

Agenda Item	12.
Report No	EDU/19/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Education

Date: 3 June 2026

Report Title: Highland Sport Strategy Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the commissioning of a Highland-wide Sport strategic assessment by Hub North Scotland, in partnership with Mott MacDonald.
- 1.2 The commission will support the development and finalisation of a Highland Sport Strategy through the establishment of a robust evidence base, stakeholder engagement and technical analysis. This will inform the refinement and finalisation of a prioritised and financially informed framework to guide future investment decisions. The work is expected to be delivered over a four month period commencing mid-June 2026.
- 1.3 An all-Member seminar will be arranged to consider the emerging findings of the review, prior to the draft strategy coming forward for formal Member approval before the end of the year.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. Note the commissioning of Hub North and Mott MacDonald to develop a Highland Sport Strategy proposal;
 - ii. Consider and note the commission brief at **Appendix 1** and programme timeline at **Appendix 2**.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource - The commissioning approach and budget for this work has been previously approved at full Council.

The outcomes of the Strategy will feed into the development of the Highland Investment Plan as well as enabling the Council and partners to maximise opportunities for funding through external sources such as sportscotland.

- 3.2 Legal - No direct implications at this stage.
- 3.3 Risk - The timescales for completion of the commission are ambitious so engagement timing and programme delivery will need to be closely managed.
- 3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - No direct implications at this stage.
- 3.5 Gaelic - No specific implications identified at this stage.

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 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

- 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening was undertaken on 8 May 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.
- 4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there are no direct impacts identified at this stage, as the proposal relates to commissioning activity only and does not introduce changes to services, access or provision. A full impact assessment is therefore not required at this time.

5. Background and Context

- 5.1 Highland has a diverse and dispersed population with varied sport and leisure provision delivered through a mix of Council services, HighLife Highland, national governing bodies, community organisations and the private sector.
- 5.2 The Council currently does not have a Highland-wide sport strategy. This commission is intended to create a consistent and evidence-based framework for future planning; support positive and sustained engagement and collaboration with partners across all sectors; and enable Highland to develop and enhance sport and leisure provision across the whole area in a way that maximises available resources.

6. Proposed Approach and Governance

- 6.1 The objectives of the commission are to produce a comprehensive evidence base covering participation, facilities and delivery structures. Identify priority gaps, inequalities and pressures. Evaluate condition, accessibility, suitability and long-term viability of key facilities. Provide GIS mapping of provision and highlight areas of

limited access. Deliver a prioritised set of recommendations including short, medium and long-term actions. Provide the framework for Local, Area and Regional sports hubs and recommendations for strategy development.

It will also include early-stage strategic analysis of two key areas of provision - swimming pools and playing pitches.

- 6.2 The Programme is arranged across 5 workstreams over 4 months:
1. Rapid Baseline Mapping
 2. Stakeholder engagement
 3. Facilities assessment
 4. Strategy Development and Project Management
 5. Cost Modelling
- 6.3 Governance will include formal member oversight and approval through the Education Committee; Senior Officer governance through a Strategic Board comprising the Assistant Chief Executive - People, the Assistant Chief Executive - Place, and the Chief Executive of Highlife Highland; a Cross-Service Community, Leisure and Sports Steering Group including Education, High Life Highland, Property, Finance, Health & Safety, sportscotland, NHS Highland, Climate Change and the POD Programme, informed by engagement with sports bodies, community sports and leisure providers.
- 6.3 The programme will run June to October 2026 with key milestones and review points as set out in **Appendix 2**. An all-Member seminar will be arranged to consider the emerging findings of the review, prior to the draft strategy coming forward for formal Member approval before the end of the year.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 21 May 2026

Author: Derek Martin, Strategic Lead- Operations

Background Papers:

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Commission Brief
Appendix 2 – Outline Review Programme



Highland Wide Review of Sports Provision

A Review to Inform Strategic Planning and
Investment in Sport

1. Project Title

1.1 Highland-Wide Review of Sports Provision

2. Project Sponsor

2.1 Assistant Chief Executive – People

3. Project Lead

3.1 Strategic Lead (Operations), Education Service

4. Background

4.1 Sports provision in Highland is delivered through a mix of Council services, HighLife Highland, national governing bodies, community clubs and organisations and the private sector. This creates a wide and varied landscape.

4.2 There is currently no single, consolidated evidence base covering facilities, participation, inequalities, or alignment with the Learning Estate Strategy, Highland Investment Plan, or national sportscotland frameworks.

4.3 A robust review is required to provide clarity, guide strategic planning and inform future investment decisions.

5. Purpose of the Project

5.1 To conduct a structured, Highland-wide review that establishes a clear baseline of provision, identifies gaps and inequalities, evaluates facility needs, and provides actionable recommendations to inform and support the development of a Highland Sport Strategy to support future decision-making.

6. Project Scope

6.1 All Highland Council sport-related functions including Education, school estate access, Outdoor Education, Property & Facilities Management.

6.2 High Life Highland services including Active Schools, sports development, leisure centres and community hubs.

6.3 sportscotland and national governing bodies of sport, including performance pathways and regional development.

6.4 Local clubs, voluntary groups, 3rd sector organisations and community delivery partners.

6.5 Physical activity initiatives where these support sports development outcomes.



In scope: all sports and indoor/outdoor provision. **Out of scope:** capital design work.

7. Objectives

7.1 Produce a comprehensive evidence base covering participation, facilities and delivery structures.

7.2 Identify priority gaps, inequalities and pressures with clear rationale.

7.3 Evaluate condition, accessibility, suitability and long-term viability of key facilities.

7.4 Provide GIS mapping of provision and highlight areas of limited access.

7.5 Deliver a prioritised set of recommendations including short, medium and long-term actions including the development of an investment pipeline.

7.6 Provide the framework for Local, Area and Regional sports hubs.

7.7 Improve the customer/participant journey.

8. Workstreams

8.1 Rapid Baseline Mapping – full listing of facilities, programmes, workforce and access arrangements.

8.2 Participation, Demand and Inequalities Analysis – including demographic and geographic patterns.

8.3 Facilities Assessment – high-level review of condition, suitability and usage including RAG status.

8.4 Stakeholder Engagement – structured engagement plan including surveys, workshops and interviews.

8.5 Benchmarking – alignment with national frameworks, comparator councils and sportscotland guidance.

8.6 Cost modelling including charging methodology and accessing revenue and capital funding.

8.7 Recommendations – evidence-based and prioritised, with dependencies and delivery considerations.

9. Deliverables

- Full Baseline Mapping Report including datasets in editable format, prioritising a Pitch Review to support development of a Pitch Strategy
- Participation and Inequalities Assessment with mapped outputs



- Facilities overview with RAG rating and access analysis
- Stakeholder Engagement Summary including consultation materials
- Benchmarking Review aligned to national frameworks
- Prioritised recommendations with short/medium/long-term actions
- Prioritisation of Pitch and Pool strategies
- Alignment with existing Council Programmes: Highland Investment Plan, Asset Rationalisation, Future Operating Model
- Consideration of capital, whole-life and high-level revenue impacts to support prioritisation, affordability and evidence-based decision making with the Highland Sport Strategy
- Consideration of the Council's net zero transition and long-term estate sustainability objectives
- Draft outline for the Highland Sports Strategic Framework
- Presentation materials for senior officers and Elected Members

10. Methodology

- Evidence review of local and national sport and activity data
- Structured data collection from partners and providers including sub regional population and demographic data
- GIS-based mapping for accessibility and distribution analysis
- Surveys, interviews and workshops with stakeholders
- Use of national datasets and sportscotland guidance
- Integrated analysis and synthesis into clear deliverables

11. Proposed Timeline

11.1 Month 1: Programme plan signed off; policy review; initial data gathering and facilities mapping. Presentation materials for early Committee reporting.

11.2 Month 2 & 3: Initiate engagement programme; undertake supply, demand & gap assessment; establish baseline; financial/resource assessment; analysis and initial options appraisal.

11.3 Month 4: Development of recommendations and prioritisation/phasing; final presentation and reporting to senior officers.

12. Governance

12.1 Oversight by Senior Officers Group comprising ACE – People, ACE - Place, Chief Executive, HLH.

12.2 SOG supported and informed by a cross-service Community, Leisure and Sports Board including Education, HighLife Highland, Property, Economy; Finance,



Health & Safety, sportscotland, Active Highland, Corporate Comms; Climate Change and the POD Programme.

12.3 Monthly progress reporting to Senior Officers Group

12.4 Reporting to the Education Committee.

13. Dependencies

- Availability and quality of data across partners
- Alignment with Learning Estate Strategy and Highland Investment Plan
- Partner capacity and engagement levels
- Geographic and rural delivery challenges
- Financial constraints affecting future feasibility

14. Key Risks and Mitigations

- Incomplete data – mitigated by early data requests and clear deadlines
- Low engagement – mitigated by structured engagement plan and multiple channels
- Misalignment with major programmes – mitigated by governance oversight
- Unrealistic expectations – mitigated through clear scoping and communication
- Financial Pressures - mitigated through strategic prioritisation, alignment with HIP and external funding programmes and opportunities
- Geographic access issues – mitigated with hybrid engagement approaches

15. Expected Outcomes

- Robust, Highland-wide evidence base
- Clear identification of priority areas
- Improved partnership coordination and clarity of responsibilities
- Actionable recommendations supported by evidence
- Foundation for an ambitious, affordable and deliverable Highland Sports Strategic Framework



