

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held remotely on Thursday 5 November 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam
Mr R Bremner
Mr J Gordon
Mr A Henderson
Mr A MacInnes

Mr D Mackay
Mr G MacKenzie
Mr C Munro
Mrs M Paterson
Mr D Rixson

Non-Member also present:

Mr J Finlayson

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr C Munro in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair conveyed the following items of good news:-

- the thanks of the Royal National Mod Local Organising Committee to the Highland Council for their support during the virtual Mod in October;
- Kate Forbes MSP was to share a pre-recorded message to the pupils who were participating in “Siuthad!”, a Gaelic Careers event; and
- Fèisean nan Gàidheal had just issued a Press Release introducing the Blas Festival Programme.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs I Campbell, Mr A MacKinnon, Miss E Roddick and Mr A Sinclair.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 4 – Mr R Bremner (non-financial)
Item 6 – Mr C Munro (financial)

Mr R Bremner also declared non-financial interests in any item which might relate to his connection with the following organisations: Caithness & Sutherland Provincial Mòd, Caithness Branch of An Comunn Gàidhealach, Melvich Gaelic Choir, Atomaig Piseag (Gaelic Choir) and the Local Organising Committee – Mòd Ghallaibh 2010.

3. Impact of Covid and Gaelic Recovery

There had been circulated Report No. G/3/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the bilingualism at the Gaelic Committee was welcomed and it would help evidence the level of commitment Members had to the Gaelic language;
- access to Gaelic speakers in schools and communities would have been hindered during Lockdown;
- recognition was made of the various digital events which had been provided both for young people and parents. This had required the Gaelic Team to change its approach from face-to-face to more innovative ways;
- details of the structure of the current Gaelic Team together with their roles, remits, responsibilities and areas covered were sought. In addition, it was also questioned if there was a Gaelic Team Development plan that linked specifically to education;
- it was noted that the Gaelic Development team members and their roles had been provided at a recent members' workshop and the workplan was also the subject of a report later on the agenda;
- it was important to highlight the availability of Gaelic Development officers;
- an application had been made to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's COVID support fund for projects to support the Gaelic Language Early years sector in relation to the Gaelic Language Recovery Programme. Only part of the requested amount was awarded and it was hoped that this had not negatively affected any of the projects;
- the online after school club for primary pupils was commended, especially as it was involving secondary pupils who would be able to relate better to the primary school pupils than adults would;
- reference was made to an article in the West Highland Free Press which had highlighted online surveys by Bòrd na Gàidhlig seeking opinions on Gaelic usage and increasing usage in communities. Shinty could be used as a vehicle for doing so and several youngsters from the Kinlochsheil Ladies team had contacted Councillor MacInnes to highlight their interest in this which was very encouraging;
- it was important the Education Committee was aware of developments in Gaelic education.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the action that had been taken to mitigate the impact of Covid on the delivery of the Gaelic Language Plan priorities;
- ii. **NOTED** the areas of current and future development; and

- iii. **AGREED** that details of the structure of the current Gaelic Team together with their roles, remits, responsibilities and areas covered be prepared and communicated.

4. Progress against Gaelic Language Plan 3

Declaration of Interest: Mr R Bremner declared a non financial interest as he had taken part in a recent Fèis Rois event at the Online Mod but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in general discussion. However should discussion arise specifically on Fèis Rois he would take no part in discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. G/4/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the formal reporting of external funding detailing the projects, source, grant requested, grant given etc was welcomed;
- it was queried why grants provided often were less than the initial amount sought and whether it was because there were more organisations seeking funding or if this was a shortfall in meeting Highland's needs;
- additional information was sought about projects. For example, the Council had applied for £988k as Gaelic Specific Grant (GSG) funding to support the Gaelic Team, their specific projects and Gaelic Medium Education staffing in Early Learning and Childcare, Primary and Secondary Education. It was felt that this was too generic and a more detailed breakdown would explain how the cut of £83k would impact on deliverability;
- from 2018/19 to 2020/21 the GSG request had increased by £44k but there were no reasons provided as to what had necessitated this;
- the organisations funded by the Highland Council's Gaelic Language Plan Statutory Funding were detailed and information was sought, and provided, as to the level of communication exchanged in regard to the expectations of the organisations and what the Council had the ability to deliver. This was a similar scenario that the Council had when bidding for GSG funding;
- Gaelic language courses for Members, and staff, would be beneficial. Many of these could be delivered virtually and at minimal or no cost. It would also result in more Members of the Committee being able to contribute in Gaelic; and
- encouraging organisations to work together when funding was scarce was paramount but this needed to be done in cooperation and in a carefully considered manner.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. that the GLP3 be monitored on a quarterly basis utilising the Performance & Risk Management System (PRMS) which was the Council's corporate performance management system in order to support monitoring progress delivering GLP3;
- ii. a progress report on GLP3 would be submitted each quarter to the Gaelic Committee; and

- iii. the Chair of the Gaelic Committee and Senior Management aimed to meet bi-annually with the Scottish Government's Gaelic senior officers.

5. Virtual Online National Mod

There had been circulated Report No. G/5/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- Highland Council's Gaelic Team had worked alongside An Comunn Gàidhealach to help deliver the virtual online Royal Nation Mod. The Chair also made reference to Cèilidh na Comhairle, this time delivered in partnership with Fèis Rois, which had taken place on the Friday evening. This had included performances by Councillor Raymond Bremner and which he was congratulated on. The format of the evening was applauded, involving competitors and families, and meant that the Mod had finished on a positive note;
- appreciation was expressed for all the work involved in this year's Mod. In particular, it was pointed out An Comunn Gàidhealach had received 550 video submissions which had all been successfully processed in time for the Mod. This had been no small feat but had generated a huge amount of attention on social media;
- although undoubtedly the "traditional" Mod had been missed by many, the virtual online version had focused attention that the festival was still there;
- the international engagement was welcomed;
- the cancellation of the "traditional" Mod had had serious consequences for the local economy and for the many artists who were self employed within the creative industries who would not have acquired any of the usual bookings for events and gigs. Given the uncertainty as to what shape next year's Mod might take, it was likely that there would at least be some element of an online Mod and efforts should be made to replace this economic loss. This might include a modest live-streaming charge which could go some way to support these self employed artists;
- a "traditional" Mod would generate in the region of £3.2m in direct and indirect benefit with over 9,000 attendees and it was important that the lessons learnt this year were taken on board to provide something of value in 2021;
- Inverness now had a year in which to prepare and plan for the Royal National Mod 2021 and how the digital offering could be incorporated while maximising the cultural and economic benefit. Good strategic engagement had already taken place with key partners; and
- the enjoyment the Mod had given was inestimable, especially in a year affected by Covid 19, and had been a privilege to watch.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Virtual Mod;
- ii. **NOTED** the projects which the Gaelic Team developed and managed in conjunction with key stakeholders to support the Virtual Mod; and
- iii. **AGREED** to look in further detail the points raised during discussion in relation to developing the Mod for next year;
- iv. **AGREED** to look at the potential for generating income for the artists involved and the wider community; and

- v. **AGREED** a progress report be brought to the Gaelic Committee in May 2021.

6. Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learners Report

Declaration of Interest: Mr C Munro declared a financial interest as a close family member was employed as a Gaelic Medium Teacher but, but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion. However, should discussion relate to agreeing resources or changes in policy, he would leave the meeting.

There had been circulated Report No. G/6/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the Chair of the Education welcomed the forthcoming attendance at the Education Committee of Sarah Fraser, Head Teacher of Newtonmore Primary School who was to report on Gaelic attainment;
- while welcoming in the increase in pupil numbers across Pre School, Primary and Secondary education, there still remained relatively few pupils sitting senior phase Gaelic and Gàidhlig qualifications. Other Members considered the increase to be relatively modest but felt this could be because language subjects were no longer popular with young people. Closer examination was therefore needed to see how young people could be motivated and encouraged to study languages;
- it was feared that the subject choices that needed to be made in S2 sometimes resulted in subjects such as Gaelic being filtered out;
- the level of information now provided enabled better Member scrutiny;
- ideally a Gaelic Medium education plan should be prepared for each school as this would assist forward planning and resourcing. This would also show Highland's ambition and vision for the future;
- e-Sgoil, an initiative developed by the Western Isles Island Council to improve equity and access to education, had been hailed as the way forward. However, little progress was made and an update requested on distance learning and the plans in place for the future to encompass more pupils; and
- greater support for Head Teachers was required if they were to successfully deliver the 12-18 programme in Gaelic.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to recognise the importance of the collaborative approach between the Gaelic Team and Education Officers who led, supported and provided professional development opportunities and resourcing for the range of contexts within Highland schools to provide and promote Gaelic Learner and GME provisions pan Highland;
- ii. **NOTED** the attainment profile within the framework of both a national discussion and direction on Gaelic and Gàidhlig curriculum reviews at secondary level; and
- iii. **NOTED** the Gairloch Catchment Gaelic Medium Consultation and that further information detailing this will be shared with the Education Committee.

7. Gaelic Committee Workplan

There had been circulated Report No. G/7/20 dated 29 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- this clearly demonstrated that there was a robust strategy in place to achieve the aims of the GLP3;
- some Members expressed disappointment that they had been unable to attend the virtual workshops;
- Members welcomed the support and focus in Workshop 4 for Gaelic in secondary schools;
- the Committee endorsed an examination of the research being carried out by the Scottish Government and UHI into the decline of Gaelic in the vernacular community and that progress of the Gaelic Language Plan be reported to the Full Council annually;
- turning to Gaelic Communications and Engagement Strategy, it was important that this was still fluid and flexible and, as necessary, to reshape ideas. The Chairman confirmed that the Committee would be responsive to opportunities as and when they arose; and
- it was gratifying that Gaelic was now receiving the prominence it deserved and it was possible to now publicise the extensive and proactive work taking place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the common themes which arose out of the workshops;
- ii. **AGREED** proposed reports for future Gaelic Committee meetings;
- iii. **AGREED** to include in the workplan an examination of the research being carried out by the Scottish Government and UHI into the decline of Gaelic in the vernacular community; and
- iv. **AGREED** that progress on GLP3 would be reported to Full Council annually.

8. Gaelic Communications and Engagement Strategy

There had been circulated Report No. G/8/20 dated 28 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

Having suggested that more enthusiastic language be used when promoting the Gaelic language and culture, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the approach to developing a Gaelic Communications Strategy and **AGREED** the timescale for bringing the Communications Plan back to Committee.

The meeting concluded at 12.45 pm.