

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE
13 NOVEMBER 2008

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Highland Football Academy Trust
Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport

SUMMARY

This report updates Members on the work of the Highland Football Academy and its place in delivering the Regional Youth Action Plan for Football.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Highland Football Academy Trust (HFA) was established in April 2002. The Highland Council acted as the principal driver in forming a partnership with Inverness Caledonian Thistle FC and Ross County FC. The Trust was established as a Company Limited by Guarantee and as a Registered Charity.

Formation of the Trust enabled the pursuit of funding from **sportscotland's** Sports Facilities Programme Scottish Football Academy Strand towards building a two centre facility at Jubilee Park, Dingwall, and Charleston Academy, Inverness. Further funding was secured from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Football Partnership. The Dingwall Indoor Centre was opened in December 2003, while the Inverness Centre's artificial pitch was completed in December 2005. The formal opening of the Highland Football Academy took place in February 2006.

2. The Trust and its Facilities

- 2.1 The HFA Board has 12 directors:

- 2 Highland Council nominees
- 2 Inverness CTFC nominees
- 2 Ross County FC nominees
- 1 North of Scotland FA nominee
- 5 representatives of the community, including the original two directors.

The facilities developed to date are:

- Dingwall Centre – one floodlit grass pitch; one floodlit grass training area; sports hall; offices; foyer & reception area; changing rooms; fitness suite; sports injury clinic; meeting rooms; learning space; and three storage spaces; disabled toilet
- Inverness Centre – two high specification grass pitches and floodlit synthetic pitch.

The facilities are managed by the Trust, in collaboration with the Highland Council.

3. Football Use of the Academy

3.1 The original aim of the Scottish Football Academy Strand was to provide high quality facilities for youth football development work. This is focussed on youth team work, run as part of the Scottish FA's Youth Initiative, undertaken by Inverness CT FC and Ross County FC. Highland Football League Youth Initiative clubs Alness United and Clachnacuddin also make regular use of the facilities.

Each centre has a core of use by the partner clubs, so that -

- The Dingwall Centre is used during weekdays by Ross County FC 1st Team and U19's; used two evenings, plus Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon by Ross County Youth Teams; and is also used on two weekday evenings by Inverness CT Youth Teams.
- The Inverness Centre is used occasionally during weekdays by Inverness CT 1st Team and U19's; is used four evenings plus Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon by Inverness CT Youth Teams.

In addition, a wide range of other clubs and community groups make use of the facilities, including youth groups such as Dingwall Boys Club and Conon Kids. Highland Disability Football has settled in to a regular pattern of using the artificial pitch in Inverness. In fact, during the period September to May, the facilities have very high occupancy rates during opening hours. The Academy's facilities are frequently used by the Scottish FA so that, for example, in 2007:

- 8 Coach Education Courses were held at the Highland Football Academy
- 2 Coach In-service events took place
- The SFA Girls' Regional squad trained regularly at Dingwall
- The SFA North Region Development Squad used the facilities
- A Macdonalds' Festival took place, along with numerous other community activities run by SFA partners Ross County FC
- HFA provided training facilities for all teams in the SFA run Home Nations Semi-Professional Tournament

4. Other Uses of the Academy's Facilities

4.1 During the period since its opening, awareness of the possible uses of the Trust's facilities has grown significantly. The indoor arena at Dingwall has proved particularly versatile, with it hosting a wide range of events, such as Coach Education for other sports, including Angling, Badminton and Cricket; a Cheerleading Course; a Primary Science Festival; and two Skillcity Careers Festivals run by Highlands & Islands Enterprise.

May 2007 was especially busy in that not only did the Trust provide training facilities for the Home Nations Semi-Professional Tournament, Forest

Enterprises held its Touchwood Festival at Dingwall as part of Highland 2007 and there was a memorable visit by the National Theatre of Scotland with its ground breaking production of Black Watch. Indeed, the production was filmed for television during its run at the Highland Football Academy.

5. Delivery of Regional Youth Football Action Plan

- 5.1 The Highland Football Academy Trust has, since its inception, carried the ambition that its work should extend beyond the provision of facilities to becoming a base for the wider development of sport in the Highlands. The other uses of the Dingwall Centre noted above allude to this, and the development of the Scottish FA's National Plan for Youth Football provided a significant opportunity.
- 5.2 Lengthy negotiations led to the formation of a three-year partnership between Highland Council, Orkney Islands Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, **sportscotland** and the Scottish FA. The partnership is hosted by Highland Council, based at the Highland Football Academy's Dingwall Centre and commenced in February 2007 with the appointment of a Football Development Officer. The Partnership is responsible for implementing the Youth Action Plan in Highland, Orkney and the Western Isles.
- 5.3 Implementation is conducted through two principal approaches. First, there is a responsibility for implementing the Plan's main strands, namely Participation, Player Pathways, Club Development and Coach Education. Second, there is a responsibility for working with all football interests in a given area to take stock of the state of the game therein. This is approached by inviting all interested parties to form a Local Football Forum which then does that stocktaking, which in turn leads to the development of a Local Football Development Plan. The aim is to implement the principal elements of that plan in the succeeding 18-24 months, so that community capacity has been enhanced by the work.

6. Using Football as a link to learning

- 6.1 There is a growing body of evidence that football presents significant opportunities for working with the less advantaged. The facilities offered by the Highland Football Academy provide a valuable context for such work. Since their establishment, there have been three significant projects that have utilised the facilities so that football becomes a vehicle for re-engagement. These projects, in chronological order have been:

- Ross County FC's Life Skills Through Sport Programme
- Highland Council's Goals 4 Us Project for Looked After Children
- Inverness Caledonian Thistle's Kick Start Programme for Children with significant risk of being caught up in the "Not in Employment or training category.

The Highland Football Academy Trust derives considerable satisfaction from this particular use of its facilities, with the opportunity for supporting significant changes in peoples' lives.

7. Future Challenges

7.1 The Highland Football Academy is now a well-established element of the sporting infrastructure of the Highlands. However, there are still a number of challenges that the Trust has to meet, including continuing to:

- reinforce revenue sustainability
- implement the Scottish FA's Youth Action Plan
- find the means of developing improved changing facilities at its Inverness Centre
- review energy management at its Dingwall Centre

8. Recommendation

8.1 Members are asked to comment on and note the work to date and future plans of the Highland Football Academy.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Date: 17 October 2008

Author: Ian Murray, Head of Community Learning and Leisure

Background papers: