

Agenda Item	10
Report No	SCC/19/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Sutherland County

Date: 1 June 2026

Report Title: Scottish Government Play Park Funding

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Members agreed at Communities and Place Committee in November 2021 to allocate the funds received from the Scottish Government’s play park renewal fund, £60m over the lifetime of the parliament, be apportioned to Area Committees based on a blend of play park conditions and the criteria used by Government. In 2021/22 this was based on 95% 0-14-year-old population and 5% on rurality and in 2022/23 and future years based on 93% age and 7% rurality. The Council’s allocation to 2026 is £2.9m.
- 1.2 This report proposes Members agree the allocation of the funding for the specific projects in Sutherland as discussed with Members.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to **agree** £150,500 to be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined in sections 6.4.1.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - In 2021 £2,918,000 of capital grant was allocated to the Council as part of the Scottish Governments commitment to play area renewal. The principles for investing this funding and reporting on its use were confirmed in October 2022.

Members agreed at Communities and Place Committee in November 2021 the allocation of the funds received from the Scottish Governments play park renewal fund be apportioned to Area Committees based on a blend of play park conditions and the criteria used by Government which was 95% based on the 0-14-year-old population and 5% on rurality and in 2022/23 and future years is based on 93% age and 7% rurality.

- 3.2 **Legal** - Play areas are not a statutory service; however, where they are provided, we must comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 for employees and members of the public attending play areas. We must also comply with our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Fairer Scotland Duty.

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to relax and play, and participate in a wide range of cultural, artistic and cultural activities. The Council's approach to support these rights was set out in the Play Park Strategy agreed by Communities and Place Committee in November 2023. This recognises the value of informal spaces for play as well.

- 3.3 **Risk** - Inspecting and maintaining and/or replacing play park equipment will prevent injury to children and claims being made against the Council.

The approach to engaging locally on play area options with Members and other community bodies and children will enable honest conversations about prioritising resources. This not only reduces the risk of unreasonable public expectation given the importance of an affordable play estate, but it also enables joint problem solving and the identification of external funding and volunteering support.

- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - There are no risks arising from this report.

- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are Gaelic implications for any new signage required ensuring it has bi-lingual content in keeping with the Council's policy.

4 **Impacts**

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

- 4.3 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening was undertaken on 23 July 2025. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

- 4.3.1 The Screening process has concluded that there are many positive impacts from this proposal. Encouraging more outdoor play and enhancing play areas in rural communities will have a positive impact on health. This proposal aims to provide higher quality, more accessible, and inclusive play park equipment and surfacing. While the installation of new equipment may have a minor impact on climate change, this will be mitigated by selecting equipment with sustainability in mind, using durable, environmentally friendly materials that extend the lifespan of the equipment and reduce the frequency of replacements.

Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.2

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Young People – <i>Positive impact</i> • Children affected by disability – <i>Positive impact</i>
Socio-economic	<i>Positive impact</i>
Human Rights	<i>Positive impact</i>
Children's Rights and Well-being	<i>Positive impact</i>
Island and Mainland Rural	<i>Positive impact</i>
Climate Change	<i>Negative impact</i>
Data Rights	<i>No impact</i>

5 Background

- 5.1 Playparks have positive social and mental health benefits for children and young people.
- 5.2 Amenity Services has responsibility for 307 play parks and over 2027 pieces of play equipment, Sutherland has 37 play areas and 241 pieces of play equipment.
- 5.3 The provision of play parks is not a statutory duty; but the inspection and maintenance of equipment once installed, is a mandatory requirement. For this reason, play parks are subjected to daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly inspection based on usage and risk, and an annual inspection carried out by an independent, qualified playground inspector.
- 5.4 Play Park equipment has an average expected life expectancy of 10-15 years. In coastal communities where salt air accelerates corrosion, it can be challenging to reach or extend the projected life expectancies.
- 5.5 On a 15-year life equipment expectancy, on average in Sutherland, 16 play items will reach end of life, necessitating removal. This can be concerning and appear disproportionate for communities when all the equipment in a play park is of the same age and reaches the end of its life at the same time, sometimes this could be all the play items in a single play park requiring removal within a short space of time.
- 5.6 Although removal of unsafe equipment at the end of its life is essential, when this happens, the play park will remain open and can be used for relaxation, games and imaginative play, until such time as it can be refurbished with new play equipment.
- 5.7 Play Park refurbishments are often facilitated through community fundraising, and community groups, who can take leases, or take Community Asset Transfers of play parks to enable improvements from external funders. This has been successfully achieved for many play parks throughout Highland.

- 5.8 Members allocated Place Based Investment Funds to improve and refurbish play parks throughout the committee area, these included replacement parts for all items identified through the Annual Play Inspections.

Repair and refurbishment work included materials and parts for the following play parks in the County:-

- Ardgay – Carron Place
- Dornoch – Bishopfield
- Bonar Bridge – Carnmhor
- Embo – Gate Street
- Kinlochbervie – Innes Place
- Golspie – King George V
- Lairg – Lochside
- Melvich – Melvich Terrace
- Scourie – Moffat Square
- Brora – Muirfield Road
- Golspie – Ross Street

- 5.9 A place-based review of play parks is well underway and being taken forward in discussions with Members locally. This is aligned to the Council agreement in January 2021 that:-

“Budget and decision-making are devolved to Area Committees to enable a place-based approach that uses local knowledge, community effort and resources alongside Member views and staff advice to solve problems together and to identify possibilities for a more sustainable approach to the play estate.”

- 5.10 To comply with the conditions of capital grant from the Scottish Government’s Play Park Renewal Programme, wider engagement is required along with reporting back on how the investment is being deployed. Wider engagement will align well to the principle of inclusion above and support Members in their local decision-making. In some Wards interested groups have already been involved.
- 5.11 Any refurbishments and upgrades will require to be in line with the approved Play Park Strategy agreed at the Communities and Place Committee on 29 November 2023, to consider the needs and expectations of communities and supports the active play, wellbeing and social activity of our children and their families.

6 Budget and Investment

- 6.1 The annual revenue budget for play parks for Sutherland in 2026/27 is £9,900. This includes labour, plant and fleet, materials, and some contractor costs.

The materials portion of the budget for maintenance and replacement parts is £900, giving on average £24.32p per play park per year.

6.2 Following consideration at the Community and Place Committee on 25 November 2020, the Council agreed in January 2021 that budgets and decision-making for play parks would be devolved to Area Committees. This has involved more local discussions with Members within their Ward, given the Ward funds available and to enable a more local consideration as part of the place-based approach.

The total allocation from the Scottish Government over the five-year programme for play parks renewal programme for Sutherland is £161,591, which was equally split with each Ward receiving £80,795.50.

6.3 If these projects are approved the remaining budget for the Wards will be: -

- Ward 1 £4,290
- Ward 4 £6,321

6.4 The following proposals were discussed with Members.

6.4.1 For Ward 1 a total commitment of £76,500: -

The play parks to be refurbished with the following items

- Lochinver - Kirk Road. Rainer Climbing Frame
- Kinlochbervie – Innes Place. Swing Set
- Ardgay – Finches. Basket swing and a Spinning Bowl
- Bonar Bridge – Cammhor Road. See Saw

For Ward 4 a total commitment of £74,000

- Dornoch – Bishopfield. Double Cableway, Saturn Swing, Basket Swing, and a Sky Carousel.
- Golspie King George V. Double Cableway, Saturn Swing, and a Sky Carousel.
- Embo – Gate Street. Basket Swing, Sky Carousel, and a Spring Mobile.

6.5 Members will be updated with timescales on delivery and installation.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 29 April 2026

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment Summary

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening – Summary

The proposal has been screened for impact and the following summarises the key findings:

The screening identified overall positive impacts on the community, including benefits for many protected characteristic groups, particularly through the installation of inclusive and accessible play equipment. Additionally, the enhancement of play areas strengthens the Council's commitment to Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms children's right to rest, play, and engage in cultural and artistic activities. While a negative impact relating to climate change was noted, mitigation measures have been outlined to ensure this impact is minimised as much as possible.

Equality

The introduction of new accessible and inclusive play equipment will have a positive impact on all children and young people by enhancing play areas and recognising the importance of informal spaces for play. Children with additional needs and disabilities will particularly benefit from the improved accessibility of both the equipment and surfacing in the designated play areas.

By providing safe and engaging spaces for outdoor play, these enhancements will contribute to better health and wellbeing for children and young people.

Children's Rights and Wellbeing

This proposal has a direct positive impact on children's rights. Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that children have the right to rest, play, and engage in a variety of cultural and artistic activities. The Council's commitment to upholding these rights is outlined in the Play Park Strategy, which was approved by the Communities and Place Committee in November 2023.

Rural

Ensuring accessible and inclusive play areas in rural locations is essential, and by delivering improvement works across all areas of Highland, rural communities will benefit from this additional investment.

Climate Change

A negative impact related to climate change has been identified, as the installation of new play equipment and surfacing will contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. However, this impact will be mitigated by selecting equipment which has as low an impact as possible on the environment. Choosing items which are made of robust, sustainable materials such as steel and robinia wood, designed to minimise environmental harm. Preference will be given to items made from durable, sustainable materials such as steel and robinia wood, which offer greater longevity and reduce the need for frequent replacements.