

Councillor Robson appointed as Play Champion

Councillor Keith Robson was appointed yesterday as the council's Play Champion. He is the recently appointed Labour group representative for Liberton/Gilmerton Ward with a background in education so was naturally interested in putting himself forward for the position.

The Scottish Government started the ball rolling with its National Play Strategy including the idea that there will be a network of Play Champions appointed throughout Scotland. The report is clear as to what this government initiative will achieve.

"Children's play is crucial to Scotland's well being; socially, economically and environmentally. Our people are our greatest resource and the early years of life set the pattern for children's future development."

✘ So what does a Play Champion do? The Edinburgh Reporter spoke with Councillor Robson this morning to find out.

"Initially my job it is to chair the inaugural meeting of the Play Forum. There has already been across-departmental and a multi-party steering group working on the issue so far, but now we have to widen that out and decide on a programme of work and we have to develop a play strategy.

"There will be a report to the council in May, so we have a bit of a deadline. I have to work out who should be invited to the meeting. It is early days but this morning has been a blur of phone calls and nobody is on or off the list as yet! There will be a variety of different organisations with an interest and also some parents invited.

"We are just trying to get the whole process started at the

moment. Our intention is that a rolling chair will be appointed to run the Play Forum on an ongoing basis.

“This project will only be delivered through partnership with the voluntary sector and parents. We will only see success if there is a genuine partnership between the council and a variety of other people. ”

“The Scottish Government launched its [play strategy](#) in June and last month issued its action plan so the council had to appoint someone as Play Champion, but it means we will also have a national strategy to benchmark ourselves against. Individuals have been working on this for a number of years. Play is a massively important part of a child’s development, to ensure they have fun. The challenge for me is not to sound like a patronising politician! One of our objectives is that we want to ensure that communities recognise the importance of play for children.

“The world has changed. How children play and their access to places to play has changed dramatically to how it was when I was a child.

The Reporter asked what the tangible results might be – will there be many more play areas across the city?

“I am quite open to what the results will be after this group gets going. I can give you few examples, as I don;t want people coming to a meeting thinking I have all the answers, but one idea I have is to establish Play Streets – cities like Bath and Bristol have actually closed down streets at certain times for this purpose. Edinburgh Council has been running National Play Day with the Play Bus outside the City Chambers for a number of years, but Play Streets would be more than that. So that is one potential project we could work on, but ahead of any meetings I am genuinely open-minded about this and how it will develop.

“My own background is in Youth and Community work from

Jordanhill College I worked within education all through my career and I have a five year old son. I have a real interest in the subject area and I was keen to put myself forward for the role. I am not holding myself up as an expert, but I can bring the different groups together then we can find the targets and benefits of such a scheme.

“I would be happy to receive any and all comments from anyone interested in sharing their thoughts with me. They can contact me through Twitter or my council email address which is keith.robson@edinburgh.gov.uk.”

You can also contact Councillor Robson on [Twitter](#)

Alex Cole Hamilton, Convenor of Together (the Scottish alliance for children's rights) said:-“The right to play is a fundamental pillar of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is incredibly important for children's development on a number of levels and I am delighted to see the City of Edinburgh Council embrace the aspirations of the Scottish Government's Play Strategy. Knowing Keith personally I am fully aware of his commitment to children's rights and he will make an excellent inaugural Play Champion for the city.”