

Children Outline Their Vision for Belfast at City Hall



Environment Minister, Mark H Durkan joins (L/R Back row) Joan Devlin, Chief Executive, Belfast Healthy Cities; Patricia Lewsley-Mooney, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People; Cllr Maire Hendron, Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast and Laura McDonald, Health Development Officer, Belfast Healthy Cities alongside children from schools participating in the Children's Voices event at Belfast City Hall on Monday 16 June.

School children from across Belfast put policy makers in the spotlight in City Hall as they set out their priorities when it comes to making the city 'child friendly.' The event was co-ordinated by Belfast Healthy Cities, the World Health Organization body in Belfast.

The City Hall event is the culmination of work by over 400 primary school pupils who have identified their priorities for the built environment in their local neighbourhoods through the Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children programme. Politicians and policy makers including Environment Minister Mark H Durkan MLA and Belfast Deputy Lord Mayor Cllr Maire Hendron, who opened the event, were in attendance to hear directly how our children feel about their city. During children's question time the pupils raised issues on the built environment with a panel of key decision makers. A live 'real time' opinion poll measured children's attitudes towards both outdoor and indoor play and issues associated with both.

Mark H Durkan MLA, Minister at the Department of the Environment, said: “Today is a great idea. All too often it’s grown ups who say what our cities should look like. But children will know what they want, what works best for them. It’s important they have their say as well.”

Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast, Cllr Maire Hendron, hailed the City Hall event as being “timely and important”.

“Children are not only a population group to be supported and nurtured, they are also a great asset and can help develop a better Belfast for the future,” she added.

Belfast Healthy Cities’ Chief Executive Joan Devlin said the event allowed Belfast to draw on experience from other major cities: “It is accepted that a child friendly city is one which offers safe, green and clean spaces where children can interact and play freely. Good design in the city makes it a desirable place to visit and live and makes a positive contribution to physical and mental wellbeing. Children’s experiences of the built environment should be valued and listened to; this will not only generate better decisions, but also help children grow up as active and engaged citizens.”

“Our speakers included Sue Rumbold from Child Friendly Leeds who shared the approach used to make Leeds a successful child friendly city. She also discussed the reasons why Leeds is aspiring to be the best city in the UK for children,” she added.

[Children's Voices: A Charter for Belfast](#) was also presented at the event; it sets out the priorities identified by children through the Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods Project. We were also delighted that the event was featured on the [BBC Radio Ulster Talkback](#) programme. (Listen from 83 minutes).

