

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held **Remotely** on Thursday 16 September 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam
Mr R Bremner
Mrs I Campbell
Miss J Campbell
Mr A Henderson

Mr D MacKay
Mr G MacKenzie
Mr C Munro
Mr D Rixson

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance
Ms J MacDonald, Senior Gaelic Translation Officer
Ms M A MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator

Also in attendance:-

Mr J Graham, Chief Executive Officer, An Comunn Gàidhealach
Ms F Hampton, Director of Inverness Castle, High Life Highland

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 – Items 1-5

Mr A Henderson in the Chair – Item 6-8

Preliminaries

The Chair conveyed the following items of good news:-

- a new Gaelic Medium School was opening in Mabou, Nova Scotia. Highland Council had long standing links with Nova Scotia and he looked forward to working with the school in the years ahead;
- in the co-fharpais ChLAS (S1-S3 National Gaelic Writing Competition) 5 prizes had come to Highland . Andrew Cumming and Anna Varwell had won prizes in the Fluent Category and in the Learners' Category prizes were won by William MacNeil, Matthew Bird and Anna Duncan;
- Innes MacNeil, Portree High School and pupils from Inverness Royal Academy had taken part in a project with the National Library of Scotland researching the history of mountaineering, a project which was now being exhibited; and
- at the end of the last school session, Cròileagan Inbhir Pheofharain saw two longstanding members of staff retire. Manager Annie Macdonald had been at the helm of the Gaelic medium partner setting in Dingwall for 33 years, joined shortly after by Margaret Mackenzie as Senior Early Years Practitioner (EYP). The Chair explained the history of the Cròileagan and that it was often a child and their family's first experience of Gaelic. A new manager had now taken up post, supported by the team of Gaelic speaking EYPs.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Gordon, Mr A MacInnes Mrs M Paterson, Ms E Roddick and Mr A Sinclair.

2. Declarations of Interest

Item 3 – Mr G Adam, Ms I Campbell and Miss J Campbell (non-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. Royal National Mòd 2021

Declarations of Interest: Mr G Adam, Ms I Campbell and Miss J Campbell declared non-financial interests as Council appointed Board Directors of Eden Court Theatre, the main venue for the Mòd, but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. G/12/21 dated 8 September 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance. In addition, Mr Graham, Chief Executive Officer, An Comunn Gàidhealach gave a short presentation outlining the plans and preparation underway for this year's Mòd which was to be held in Inverness. The official launch had taken place on 2 September 2021 and had been well received. Tickets for in-person events were now being sold at Eden Court but there would also be an online element available. The programme of events was now printed and could also be accessed digitally. Due to ongoing Covid restrictions the usual mass choir procession would not take place but, as an alternative, would meet collectively in the Northern Meeting Park. In conclusion, he expressed his thanks for the support of Highland Council, both financially and from the advice and support provided.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- information was sought, and provided, on how the monetarisation of income would be measured. It was important that this data was available for scrutiny in the future to demonstrate to the Highland Council that the Mòd offered a good return on its investment, both financially and culturally;
- previous in-person attendance at a National Mòd had been in the region of 9,000-10,000 people over a 9-day period. However, as this level of attendance would not be achieved, and neither the financial economic injection to the area or the same length of time that the Mòd would be taking place, it was questioned what comparisons with previous years could be made. It was recognised that direct comparisons with previous years would be difficult;
- details were requested, and provided, on what percentage of the programme that would normally be delivered would be presented and what percentage of competitors numbers were being realised;

- in response to a question, it was explained that there would be fewer choirs this year as many choirs had not had the opportunity to practise, due to Covid restrictions;
- confirmation was provided that the literature competition would take place but this would be a pre-recorded event available online;
- in relation to the Council's funding for both 2020 and 2021, it was hoped that it would not be used to supplement the loss of membership, competition entry or local committee income. It was questioned, if there was a reduced programme and a reduced economic benefit, if all the funding was all required;
- it was queried why An Comunn Gàidhealach were not selling tickets and they would only be available through the Eden Court Box Office. As tickets for the live streamed events could be ordered online, it was questioned why An Comunn hadn't adapted to an online ticketing service. In response, it was explained that, given Covid restrictions and the need to tie in with Eden Court's biking system, it had been more practical to hand this element over to the Theatre;
- it was confirmed that An Comunn Gàidhealach were working closely with the Highland Council to ensure that the opportunity to promote Inverness and the Highlands and the contribution made by Highland Council was taken, especially with online events; and
- staging the Mòd in the current climate was challenging and appreciation was expressed for the hard work of officers in Highland Council and An Comunn Gàidhealach.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the current programme;
- ii. that contingency arrangements were in place to adjust between virtual and in-person events;
- iii. that any underspend in the planned budget arising from a reduction in the in-person content of the event would be set against the budget feed of £80,000 approved by Corporate Resources Committee, resulting in a reduced cost to the Council; and
- iv. the arrangements to ensure proper governance and scrutiny of the Council's financial contribution to the event.

4. Progress against Gaelic Language Plan 3

There had been circulated Report No. G/13/21 dated 3 September 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

Amongst it's many aims, the Gaelic Language Plan 3 sought to raise the profile and use of Gaelic with external partners/relevant stakeholders and to contribute to and support Community Partnership Development Plans. There was a locality plan in place in Caol, Lochaber where there was already a Gaelic Medium Primary school and links with it were encouraged. Furthermore, the links with the Nova Scotia Government was welcomed, given the huge local value which could be devised from such transatlantic connections.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress made in both monitoring and implementing GLP3 on a quarterly basis utilising the (PRMS) support delivery of GLP3; and
- ii. the progress and challenges regarding the implementation of some enabling actions in the Plan. Challenges were largely due to the pandemic, which had impacted some projected project implementation and completion dates, however, the Gaelic Team had and continued to endeavour to adapt to an on-line or a blended approach to deliver the enabling actions.

5. Bilingual Signs Policy

There had circulated Report No. G/14/21 dated 18 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- appreciation was expressed for the translation of the Money Matters leaflet;
- in the event where Gaelic and English place names were the same it was suggested that only the Gaelic version be used;
- the increase in costs of producing Gaelic publications was acknowledged;
- it was questioned how much of this policy was ringfenced;
- proof reading of signage was of paramount importance;
- the origins of place names came from many sources so it was important to have a degree of flexibility; and
- in addition to the larger companies, it was hoped small housing developers could be made aware of the help that was available.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the work that had been undertaken in relation to the bilingual policy refresh; and
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed changes.

6. Statutory Consultation - Gaelic Medium Catchment Proposals for Glenurquhart Primary School

There had been circulated Report No. G/15/21 dated 6 September 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

Members welcomed the consultation and explored the issue of catchment areas. Catchments areas differed and relied on a number of factors but every effort was made to minimise pupils' travel time. However, it was hoped a flexible approach on the limit that distance might impose was adopted.

The Committee **AGREED** to support the proposal **NOTED** that the Education Committee would be advised of Members' views prior to taking its decision.

7. Gaelic and Gàidhlig Medium Education Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/16/21 dated 6 September 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 had looked to increase the number of Gaelic speakers and Highland Council was the biggest performer. However, it was vital that the Council's Gaelic Language Plan needed to be robust enough to demonstrate that it could grow more speakers and this primarily took place in the education sector;
- whilst information in the report was graphed it was suggested that other forms be considered to demonstrate the number of learners, fluent speakers etc and how the Council was progressing over a period of time;
- the subject material for schools being delivered through Gaelic was another key indicator;
- it was important that the Gaelic and Education Committees worked together to deliver Gaelic Medium Education;
- the Census in 2022 would strongly influence Scottish Government funding and this reinforced the need to highlight how many fluent Gaelic speakers were now in Highland; and
- information was sought on the number of pupils who continued with Gaelic Medium Education and those who reverted to English Medium due to a lack of provision. This would identify where resources needed to be channelled.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the contents of the paper and recognised the significant improvement trends in attainment and presentation numbers for Gàidhlig and Gaelic in S4, S5 and S6;
- AGREED** to congratulate the young people, their families and the school staff for such significant improvement in Gàidhlig SQA attainment in the Highlands in August 2021; and
- AGREED** that a report would be brought back to the Gaelic Committee highlighting best practice in strategies being deployed to further improve work in our secondary schools.

8. Inverness Castle Project

There had been circulated Report No. G/17/21 dated 6 September 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance. The Director of Inverness Castle, High Life Highland, was also in attendance and gave a presentation as to how Gaelic Language and Culture was to be incorporated into the project to enhance the visitor experience.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the transformation of the castle would result in an iconic Scottish landmark, luring visitors from all over to Inverness;
- the development was revealing many hidden features of the building;
- it was hoped that the Castle Project would benefit all of Highland, not just Inverness;
- it would be important to connect the Project to the Education sector to highlight, outside the classroom, that there were other opportunities to use Gaelic;
- it would be important that pupils from the rural areas were also afforded the opportunity of visiting Inverness Castle; and

- the concept of the Gaelic garden was commended and gave the opportunity to develop the history of Gaelic healing and medicines.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm