



PLACEMAKING ENGAGING CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

A guideline for planners, policymakers and developers in Northern Ireland



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Belfast Healthy Cities is the partnership organisation providing a platform for intersectoral collaboration to improve health and improve wellbeing for the Belfast population.

Belfast has been a leading city within the World Health Organization (WHO) European Healthy Cities Network since 1988. As part of the commitment to roll out the WHO European Healthy Cities Network programmes, Belfast Healthy Cities has been promoting the concept of Healthy Urban Environments to policymakers in Belfast and across Northern Ireland. A key role for Belfast Healthy Cities is to support partners in the city by providing evidence, capacity building and piloting new approaches and ways of working to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. The Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment promotes the highest quality of places for all those involved in using and shaping them such as developers and decision makers including those in councils, government departments, housing associations and the community. The Group undertakes its roles in a number of ways including briefing and design workshops, design reviews, consultation responses, site visits, symposiums, position papers, research, advising and working with government departments and district councils.

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FOREWORD

2019 marks the 30th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which lays out government's responsibility to every child in relation to all aspects of the child's life, including the environment and places. Article 12 of the UNCRC is clear that children and young people have a right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and that "due weight is given" to those views.

Therefore, I am pleased to support this publication as it outlines both the strategic framework and clear guidelines for engaging children and young people in the shaping of their built environment.

The built environment has an important influence on our whole community's health and wellbeing but too often we forget the nearly 25% of our population who use our public spaces to play and meet friends as well as participating in leisure and sporting activities.

Children interact with every aspect of the environment and spend a lot of time within their own neighbourhoods. Healthy and safe spaces provide for connections with peers; contact with nature; opportunities for physical activity and play; safe transport by foot or bike; and convenient access to services and amenities. Poor places can have adverse impacts on health that can affect children disproportionately, such as high traffic volumes; poor air and noise quality; obesity, asthma, unintentional injuries and mental health and wellbeing¹.

The key message of this publication is that including children is a necessary part of the placemaking process. Doing so demonstrates that children and young people are not passive recipients of plans and interventions but active participants in the design and development of those plan and spaces.

It is only by engaging meaningfully with its children and young people that Belfast can realise its ambition, as stated in the Belfast Agenda, to become more inclusive and be recognised as a World Health Organization Healthy City. By doing so, Belfast will also contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as formulated by the United Nations.

These guidelines are intended to support all parties working to shape the built environment for improved health and wellbeing, including planners, policymakers and developers, engaging with children and young people. They will also be of interest to other professionals working in the fields of public health, transport and community development. The publication should also be read in conjunction with the "*Designing Places for Children and Young People*" document that is being developed by the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment (MAG) in partnership with Belfast Healthy Cities, which summaries how to plan, design and manage places for the benefit of children².

It sets out a selection of models for engagement that have been tested locally and elsewhere and follows the publication of Belfast Healthy Cities' intersectoral action plan *Taking action for child friendly places: first steps* in 2016. The vision and priority areas contained in the action plan are based on extensive engagement with over 7,000 children and families in Belfast over a five-year period.

Although not specifically mentioned, these guidelines demonstrate compliance with the internationally recognised Lundy Model³ of participation for children and young people. It gives guidance on how to make sure that children and young people's voices are heard and reminds planners and designers of the importance of ensuring that children and young people have genuine influence in the future of the City of Belfast.

To become a healthy city Belfast must become a child friendly city.

Koulla Yiasouma

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People



KidsSpace at St Anne's Square

CONTENTS

1. Child Friendly Places.....	5
Origins of the Child Friendly Places concept.....	5
What is a child friendly city?	5
The link between the built environment and children’s health and wellbeing.....	7
2. Engaging children in urban planning.....	9
Why is it relevant to engage children in the decision-making process?	9
Policy on children and young people’s engagement.....	10
Children and young people’s participation in practice.....	13
3. Engagement guidelines.....	17
4. Engagement models: Case studies from Belfast.....	21
Belfast’s Young Population	21
A Changing Belfast.....	21
Belfast Healthy Cities Engagement models.....	22
5. Conclusion.....	45

1



CHILD FRIENDLY PLACES

ORIGINS OF THE CHILD FRIENDLY SPACES CONCEPT

The development of the concept of child friendly places can be linked to a more general global child-friendly movement that has put the focus on children's rights and participation. Part of the momentum behind this movement can be explained by the United Nations' focus on children's rights that was promoted through the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, adopted in 1982, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted in 1989. Subsequently, both United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), through its formulation of the concept of child friendly cities, and the World Health Organization, through its inclusion of Healthy Urban Environments within its European Healthy Cities Network priorities, have played a major role in promoting the concept of child friendly spaces in the European context and beyond.

WHAT IS A CHILD FRIENDLY CITY?

"A good city is one in which children can grow and develop to the extent of their powers; where they can build their powers; where they can build their confidence and become actively engaged in the world; yet be autonomous and capable of managing their own affairs" (Kevin Lynch, 1977⁴)

There are two discernible, and sometimes conflicting, paradigms that are used to measure how child friendly a city is, which often hinders the formulation of a single and straightforward definition about what a successful child friendly city really is. On the one hand, a child friendly city can be seen as a place where children are successfully protected from the malicious influences of the modern world through various forms of professional intervention in the interest of the child. On the other hand, cities and places can be deemed child friendly based on who has the right or power to determine the best interests of children. These different interpretations can often lead to clashes, whereby it is left to officials to weigh up a child's right to be heard against their need for protection, meaning the child is subject to the decision makers competence regarding children's needs and civil rights.

UNICEF defines a child friendly city as a place where local governance is committed to fulfilling children's rights but also where the local community listens to the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children and makes them an integral part of public policies, decisions and programmes. However, the meaning of the child friendly city can be interpreted differently in different cultural and social groups, and can vary over space and time. Belfast Healthy Cities define a child friendly city as a place that:

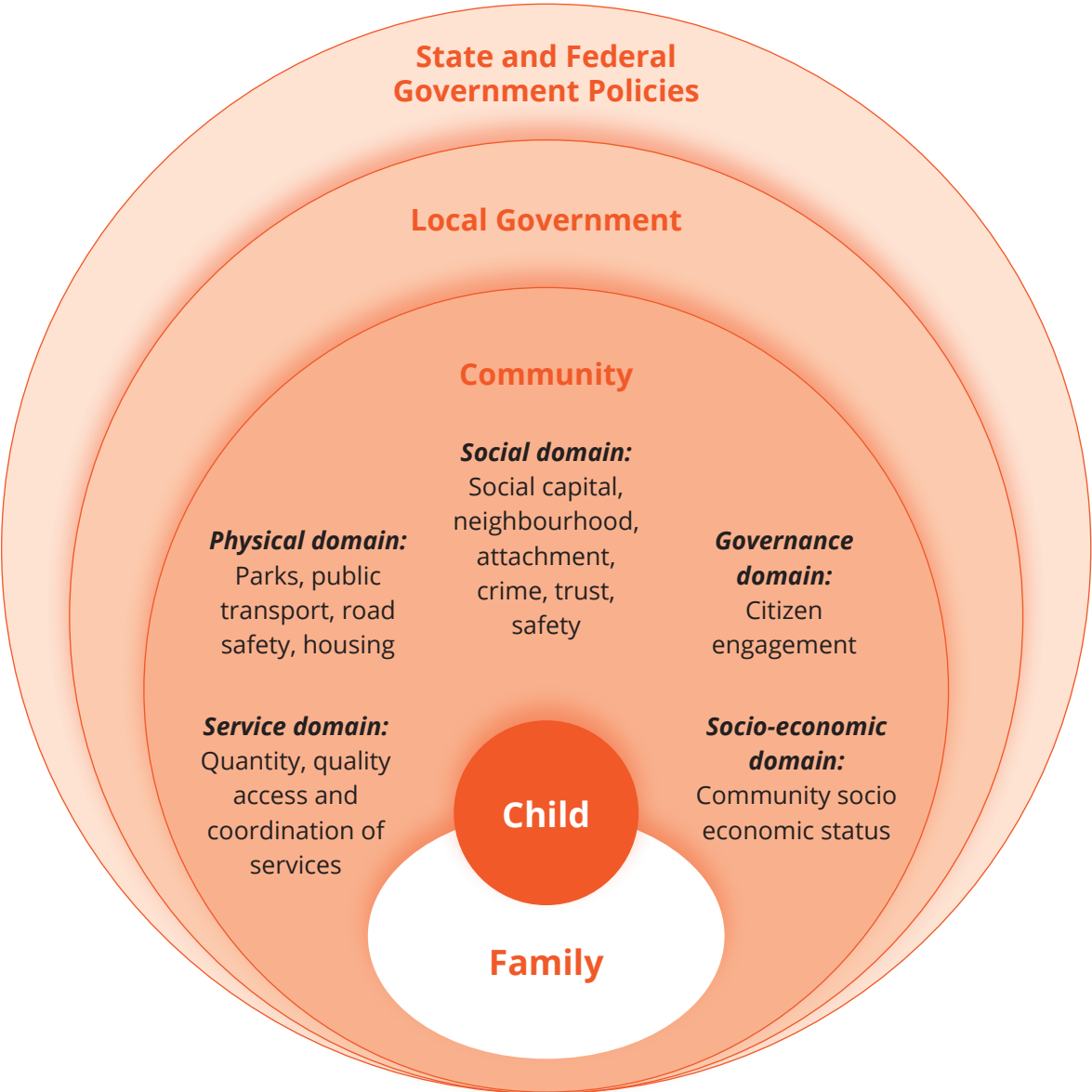
"welcomes children of all abilities and that meets all children's needs and priorities."
(Belfast Healthy Cities, 2016⁵)

4. Lynch, Kevin . 1977. Growing up in cities: Studies of the spatial environment of adolescence in Cracow, Melbourne, Mexico City, Salta, Toluca, and Warszawa. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Paris: UNESCO.

5. Belfast Healthy Cities (2016). Taking Action for Child Friendly Places: First Steps. Belfast, Belfast Healthy Cities.

In addition, a child friendly city should also respect all children’s rights as citizens to access community services and facilities and to participate in community development processes. When children are able to move about a city safely, to play outdoors with peers, to mix with people of different ages and incomes and to enjoy clean air and outdoor spaces, then a city becomes a good one for all of its residents. A good city for children is a good city for everyone⁶. This also includes the acknowledgment of the role that children play in society and enabling their contribution in decision making across all sectors.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of key determinants of children’s wellbeing (Goldfeld et al., 2015)



Research highlights the importance of socio-environmental factors, such as the neighbourhood children grow up in, as key determinants of children's developmental outcomes⁷. The research proposes a conceptual model that aims to consider the multiple environments that may act as key determinants of children's wellbeing and psychosocial outcomes. The model is useful to refer to when considering the different interconnecting domains which effect childhood development and the importance that physical spaces, access to services and community engagement play in childhood development.

THE LINK BETWEEN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING

As global urbanization continues to increase at a rapid rate, 70% of the world's population is predicted to live in urban areas by 2050⁸. The process of urbanization has an even greater impact on children and young people as 60% of these urban dwellers are likely to be under the age of 18⁹. Health challenges that manifest themselves predominantly in the urban arena, such as poor sanitation, air pollution and lack of physical activity, are often particularly detrimental for children and young people. Children spend most of their time in their local surroundings and their development is more affected by the environment in which they live than that of adults. The built environment of the home and outdoor space immediately surrounding it is therefore of central importance to children's wellbeing because of their prolonged exposure to it¹⁰. Poor quality surroundings can have a negative impact on children's health and can result in traffic injuries, obesity and respiratory disease. The built environment, if properly designed and managed, can be an asset which can create the conditions for children's health to flourish, for example by encouraging children's lifestyles to be more active. It is therefore more imperative than ever that cities are being designed and built to meet the needs of children. As so pointedly expressed by Enrique Peñalosa, child friendly planning adds value to all city dwellers lives and helps to build successful cities that work for everyone.

"Children are a kind of indicator species. If we can build a successful city for children, we will have a successful city for all people." (Enrique Peñalosa, 2013¹¹)



6. New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Communities (2015). Robin Kearns: Child-friendly city would let us ease up on cotton wool, <http://sustainablecities.org.nz/2015/02/child-friendly-city/>
7. Goldfeld, S., Woolcock, G., Katz, I., Tanton, R., Brinkman, S., O'Connor, E., Mathews, T. & Giles-corti, B. (2015). Neighbourhood Effects Influencing Early Childhood Development: Conceptual Model and Trial Measurement Methodologies from the Kids in Communities Study. *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 120, no. 1, pp. 197-212.
8. UNICEF (2012). *State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an Urban World*. New York: UNICEF. Available at https://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/files/SOWC_2012-Executive_Summary_EN.pdf
9. United Nations (2014). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*. New York: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available at: <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/publications/files/wup2014-highlights.pdf>
10. Burton, E. (2011). LSE Cities, The built environment and children's health and wellbeing, <https://lsecities.net/media/objects/articles/the-built-environment-and-childrens-well-being/en-gb/>
11. Penalosa, E. (2013). Rethinking Global cities. Available at: <https://planning.unc.edu/rethinkingglobalcities>

2



ENGAGING CHILDREN IN URBAN PLANNING

Children's engagement is fundamentally about giving children an opportunity to have an input into decisions that affect their lives. A key part of the engagement process is to allow children and young people to share their knowledge, needs and ideas and utilizing this information effectively, whilst being open, honest and realistic about the levels of impact that they can have¹². This process is a dialogue and is not about handing over power or control over decisions.

Cultural attitudes may mean that children are not recognised as having useful and legitimate contributions. These attitudes may have particularly adverse impacts on children from marginalised groups, including children with disabilities, children from minority communities and girls¹³. As a result, children often lack economic, social and political power. They are seen as citizens 'in the making' rather than as citizens with rights 'here and now.' Unsurprisingly, these barriers are likely to be exacerbated where certain adults are themselves not fully able to realise their rights (e.g. women, minority groups and those with disabilities).

WHY IS IT RELEVANT TO ENGAGE CHILDREN IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS?

Engaging children and young people in the planning and design of city environments can contribute to more informed decision-making and design of places and spaces that are engaging, fun, safe and accessible to people of all ages. The distinctive role that children and young people can play in creating inclusive places has been acknowledged by urban design professionals in Northern Ireland¹⁴.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) states there are real benefits for children: active involvement of children and young people will develop the skills and confidence of the young person, which in turn will enhance the local community¹⁵. When they are engaged over a longer time, children have better chances to increase their confidence and knowledge and see that their views are valued and respected. Children can also become more aware of the link between their health and wellbeing and the characteristics of the places they grow up in. By giving children a sense of ownership of place they are also encouraged to grow up into adults who are actively involved in their environment and the decision making process¹⁶ and able to hold organisations, institutions and governments to account¹⁷. This can ultimately lead to changes in perception of children and young people and their abilities, aspirations and needs.

12. East Lothian Council (2011) Children and young people participation strategy. Available on: www.eastlothian.gov.uk/.../id/.../children_and_young_peoples_participation_strategy
13. Child to Child - Work with us to overcome the barriers to child participation, <http://www.childtochild.org.uk/child-participation/barriers-participation/>
14. Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment (2014). Civic Stewardship final report. Available at: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dcal/mag-civic-stewardship-final-report.pdf>
15. Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), <http://www.niccy.org/professionals-practitioners-policy-makers/participation/community-planning/>
16. Belfast Healthy Cities (2016) Taking Action for Child Friendly Place: First Steps, Strategic Approach & Action Plan for Belfast. Available at: <http://www.belfasthealthycities.com/sites/default/files/publications/TakingAction.pdf>
17. NICCY, Benefits of engagement with children and young people. Available at: <http://www.niccy.org/media/1330/niccy-advice-benefits-of-engagement-with-children-and-young-people-dec-14.pdf>

At the same time, professionals learn to understand that working in collaboration with children, both as individuals and as organisations, can bring a fresh perspective to their work as well as greater credibility of outcomes. There are also other benefits of children's participation to children, communities, and professional organisations:

- **reduction in vandalism and other anti-social behaviour;**
- **increase in the visibility of children and children's issues ensuring that they are given greater weight in economic, social and political agendas;**
- **different perspective offered by children and young people can lead to creative solutions;**
- **enhances organisational credibility, reputation and governance;**¹⁸
- **more effectively use of resources;**
- **more effective service delivery.**

More specifically, planners, policymakers and developers in Northern Ireland (NI) benefit from engaging with children by being able to:

- **apply the objectives of international law and agendas such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Habitat Agenda to the Northern Ireland context;**
- **progress the targets as set out by the Northern Ireland Programme for Government, particularly the targets relating to health and childhood development;**
- **encourage urban developments that are conducive to all people's health and wellbeing;**
- **understand more fully the needs and issues of the communities they serve;**
- **make better, more informed planning and development decisions;**
- **encourage urban developments that are more people-centred and humane;**¹⁹
- **inform community members on the inherent complexities and trade-offs involved in decision making;**
- **and, not least of all, make their work more fun, energising and multidimensional.**²⁰

POLICY ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A number of statutory documents have been produced that seek to safeguard children and young people's rights in Northern Ireland. The Children (NI) Order 1995 provides a framework for childcare law in Northern Ireland and is central to efforts to promote and safeguard the welfare of children across statutory and voluntary agencies. In addition, the Children's Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015 places a statutory duty on all authorities providing services to children such as District Councils, the Education Authority, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Police Service Northern Ireland to collaborate when developing and planning services. It provides powers for statutory bodies to pool budgets to support services for children and outlines how children can be engaged successfully.

18. NICCY, Benefits of engagement with children and young people. Available at: <http://www.niccy.org/media/1330/niccy-advice-benefits-of-engagement-with-children-and-young-people-dec-14.pdf>

19. Driskell, D (2002) Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth, A Manual for Participation

20. Save the Children (2010) Putting Children at the Centre, A practical guide to children's participation. Available at: [https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Putting_Children_at_the_Centre_final_\(2\)_1.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Putting_Children_at_the_Centre_final_(2)_1.pdf)

The ten-year strategy *Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge*, adopted in 2006, was NI government’s first attempt to promote general wellbeing of children and young people. The *Play and Leisure Implementation Plan 2011* was developed to help achieve the goals of the strategy and promote active participation and engagement with children and young people across a range of stakeholders. The Northern Ireland government’s draft *Children and Young People’s Strategy 2017-2027* seeks to build on the *Play and Leisure Implementation Plan’s* positive outcomes including improvements in road safety, educational attainment and good relations. The strategy also focuses on areas of concern such as obesity, mental health and poverty. Consultation with different groups of children took place before the development phase of the strategy, allowing children to help form the basis of the strategy. A separate document specifically designed for children and young people aimed to improve their participation in the strategy. An updated Implementation Plan is intended to be produced when the *Children and Young People’s Strategy 2017-2027* has been adopted by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

A multiagency strategic partnership that brings together senior leaders of key agencies from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors has been put in place with the objective of improving outcomes for all children and young people in Northern Ireland. The Children and Young People Strategic Partnership’s (CYPSP) produces regular *Northern Ireland Children and Young People’s Plans* that aim to ensure that children and young people are considered when delivering services.

A tendency to promote the inclusion of civic society into the decision making process can also be recognised in the Northern Ireland planning system. The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 introduced a new emphasis on public engagement as part of the planning application process, through the requirement to produce a Statement of Community Involvement, and the new provision of pre application consultations for major individual schemes. In addition, the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 introduced a statutory requirement for councils to produce Local Development Plans and Community Plans that allow greater input from citizens and other stakeholders. Improving children and young people’s quality of life is a core objective that sits at the heart of most Community Plans. The Community Planning process replicates the CYPSP model of partnership working that allows Councils to collaborate with statutory partners such as the Health and Social Care Trusts, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Education bodies and Police Service Northern Ireland to achieve better outcomes for their citizens.



Figure 2. Hierarchy of legislation, policy and guidelines

INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION
United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989)
▼
NORTHERN IRELAND LEGISLATION
The Children (NI) Order 1995
Planning Act (NI) 2011
Children’s Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015
▼
REGIONAL POLICY
Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation – <i>Department of the Environment (2004)</i>
Regional Development Strategy 2035 – <i>Department of the Environment (2010)</i>
Play and Leisure Implementation Plan – <i>The Executive Office (2011)</i>
Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland – <i>Department of the Environment (2015)</i>
Statement of Community Involvement – <i>Department of the Environment (2016)</i>
Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland – <i>Department of Health (2017)</i>
Draft Children and Young People Strategy 2017-2027 – <i>The Executive Office (2017)</i>
▼
LOCAL POLICY
The Belfast Agenda: Community Plan – <i>Belfast City Council (2016)</i>
Draft Local Development Plan Strategy – <i>Belfast City Council (2018)</i>
▼
GUIDELINES
Let’s Talk, Let’s Listen – <i>Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007)</i>
ASK FIRST! Northern Ireland Standards for Children and Young People’s Participation in Public Decision Making – <i>Participation Network (2010)</i>
Living Places: an Urban Stewardship and Design Guide for Northern Ireland - <i>Department of the Environment (2014)</i>
Participation with Children and Young People: Advice to Public Bodies – <i>Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (2018)</i>
Draft Northern Ireland Children and Young People’s Plan 2019-2021 – <i>Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership (2019)</i>

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN PRACTICE

A number of organisations in Northern Ireland have been working over the last decade to promote children and young people's participation in decision making processes to support delivery of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The **'Let's Talk, Let's Listen'** document, produced by the Equality Commissioner, provides a step-by-step guide on how to plan effective consultation with children and young people by presenting problems when consulting with them such as lack of resources; producing a child-friendly format; and avoiding repeatedly consulting with the same groups. It also offers examples of effective engagement methods, recommendations on how to deal with legal and ethical issues, and advice on evaluation, monitoring and feedback.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) recognized the opportunity that the introduction of statutory community planning by the Local Government Act presented for promoting children and young people's participation²¹. NICCY subsequently informed the development process of statutory community planning guidance by focusing on the meaningful and constructive role that can be played by children and young people in the community planning process. NICCY monitor the implementation of the guidance and developed a **'Northern Ireland regional model of engagement'** that aims to support statutory agencies in developing local children and young people engagement models²². NICCY has also applied this engagement model in practice by consulting with young people throughout the entire process of its formulation.

'ASK FIRST!' is a set of standards for children and young people's participation in public decision making that was developed by the Children in Northern Ireland's participation network in 2010. The standards were designed to assist public authorities with the encouragement of children and young people's involvement in the development of policy by providing guidance for establishing effective direct engagement mechanisms and providing a way of measuring their effectiveness.



21. NICCY. Available on <http://www.niccy.org/professionals-practitioners-policymakers/participation/community-planning/>

22. Northern Ireland regional model of engagement, NICCY. Available on: <http://www.niccy.org/media/1329/niccy-ni-regional-model-of-engagement-web-version-dec-14.pdf>

Figure 3. Summary of existing Northern Ireland children and young people engagement principles

<i>Document</i>	<i>Engagement principles</i>
Northern Ireland regional model of engagement	Preparation; Engagement; Follow-up.
ASK FIRST!	Standard 1: A ppropriate methods; Standard 2: S upport; Standard 3: K nowledge; Standard 4: F eedback; Standard 5: I nclusion; Standard 6: R espect; Standard 7: S enior people; Standard 8: T iming.

Taking the engagement documents provided above as a reference, a number of overarching standards for engaging children and young people can be identified:

- **the adoption of a language and visual / audio documentation that is easy to understand for children;**
- **the introduction of fun elements to the engagement exercise;**
- **proper support mechanisms;**
- **the nurturing of values such as respect and inclusion; and**
- **appropriate follow-up after the engagement has taken place in order to ensure that children and young people feel their views and opinions are valued.**

These standards form the basis for a more comprehensive set of engagement guidelines that have been formulated by Belfast Healthy Cities. The guidelines highlighted in the next section can be applied to all placemaking processes.





KidsSpace at City Hall

3



ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Children Engagement Guideline (1)

Acknowledge children's participation rights and capabilities in generating useful ideas

- **Make children aware of their rights;**
- **Promote the link between children's and young people's wellbeing and the built environment as part of education curriculum.**



Children Engagement Guideline (2)

Get young people involved at an early stage in planning

- **If possible, consider young people when preparing consultation processes;**
- **A last minute, tokenistic effort is never going to produce good results.**



Children Engagement Guideline (3)

Prepare appropriate forms of engagement

- **Make sure a range of children (different areas, backgrounds, race) are represented;**
- **Understand the age-group and prepare age-appropriate material accordingly such as easy read versions of materials;**
- **Include back-up if chosen methodology is not proving successful;**
- **Hold meetings at a suitable venue which is easily accessible for children and young people (schools, youth clubs, Further Education colleges, leisure centres);**
- **Make sure meetings take place at a time which suits young people;**
- **There should be no extra cost for children to attend meetings;**
- **If using online tools make sure they are accessible for everyone;**
- **Make sure that all safeguarding policies and procedures (i.e. child protection policy and procedure, data protection policy and procedures, health and safety of activities/risk assessment undertaken, parental consent for video/photo images etc.) are in place prior to and during the engagement activities;**
- **If possible, speak to an adult who knows the group in advance (e.g. teacher) to understand dynamics.**



Children Engagement Guideline (4)

Engage in a respectful and inclusive way

- **Adjust the language of the consultation document to fit children and young people's understanding and avoid the use of jargon. Explain things clearly if necessary;**
- **Make sure children and young people feel their opinions and ideas are respected and appreciated;**
- **Make it interesting and fun;**
- **Use facilitators who are genuinely interested in young people's views;**
- **Don't make promises you can't keep.**



Children Engagement Guideline (5)

Plan how the feedback will be used

- **Be realistic about how views and opinions will be used;**
- **Translate any feedback received into professional action points;**
- **Make sure the feedback gets to the right people.**



Children Engagement Guideline (6)

Keep children involved along the process

- **Make sure to let participants know how you have used the information they provided in decisions made;**
- **Don't patronise - children and young people understand that they can't have everything they want, but they want to know how decisions are arrived at and that their views have been considered properly;**
- **Evaluation of the engagement process so you can improve any future consultation exercises.**



4



ENGAGEMENT MODELS: CASE STUDIES FROM BELFAST

BELFAST'S YOUNG POPULATION

Belfast has a comparatively young population, particularly when viewed within the context of ageing populations in most of Europe. Of its approximately 342,000 residents, almost 20% is composed of those under 16 years old²³. The population of children is distributed relatively evenly across the city, although it is proportionally larger in some neighbourhoods in the west and north of the city. In wards such as Ardoyne, Whiterock and Cliftonville 25% of residents are younger than 16 years old²⁴. These neighbourhoods are also most affected by disadvantage and long term deprivation²⁵. Children's wellbeing is strongly impacted by lack of family resources. Due to the high prevalence of areas affected by significant levels of deprivation in the city, up to 34% of children under 16 live in low income families²⁶.

A CHANGING BELFAST

A key aim of Belfast's community plan and Local Development Plan is to increase the population of the city by 66,000 residents by 2035. Densification of the city centre and inner city corridors will be key if the city is to accommodate such a future increase in population. Making the inner city a more family friendly environment to live in will contribute to the achievement of this target. Understanding what type of built environment is attractive to children and young people is important for guiding future spatial developments in Belfast and achieving the city's ambition to transform the city into a desirable place to live in. Making the city centre more attractive to live in for families through the provision of family friendly housing and appropriate facilities is an important step in achieving this ambition.



23. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Population estimate by Making Life Better age groups 2018.

24. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Population estimate by broad age bands 2018.

25. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017.

26. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Children in low-income families 2014.

BELFAST HEALTHY CITIES ENGAGEMENT MODELS

Direct engagement with children is the core principle underpinning Belfast Healthy Cities' work on promoting Belfast as a more child-friendly place. As part of their involvement in the development of the child friendly places action plan '*Taking action for child friendly places: first steps*', Belfast Healthy Cities developed and tested a range of children and young people's engagement approaches. This helped to inform engagement models that seek to provide children and families from all parts of Belfast with an opportunity to share their views and priorities for child friendly place making in the city. The engagement methods used by Belfast Healthy Cities and various case studies that have been used to test these methods are outlined below. It is important to note that the engagement methods contained in this publication do not showcase the full spectrum of engagement methods available. A more detailed description of these case studies highlight some of the advantages and limitations of the type of engagement used and sets out the resources required for delivering the engagement model. Finally, the various considerations when implementing these engagement models have been listed as well.

Pop up play

Pop up play and community events bring children and families together to take ownership of spaces usually unavailable to them to participate in a range of fun activities such as making small arts and craft with artists. Pop up play events allow for informal consultation to take place in a safe and encouraging setting. They are usually highly visible events.

Questionnaires / surveys

Surveys can be administered in many ways, including online surveys, email surveys, social media surveys, paper surveys, mobile surveys, telephone surveys, and face-to-face interview surveys. The anonymity of surveys allows respondents to answer with more candid and valid answers than other research methodologies that involve face-to-face interaction, especially if it is clearly stated that survey answers will remain completely confidential. Research suggests that most children aged nine years and older are capable of completing a written survey²⁷.

Semi-structured group discussions

Exchange of ideas between several people is an effective process of learning and teaching from one another. The discussion method is suitable in many situations and can take different forms. In a focus group environment, discussion is a good way of promoting conducive learning among participants by giving them an opportunity to express their views or opinions orally on certain issues. One person speaks at a time, while others are listening. This format doesn't always involve the presentation of new information and concepts, but can involve sharing of ideas and experiences, solving problems and promoting tolerance with understanding.

Street audits incorporating Photovoice

Photovoice is a group analysis method combining photography with grassroots social action, and is commonly used in the fields of community development, public health, and education²⁸. Participants are asked to represent their communities or express their points of view by photographing scenes that highlight research themes. Common research themes may include community concerns, community assets, or health barriers and facilitators²⁹. These photographs are collaboratively interpreted, and narratives can be developed that explain how the photos highlight a particular research theme. These narratives are used to better understand the community and help plan health or social programs that address community needs.

Posters and Art

Art and posters can be used as stand-alone engagement activities. Young people's drawings of their local area can provide a tool for discussing their perceptions of the area, their activities, their range of movement and their favourite and least favourite places. Observations of the drawings of the drawing process and the drawings themselves can provide insights about what is most and least important to young people.

Co-production in Placemaking

Co-production in placemaking practices entail a way of involving children or young people in the planning process. Working with, rather than doing to, people and communities often leads to more targeted and efficient outcomes. A co-production project builds on participants' existing capabilities and can help to break down the barriers between people who use services and professionals. The outputs of a co-planning project can range from proposed maintenance to larger scale proposals for alterations in the built environment. Done well, a co-production project can support children and young people become agents for change.



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POP UP PLAY

KidsSpace

The KidsSpace model explores the creation of child friendly places in the city centre through pop-up events. The aim of KidsSpace was to encourage children and families to take ownership of public space. Activities such as arts and crafts, dance and puppet theatre were offered to encourage children to engage with the space, along with flexible play equipment and pavement chalk. The events were open to families and children of all ages and were designed to accommodate children from 3 up to 14 years of age. Since 2011, KidsSpace has taken place in a variety of locations across the city centre, including St Anne's Square, Buoy's Park, Writer's Square, Belfast City Hall front lawns, Urban Soul, May Street and vacant units in Castle Court and Victoria Square shopping centres and became a key event in the Annual Culture Night programme.



KidsSpace at St Anne's Square

ADVANTAGES

- Provides an informal and accessible setting for engagement. Participants often feel more comfortable as they are attending out of own interest and the environment is often familiar;
- Events attract children from a wide range of ages and backgrounds, including those less likely to attend a focus group or meeting;
- A range of fun activities enable children to find something that suits them;
- Community artists can be involved to engage with children through arts and crafts and record feedback;
- Both children and parents/carers/ adults can be consulted;
- The event is designed to test use of space and thereby provides a wealth of information on what works in particular locations;
- Children and families are given ownership of a space for a particular time to have which fun encourages engagement and feedback as people feel relaxed and open.

LIMITATIONS

- Not all participants' views might be recorded due to the large number of participants and potentially limited time of participation.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

- Marketing materials including posters and flyers to be displayed and distributed – social media can be effective as well;
- A space large enough to accommodate large numbers of participants – in the case of an outdoor space arrangements have to be made for shelter in case of adverse weather conditions;
- Public liability insurance cover;
- Staff to set up and dismantle the event;
- Sufficient staff to ensure public safety – 3 to 5 staff for acting on health and safety protocols;
- Between 2-4 experienced artists and arts materials – Belfast Healthy Cities have sourced artists through Play Resource, Belfast;
- Large free standing play equipment for example, Connect 4, Jenga, Lego, play mats and smoothie bikes;
- Motorised vehicle to transport equipment;
- Skilled facilitators that are able to guide children's activities for example puppet show artists or dance coaches – Belfast Healthy Cities have used Jump, Jiggle and Jive, Belfast to facilitate creative dance sessions.



POP UP PLAY / POSTERS AND ART

Planning my City

Planning my City was a four-day event organised in collaboration with the Royal Town Planners Institute (RTPI) that focused on the role that the built environment and urban planning play in children's lives. The event included arts and crafts, paper-bag houses, computer modelling/interactive areas, Lego® workshops and free play suitable for all ages.

A number of facilitated workshops centred around a miniature city model consisted of houses, trees, roads, office buildings, a church etc supported children to explore how a city is designed, what the uses of buildings could be, where they should be located and how they would contribute to the wellbeing of the city's residents. Using a model, children were able to create their own miniature city and try out models for producing a healthy and enjoyable place to live and work.

The event also allowed children with an opportunity to identify positive and negative aspects of the built environment by attaching comments on post-its to photographs that displayed various types of built environment.



Planning My City



Photovoice wall

ADVANTAGES

- Children are creatively engaged through a fun activity;
- Events attract children from a wide range of ages and backgrounds, including those less likely to attend a focus group or meeting;
- The use of a miniature model stimulates discussion;
- The event makes use of urban environment elements (roads, parks etc) and thereby provides a wealth of information on children's understanding of the built environment;
- Visual method of gathering children's feedback.
- Drawings are a very engaging information gathering technique and as such are a good 'ice breaker' activity for early in the process;
- Development of a visual database that can be used to communicate children's perspectives to the wider community or policymakers;
- Appropriate for vulnerable/excluded children (for example those with limited writing skills);
- Captures not only needs but also assets and strengths;
- Both children and parents/carers/ adults can be consulted.

LIMITATIONS

- Not all participants' views might be recorded due to group dynamics – confident participants might dominate;
- Preselection of photos by organiser might miss out on all elements of the built environment;
- Older children might be difficult to attract as part of these events.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

- Marketing materials including posters and flyers to be displayed and distributed – social media can be effective as well;
- An indoor space large enough to accommodate the miniature model and large numbers of participants;
- Public liability insurance cover;
- Staff to set up and dismantle the event;
- Sufficient staff to ensure public safety, 1 or 2 staff for acting on health and safety protocols;
- Skilled facilitators that are able to lead children's workshops.
- Miniature city model;
- A wall or pin up boards for displaying photos;



SURVEYS / QUESTIONNAIRES

Belfast School Survey

This survey was disseminated among schools in 2014 by the then Belfast Education and Library Board and was also distributed in major shopping centres. The survey took the form of a questionnaire adapted from the Spectrum tool developed by Barton and Grant³⁰, and invited respondents to rate their neighbourhood in relation to open space, play space, condition and safety of roads and street lighting. The survey also sought respondents' views on priority areas for change.

The survey focused on Primary Year 7 and Post-Primary Year 8 school children, to enable exploration of how the transition to post primary school affects young people's views and priorities, but also incorporated respondents from Year 4 and Year 10 groups.

What do you think about your environment and outside world?

Age of pupil:

School:

Pupils home postcode:

	Very good	Good	OK	Not very good	Not good at all/not enough
The street					
What are the road crossings like?					
How is the pavement?					
The green spaces					
How much green space do you feel there is?					
What are the green spaces like?					
The play places					
If there are play places what are they like?					
How good are the routes going there, from home or school?					
The light					
How good is the lighting in the evening?					
How do you feel walking in your area in the evening?					

ADVANTAGES

- useful in describing the characteristics of a large population;
- relatively easy and quick method of gathering information from a large number of people in a short period of time;
- cost effective method of data collection;
- can be carried out by staff with varying degrees of expertise with limited affect to its validity and reliability;
- results are easily quantified through the use of a software package;
- the quantitative form of output can be used to analyze differences over time or between different locations and social groups.

LIMITATIONS

- Since face to face interaction can be lacking misinterpretation of the questions or invalid answers cannot always be corrected;
- Pre-set answer categories might miss out on complexity of views – more qualitative methods might be needed to supplement the survey results;
- Risk of bias creeping into the answers – e.g. peers might choose to answer similarly.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

- Printed questionnaires;
- Staff to distribute and collect questionnaires;
- In case of face – to face questionnaires staff is required to help participants complete



SEMI-STRUCTURED GROUP DISCUSSIONS / STREET AUDITS / POSTERS AND ARTS

Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children

As part of its 'Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children' programme, Belfast Healthy Cities sought to give Key Stage 2 (year's P5-P7) primary school children an opportunity to share their views and priorities for their change within their local environments. Over 400 primary school children aged 8-11 years in a total of seventeen classes in twelve schools across the city participated in the programme between 2011 and 2014.

A semi-structured group discussion was held with children that focussed on introducing the concepts of place and planning and exploring children's understanding and experience of living in their neighbourhood. Children were given the opportunity to explore elements of healthy local environments in a class based setting. The group discussions were based around a number of topics, but also gave children opportunities to raise issues that concerned them themselves.



Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children

ADVANTAGES

- Interactive form of engagement that encourages all participants to have a voice;
- Encourages participants to listen carefully and to speak in a group;
- Helps participants to articulate ideas;
- Develop ability to critically evaluate and respond to alternative views.

LIMITATIONS

- Not all participants' views might be recorded due to group dynamics – confident participants might dominate;
- Discussions can easily get side-tracked on irrelevant topics;
- Conflict between participants can erupt if insufficient moderation is provided by a facilitator.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

- An indoor space large enough to accommodate the numbers of participants;
- Sufficient staff to ensure public safety – 1 or 2 staff for acting on health and safety protocols;
- Skilled facilitators.
- Images/photographs to prompt conversation;
- Age appropriate conversation prompters.

Questions which may help include:

Where do you live?

Where do you go to school?

What is your area like?

How far is it to your friend

house? Relative's house?

Are you able to walk to school?

Is there a local shop? Are you allowed to go there on your own?

Is there a park? Can you walk

there/do you go there?

How green is the area? Are there trees?

How does the area feel?

What do you like about your area?

What would you change about your

area and why? What are the

things that make a place good for children like you?



SEMI-STRUCTURED GROUP DISCUSSIONS / STREET AUDITS / POSTERS AND ARTS

Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children

Children also participated in a street audit that aimed to capture children's views on the built environment by using disposable analogue cameras or tablet computers. Participants were instructed to take photographs of elements of their environment they found welcome and positive, or elements they found negative, unpleasant or difficult to deal with during a walk within the local neighbourhood. Children also completed a simple analysis sheet documenting the experience of their walk.

The photographs from street audits were used as a basis for posters and electronic presentations, which were developed in groups of 4-5 children and highlighted key issues – positive and negative – identified during the walk. In addition, groups were encouraged to use art and text to describe what they would like to see in their area. Facilitators supported this process using a semi structured approach to clarify children's thinking and to record the discussion.



Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children: street audit

ADVANTAGES

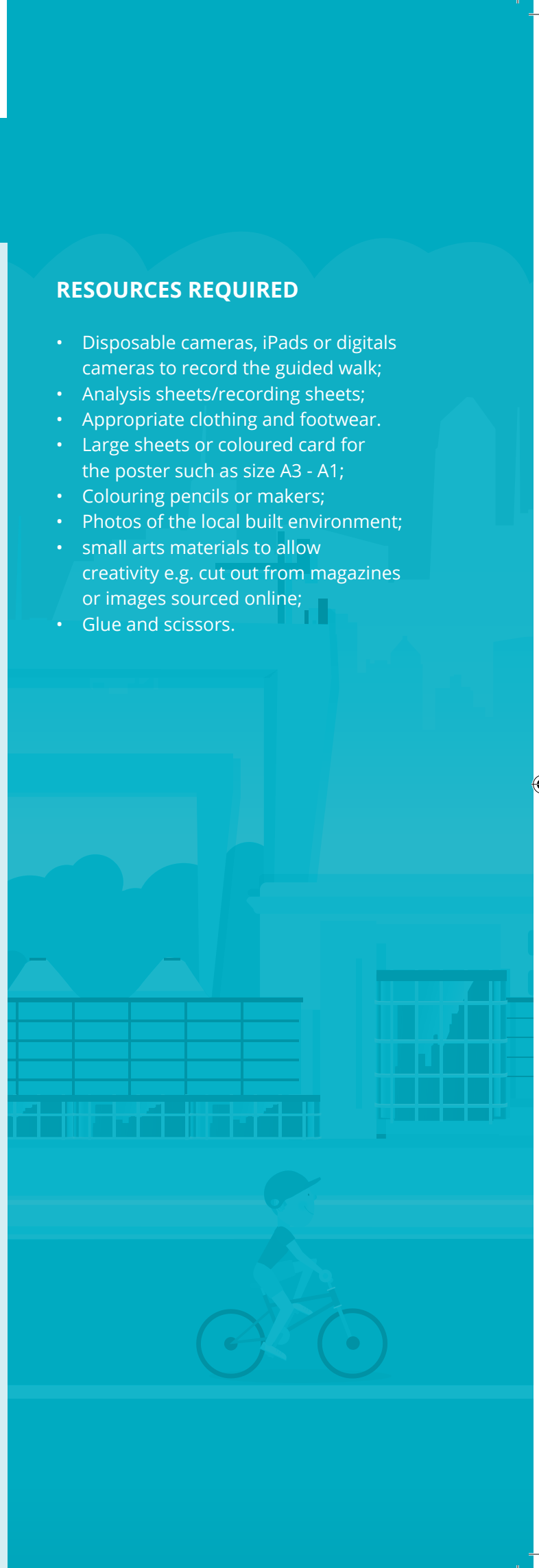
- Interaction with young people in the context of their local area;
- Engages children in a fun and creative activity;
- Short guided walks in the local community near to the school area allow children to explore and analyse the built environment;
- Taking photographs are useful for encouraging critical thinking;
- Development of a visual database on young people's perspectives of their local area that can be used to communicate children's perspectives to the wider community or policymakers;
- Appropriate for vulnerable/excluded children (for example those with limited writing skills);
- Captures not only needs but also assets and strengths
- Engages children in a fun and creative activity;
- Drawings are a very engaging information gathering technique and as such are a good 'ice breaker' activity for early in the process;
- Development of a visual database that can be used to communicate children's perspectives to the wider community or policymakers;
- Appropriate for vulnerable/excluded children (for example those with limited writing skills);
- Captures not only needs but also assets and strengths.

LIMITATIONS

- The visual material produces might need additional clarification;
- Risk of bias creeping into recording of visual environment – e.g. peers might choose to copy photographs and participants might put more emphasis on unfamiliar sights.
- Meaning of poster will need to be explained by the participants;
- Some older children/young people may be less willing to engage in drawing/developing a poster³¹;
- Children with less developed drawing abilities might be reluctant to participate.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

- Disposable cameras, iPads or digital cameras to record the guided walk;
- Analysis sheets/recording sheets;
- Appropriate clothing and footwear.
- Large sheets or coloured card for the poster such as size A3 - A1;
- Colouring pencils or makers;
- Photos of the local built environment;
- small arts materials to allow creativity e.g. cut out from magazines or images sourced online;
- Glue and scissors.



CO-PRODUCTION IN PLACEMAKING

Healthy Places, Healthy Children

The 'Healthy Places, Healthy Children' teaching resource (www.belfasthealthycities.com/hphc) was developed for use in schools, but it can also be used in an afterschool or youth group setting. The resource consists of seven units that are designed to introduce Key Stage 2 (year's P5-P7) primary school children to a project planning approach and enable children to work their way through a planning process from framing the issue and gathering evidence to identifying priorities and developing a delivery plan. The units are supported by a range of guidance and practical resources, including learning intentions, teachers note and learning exercises. The 'Healthy Places, Healthy Children' resource has been piloted with over 20 schools and has resulted in numerous proposals, developed by children and presented to decision makers, being brought to life.



Healthy Places, Healthy Children resource presentation of proposals

ADVANTAGES

- A fun and creative way of learning about the built environment;
- Helps to improve children's skills such as critical thinking, teamwork and problem solving;
- Enables children to work their way through a planning process from framing the issue and gathering evidence to identifying priorities and developing a delivery plan;
- Children are empowered and have ownership of outcomes;
- Provides a platform for children to contribute towards decisions that affect them in places where they live;
- Integration within the school curriculum allows consistent participation.

LIMITATIONS

- Not suitable for very young children;
- Not all participants' views might be recorded due to group dynamics – confident participants might dominate.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

- Booklets, training videos and teaching exercises (available online);
- Exercise sheets for participating children (available online);
- Classroom or other indoor space;
- Teacher to supervise children and facilitate the learning process;
- Small arts materials to allow children to produce proposals e.g. sheets or coloured card;
- Art utilities such as colouring pencils or makers, glue and scissors;
- Computers and software for designing visual presentations e.g. Microsoft PowerPoint.



The table below sets out a range of practical considerations that should be taken aboard when seeking to replicate any of the engagement models described above.

	Pop-up play: KidsSpace	Pop-up play: Planning my City
Clarity about purpose of consultation		
Clear instructions for engaging with participants		
Methods of recording feedback e.g. using audio recording or flip chart – identify a staff member or community artist		
Effective partnership working is required to deliver an event on this scale		
Weather conditions (availability of indoor alternative space)		
Size of (indoor) space required		
Accessibility of venue		
Type of activities on offer		
Additional facilities e.g. toilets and seating		
Cost and funding requirements		
Staffing requirements and organisational skills		
Channel of distribution		
Health and safety/child protection issues e.g. adult supervision		
Safeguarding of children’s privacy e.g. consent forms for use of photographs, names etc.		
Risk assessments of venue/space prior to event		
Parental consent might be needed.		
Confidentiality of participants		
When involving a school class, restrictions might be set by schools on the time available		
Reliance on schools/after school clubs/youth centres for accommodation and implementation		
Involvement of planner /policymakers is possible		
Local dignitaries may be invited to open the event		
Facilitation and moderation are required to ensure that all participants get a chance to contribute and to avoid conflict		
Age appropriate prompts for encouraging conversation e.g. images/photographs or low threshold questions		
Questions and instructions need to be very clearly formulated in order to avoid misinterpretation - questions must be age appropriate and jargon free;		
Visual appearance of documents - The use of characters or pictures to break up written text can make documents more appealing to children		

OTHER METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

There are many ways to engage with children and young people on their priorities. The appropriate activities and level of participation are dependent on a number of factors including the type and content of decisions and the age of children/young people. Using a variety of informal and formal activities helps include everyone in ways that suit their needs. Other ways of involving children and young people in decision-making processes include³²:

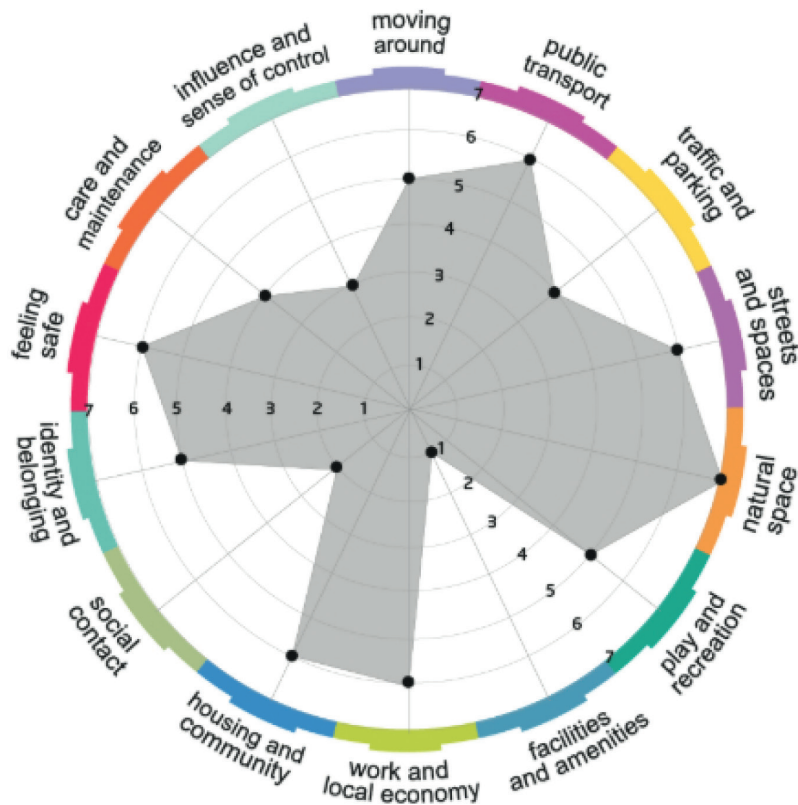
- **reviewing of material;**
- **testing out new resources;**
- **attending campaigns and advocacy events; and**
- **attending workshops or training.**

Examples of giving children more formal roles in the decision-making process might involve children:

- **conducting research into young people's needs;**
- **developing materials for a youth audience;**
- **planning and organising public campaigns, events and conferences;**
- **fundraising development work;**
- **acting as media spokespeople;**
- **lobbying and advocacy work, e.g. 'child mayor';**
- **recruiting staff;**
- **training adults e.g. staff inductions and young people;**
- **reviewing and evaluating policy.**



Figure 4. Children's Place Standard Tool



The Place Standard is a tool developed jointly by the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and Architecture & Design Scotland to support inclusive decision making and community engagement on place. The Place Standard Tool can promote the links between good quality living environment and better health outcomes. The focus of the tool is seeking the views of local people on the quality of their living environment and how this could be affected by a range of policies that are relevant to spatial planning, physical and social regeneration. The findings from the tool can be used to inform decision making at policy as well as operational level, and the tool can also be used to increase mutual understanding between policymakers and local communities.

A Children's version of the Place Standard Tool is currently being developed.

5



CONCLUSION

Engagement is at the heart of shaping places that help to improve children's health and wellbeing. The built environment can help to improve the quality of life for children and young people by providing safe and convenient access to a wide range of facilities such as schools and green spaces, while also providing abundant opportunities for play. On the other hand, children and young people are adversely impacted by negative aspects of the built environment such as air pollution, high traffic volumes, poor connectivity and lack of green spaces³³. Yet, despite the progress made in promoting of children as legitimate citizens, children often are not aware of their right to participate and do not have the skills or knowledge to exercise it.

Children and young people are an important part of our wider society and have an interest in shaping it. Treating children as equal stakeholders by working alongside them and valuing their knowledge is now considered a best practice approach on dealing with issues relevant to children. Children and young people are experts about their own experiences and aspirations³⁴, however, they are often considered too inexperienced, too unrealistic and too unqualified to be involved in decision making processes. Meaningful participation requires developing new relationships that are rooted in mutual trust and respect and encourage positive dialogues between children and young people on the one hand and professionals on the other. High ethical standards must be maintained in order to protect and respect children and young people, including obtaining appropriate consent and flagging up of child protection concerns³⁵.

Undertaking meaningful and sustainable engagement with children and young people requires many organisations to change their way of working. This change is about developing new ways of working with children and young people and involves adjustments to the ethos and culture of the organisation that effect all levels of management. Such organisational change needs dedicated commitment, sufficient staff support and commitment to new learning, all of which are more likely to happen if champions of children and young people's participation are embedded within the organisation³⁶. At the same time, the planning system itself needs to be able to provide children and young people with a meaningful opportunity to make their opinions and priorities heard. The adoption of a co-production approach for place-making projects across the city will make this possible. Another possibility is to embed engagement with children and young people into the formal planning consultation process e.g. through inclusion of children's section in Statement of Community Involvement.

Through extensive engagement experience Belfast Healthy Cities have learnt that engagement with children requires planning, time, effort and resources. A number of children's advocacy groups and childcare organisations operating within Northern Ireland have the skills and willingness to support children and young people to participate in decision making processes. These organisations also hold useful expertise that can be drawn upon by planners, policymakers and developers when working to shape our built environment for improved health and wellbeing.

33. The Scottish Government (2011). Good Places Better Health for Scotland's Children. Available at: <https://www2.gov.scot/resource/0039/00398236.pdf>

34. Victorian Local Governance Association (2014) Child Friendly Cities and Communities Toolkit

35. Scottish Executive (2006) Engaging children and young people in community planning, Community Planning Advice Note, <http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/154089/0041433.pdf>

36. Kirby, P et al, Building a Culture of Participation, Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DfES-0826-2003.pdf.pdf>



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