government to implement Rights of the Child and recognising the crucial role of the environment for rights of children. He gave an overview of what European Network for Child Friendly Cities (ENCFC) is - a dissemination agency for child friendly cities. He spoke about the importance of collaboration between different departments under the Mayor's powers. The first London plan included a policy on play. The culture change that is needed is that children be recognised as stake holders. Children need to be seen and heard as co-researchers and they should be involved in how that material is gleaned. They need to be integrated into the city, not ghettoised.

Joyce Jacca - Lewisham Councillor from Pepys Ward and community activist

Joyce said that for her, a child friendly city would be one that has a strategy that would be used across the board - accessible child-care for everybody, also childcare in the workplace, accessible and local places in the community for children with activities for free and that can be walked to. Park planning and design to include input from parents and children. Free school meals across the board. Bring back free school milk. There needs to be a Children's Officer in every Borough to implement policy.

Some points from the Discussion

Regarding a choice of only investing in already or becoming affluent areas of new development at a time when we need to focus on the disadvantaged, Tim agreed that it is a serious challenge but that in practice progress has been made where there is already change taking place. It is important to recognise the opportunity of focusing on current developments that will affect generations. Adrian pointed out that it is costly to retrofit public space so if there's a chance to get into designs of development that is a fantastic opportunity. But that it should not be either/or. It is possible to turn capital money into revenue. There is an opportunity for transactional arrangements and this needs to be in the London Plan. Child friendly developments can be profitable.

Tim Gill was involved in writing the Child Friendly Special Policy Guidance (SPG). Would he adapt the or rip it up and start again? There are some issues he would like to see more firmly addressed in policy. He would like to see the unit of analysis shifting away from developers creating something token or throwing money to a body who do not know what to do with it, which is a general problem with the planning process. He wants to see more emphasis on maintenance and upkeep. He questions whether children should live in high rises at all and whether that should be in housing policy or SPG. It is the crucial importance of the relationship between dwellings and public space, where there is spacial contact between the home and the child. He would like a proper consideration of wider public realm and to move away from play ghettos.

On the issue of developers, they are open to including child friendly plans but they need clear input and direction. London Boroughs do not have functioning play strategies on the whole. How could we make a case for those? Developers were happy to provide space for birth - 5 and 5 - 11 years of age, but that there was a complete lack of understanding around youth provision (apart from sports based). Qualitative and quantitative provision for youth is required. There is a lack of political will. People don't know what to do with young people in the community. It comes from risk aversion - the fear of what might happen if they create spaces that are welcoming for young people. If the London plan is to have any effect it needs political leverage. This is lacking because of Local Government being undercut by government when it comes to development.

Inspiring Youth

Emma Stow announced the Alliance for Childhood's conference for young people by young people proposed for Feb 2018.

Next London Forum

Friday 8th December 2017, City Hall

From the notes of Emma Stow, edited by Marion Briggs