

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 30 March 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr I Brown
Mrs I Campbell
Ms S Fanet
Mr J Grafton

Mr P Logue (remote)
Mr W Mackay (remote)
Mr D Millar (remote)
Mr C Munro
Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Mr J Finlayson

In attendance:

Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance
Ms C Macklin, Head of Early Years & Primary Education
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager
Ms M A MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer
Ms E Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:-

Mr M MacSween, Managing Director, Astar Media

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

The Chair paid tribute to Professor Norman MacDonald, a Skye man and a great campaigner for the Gaelic language, who had passed away. He had been a news reporter for the BBC and had a keen interest in books, politics, Gaelic and, in particular, the history of Skye. He had left a great legacy in his collaboration of the “Great Three Books of Skye”, now an invaluable resource for genealogists and historians. Condolences were expressed to his family for their loss.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr C Aitkin, Mrs M Nolan, Ms L Niven and Mrs M Paterson.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 7: Mr C Munro.

3. Good News

The Chair conveyed the following items of good news:-

- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig was celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year. The Gaelic language and culture would be in a very different place today were it not for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the impact of its many thousands of students over the last 50 years.
- The Gaelic Team were in the process of developing the refreshed Gaelic Language Plan 4 (GLP4). A Consultation drop-in session had taken place on 29 March in Bun Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis with further drop-in sessions planned for Fort William and Portree in mid-April.
- A Family Learning Day was held in Bun Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar at the end of February and was attended by over 30 adults and around 35 children.
- As part of World Gaelic Week a suite of projects had taken place with many schools participating in the week and corporate activities which included place-names and proverbs of the day delivered through social media. The Chair had launched it with a short video and the Chair of Education, Councillor John Finlayson, closed the event by thanking all the teachers, community groups, participants, the Gaelic Team and the Corporate Communications Team.
- The Gaelic Team, in partnership with Kilmuir and Bun-sgoil Stafainn Primaries, secured £3.8K through Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Taic Freumhan funding scheme to develop projects to support GME pupils and the wider community.
- The Gaelic Team, in conjunction with Comunn na Gàidhlig and Culturlann Inbhir Nis, organised a coffee afternoon where adults had the opportunity to meet, speak Gaelic and sing songs. Children of all ages attended and had a lot of fun taking part in different arts & crafts activities.
- The Gaelic Team were working with Iomain Colm Cille who organise Cupa Iomain na h-Oige and which takes place in Acharacle, Portree and Strathpeffer. As well as competing for the shinty trophy, young people would also be competing for the Highland Council Duais na Gaidhlig which was awarded to the School or Team who maximised their usage of Gaelic on the pitch and throughout the day.

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News.

4. Presentation – Astar Media

Mr Murdo MacSween, Managing Director at Astar Media gave a short presentation on the Highland Council's participation and success in FilmG 15. 22 Highland Council schools participated in the competition with other pupils, ex-pupils, adults and students in the Highlands also submitting films independently. In total there had been 47 entries this year across Highland over the 19 categories of the competition. He explained the aims of the competition and that workshops were an important part with 24 of these being held in Highland. The award ceremony had been held in the

Fruitmarket in Glasgow in February 2023 and had been an opportunity to celebrate the efforts and achievements of entrants.

Members welcomed the support and encouragement FilmG was providing to the Gaelic language and culture by demonstrating it was a living language. It also showed the hard work Highland Council had put in to support communities and, in particular, young people who might progress on to future work opportunities through the medium of Gaelic.

Having thanked Mr MacSween, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Performance Against Gaelic Language Plan 3 (GLP3)

There had been circulated Report No. G/1/23 dated 13 March 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

When analysing performance of GLP3, it was a predict of how targets of GLP4 would be set. It was understood Highland Council performed well in this regard against other local authorities and it was important to highlight these achievements.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

6. Gaelic Language Plan 4 Progress Report - Consultation and Engagement Plan

There had been circulated Report No. G/2/23 dated 17 February 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

Mr MacSween also presented information about the consultation process and planning for draft GLP4, including an update on the Drop-in-Session which was held in Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis on 29 March 2023 and a look ahead to the events planned in mid-April.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the Chair had attended the Drop-in-Session in Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis and was pleased at the positive approach adopted. It had been a good start to the consultation process. He emphasised the importance of meaningful consultation which would have impact;
- when the time came to deliver the challenges in GLP4 it was important to measure the risks. These risks were well known as they had also been faced in GLP3. It was hoped contact could be made with the Scottish Minister for Gaelic so that they were aware, particularly in Highland, of these risks and how they could support the Highland Council in mitigating those risks and achieving the objectives of GLP4;
- it was important that Highland Council remained one of the best performers in Scotland on delivering the Scottish Government's Language Plan and their aspirations with the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005;
- Gaelic should be seen as a normal part of everyday mainstream life; and
- the opportunities which Gaelic brought to young people were highlighted.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

7. Blas Festival 2022

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro made Transparency Statement in respect of this item he had music produced and performed as part of the Blas festival this year but he received no financial payment for doing so. Having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. G/3/23 dated 1 March 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

Following a video highlighting the huge economical and cultural benefits of the festival, Members made the following points:-

- Blas had first been set up by Highland Council and was then organised by Fèisean nan Gàidheal. It was important to remember its origins as it demonstrated what the Council could do - and could do well;
- it was important to empower officers to continue with engaging with partners and operators of such festivals so that they could continue to deliver commitments to communities;
- Highland Council needed to be seen, as part of GLP4, to be providing opportunities for people to learn Gaelic and festivals such as the Royal National Mod and Blas could be a catalyst for that;
- music provided a link for many to engage with Gaelic, not just in Highland but worldwide;
- Highland Council's involvement in Blas was essential;
- reference was made to the resilience of Blas which had survived over the last 18 years despite cuts in funding. During this time it had generated £7.6m to the local economy, especially as it took place at the end of the tourist season;
- Blas allowed young talent to perform in their local community;
- Lochaber had its own festival and music school and it was important the Council supported these to access sources of funding; and
- Blas was an excellent example of how to serve and nourish Highland communities.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the report; and
- ii. statistics and audience numbers.

8. Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learner Education

There had been circulated Report No. G/4/23 dated 28 February 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the work that continued in providing Gaelic learner opportunities was acknowledged. There were many opportunities throughout Highland Council to learn Gaelic, whether it was just a few words or supporting parents when putting their children through Gaelic Medium Education (GME);
- there was also a plethora of opportunities throughout Highland communities where the learning of Gaelic was afforded;

- the recruitment and retention of GME teachers remained an issue and it was important to continue engagement with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to ensure Highland Council continued to recruit teachers. This was vital as the number of pupils in GME continued to grow and it was important it continued to do so. In this regard, the Council Leader undertook to bring this to a meeting of the Senior Leadership Group so that representation could be made at Government level. Whilst relevant to all local authorities this was a particular issue in Highland given its geographical sparsity and, consequently, the increased costs of living;
- at a recent Education Committee it had been pointed out that there were GME teachers who were opting out. However, there were also other teachers who were well able to teach in GME but who were reluctant to do so and consideration was needed to see how these teachers might be encouraged to reconsider;
- the recruitment of teacher probationers from Sabhal Mor Ostaig was welcomed;
- there was sometimes a conflict in schools between subjects and there was a fear that languages would lose out;
- when placing children in GME parents were looking for assurance that they would be able to progress into secondary school and that there would be subjects available in Gaelic. This might involve online learning, particularly for the more senior pupils, but a more detailed look at how this would be delivered was necessary; and
- disappointment was expressed that it had not been possible to recruit a teacher to Applecross Primary.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the revised draft Strategic Priorities for Gaelic Education for The Highland Council's fourth Gaelic Language Plan;
- ii. the areas of current and future development to support Gaelic teacher recruitment and sustainability;
- iii. an update on the creation of catchment for Gaelic Medium provision and Gaelic Medium schools; and
- iv. the current position on the Applecross Gaelic Medium Primary Education request.

9. Provision of 3-18 Gaelic Medium Education - Inverness

There had been circulated Report No. G/5/23 dated 17 March 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- it was queried, and confirmed, that the Invitation to Quote would be successful in attracting contractors;
- whilst welcoming the progress that had now been made, disappointment was expressed at the time it had taken to reach this stage. However, with Inverness continuing to grow, it was a natural progression to have a 3-18 GME campus;
- the expansion of GME was a success and would continue to grow and the need now for a 3-18 GME campus demonstrated this; and
- a 3-18 GME campus would create an environment for Gaelic speaking children and it would be through the workshops and discussions with communities as to how it would be shaped.

The Committee **NOTED** the approach and timescales to developing a 3-18 Gaelic Medium for Inverness.

10. Gaelic Specific Grant - 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No. G/6/23 dated 14 March 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the report demonstrated the level of Highland Council investment in Gaelic and how it was delivered, whether it was GME, Gaelic in the community or the administrative support for delivering the language;
- Highland Council had been consistent for some time in securing grant funding for projects and this gave some reassurance to support the greater value that the Council hoped to invest in Gaelic;
- the projection of GME pupil numbers, broken down, should be the subject of a report to a future Committee in terms of how it fitted into GLP4; and
- if Highland Council was to deliver on the challenges in GLP4 then funding needed to be secured for that.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the 3 projects outlined in the Gaelic Specific Grant bid;
- ii. the ambitious programme of work that the grant would help to support and that these might need to be adjusted should the full amount not be secured; and
- iii. the application was still under consideration by the Scottish Government with a decision expected by the end of April.

11. Gaelic and Scots and Scottish Languages Bill – Consultation Response

There is circulated Report No. G/7/23 dated 13 March 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

The Committee **AGREED** to **HOMOLOGATE** the response.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm