

AGM Report 2026 – Adult League Hockey

The 2025-26 season saw adult league hockey across London delivered successfully despite sustained operational pressure. The season was, however, more demanding than most: a high volume of disciplinary and eligibility cases, a continuing umpire shortage, persistent Game Management System (GMS) limitations and a complex end-of-season promotion and relegation situation all required significant committee attention.

With 341 teams participating across 29 divisions, the playing environment remained competitive and inclusive. This report outlines key developments in competitions, league management and strategic priorities for the coming year.

Season Overview

- **Total Teams: 341** (175 Men's, 166 Women's) at the end of the season
- **Total Players: 8550** (4498 Men, 4052 Women)
- **Total Appearances: 96999** (49794 Men, 47205 Women)
- **Average Appearances/Player:** Men **11.1**, Women **11.6**
- **Divisions: 29** (15 Open|Men's, 14 Women's)
- **Fixtures Scheduled: 3886** (1980 Open|Men's, 1906 Women's – including 142 byes)
- **Fixtures Forfeited** ("walkovers"): **88** (51 Open|Men's, 37 Women's)
- **Withdrawn Teams:** Withdrawals during the season included Old Uxonians W1, East London W9, OMT M5, Tulse Hill & Dulwich M8 and W7, West Herts W3, Eastcote W4, and Croydon Trinity Whitgiftians M1. Old Uxonians LHC folded.

The 2025-26 season was marked by sustained participation under pressure, regulatory enforcement and continued operational improvement efforts, including new data, transparency and compliance initiatives.

Open|Men's League – Division Winners and Runners-Up

Grade	Division Name	Winner	Runner-Up
2	Premier Division	Richmond M2	Teddington M2
	Division 1	Surbiton M3	Old Merchant Taylors M1
3	Division 2 North	Spencer M4	Barnes M2
	Division 2 South	Spencer M3	Bromley & Beckenham M2
	Division 3 North	London Wayfarers Vikings	Teddington M4
	Division 3 South	Epsom M2	London Wayfarers M3
4	Division 4 East	Wapping M4	Spencer M6
	Division 4 North West	West Hampstead M4	Harrow M1
	Division 4 South West	London Wayfarers Knights	Wanderers M4
5	Division 5 East	Bromley & Beckenham M4	London Wayfarers Pirates
	Division 5 North West	Ealing M1	Ashford (Middlesex) M2
	Division 5 South West	Old Cranleigh Warriors	Teddington Oaks
	Division 6 East	Honor Oak M4	London Academicals M4
	Division 6 North West	Richmond Redoubtables	Winchmore Hill & Enfield M2

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	Division 6 South West	Merton M2	Spencer Harlequins
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Congratulations to all of the Division winners and runners-up, with a special mention for Premier Division champions **Richmond M2**, promoted to the EHL Conference East, and Division 1 champions Surbiton M3. Richmond's playing record was P22, W13, D5, L4 and GD +29.

The 2025-26 season saw 175 Men's teams participating across 15 divisions in 1,980 fixtures, 51 of which were forfeited.

Women's League – Division Winners and Runners-Up

Grade	Division Name	Winner	Runner-Up
2	Premier Division	Southgate W2	East London W1
	Division 1	Spencer W2	London Academicals W1
3	Division 2 North	Southgate W3	Richmond W1
	Division 2 South	Teddington W3	Wanderers W2
	Division 3 North	Wanderers W4	London Wayfarers W4
	Division 3 South	Ashford (Middlesex) W1	London Academicals W2
4	Division 4 East	Wanderers W6	Honor Oak W1
	Division 4 North West	PHC Chiswick W3	Eastcote W3
	Division 4 South West	Barnes W4	Surbiton W6
5	Division 5 East	Wanderers W7	Wapping W6
	Division 5 North West	PHC Chiswick W4	Indian Gymkhana W1
	Division 5 South West	Sunbury & Walton Hawks W2	Ashford (Middlesex) W2
	Division 6 East	London Wayfarers Wolves	London Academicals W3
	Division 6 South West	Berrylands W1 **	Surbiton Wolves **

** Final placings in Division 6 South West were determined by Points Per Match (Berrylands 2.143 // Surbiton Wolves 2.136).

Congratulations to all of the Division winners and runners-up, with a deserved mention for Premier Division champions **Southgate W2**, promoted to EHL Conference East, and Division 1 champions Spencer W2. Southgate's superb unbeaten playing record was P22, W19, D3, L0 and GD +52.

Over the 2025-26 season 166 Women's teams participated across 14 divisions in 1,906 fixtures, of which 37 were forfeited.

Top Goalscorers

Congratulations to London's top goalscorers – well done to both players on their standout goalscoring records this season:

- Toby Micklewright of Ealing HC scored an impressive 46 goals (27 FG, 19 PC) in 19 M1 appearances in Division 5 North West (Open|Men's); and

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- Lucy Downs of Ashford HC with 35 goals (29 FG, 6 PC) in 18 W1 appearances in Division 3 South (Women's).

Weekly publication of top scorers and clean sheets for every division on the London Hockey website was a new transparency initiative launched mid-season. Driven by Chris Savory, adapting an approach pioneered by South Central, and maintained weekly despite the data requiring significant manual preparation, this has been well received and will continue in 2026-27, with the workload expected to fall if direct GMS data access materialises.

Indoor Hockey

London's indoor Super 6s competitions took place at Whitgift School over the weekend of 13–14 December 2025, with Whitgift once again providing a first-class venue (rebooked for next season).

- Open|Men's Winners - **Teddington**
- Women's Winners - **Hampstead & Westminster**

Teddington won the 9-team Open|Men's event and progressed to the Division 2 South qualifier in January, finishing 5th; they will return to the London competition next season.

First-time participants Hampstead & Westminster won the 8-team Women's event, went on to win the Division 2 South qualifier ahead of Southgate, and both teams subsequently qualified for the Division 1 competition next season – an outstanding achievement for London's women's indoor hockey.

Overview of the League Season and ALMC Activity

The Adult League Management Committee (ALMC) activities over the past season consistently focused on:

- Disciplinary enforcement and player eligibility, with a marked increase in regulatory breaches and the need to differentiate administrative errors from deliberate misconduct;
- Umpiring standards, safety, recruitment and preparation for England Hockey's new umpire pathway;
- Fixture scheduling and weather disruption, including the season-long closure of Battersea Park and widespread January frost cancellations;
- GMS system limitations and data access, alongside the introduction of AI-assisted compliance tools;
- Participation decline and club sustainability, including team withdrawals and clubs at risk, particularly in north-west London;
- Forward planning, with the 2026–27 regulation review completed ahead of schedule.

Discussions balanced structural enforcement of rules with empathetic engagement with member clubs, while significant administrative and structural matters were deliberated affecting both the current and future seasons.

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Operational Challenges

The ALMC is committed to transparent and effective governance, aligned with England Hockey policies, while fostering a fair and compliant environment for all member clubs.

- We address specific challenges and foster a positive and compliant environment for all member clubs and players.
- Key issues raised by clubs include:
 - Challenges with player availability
 - Disagreements over selection regulations
 - Frustration with GMS functionality
- We have addressed these matters through regular communication, flexibility where appropriate, and clear enforcement where needed.

There were many successes on and off the field yet the ALMC faced several significant challenges this season:

Complaints & Conduct

The volume and severity of disciplinary cases increased this season. The committee maintained a clear distinction between administrative errors (where mitigating factors may apply) and deliberate falsification (attracting full sanctions including deferred points penalties).

- The most serious case involved ineligible and unlisted players participating in a fixture and goals being attributed to other players falsely. Sanctions included a 5-0 walkover, multiple points deductions, a fine and a deferred 5-point penalty.
- Card statistics: ten red cards were issued in the Open|Men's competition, with 487 yellow cards (men) against 54 (women) and two yellow card accumulation suspensions.

Redacted case studies of recent sanctions will be shared with clubs before next season to improve compliance culture, and a structured post-match conduct feedback initiative is in development with England Hockey's support.

Selection and Eligibility

Clubs must select players for their League teams in hierarchical order based on availability; players should not be selected at a lower level than their Regular Team to strengthen a lower-ranked team.

- The ALMC conducted regular analyses to identify fair-selection violations and imposed sanctions on several clubs for fielding ineligible or unregistered players.
- A GMS transfer loophole was identified and reported to England Hockey for a system-level fix.
- **Data-led compliance:** This season the committee moved to systematic eligibility monitoring. The availability of unique player ID numbers in GMS reports for the first time enables reliable week-by-week auditing of player appearances, allowing the identification of doubling-up cases that name-based checking alone could not always reliably detect previously. This methodology was progressively automated, first through programmatic scripts and later through a tool that cross-references appearance data, fixtures and divisional tables to produce a flagged assessment of

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every SXP request. Processing time has fallen materially, consistency improved and every automated output remains subject to human review.

Selection Exemption Passes: The committee processed 376 SXP requests this season – virtually identical to last season's 375, but still more than 50% above the 240 received in 2023-24, confirming that elevated volume is the new normal.

- The dispersion of requests tells its own story: 225 requests (60%) arrived in the final four weeks of the season, when promotion and relegation pressures peak, and goalkeeper-related requests (doubling up, shortage cover, and outfield players going in goal) accounted for 121 (32%) of the total – clear evidence of the nationwide goalkeeper shortage. The most common single reason cited remained players returning from injury or illness.
- Encouragingly, requests categorised as attempted team strengthening – the category the SXP regime exists to prevent – remain a small minority. Each request takes five to ten minutes to process even with AI assistance (roughly half the time previously required), with difficult edge cases needing committee discussion; at peak times the SXP workload alone is substantial.

Match Disruptions

Weather disrupted the January restart significantly. A cold snap on the weekend of 10 January froze pitches across London and caused widespread cancellations, particularly of morning fixtures. Umpires and clubs made the correct safety calls, and the committee handled the postponements case-by-case: captains were given a defined window to agree rearranged dates, with midweek evenings and Sundays actively used as rearrangement dates, and the great majority of fixtures were replayed within the required timeframe.

Pitch capacity was a season-long pressure. Beyond the Battersea Park closure, which removed eight to ten Saturday slots and displaced several clubs for the entire season, NPL lost the St Mary's (Teddington) pitch to football, and club-led development projects elsewhere were blocked by objections from other sports.

The committee engaged actively where it could influence outcomes: when consultants on the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre redevelopment claimed there was no demand for hockey, we demonstrated that the absence of bookings reflected football block-booking rather than absent demand, and encouraged London clubs to respond to the public consultation.

On the positive side, Battersea Park returns to availability for 2026-27, the Tiffin School pitch has been re-laid and we are aware of a new pitch that is shortly to be approved elsewhere in south-west London, which will ease facilities pressure.

Club Appointed Umpires

There was also encouraging news on umpiring. The free Level 1 course drove exceptional uptake across London clubs – with many leading clubs each putting scores of members through the course – and the end-of-season Umpire Health Check showed fewer clubs rated Red than in 2024-25, reflecting both regulation changes and the removal of the cost barrier to qualification. Umpire welfare reports, which had been running at one to three per month, largely ceased from mid-November, a tentative but welcome indicator of improving standards and more reasonable expectations on match days.

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The League continues to face challenges in umpire recruitment and retention. At one point only 13 of 23 Grade 2 matches had appointed umpires for a weekend, with local resources depleted by progression to National League level. Compliance was mixed – umpire names on team sheets were reaffirmed as being mandatory – and enforcement disparities between clubs that invest in umpiring and those that do not are a growing source of friction.

England Hockey's new umpire pathway, aligning umpire levels to playing grade levels, is now planned for 2027-28.

Technology

GMS issues remained a recurring concern throughout the season:

- Player transfer and registration problems persisted, including duplicate registrations causing eligibility violations;
- No confirmed timeline has been provided for Area Leagues to gain direct access to underlying GMS data following the two-year supplier contract extension being announced;
- Requested features, such as automated fixture-change notifications to clubs, could not be implemented this season despite Area-appointed umpires already receiving such notifications;
- End-of-season player appearance data was approximately 25% incomplete when first run, requiring manual supplementation.

As in previous seasons the committee spent considerable energy holding England Hockey to account on system and process failures. Examples include working groups convened and then disbanded without delivering agreed GMS improvements, and an interface redesign deployed without consulting the clubs and administrators who use it daily.

The committee expanded its own programmatic and AI-assisted compliance monitoring, though these tools rely on data that may be incomplete. England Hockey's communication on system updates remains a source of frustration.

Some progress has resulted, and we will continue to press until the administrative burden on volunteers is meaningfully reduced. In the meantime, the committee has produced its own workarounds and step-by-step guidance for clubs on registration, transfers and umpire administration.

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Looking Ahead

Regulations for 2026-27: The annual regulation review was completed ahead of schedule and approved by the Area Steering Committee late in May, two months earlier than last season. Key changes include:

- The quarters format moves from opt-in to opt-out for the Premier Divisions only;
- The player doubling-up maximum is restored to 12 (from 13);
- A visa/immigration compliance clause (a UK government initiative);
- A new floodlight illumination certification requirement for clubs using late starts;
- Discretionary framing of the 5-0 walkover sanction to give appropriate first-offence discretion.

Of the changes to the FIH Rules of Hockey 2026, a mandatory yellow card for the team captain is adopted when too many players are on the field. Note that the 10-minute half-time interval and stopped clock when a goal is scored are not adopted by the Area League Regulations.

Calendar: For 2025-26 the committee aligned London's calendar with Masters and South East fully for the first time, and actively encouraged clubs to use Sundays for rearranged fixtures rather than accumulating postponements. For 2026-27 the calendar has been designed around the early Easter: the season will start in mid September and include two post-Easter fixtures, placing roughly half of the season's fixtures in the more favourable weather windows either side of the December-January period.

League structure: The end-of-season promotion and relegation settlement was more complex than in recent years, including a Women's Premier restructuring driven by Conference East relegations and the entry of Epsom W1, and attracted complaints from several clubs.

Six new women's teams and three men's teams join London for 2026-27. On the women's side, the new entrants from the South East League (Epsom W1-2 and Purley Walcountians W1-3), plus Old Kingstorian W3, are accommodated through divisions of 14 in two divisions. On the men's side, new teams Teddington Peregrines, Teddington Saplings and Old Millhillians M1 are accommodated through a North/South split of Division 6 after a few team withdrawals.

Two further structural changes are under discussion: geographic division names (North West, South West, East) may be replaced with non-locational titles to allow more flexible team placement, and the committee has considered whether a full North/South split across all grades below Division 3 may be the preferred long-term direction. Clubs will be consulted on this proposal during 2026-27 ahead of possible implementation in 2027-28.

Eligibility: We expect teams and players at all levels to comply with the Adult League Regulations or face penalties, including points deductions and fines. This includes full completion of GMS team sheets prior to matches, accurate match sheets including goalscorers, cards and umpires, correct registration and transfers, and playing rearranged fixtures within the required timeframe.

Balancing Competitiveness and Inclusivity: Continued support for Development teams aims to enable new, young or returning players to gain league experience and develop ability and confidence, encouraging teams that would not ordinarily play adult league hockey.

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Participation: Multi-season analysis of appearance data conducted this year indicates that overall participation across London is broadly stable rather than in structural decline; the operational strain comes from recurring availability dips at predictable pressure points (early season, the new year and in the final weeks). That said, the structural challenges in north-west London are real: several clubs in the area are contracting, driven by weak school links, limited junior pathways and the concentration of larger clubs in the south-west. The committee has raised this formally with England Hockey and it will remain a strategic focus for 2026-27, alongside possible outreach to London universities as a potential source of new teams.

Governance: The committee also contributed substantively to England Hockey's Fit for the Future governance review and to London Hockey's own strategic plan and is developing a structured post-match conduct feedback initiative with England Hockey, designed to capture the low-level behavioural patterns that formal complaints never reach.

ALMC Chair Succession

After more than five years as Chair of the ALMC, I am stepping down at the end of this cycle. Succession planning has been underway since December: Chris Savory, whose contribution to the League's operations, Grade 3 division management and statistics initiatives has been outstanding, has indicated his willingness to stand, and a structured handover – including system access and representation at national Area Leagues meetings – is already in progress. The League is in good hands.

The role of Chair is rewarding but demanding. At peak times of the year – the pre-season setup, the mid-season disciplinary load, the end-of-season promotion and relegation settlement, plus the annual review of the Area League Regulations conducted with other Areas and England Hockey – it often requires 30-40 hours per week, all of it volunteered. To give one concrete measure: 225 (60%) of this season's 376 Selection Exemption Pass requests arrived in the final four weeks of the season, each requiring individual review and a decision, alongside the usual League management tasks those same weeks demand. As noted above, each request takes five to ten minutes to process.

A meaningful share of that time is consumed not by managing the League but by responding to complaints that are out of time, outside the regulations, or simply attempts to relitigate committee decisions that a club disagrees with. Every complaint must be read, assessed and answered, and the unfounded ones inevitably slow our response to those that merit proper attention. Time we spend on frivolous cases is time we cannot spend on genuine ones.

As the committee transitions to new leadership, I would ask clubs to help protect their volunteers: raise genuine issues promptly and through the proper channels, and accept that well-documented decisions, consistently applied, will not always go your way.

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Acknowledgements

My personal thanks to the members of the Area League Management Committee for their continuing hard work on behalf of London's hockey clubs: *Chris Savory, David Lloyd-Williams, Georga Reed, Kam Roopra, Liz Laird, Shaf Moledina and Sherry Parnell.*

The members of the ALMC are all dedicated volunteers:

- We bring diverse hockey experience as players, coaches, officials, administrators, club officers and parents of junior players.
- We strive to deliver a competitive, fair and enjoyable adult league hockey experience for London clubs.

We are grateful to all clubs for their continued commitment and cooperation. Special thanks to the players, team managers, coaches, umpires, volunteers and supporters who make the League successful. Clubs' constructive feedback is valued and helps us to enhance the Men's and Women's Leagues for all participants.

Conclusion

The 2025-26 season demonstrated, once again, the resilience of hockey in London. Under sustained pressure – disciplinary caseloads, umpire shortages, system failures, participation strain – clubs, volunteers and players kept competitions running successfully, and the committee's decisions remained well-documented and consistently reasoned.

The priorities for 2026-27 are set: the umpire pathway transition, better access to GMS data, and support for clubs at risk, with fairness, safety and accessibility underpinning all of it. The regulations are approved, the structure is communicated and the handover is underway. The incoming Chair inherits a League in good order.

Writing this report for the final time, I thank all member clubs for their patience, support and dedication – not just this season, but across the past five. It has been a privilege to serve London's hockey community, and I have every confidence the ALMC will continue to deliver competitive, fair and enjoyable hockey for all participants across London.

Paul Mangat
Chair, Adult Leagues & Competitions Committee
11 June 2026