

C04/06520/mk

cc
Anne-Marie
Andrew
m Reader

Rt Hon Frank Dobson MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



16th January 2005

Dear Frank,

Almost a year has passed since the publication of the play review. As you know we have been taking forward our reforms to make the Lottery more open, accessible and responsive to the needs of communities. The way forward for the Big Lottery Fund is now clear and the fund's consultation on proposed outcomes and priorities to meet the themes announced by Government has now ended. I am now able to respond to the Review and explain how I see this important work moving forward. I am very sorry that I have been unable to respond until now.

I very much welcome your review and recognise that it represents a huge amount of thought and effort on the part of yourself and Tim Gill. I am grateful to you for all your work and to everyone who contributed to the review and took part in the consultations.

It is already widely known that a decision has been taken not to ring-fence lottery money for play. I know there has been some consternation amongst the play sector about that decision - and the possibility that we are now renegeing on our commitment. I can assure you that this is not the case. We are as committed as ever to seeing children's play areas transformed by lottery money. The decision not to have a specific pot of money is because we feel the lottery should not work in this way - for any area of funding.

Our challenge has been to consider how best to support the spirit of the Play review and Government's commitment for Play whilst ensuring the improvements to the Lottery that the Big Lottery Fund will bring. We have set out our aspirations for the Big Lottery Fund: it will be more responsive to local needs; it will be more accessible and supportive of prospective applicants; and it will be open to new ideas and able to take risks. Government will have a strategic relationship with the Big Lottery Fund, based on agreed themes and the achievement of outcomes. Our proposals reflect the fact that play projects are likely to come in many forms and contribute towards outcomes in different ways. Play was mentioned specifically in two of the proposed priorities in the Big Lottery Fund consultation.

The Fund will not have centrally defined, ring-fenced programmes but will engage more with local communities and respond to their aspirations. The Fund will consider the play review findings, which were written with the previous operation of the NOF in mind, in light of this new approach. Overall we expect funding for play projects to reach at least £200m across the UK between 2006 and 2012. I am aware that there has been some misunderstanding around the dates quoted, however the Government view has always been that 2012 is a realistic timescale.

Government will expect more joint working across all Lottery Distribution Bodies in the future and we are currently considering how best to monitor investment in play activities across the Lottery.

We feel more can be achieved for play by allowing lottery distributors to decide on how this money is spent - the freedom to give money to a range of projects - and a range of innovative ideas for new play areas. Be sure that play is as important as ever to this government. I am convinced the difference the lottery will make for play will be felt far and wide.

My department will continue to work with and support the Children's Play Council and the play sector to take forward some of the review's recommendations as they relate to Government. We recognise that play can impact positively on a range of issues and we will continue our work with the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that play is recognised as having an important contribution to the Change for Children programme; with the Department of Health on the Choosing Health programme and on the preparation of a Physical Activity Plan; and with ODPM, given the links between play and the Cleaner, Safer, Greener agenda. We will be considering how to take forward a more strategic, cross-departmental approach to play policy.

We will discuss with the devolved administrations any implications for them, although it is obviously for the devolved administrations to consider their own positions against the review and to direct the Big Lottery Fund accordingly.

I very much value the contribution that you have made to highlighting Play's role across Government and to ensuring that our children ultimately benefit from a legacy of good quality play spaces and opportunities.

Yours with an honest wish
Tessa

TESSA JOWELL

"GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT PLAY" REPORT TO GOVERNMENT BY RT. HON FRANK DOBSON MP AND THE CHILDREN'S PLAY COUNCIL

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: JANUARY 2005

Many of the recommendations in the review relate to the New Opportunities Fund. However, the merging of NOF and the Communities Fund (announced in the National Lottery Funding decision document –July 2003) to form the new distributor – the Big Lottery Fund – means that the proposals about children's play have had to be considered in the context of the new lottery structure. While we still expect £200 million for play (across the UK) to be spent over time, we anticipate that funding for play will come from across all distributors, and not only from the Big Lottery Fund. The response document reflects that approach.

POINT/RECOMMENDATION (Page 6 - 1&2 are scene setting)	RESPONSE
3. Definition of play "what YP do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons"	Agree
4. "The NOF funding programme should improve and create thousands of spaces where children and YP can play freely and in safety"	Agree in principle.
5. "Funding should be focused on areas and groups with the poorest access to good quality play opportunities and with a major emphasis on the inclusion of disabled children and YP."	Agree in principle. Lottery money should be targeted at those most in need.. However this is an issue which all lottery distributors should consider when considering applications.
6. Measuring success: "Long term popularity will be main test of success" (p6 para6). Other characteristics of success are: centred on children, attractive location, high quality play opportunities, fit in well locally and provide parents with sense of security. NOF should consider applications against these criteria.	Agree. Welcome the helpful views on play projects most likely to succeed. No doubt lottery distributors will take these into account.
7. The main emphasis should be on projects with medium or small size catchment areas. Access should be free.	Agree. We welcome this proposal. Again this is for lottery distributors to consider.
8. Play opportunities with some form of adult supervision or adult oversight are likely to prove more successful.	As in 6 above
9. Bulk of funding, around 80%, should support exemplary projects. Most of remaining should support new approaches.	Agree with suggestion in principle. It is consistent with the purpose behind lottery funding, that new ideas offering innovative solutions should be supported.

10. NOF should make provisional allocation of the main funds to unitary and lower tier LAs on a basis that reflects level of child poverty	Welcome suggestion and agree in principle –but again this is for the lottery distributors to consider. Should work alongside point 5 above.
11. The LA or a local partnership should be responsible for drawing up proposals ... must be prepared in partnership with other local agencies, children and YP and communities in the neighbourhoods concerned.	Agree that proposals should encompass the views of wider community, especially the views of Children and YP themselves We are keen to see the voluntary and community sector engaged in developing opportunities.
12. Local agencies will be expected to fund preparation of plans themselves, however Gov and others should work together to ensure that most deprived areas have support to prepare proposals and to implement them.	Agree.
13. NOF programme should allow enough time to prepare effective proposals and for projects to become established.	Agree.
14. Local proposals should, where possible maximise the impact of funding by complementing and augmenting it with funds from other sources	Agree – it will be important that projects take into account whatever else is happening in their area.
15. Out of hours school grounds and buildings should be promoted, especially when schools are being built and refurbished.	Agree, would welcome proposals for more creative use of school facilities for play. Consistent with Young People’s Fund supported Extended Schools Programme where “Schools for the future” investment is attached to embracing extended schools approach. But will be for schools/local education authority and lottery distributors to implement.
16. As funding may cover revenue and capital spend, projects should indicate how they will continue once revenue grant stops.	Agree and consistent with approach to date.
17. Local authorities should designate a “play champion”	Welcome more strategic involvement by local authorities who are key to the play sector. The Change for Children programme, Children’s Trusts and new Directors of Children’s Services are relevant, however resourcing is a matter for each authority.
18. NOF and Government should ensure that there is clear responsibility for implementing the programme nationally and locally and should seek to give it a national identity to maximise its impact, raise standards	Agree to recommendation in principle; will consider how to take forward a more strategic, cross departmental approach to play policy.

and promote long-term viability.	
<p>19. NOF should evaluate the impact on Children and YP, parents and local communities of the play projects they fund and also build up a database of what works and what does not.</p>	<p>Agree that monitoring and evaluation is essential – we will work with distributors to achieve this.</p> <p>More broadly we will continue work with CPC to spread best practice and promote sustainability within context of existing contract.</p>
<p>20. DCMS and DFES should enhance their capacity to support the NOF programme and to ensure joint support for it across government</p>	<p>Recognise the need to work across government to maximise impact of play opportunities and to build on other programmes (such as the change for Children programme; ODPM living spaces programme, DH Choosing Health programme and existing lottery schemes).</p>

Strategy Division
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