

Agenda Item	7
Report No	RES/16/21

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Corporate Resources Committee

Date: 26 May 2021

Report Title: Royal National Mòd 2021

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members agreement to a one off budget feed of £80,000 to fund the 2021 Royal National Mòd (RNM) which is planned to take place in Inverness between 8th – 16th October 2021. The view of the Gaelic Committee is also being sought and this will be reported back to the Corporate Resources Committee on 26 May 2021.
- 1.2 The Highland Council has pledged to support the Royal National Mòd as one of the commitments made in Council's Statutory Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2023. Up until the end of 2020/21, the agreement had been that the RNM would take place in Highland every 3 years and the total sum provided to An Comunn Gàidhealach (ACG) to host the RNM in Highland was £120,000, made in 3 annual instalments of £40,000 paid from the Council's approved Gaelic budget.
- 1.3 The RNM was due to be held in Inverness in 2020. However, due to the restrictions imposed by COVID the festival had to fundamentally change its operating model and instead invested in staging a highly successful virtual event. This was the subject of a report to the Gaelic Committee in November 2020:
[file:///C:/Users/cathu/Downloads/Item 5%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/cathu/Downloads/Item%20(3).pdf).
- 1.4 The investment in online media and virtual platforms saved the event and provided a outlet for musicians, performers and enthusiasts at a time when almost all other cultural and musical opportunities had been postponed. It also showcased the Highlands to a national and international audience through broadcasts by BBC Alba and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and many people have also viewed the recorded events on Youtube. The downside was that Inverness missed out on the significant economic, social and community benefits of hosting the traditional festival and associated fringe events.

- 1.5** An Comunn Gaidhealach has indicated a strong desire to return to Inverness this coming Autumn rather than waiting until 2024 which is the next time that the festival is scheduled to come to the Highlands. However, due to the previously agreed funding model that is in place, the Council now only has £40,000 budgeted for the RNM, as opposed to the £120,000 needed to host the event. Consequently, Members are asked to agree to a mid-year budget feed of up to £80,000 to retain the Mòd in the Highlands for another year.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the initial outline of events for the Royal National Mòd 2021 at Appendix 1;
- ii. Agree to a one-off budget feed of up to £80,000 to retain the Mòd in the Highlands for another year.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

The resource implications are as set out in the report. The Service will attempt to offset the £80,000 pressure as much as possible by reducing expenditure in other areas, although the scope to do this is limited as much of the funding for the Gaelic activities are received in the form of grants for specific projects.

The RNM brings significant economic benefit to the host location, particularly the hospitality sector, due to the numbers of participants involved in the formal festival and the wide-ranging fringe events that will take place throughout the host location. It also provides employment for numerous musicians, technicians and support staff from the local area.

3.2 Legal

The Council has committed to supporting the Royal National Mòd in its Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2023 which derives from the requirements of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) the Royal National Mòd is an event that encourages participation from across the whole of the Highlands and assists in the promotion of the Gaelic language and culture.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – the continuation of an online virtual offering will enable a larger audience to enjoy the RNM without the need to travel.

3.5 Risk – if the Council does not provide the financial support required, the RNM may move to Perth, which was the intended location of the 2021 Mòd, and the Highlands will lose the economic, community and reputational benefits associated with the festival at a time when economic and wellbeing recovery is so important. Lack of support for such an important event may cause reputational damage to the Council because of a perceived lack of support for Gaelic language and culture.

- 3.6 Gaelic
Retaining the RNM in the Highlands this year will have extremely positive implications for Gaelic as the Mòd is one of the Highland Council's core commitments within GLP3 and will demonstrate the Council's commitment to supporting Gaelic language and culture in the Highlands.

4. Background

- 4.1 The RNM is Scotland's premier celebration of the Gaelic language, music, and culture. The Mòd celebrates the unique language, culture, and spirit of the Gaels, promoting its relevance and value in modern Scotland. The Mòd is a showcase and focal point for all Gaelic users and supporters, and it is particularly relevant to new generations of confident young Gaels emerging from schools and universities, and who are the lifeblood and future of the Gaelic language.
- 4.2 In addition to the official Mòd competitions and events, a packed programme of diverse fringe events typically runs in tandem with the Mòd. The fringe is an imaginative and innovative event, which aims to be both aspirational and inspirational, pairing emerging talents with established acts.
- 4.3 Members will be aware that the 'traditional' Inverness 2020, fell victim to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, ACG designed an online version of the event which allowed them to be innovative in their approach to engage with both the Mòd and Gaelic community, made possible due to maximising the use of current technologies.

5. The Inverness Mòd 2021

- 5.1 As the Inverness 2020 Mòd did not take place in its traditional form ACG have been in communication with the Highland Council and Perth Council to discuss altering the schedule to host the 2021 RNM in Inverness and the 2022 Mòd in Perth (Perth is the scheduled location for RNM 2021). The Inverness RNM 2021 Local Organising Committee (LOC) and the Mòd Events Group (MEG) are meeting virtually, and the Gaelic Team continue to support LOC, MEG and ACG.
- 5.2 Due to the on-going uncertainty over the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a hybrid event model is being planned for the 2021 RNM. While unconventional by comparison with the traditional event model, this blended approach will provide the best potential for ACG to deliver the organisation's key objectives and aims, supporting and developing aspects of the Gaelic language, culture, and heritage at local, national, and international levels whilst still providing economic and social benefits for the City of Inverness and the Highlands. By utilising some of the virtual approaches adopted in 2020 it will also be possible for the Mòd to reach a much wider audience than the traditional event would have done, showcasing Inverness and the Highlands on a national and international stage.

6. The Inverness 2021 Mòd Planned Schedule of Events

- 6.1 A list of planned events is being developed by ACG which will identify key flagship events as part of the overall festival while allowing some flexibility on the number and range of live elements which may be incorporated depending on the level of pandemic restrictions. It is expected that more fringe events will be added subject to event budget capacity and easing of COVID-19 restrictions.
- 6.2 Proposed physical events within the programme cater for anticipated limited live audience capacities, but if an easing of restrictions is realised these capacities can be increased accordingly. The situation will be monitored and reviewed as plans for the event progress.

6.3 The hybrid combination of live and online production for the event makes it likely that additional staff will require to be hired on a short-term freelance basis, to assist with project management and event production, and support. The live streaming of events such as ACG are proposing is increasingly recognised as an important means of reaching widely dispersed audiences, and the minimum requirement of additional technical operators and directors, results in increased costs.

7. Risk Register

7.1 ACG have developed a Risk Register relating to the proposed event plan and considers the main challenges and risks involved in its delivery. Most of the risk surrounds the uncertainty and unpredictability of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, but it also identifies potential risks with funding and resources for the event. The Risk Register is regularly updated and revised by all key stakeholders.

8. Funding of the Inverness Mòd

8.2 The Council funded the RNM in 2020 as planned, in line with the funding model that had been approved by the Council's Resources Committee in November 2019 and agreed with An Comunn Gàidhealach. However, as already set out, the pandemic meant that the event itself had to be delivered in a very different way and the Highlands missed out on many of the benefits that a traditionally hosted festival would have delivered.

8.3 Rather than having to wait until Highland's turn to host comes round again in 3 years time, An Comunn Gàidhealach has confirmed it will host the Royal National Mòd in Inverness this Autumn if the Highland Council is able to confirm that it will provide the usual financial support. This will be a very positive development for the city and the Highlands, especially at a time when opportunities for economic development and social and cultural interaction are so needed to recover from the impacts of COVID. Perth Council has indicated it would accept a postponement for one year.

8.4 Unfortunately, the Gaelic budget will be unable to cover the £80,000 shortfall created by supporting the RNM for two consecutive years because most of the Gaelic Development budget is grant funded and so it will be difficult to cover this by managing down expenditure elsewhere. Consequently, the Corporate Resources Committee is asked to agree to a budget feed of up to £80,000 on a one-off basis to enable the festival to go ahead.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance

Date: 13 May 2021

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Background Papers: