



SPÓRT ÉIREANN  
SPORT IRELAND

# Developing a Local Sports Plan – A Toolkit

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## Background

### Sport Ireland

Sport Ireland is the statutory authority tasked with leading, advocating and providing directed funding for the development of sport in Ireland. With integrity as the clear foundation upon which this is built, it advises, supports and works with and through partner organisations, such as National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), and others who deliver sport and physical activity to:

- Increase levels of participation in sport, with a particular focus on diversity and inclusion – with innovative programmes and initiatives to engage and encourage low participation groups.
- Champion high performance sport – helping Irish teams, athletes, and support staff to be the best they can be and to be successful on the world stage.
- Empower people to build a commitment to their sport and take part for longer.
- Increase the number and quality of the coaches, officials, administrators, and volunteers who run and support sport.
- Deliver key support services such as safeguarding and anti-doping so that sport is ethical, safe, and fair.
- Further develop and improve the Sport Ireland Campus and the sporting infrastructure in Ireland.
- As the statutory development agency for sport, Sport Ireland will focus its work on ensuring that Ireland is an active nation where people are encouraged to start, continue to participate, progress and achieve in sport.

To do this Sport Ireland will work to:

- Support its partners, particularly NGBs and LSPs, to increase levels of introductory and sustained participation in sport and physical activity for all.
- Deliver high performance sport success.
- Communicate the value and benefits of, and lead national thinking on, sport.
- Develop a stronger and more effective, safe, fair sport sector with the ambition to achieve the highest standards of governance.
- Increase the number and quality of the coaches, officials, administrators and volunteers who run and support sport.
- Promote diversity and inclusion and be proactive in supporting the sector to provide opportunity to develop physical literacy and for lifelong participation in sport for everyone.
- Optimise the impact of Government investment in sport. In driving this mission, Sport Ireland recognises that it has work to do to be an exemplar in terms of leadership, governance, strategic priorities, communication, adherence to its values and operational effectiveness.

The ten-year National Sports Policy 2018-2027 sets out targets for Irish sport to achieve in the coming years which include.

- Overall adult participation in sport to rise from 43% to 60% by 2027.
- Reducing the participation gradient between men and women from 4.5% to 0%.
- Social participation in sport (through volunteering/club membership/event attendance) to grow 10% by 2027.
- Increased targeted high-performance funding to deliver more Olympic/Paralympic medals (from the securing of 13 medals in 2016 to a target of 20 in 2028).

All funded bodies adopting the Governance Code for Sport and achieving the gender representation requirements on their Boards.

## Local Sport Plans

Under the Government's National Sports Policy 2018-2027, Local Authorities are positioned as key stakeholders in the context of public spaces for sport and physical activity as well as providing opportunities for participation initiatives.

Under Action 8 of National Sports Policy 2018 -2027, Sport Ireland has been given the directive to support Local Authorities in developing their Local Sports Plans. This action states:

***“We will establish, through Sport Ireland, an initiative to support Local Authorities in developing Local Sports Plans consistent with the overall vision and objectives of this National Sports Policy. The Local Plan will review needs and set out actions to increase participation locally. It will be developed and implemented in cooperation with Local Sports Partnership (LSPs), clubs, communities, and partners within and beyond sport.”***

In addition to this important part already being played by Local Authorities in facilitating sport and physical activity opportunities, it is recognised that sport and recreation are key issues in the development of County and Local Area Development Plans, that sport is a very important element in the Local Economic and Community Plans and a core consideration for the Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs).

For the above reasons, the Government has stated that Local Authorities are uniquely positioned:

- to be charged within the policy with a formal leadership role in facilitating the drive towards greater participation at a local level throughout the population
- to foster a strong sense of collaboration across traditional boundaries with key roles for clubs, LSPs, community groups, leisure centres and other partners locally

Recognising the pivotal role of the Local Authorities and in light of the participation trends, each Local Authority is asked to develop a Local Sports Plan to increase participation locally, in a manner consistent with the vision and objectives set down in this National Sports Policy and taking appropriate account of any existing plans.

To do this, each Local Authority is asked to work with the LSP, with partners on the Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) and CYPSC, with clubs, schools, leisure facility providers, community groups and other stakeholders. ***A locally led, nationally supported approach will be a key feature of the local sports plans.***

## Project Initiation

In 2024, Sport Ireland contracted S3 Solutions to develop Local Sports Plans for four Local Authorities in Ireland. In addition to Local Sports Plans for each of the four local authorities participating in the pilot, S3 was tasked with producing an agreed set of templates and frameworks that can subsequently be used by other local authorities in Ireland to develop their own local sports plans. These templates consider the variances in social, geographic and demographic composition of councils, as well as different relationships and structures between the LSP and local authorities.

### The Local Sports Plan Process

This document sets out the process undertaken to develop local sports plans. This is captured four key stages, outlined below. Each stage is described in more detail in this document and a total of 10 templates have been developed to assist local authorities to navigate through each stage. Where a template is available, this is referenced throughout this document.

Step 1: **Getting Started:**  
Governance and Mapping



Step 2: **Engaging:** Stakeholder  
Consultation



Step 3: **Planning:** Strategic  
Visioning and Planning



Step 4: **Signing Off:**  
Communicating and Promoting



## Step 1: Getting Started: Governance and Mapping

### Governance

The Local Sports Plans are underpinned by a need for a ‘whole system’ approach to sport and physical activity. Achieving a significant shift in regular participation requires that every local authority department, alongside external partners and stakeholders, play a role in improving opportunities for people to be active.

For this reason, critical factors in delivering a successful sports plan include:

- Establishing the correct structure to oversee the local sports plan process
- Securing commitment and ownership from across the local authority

Key Actions	Description	Templates Available
Establish a Steering Group to oversee the Local Sports Plan	<p>A steering group should be established for the duration of the process of developing and adopting the Local Sports Plan.</p> <p>The steering group can provide strategic oversight and guidance, support the appointed consultant to ensure inclusion and participation in the consultation process, challenge emerging findings and ensure alignment to relevant priorities, strategies and policies.</p>	A template terms of reference for a Local Sports Plan Steering Group is provided.
Engagement with local authority departments, including Directors of Service, Senior Executive Officers and Senior teams to secure commitment to the plan	<p>At an early stage, key personnel from across the local authority should be engaged, setting out the process to be undertaken to develop the plan and setting out the requirement in terms of participation and input from their respective teams.</p> <p>Promoting the ‘whole system’ message is critical at this stage of the process.</p>	A Slide deck setting out ‘Why a Local Sports Plan is Important’
Procurement of a strategic planning consultant to support the process	<p>The procurement of a consultant to facilitate the development of the Local Sports Plan. The role of the consultant includes carrying out a comprehensive and independent consultation process, producing strategic, evidence-based recommendations to inform the subsequent local sports plan.</p> <p>The consultant will also facilitate strategic planning workshops and discussions, leading to the development of a highly visual, designed public facing document suitable for publication on council websites or in print.</p>	A tender brief for appointing consultant is provided.

### Mapping

The Local Sports Plan should seek to complement and build on existing structures, activities and work carried out across the local authority area, as well as align closely with existing policies, strategies and priorities.

Key Actions	Description	Templates Available
<p>Gather information about current contributions to sport and physical activity by various departments within local authorities.</p>	<p>It is important to understand the existing contributions and roles played in delivering or supporting sport and physical activity across the local authority. This includes strategies and studies, facilities, people, collaborations and partnerships, grants, programmes and events.</p> <p>This information can be gathered by requesting templates to be completed, or in a conversational way during the early promotion and ‘buy in’ process.</p>	<p>A Systems Mapping Template is provided, offering a guide as to the type of information that can be gathered.</p>
<p>Setting the Strategic Context – aligning the local sports plan to regional and national priorities, defining why a local sports plan is important</p>	<p>Ensuring that the Local Sports Plan contributes to and aligns with existing strategies – both local, regional and national is important. In particular, it is important to capture the potential contribution/alignment of the sports plan to strategies such as: Climate Action, Active Travel, Parks and Open Spaces, Play and others.</p>	<p>A summary of the national and regional strategic context underpinning the local sports plans is provided.</p> <p>* Whilst the template provides a national and regional context, each local authority and their appointed consultant will need to consider alignment to local strategies such as the LECP, County Development Plan and others”</p>



## Step 2: Engaging: Stakeholder Consultation

### Consultation

Ensuring the meaningful participation of a broad range of stakeholders is a critical component in the development of a successful local sports plan. The development and distribution of online surveys is an effective way to engage large numbers of stakeholders. The following key actions are identified:

Key Actions	Description	Templates Available
Develop and distribute a survey targeting local residents	An online survey targeting local residents that explores current participation, motivation, barriers, facilities and future priorities.	A template resident survey is provided. This can be uploaded to an online platform for distribution.
Develop and distribute a survey targeting children and young people	Ensuring that the process fulfils statutory obligations to consult with children and young people on issues that impact them is an important step. A youth friendly survey is required to ensure engagement from this target group	A template children and young people's survey is provided. This can be uploaded to an online platform for distribution.
Develop and distribute a survey targeting stakeholder organisations	Capturing the views and experiences of stakeholders including sports clubs, NGBs, educational bodies, community and voluntary groups, social inclusion groups is a key part of the process.	A template stakeholders survey is provided. This can be uploaded to an online platform for distribution.
Communications strategy to promote the consultation process	It is important that stakeholders have adequate opportunity to contribute to the process. The mixed method approach of survey, focus group and interview supports this – but it also requires targeted and focused communication and promotion to raise awareness of the consultation process. This may mean offering incentives, or using different promotional methods such as posters, QR codes, online registration or hard copies.	A template communications strategy is provided, setting out options and methods to ensure strong engagement in the process.

Whilst surveys are an effective way to engage large numbers of stakeholders, it is important to combine survey engagement with qualitative discussions using interview and focus group. Working collaboratively with your appointed consultant to engage local authority teams and external stakeholders will complement survey findings, adding robustness to the Local Sports Plan.

Point to note – to capture information on potential future facility development, it is recommended that the relevant National Governing Body of Sport and/or your Local Sports Partnership is consulted directly to ensure the proposed space is maximised. We also recommend utilising guidelines for suitable spaces for women and people with disabilities and reviewed extensively before commissioning facility development.

### Step 3: Planning: Strategic Planning and Visioning

#### Strategic Planning

Effective consultation requires appropriate promotion, communication as well as innovation and flexibility in how you receive responses.

Key Actions	Description	Templates Available
Strategic planning to agree vision, values, strategic themes and key actions	<p>The facilitation of strategic visioning and action planning workshops with key stakeholders will help to bring the consultation findings to life. The sports plan can be organised under strategic themes, strategic priorities and headline actions.</p> <p>The content will evolve and refine from the first workshop as you test the emerging actions through focused interviews and follow up consultations.</p>	A template strategy architecture including suggested themes, values and headline actions is provided.

### Step 4: Signing Off: Communications and Promotion

#### Finalising the Local Sports Plan

Local Sports Plans are signed off by elected members at full council meetings. This requires that the plan progresses through respective local authority structures including Senior Management Teams and Strategic Policy Committees. It is also recommended that additional public facing consultation is carried out - this could be in the form of online webinars or via the **'Have Your Say'** platform in order to engender a sense of ownership amongst key stakeholders.

On sign off by each local authority, the plan should move into graphic design ahead of a public facing launch event.

#### Conclusion

These templates were created by Sport Ireland with the support of 8 Local Authorities (Carlow, Cavan, Clare, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown, Dublin City, Fingal, South Dublin) and S3 Solutions in 2024.

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