

**Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP**

Minister for Sport and Tourism  
Department for Culture Media and Sport  
2-4 Cockspur Street  
London  
SW1Y 5DH

**23 November 2012**

Dear Mr Robertson,

**Playing fields in London**

The London Assembly Health and Environment Committee has for some years had concerns about falling playing pitch numbers in London.

The Committee has been working with Sport England to get a clearer picture of playing pitch numbers over time and to understand how sites are safeguarded. Following a London Assembly report in 2006, which highlighted the significant loss that had occurred over a number of years, the Committee has sought regular updates in order to monitor playing field availability. However data, provided by local authorities, is still only 90% complete and accurate, and has been worse in the past so long-term trends cannot be reliably gauged. Also, Sport England's database covers sites that are in use, but does not track sites most at risk of loss because they are not marked out for use.

Sport England places heavy emphasis on the role of boroughs in monitoring and supporting playing field provision, but only a quarter of London boroughs have playing pitch strategies less than three years old, and a quarter neither have nor are preparing a strategy. The Committee is concerned that this suggests that in some areas there may not always be a suitable response to cases where playing fields suffer decline.

There are therefore potentially serious information and strategy gaps across London, and there does not appear to be comprehensive and effective intervention to ensure that these gaps are filled. It does not seem that the remit, powers or resources to take this role are currently with Sport England.

The Committee understands that there is to be a reconfiguration involving Sport England and UK Sport. The Committee sees an opportunity in this reconfiguration to, amongst other objectives, seek to address these issues.

There is a need for strategic monitoring of playing pitches and a supportive response when pitches are at risk. The Committee would therefore welcome your support in starting a public discussion

between the public, private and community sectors about what can be done at the regional level to meet these needs.

The Committee is writing letters similar to this to the Education Secretary, Sport England, UK Sport, the Mayor's Commissioner for Sport and the London Playing Fields Foundation.

The Committee looks forward to hearing your views on this matter. If you can copy your response electronically to the Committee's scrutiny manager [ian.williamson@london.gov.uk](mailto:ian.williamson@london.gov.uk), that would be very helpful.

Yours sincerely,

**Murad Qureshi AM**

Chair of the Health and Environment Committee