

14th July 2026

Andy Burnham MP
House of Commons
London,
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Dear Andy,

Congratulations on soon becoming our next Prime Minister. We are hopeful that addressing the crisis in children's health and wellbeing, especially for those facing inequalities, will be high on your agenda.

The national debate about children's use of social media has rightly renewed focus on childhood. But if we want children to be healthier, happier and more connected in real life, we must also restore something fundamental: their everyday freedom to play, move and socialise where they live.

Too many children can no longer kick a ball outside their front door, meet friends independently, or enjoy shared neighbourhood spaces without being moved on. This is especially true for children growing up in communities facing the greatest inequalities. While schools play an important role, 80% of children's waking hours are spent outside school, at home and in their communities. Every child deserves the chance to play, be active and belong close to home.

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee's recent *Game On* report recognised these challenges and made a series of practical recommendations to remove barriers to play. We welcomed the Government's positive response, including its commitment to remove unnecessary "No Ball Games" signs and create more opportunities for children and young people to play.

We now urge you to turn that commitment into action.

Delivering the Committee's recommendations would provide an early, visible demonstration of your Government's commitment to tackling the children's health crisis through prevention. They are practical, affordable measures that can be implemented quickly, laying the foundations for a new National Play Strategy fit for the realities of childhood today.

We therefore urge you to instruct ministers to deliver three early actions within your first 100 days.

1. End "No Ball Games" restrictions

For decades, "No Ball Games" signs have sent a damaging message that children are not welcome in the places where they live. They discourage play, physical activity, social connection and a sense of belonging.

Change is already happening in this area. The Play Commission called for a national ban on these discriminatory signs. London Sport's More Ball Games campaign has attracted widespread public support. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee's recent *Game On* report recognised the barrier and recommended national action in April, and the Government responded positively on June 26, confirming ambition to remove unnecessary "No Ball Games" signs and increase opportunities for children and young people to play.

This is a positive and welcome shift. However, leaving implementation solely to local authorities will not deliver timely or equitable change. It risks creating another postcode lottery, overlooks the significant role of housing associations and other landowners and provides no national expectation, timetable or accountability.

We urge Government to introduce a clear national prohibition of "No Ball Games" signs and similar blanket restrictions that unfairly prevent children from playing in shared public space.

2. Make Play Streets easier everywhere

Traffic danger remains one of the greatest barriers preventing children from playing out on their doorstep and moving independently around their neighbourhoods.

Resident-led temporary Play Streets are a simple, low-cost way to reclaim doorstep space for children's play, health and wellbeing, and for community connection. The CMS Committee also recognised the value of this tried and tested model and called for greater national support.

Play streets currently depend on inconsistent local processes. National guidance, a simpler and more consistent legal process, and modest enabling funding – all changes that local authorities themselves have requested - would allow many more communities to benefit from play streets across England.

3. Modernise model byelaws for parks and open spaces

Current MHCLG model byelaws still allow unnecessary restrictions on playing, skateboarding and cycling in public spaces.

They should instead begin from a clear presumption in favour of children's play, informal recreation and active travel, with restrictions used only where there is clear evidence they are necessary and proportionate.

Towards a National Play Strategy...

Together, these measures would show how national leadership can remove barriers, unlock local action and improve children's everyday lives, without major new spending. They would also provide early building blocks for a new National Play Strategy for England.

When you launched England's last National Play Strategy in 2008, you recognised that play is not a luxury but an essential part of children's health, wellbeing and development. Nearly two decades on, the evidence is even stronger.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you on restoring children's freedom to play out.

Yours sincerely,

Alice Ferguson and Ingrid Skeels, Co-Founders, **Playing Out**

Eugene Minogue, Executive Director, **Play England**

Emily Robinson, CEO, **London Sport**

Fiona Sutherland, Director, **London Play**

Paul Lindley MBE, Chair, **Raising the Nation Play Commission**

Helen Griffiths, Chief Executive, **Fields in Trust**

Dr William Bird MBE, CEO, **Intelligent Health**

Dan Paskins, Head of Policy, **Save the Children UK**

Ali Oliver MBE, CEO, **Youth Sports Trust**

Dr Naomi Luhde-Thompson, Chief Exec, **Rights Community Action**

Hugh Ellis, Director of Policy, **TCPA**

Katherine Knight, Chair, **Rounders England**

Jenny Danson, CEO, **Healthy Homes Hub**

Dr Naomi Lott, **University of Reading**

Professor Alison Stenning, **Newcastle University**

Dr Sunil Bhopal, **Bradford Institute for Health Research**

Tim Gill, Author, **Urban Playground**

Dr Wendy Russell, Senior Research Fellow in Play, **University of Gloucestershire**

Tracey McCillen, Chief Executive, **Sport Excel UK**

Paul Bickerton, CEO, **London Football Association**

Andy Taylor, CEO, **Active Partnerships National Organisation**

Adrian Leather, CEO, **Active Lancashire**

Paul Critchley, Chief Executive, **Active Cornwall**

Susanna Jones MBE, Chief Executive, **Wiltshire and Swindon Sport**

David Watson, CEO, **North Yorkshire Sport Ltd**

David Gent, Chief Executive Officer, **Active Humber**

Liz Davidson-Kennett, Partnership Director, **Active Kent & Medway**

Gareth Davies, Director, **Active Suffolk**

Josh Lenthall, Chief Executive, **Active Oxfordshire**

Pete Ezard, CEO, **Energize Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin**

Helen Rowbotham, CEO, **Access Sport**

Clare Fitzboydon, Director, **Be Active**

Adam Blaze, CEO, **Activity Alliance**

Hayley Lever, CEO, **Greater Manchester Moving**

Montell Douglas, **Olympic Bobsledder & Team GB Sprinter**

Sal Culmer-Shields, Head of Healthy Active Children, **Active Oxfordshire**

Peter Ackred, CEO, **Disability Sports Coach**

Jamie Shawyer (LDN Movements), **LDN Movements FC**