



Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 15 October 2025 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Esme Hicks (Chair)
Councillor Graham Neale
Councillor Youcef Hassaine

OTHER MEMBERS

PRESENT: Cllr Portia Mwangangye, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks & Young People

OFFICER SUPPORT: Nicolina Cooper, Interim Head of Controlled Parking, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure
Julie Timbrell, scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors Emmanuel, McCallum , and Parton all gave apologies.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. MAKE SPACE FOR GIRLS

The chair explained that items 5 and 6 would be taken together (the minutes for the discussion are minuted under item 6).

The chair welcomed Nadine Peters (Trustee) & Imogen Clark (Associate) and invited them to present:

About Make Space for Girls

Make Space for Girls is a registered charity, that has been campaigning since 2021 to make parks and similar spaces in the public realm work better for teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people.

The charity has worked with 270+ young women and gender-diverse youth to build evidence and reduce guesswork.

Teenage Play – Key Principles

- Play is self-motivated, creative, and social; not limited to under-12s.
- UNCRC: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child includes a right to play and applies up to age 18.
- Teenage play often involves socialising, “loitering,” and informal interaction (Jane Jacobs).

Current Provision & Gender Imbalance

- Facilities for teens typically = skate parks, MUGAs, BMX tracks.
- Parkwatch Survey (2023):
 - 92% of MUGA users = boys/young men
 - 84% of skatepark users = boys/young men
- Research (Yorkshire, 2022): 59% of girls feel unwelcome in parks dominated by boys.

Safety Concerns

- University of Leeds study:
 - 89% of park professionals think parks are safe for women/girls.

- Only 22% of teenage girls agree.
- Women in Sport research:
 - 49% of girls (13–15) feel unsafe exercising in parks vs 26% of boys.
- Barriers identified:
 - **Society:** Cultural norms, male dominance in public spaces.
 - **People:** Intimidation by groups of boys.
 - **Facilities:** Lack of exits, poor lighting, absence of staff.

Systemic Issues

- Current design creates gender segregation.
- Goal: **Design in girls** – not pink paint or exclusion, but inclusive spaces.
- Requires tackling systemic barriers and constructive engagement.

Recommendations for Inclusive Design

- Provide alternatives to MUGAs/skateparks:
 - Sociable seating & shelters
 - Swings for older kids
 - Reading nooks, book exchanges
 - Stages for performance
 - Spaces to decompress and “chill”
- Use design signals:
 - Lighting (warm, creative, safe)
 - Colour and public art
 - Clear signage and wayfinding
- Clean toilets, affordable food options.

International Examples

- **Malmo, Sweden – Rosens Rodda Matta:**
 - Designed by/with girls (16–24).
 - Features: climbing wall, performance stage, bars for gymnastics, smaller spaces to prevent domination.
- **Gaukel Street Parkette (Canada):**
 - Semi-private curved spaces for small groups.
 - Good sightlines, ergonomic design for teenage girls.

Local Engagement Projects

- Chelmsford & Maldon (2024–2025):
 - Workshops with 38 Year 9 students across 3 schools.
 - Explored barriers, mapped local spaces, proposed interventions.
 - Objectives: Empower participants, influence local decision-making.
- Activities included:
 - Site visits, mapping exercises, design proposals.
 - Temporary and permanent park interventions suggested by participants.

Key Findings from Workshops

- Girls want:
 - Safe, inclusive spaces with social seating.
 - Lighting beyond pathways.
 - Colourful, creative environments.
 - Places to escape stress and arguments.
 - Busy, well-used spaces (empty = intimidating).
- Suggested features:
 - Swings, trampolines, climbing structures.

- Water features, planting, public art.
- Fire pits, food trucks, temporary cinemas.

Project won Thornton Educational Trust Award 2024 for excellence in engaging young people with the built environment.

In summary Make Space for Girls highlighted that current teenage play provision is male-dominated and excludes girls. Inclusive design and co-production are essential to create spaces where all young people feel safe, welcome, and able to play.

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6. LONDON PLAY

The chair welcomed Fiona Sutherland from London Play and invited her to present.

London Play

- Established in 1998; charity advocating for children's right to play.
- Vision: Every child in London should have space, time, and freedom to play outside daily near home.
- Work includes:
 - **Adventure Play:** Supporting staffed adventure playgrounds.
 - **Doorstep Play:** Helping communities reclaim streets and estates for play.
 - **Campaigning & Advocacy:** Influencing policy and building public support.

Why Play Matters

- Fundamental for healthy childhoods:
 - Mental & physical health, emotional development, creativity, social skills.
- Benefits communities:
 - Safer streets, active travel, social cohesion.

- **UNCRC Article 31:** Right to play.

Current Challenges

- 1 in 4 children obese; mental health issues rising.
- Overcrowding: 90,000 children in temporary accommodation.
- Limited provision: 1 playground per 866 children; car-dominated streets.
- Only 27% play outside regularly; inequalities for poorer areas, Black/Brown families, SEND children.
- Barriers: No legal duty for play, financial constraints, perception of play as non-essential.

Southwark Play Audit: a strong start

- 260+ play areas (60 parks, 204 estates).
- 70% no major investment in 12+ years.
- 53% not accessible; most in deprived areas.
- £3m capital programme and Play Working Group established.

Policy Context: a policy moment

- Play Commission report and proposed Play Sufficiency Duty.
- All Party Parliamentary Group on Play formed.
- Calls for National Play Strategy and funding.

Recommended next Steps for Southwark: move from audit to action:

- **Develop borough-wide Play Strategy.**
- Move from audit to action:
- Address gaps and quality issues.
- Ensure inclusivity (girls, teens, SEND, temporary housing).

- Link play to council priorities: health, housing, safety, environment, culture.
- Focus on quality, not just quantity.

Engagement & Co-production

- Involve children, families, and residents.
- Prioritise excluded voices.
- Combine audit data with lived experience.
- Test ideas via pop-ups and pilots.

A playful borough

- Recognise play beyond playgrounds (streets, estates, parks).
- Address barriers: safety, traffic, perception.
- Embed engagement and co-production.
- Sustain coordination through Play Working Group.

Question and answer session

The chair invited the commission to ask questions of London Play and on the earlier presentation by Make Space for Girls:

Question 1: What should be the top priority for a Play Strategy?

- **Make Space for Girls:** Emphasised the need for inclusion of girls and young women, with consideration of intersectionality. Recommended co-design and active engagement with diverse groups to ensure equitable provision.
- **London Play:** Stressed that the strategy must address play needs beyond traditional playgrounds, incorporating streets and estates. Highlighted the importance of revenue funding for ongoing maintenance to prevent spaces becoming neglected, noting that complaints often relate to issues such as litter and dog fouling.

Question 2: Which places have demonstrated best practice?

- **Make Space for Girls:**

- **Sweden:** Commended for its strong commitment to gender equality at a national level, resulting in more inclusive public spaces.
- **Canada – Gaukel Street Parkette:** Highlighted the “Deconstructed Heart” design, a heart-shaped structure co-designed with young women. This space provides semi-private curved seating areas with good sightlines, ergonomic design, and a welcoming aesthetic, enabling small groups to gather safely.

Question 3: What are the biggest barriers or challenges, aside from financial constraints?

- **London Play:** Observed that play provision often falls between service areas, creating gaps in accountability. Recommended clear governance and cross-departmental involvement, including leisure, housing, public health, culture, education, and transport initiatives such as Southwark’s “Streets for People.”
- **Make Space for Girls:** Noted a lack of awareness within councils regarding how design can unintentionally exclude girls. Advocated for post-occupancy evaluations and dedicated funding to assess impact and inform future improvements.

Question 4: How does this work connect with the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy?

- **Make Space for Girls:** Explained that engagement originated through community safety teams, leading to research that captured girls’ perspectives on public space. Identified a negative cycle whereby girls’ absence from parks reinforces feelings of insecurity, perpetuating exclusion. The aim is to reverse this into a positive cycle of visibility and safety through inclusive design and engagement.

7. INTERVIEW: CABINET MEMBER FOR LEISURE, PARKS & YOUNG PEOPLE

The chair welcomed cabinet member Cllr Portia Mwangangye, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks & Young People, for her annual interview . The cabinet member was invited to provide a summary of the relevant parts of her portfolio and then members were invited to ask questions .

The following themes emerged with a focus on play spaces, parks and maintenance:

- **Equity of Investment:** Emphasis on ensuring estates receive equivalent

investment to traditional parks, recognising the importance of play access for children living in flats.

- Funding: Previous reliance on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); exploring sustainable approaches to maintain investment.
- Co-Design Examples: Goose Green cited as a successful engagement and delivery model.
- Gendered Approach: Highlighted projects such as Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park targeting young girls; commitment to applying this approach across playgrounds.
- Consultation: Engagement with school children and local residents in design processes.
- Play Working Group includes 11 departments (e.g., Community Safety, Planning, Streets for People).
- Advocacy for integration with planning policy at London level and collaboration with developers to secure investment in play.
- Recognition that play often falls between service areas; need for clear accountability and sufficient buy-in across departments, including housing, public health, culture, and education.
- Community Safety initiatives in Burgess Park: improved lighting and safe routes, informed by young people's feedback.
- Use of deprivation indices and youth input to prioritise interventions (e.g., basketball courts used by both young women and men).
- Importance of ongoing revenue funding for upkeep (bins, recycling facilities raised by young people).
- Collaboration with contractors to address maintenance concerns.
- Interest in learning from innovative play space models in North London.

8. STREETS FOR PEOPLE - ZONING CONSULTATION

The chair welcomed Nicolina Cooper, Interim Head of Controlled Parking, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure and invited her to present:

- The Streets for People strategy, launched in July 2023, aims to make

streets cleaner, greener, and safer, with a strong focus on reducing traffic, improving road safety, and tackling the climate emergency.

- The programme is based on the council's largest-ever consultation, with over 9,000 responses, including youth surveys and school workshops.
- Key priorities from residents: urgent action on climate change, safer cycling, reduced traffic, and more greenery to support wellbeing and biodiversity.
- Delivery approach includes borough-wide interventions (School Streets, cycle hangars, walking maps), strategic corridors (Vision Zero safety improvements, 20mph zones, bus priority), and local zones with measures such as footway widening, crossings, trees, and places for rest and play.
- Zones are prioritised using criteria such as road safety (Vision Zero), deprivation, public transport access, and existing projects, with early engagement underway in Zones A and B and data analysis in Zones I, J, and F.
- Programme stages include community engagement, design development, public consultation, and implementation, aiming for completion by late 2029.
- Emphasis on alignment with other programmes (School Streets, maintenance) to minimise disruption and ensure integrated delivery.

The chair then invited questions and the following themes were discussed:

- **Cross-Borough Working:**
Members raised concerns about Lambeth led plans affecting St George's Ward and residents feeling decisions were imposed. Officers confirmed Southwark signs off plans, outlined engagement to date and offered to meet councillors to ensure feedback influences the final designs.
- **Consultation Process:**
Officers outlined early engagement methods (pop-ups, social media, libraries) and stressed co-design before designs are developed. Zones A & B already have low traffic; more detailed consultation will occur in central areas, with consideration of local demographics.
- **Traffic Displacement Concerns:**
Members queried whether low-traffic schemes push traffic onto main roads near deprived communities. Officers acknowledged initial displacement but explained overall traffic usually reduces within six months, improving air quality and cycling rates. Officers said that data will be shared transparently.

- **Integration and Collaboration:**

Streets for People is cross-cutting, linking with various departments and teams including officers leading on play and public health, who are involved in project management. It was suggested adding Make Space for Girls and London Play as consultees and noted the potential for child-focused designs such as linear parks.

The chair summarised the discussion:

- Ensure engagement is diverse and inclusive.
- Consult **Make Space for Girls** and **London Play**.
- Strengthen collaboration with neighbouring boroughs.

9. SCRUTINY REVIEW REPORT: EXPLORING THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPACTS OF ACTIVE TRAVEL AND ACCESS TO NATURE

The report was noted.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was noted.