

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

SUBMISSION BY DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The role of the Department of Local Government is to administer the legislative and policy framework within which local councils in NSW operate. It does this through:

- facilitating the effective implementation of the Government's priorities
- facilitating effective decision making for and within the sector
- working in partnership with stakeholders across sectors to respond to the needs of local government
- providing accurate, timely and useful information on local government issues
- managing and promoting performance in the local government sector so it can operate efficiently and effectively

Local councils play a key role in the design of the built environment. For example, local councils either provide or play a significant role in virtually all of the built environment considerations relevant to children and young people listed on p7 of Issues Paper 1: Introduction and Overview.

The role councils play in the built environment is mainly through their land use planning functions under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, administered by the Minister for Planning.

The *Local Government Act 1993* requires councils as part of their charter to "promote and to provide and plan for the needs of children" (section 8). However, how they do this and the resources they allocate to it is a matter for each council to determine.

The Department of Local Government's role in this issue is mainly through the requirement under the *Local Government Act 1993* for councils to prepare social/community plans. Councils are required to prepare these plans at least once every five years. The plans must identify and address the needs of children and young people along with other target groups. Councils are also required to consider the plans in the development of their management plan and include a statement about access and equity activities they plan to undertake. Because councils are autonomous in regard to how they allocate their resources, there is no requirement for councils to implement their social/community plan.

More information about these requirements are contained in the department's *Social and Community Planning and Reporting Guidelines (2002)* which are available from the department's website at www.dlg.nsw.gov.au. The department has also produced the *Social and Community Planning and Reporting Manual (2002)*, which provides councils with advice about how to develop and implement their social/community plan. The Manual is also available from the department's website.

The department has undertaken or is undertaking/involved in the following relevant initiatives:

- Youth Consultation Research Project conducted in 1997-98. The findings from the project are presented in the following reports which are available from the department's website:
 - *How Local Councils Consult Young People. A report on findings from a survey of local councils in NSW* (October 1997) [includes the literature review and Directory of Youth Consultation Mechanisms]
 - *How Young People Would Like to be Consulted. A report on findings from interviews with young people as part of the Youth Consultation Research Project*, (November 1998)
 - *Council Staff and Councillors' Views about Youth Consultation. A report on findings from interviews with Council staff and Councillors as part of the Youth Consultation Research Project* (April 1999)
 - *Youth Consultation Checklist* (April 1999). The checklist encourages councils to use a range of mechanisms to consult with young people, as different groups of young people will be attracted to different mechanisms. This is consistent with Issues Paper 3: Related Developments in New South Wales (p6).
- an annual (to become biennial from 2005) survey of councils regarding selected social justice initiatives. This includes asking councils if they have or are planning to establish a youth advisory or consultative committee
- *Creating Active Communities. Physical activity guidelines for local councils*. This publication, produced by the department in conjunction with NSW Health, NSW Sport and Recreation and National Heart Foundation (NSW Division) in 2001, includes the following information:
 - key principles for increasing physical activity. These include a whole of council approach, integrated planning, safe and supportive environments, and community involvement
 - catering for specific population groups, including young people. The publication provides information about young people relevant to physical activity, opportunities for young people to participate in physical activity, examples of council physical activity initiatives, and useful publicationsThis publication is available from the department's website
- Premier's Council on Active Living. The department is represented on the Council. One of its current projects is the development of the Planning for Active Living Website, which is aimed primarily at council and other land use planners and developers. The website is being developed to encourage the design of physical environments that support physical activity. It is likely that the website will include specific information about cities, towns and neighbourhoods; walking and cycling routes; streets; open spaces; shopping centres and public transport. Further information about this project can be obtained from the Council's Manager, Natasha Sherwood, by phone on 9036 3267 or by email at natashas@health.usyd.edu.au