Agenda Item	**6**
Report No	**CIA/47/26**

The Highland Council

Committee: **City of Inverness Area**

Date: **16 November 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 Inverness Area Wards.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to **agree** the allocation of funding of £404,415 to be allocated to the previously agreed projects as outlined from section 6.5 to 6.10.

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.

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3.3 **Risk** – Inspecting and maintaining and/or replacing play park equipment will prevent injury tochildren 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-lingualcontent 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 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Background

5.1 Playparks have positive social and mental health benefits for children and young people.

5.2 The Council has 309 play parks and over 2023 pieces of play equipment. The Inverness Area has 78 play areas.

5.3 The provision of play parks in 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 a 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 annually in the Inverness Area Committee area, 25 play items 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 as many as 5-10 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.

5.9 A place-based review of play parks is well underway and being taken forward in discussionswith 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 theinvestment 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 the Inverness Area 2026/27 is £83,200. This includes labour, plant and fleet, materials, and some contractor costs.

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 play parks renewal programme for the Inverness Area is £838,162 over the five-year programme.

6.3 For Ward 12 a total commitment of £65,896

Balnain with community contributions approx. £80,000; to replace all current equipment with - Multi play unit, Flat Swings, Cradle Swings, Basket Swing, Zip Line, Roundabout, Rollover Bars and Monkey Bars.

Aird Road Beauly
Toddler Multi Unit, Bench, Mult spinner, Basket Swing, remove 1 Old Seesaw - All other equipment stays.

Abertaff Fort Augustus with community contributions £25,000; to replace all current equipment with - Toddler Multi Unit, Cradle Swings, Activity tabletop picnic bench, two sensory play panels and possibly an embankment slide subject to costs. Community funds still to be received

6.4 For Ward 13 a total commitment of £64,000

Blackpark, Scorguie
Embankment Slide and Wheelchair accessible picnic bench.

Mile End, Charlston
Zip Line, Basket Swing and Pull up bars.

Charlston View, Charlston
Swing set - Basket, Highbacked and 2 flat seats.

Lawyers Way, Kinmylies
Multi-Unit, Swing - Basket Swing, 1 flat and 1 cradle and Wheelchair accessible picnic bench.

6.5 For Ward 14 a total commitment of £43,830

Benula Road, Merkinch

Multi-unit, roll over bars, play panel, hammock, rock n bowl roundabout, swing - highbacked and cradle

Hawthorne Drive, Dalneigh
Replacing broken spinner bowl and replacement basket swing.

6.6 For Ward 15 a total commitment of £65,998

Ardbreck, Holm
Zip Line, Roundabout, hammock and seesaw.

Evan Barron Road, Hilton
Basket swing.

MacDonald Park, Lochardil
Replace swing set - 2 flat and Basket, Bench for next to toddler area as requested by Community group, resurface toddler area (remove all wet pour and replace with grass matting) - if funds allow, replace seesaw that was removed a while back.

Holm Park
Replace basketball backboard & net and add in surprise basket

6.7 For Ward 16 a total commitment of £56,000

Grebe Park, Milton
Multi-Unit, basket swing, Monkey bars, football goals and picnic bench.

Lochiel Road, Milton
Basket swing & basketball hoop installed down the hill at Harris Road.

Walker Park
suggestion is some toddlers play panels or toddler units like a shop etc? or possibly spend the £6K in another park for the ward seeing as walker park has a lot already?

6.89 For Ward 17 a total commitment of £51,990

Culloden Playing Field, Culloden
Redo all safety surfacing to grass matting.

Smithton Pitches
New climbing frame

6.9 For Ward 19 a total commitment of £56,701

Burnbrae
Cradle Swings, slide and Springer

Maxwell Park
Zipline

Cradlehall

Remove existing rotting swing set and replace with 2 flat seat swings - Cllrs are aware of this, they agreed via email to use the last of the SG funds for Ward 19 in Cradlehall and they suggested going for 2 flat seats so people can swing together.

6.10 This is a total commitment for all seven Wards of £404,415.

Members will be updated with timescales on delivery and installation.

Designation:	Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Date:	15 October 2026
Author:	David Lamont, Amenities Services Manager (South)
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	None