

The Highland Council

Gaelic Implementation Group 14 November 2013

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| Agenda Item | 5 |
| Report No | GIG 19/13 |

Gaelic in Economic Development

Report by Director of Planning and Development

Summary

This report brings Members up to date with the current situation regarding the impact that the Gaelic language has played in the delivery of economic development projects in the Highlands.

The report supports the aims of the Council's programme of priorities, "Working Together for the Highlands". The economy is identified as being one of the programme's key themes, and the current Gaelic language plan makes specific mention of the importance of Gaelic as an asset that can promote economic development.

A number of economic development initiatives that support the Gaelic Language Plan's Economic Development Strategic Commitments one and two are detailed. These are to create and support initiatives that strengthen the use of, and profile of Gaelic within general economic development and tourism projects in the Highlands. Furthermore, it underlines our commitment to working with partners to develop strategies for the Gaelic jobs market, including careers advice, skills acquisition, further and higher education and work experience opportunities.

1. Background

- 1.1 The importance of Gaelic as an economic asset has long been recognised. In 1993 Sproull and Ashcroft estimated that the total output of "Gaelic Industry" was £41m (1992 prices), and that it was responsible for the creation of 1,000 FTEs jobs. Further work into the artistic and cultural aspect of the Gaelic economy identified it as having an important impact on local economies, as well as in the creation of between 215 – 230 FTEs.
- 1.2 The Planning and Development Service is committed to supporting the Council's Gaelic language policies, and works closely with the Gaelic Team within Education Culture and Sport to deliver these. Principal areas of activity are Tourism Development and the work of the Highland Film Commission, as well as in general economic development activities. However, other areas of the Service's activities, such as the implementation of guidance for bi-lingual signage in our core path network and other signage installed for the guidance of the public, underline this commitment. Furthermore, the Countryside Rangers Service, managed within the Planning and Development Service is particularly active in a range of areas where Gaelic is seen as an asset to be utilised, for example in the interpretation of the countryside and the biodiversity

of the area, as well as in the use of Gaelic names and place-names. The Service actively encourages its staff to attend Gaelic language classes, and we provide the Rangers with specific training on the use of Gaelic in the environment.

- 1.3 From a development management perspective, the service liaises closely with developers to ensure that they understand the value of including Gaelic signage as a positive asset to their businesses in the Highlands. The success of this can be seen in the Gaelic signage clearly visible in many of the larger national businesses located in the Highlands including Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda, Boots and the Mercure Hotel, as well as fast food outlet Macdonald's.

2. Tourism Projects

- 2.1 Tourism is a key sector of the Highland Economy and the Council has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the national Tourism Agency, VisitScotland requesting that as a condition of grant support from the Council they feature the Gaelic language as part of their promotion of the Highlands distinct culture. This will include featuring Gaelic in marketing campaigns and the use of bi-lingual signage on and in Visitor Information Centres.

- 2.2 Nevis Partnership: The Service is working closely with the Nevis Partnership on project briefs for their second stage Heritage Lottery Fund Application. If successful this will see the delivery of a wide range of projects in the Glen Nevis / Ben Nevis area. Key amongst these will be a significant information and interpretation project making use of both traditional and digital methods of communicating and which will include a significant Gaelic element – in part focussing on the cultural significance of Gaelic in the area, its links with the landscape, place names etc. and the creation of a Gaelic trail in the Glen. Probably aimed at children, this would use elements such as the Gaelic alphabet and its links with trees, to encourage visitor engagement.

On the film side the most recent version of the film unit's app focussed on Gaelic and in particular the Gaelic media industry and facilities on Skye most notably Sabhal Mor Ostaig. The app is due to be launched early in 2014 and will be distributed widely amongst Film and Television production companies

LEADER Supported Projects: LEADER is an EU Community Economic Development Programme delivered by the Council throughout the rural parts of the area. A number of projects have been supported that have had a significant Gaelic element. A total of £66,000 was committed to Feis Rois to deliver their "Reaching Out" project designed to provide opportunities for young people to learn skills in traditional music, song, drama and the Gaelic language. Post project evaluation has demonstrated increased community benefits in those areas involved, illustrating that supporting language and culture provides work opportunities for freelance musicians in the local area.

LEADER also provided financial assistance to a temporary exhibition that featured the life and work of the Gaelic Poet, Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. The success of this project has underlined the importance of utilising Gaelic

heritage, firstly in this case because it places emphasise on a key element of the Scottish Enlightenment, but also because of the potential for the promotion of cultural tourism. As part of the Year of Homecoming celebrations in 2014 a further event will be held in Strontian, part of the area most strongly associated with Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. A conference, concerts and other cultural events are planned as well as a series of interpretation panels that will promote the tourism aspects of the project. The interpretative trail will be designed to enhance the visitor's appreciation of the landscape and surrounding area that were such an influence on the work of the poet.

Kilbeg: Sabhal Mor Ostaig has received planning permission in principle to develop a new village community, Kilbeg on the Isle of Skye. The proposals include ninety three new dwellings, six new college buildings including a conference centre, a multi-use sports pavilion, enterprise units, offices, shops, café/bar and a care home. As part of the overall funding package for the development of Kilbeg the Council, through its Vacant and Derelict Land Fund will be contributing £200,000 towards the overall construction costs of £5.8m. As a result of this project 20 construction jobs will be sustained as well as 155FTE jobs at Sabhal Mor Ostaig. There is the potential to further create 17 new posts and to significantly enhance the revenue received from new conference business. Sabhal Mor Ostaig generates almost £4m annually to the local economy at the present time the Kilbeg Project has the potential to significantly increase this.

3. Implications

- 3.1 There are no Legal; Equalities; Climate Change/Carbon Clever; and Risk implications for the Council as a result of this report.

The £200,000 contribution to the Kilbeg Project will come from the Scottish Government's Vacant and Derelict Land Fund.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 The important role of Gaelic in the economic development of the Highlands is adequately demonstrated by the projects outlined in this report. The Service will also be encouraging businesses to recognise the opportunities that can accrue from Inverness' hosting of the National Mod in 2014. In addition to this, the Service will continue to work closely with external partners to enhance the role of Gaelic in the economic development of the Highlands. We participate on the Gaelic Employment and Skills Panel (GESP), a Scottish Government initiative led by HIE/CNAG to monitor the impact of Gaelic on the labour market. We have also provided funding of £5000 towards the costs of research, led by HIE that is examining the role of Gaelic as an economic asset that should be utilised much more fully. This report is due to be completed early in 2014.

Recommendation

Members of the Implementation group are invited to comment on the report and presentation

Designation:

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Author: Kenny Macinnes