

## HSHAWB 47 Chwarae Cymru | Play Wales

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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Llywodraeth Leol a Thai | Local Government and Housing Committee

**Bil Digartrefedd a Dyrannu Tai Cymdeithasol (Cymru) | Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill**

Ymateb gan: Chwarae Cymru | Evidence from: Play Wales

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Local Government and Housing Committee

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### Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill Consultation

#### About Play Wales

Play Wales, the national charity for play in Wales, advocates for the right and need for all children to play. Our key areas:

- raising awareness
- promoting good practice
- providing advice and guidance across all sectors.

Our work includes:

- Policy: Working with others to inform the development of policy and other children's play issues
  - Information service: Promoting the value of children's play by providing timely and current information
  - Advice and support: Providing specialist knowledge about all issues that affect children's play
  - Workforce development: Contributing to the professional development of the playwork and play workforces.
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We worked closely with the Welsh Government to develop its *Play Policy*<sup>1</sup>, *Play Policy Implementation Plan*<sup>2</sup> and on its groundbreaking play sufficiency legislation. Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010<sup>3</sup> places a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area.

We also drafted the report for the Ministerial Review of Play Steering Group (2022) and accompanying background paper.<sup>4</sup>

Play Wales is pleased to have an opportunity to input into this consultation. Our contribution is informed by a pilot project that considered the play needs of children in temporary accommodation.

### The importance of play for health, wellbeing and happiness

Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. When they play, children contribute to their immediate wellbeing and to their own development.

There is a well-established body of solid evidence<sup>5</sup> that shows the contribution that play, particularly self-organised play, can make to children's long-term and immediate wellbeing, to their physical health and to their mental health and resilience. Various studies have concluded that play:

- supports socialisation: when they play children interact with others, develop friendships and attachments with peers, deal with conflict, and learn respect and tolerance.
- builds resilience: playing boosts children's emotion regulation, confidence, creativity, enabling them to cope with stress and challenges throughout life.
- is crucial for good health and wellbeing: being active through play helps children physically and emotionally, contributing to their health and happiness.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Play-Policy.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Play-Policy-Implementation-Plan.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://play.wales/play-policy-legislation/play-sufficiency/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-ministerial-review-play-publication-steering-group-report>

<sup>5</sup> Russell, W., Barclay, M. and Tawil, B. (2024) *Playing and being well. A review of recent research into children's play, social policy and practice, with a focus on Wales*, Cardiff: Play Wales.

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- supports children to feel part of their neighbourhoods and wider communities: playing allows children to learn about the world around them, make connections, and develop a sense of identity and belonging.
- supports learning and development: building the structures of the brain and skills such as critical thinking.

Playing is the most natural and enjoyable way for children to be active, keep well and be happy. It is fundamental to children's wellbeing and healthy development as articulated in the Welsh Government Play Policy.

Internationally, the importance of play is recognised and protected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 31 of the UNCRC explicitly states that the child has the right to play and to join in other recreational activities and that States Parties should recognise these rights. The United Nations' General Comment no. 17 on Article 31 provides further guidance on the legislative, judicial, administrative, social and educational measures necessary to ensure its implementation.

### **Play for children in temporary accommodation project**

Concerned with the growing numbers of children living in temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfasts and hotels, Play Wales developed a project to identify the opportunities and challenges of providing opportunities to play in these places.

We worked with our network of play officers in four local authorities to understand the limitations and opportunities in temporary accommodation. We sourced and supplied play packages which included no-cost and simple ideas for families to support play in limited living. We also provided small equipment and ideas to support physical activity in small spaces and supplied boxes of art and craft material to encourage creative play.

These small and simple items were intended to enable play teams to engage with parents to hear more about their lived experience of supporting children's play in temporary accommodation. The project also enabled us to learn of the challenges for housing officers and providers of temporary accommodation.

Although this was a small-scale project, we hope that the learning will enable us to work with trusted practitioners and families to co-create a practitioner-facing tool (e.g. training resource, toolkit, or information leaflet), grounded in lived

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experience. The aim is to improve how services support play in low-income and displacement-affected contexts.

Our project has highlighted that children in temporary accommodation often face unsafe or unsuitable environments for play. Our engagement with parents and families indicates that children have little access to safe, clean, or culturally appropriate spaces for play, and are often isolated from community-based provision.

## Conclusion

Play is not a luxury. It is a right under Article 31 of the UNCRC and is essential for recovery, learning, and social connection. Research shows that play supports physical, emotional, and cognitive development and can help mitigate the negative impacts of adversity. For children who have experienced displacement, poverty, or trauma, having opportunities to play becomes even more crucial and yet, it is routinely overlooked in temporary housing settings.

Being homeless and living in temporary accommodation can cause adversity and uncertainty. Children may find themselves with limited space and may be expected to be indoors for long periods of time. Our research identified that these children have limited opportunities to play both in the living environment and in community-based provision.

There is an urgent need to improve the lived experiences of children in Wales who, due to emergency or crisis situations, are living in temporary accommodation. These environments, hotels, B&Bs or repurposed communal housing, are not designed with children in mind and offer few, if any, opportunities for play.

We welcome the provision within the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill that includes an assessment of need for securing accommodation. When children are facing homelessness, provision for play must be considered as part of this assessment to support children's immediate and long-term well-being.

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