

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	8
Report No	G/17/23

**Committee:** Gaelic Committee

**Date:** August 30<sup>th</sup> 2023

**Report Title:** Early Years – Birth to Three Years of Age

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Members of the Birth to Three Sector (Gaelic) both in the Highlands and nationally. This is a crucial sector regarding parents' and toddlers' engagement and learning of Gaelic, as for many parents/guardians this will be their first encounter with Gaelic. The report sets out the background, the current position, and the position going forward.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Discuss and note the report
  - ii. Invite the author/s of the national research report on the Birth to Three Sector and Bòrd na Gàidhlig (BnaG) to a future Gaelic Committee.

## 3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource  
The Highland Council submits an annual application to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Gaelic Language Act Funding stream (GLAIF) to support the staffing and other resource requirements of the project.
- 3.2 Legal  
No legal implications
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)  
There are implications across this section due to the population demographics of rural and island communities, the sparsity of Gaelic speakers in these communities and the competing demands on employment in these areas.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever  
Where possible meetings take place online but face to face interaction is essential to meet the support requirements of the birth to three groups.
- 3.5 Risk  
The current lack of long-term commitment regarding funding creates a major uncertainty.

3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)  
There are currently no implications.

3.7 Gaelic  
The 0-3 sector is crucial to the furtherance and expansion of numbers embarking on the Gaelic Medium Education journey. The Gaelic Team continually promote Gaelic 0-3 across the Highland area where GME provision is available.

#### **4. Background**

4.1 In 2011, Highland Council entered a partnership with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to extend the support for the Birth to Three sector in the Highland Council area. During this period Bòrd na Gàidhlig employed 2.5 full time staff for the area. More support was required, particularly for those based in the rural parts of such a large geographic area.

4.2 The aim was to create a strengthened and structured Birth to Three sector which would transition into Pre-school, Primary and Secondary sectors thereby contributing towards the Scottish Government's stated aim that, "by 2021, the proportion of Gaelic speakers is back up to 2001 levels".

#### **5. Birth to Three Sector**

5.1 A strong and vibrant Gaelic Pre-Birth to Three sector is regarded by Highland Council and Bòrd na Gàidhlig as being of crucial importance in sustaining the numbers coming through into our Gaelic nursery provision (Sgoil-àraich). This supports a healthy future for Gaelic Medium Education in the Highland Council schools.

5.2 The Care and Learning Alliance (CALA) were awarded a contract in 2012 to deliver the project by recruiting four part-time Toddler Development Workers originally based in Ullapool, Wester Ross, Inverness and Thurso.

5.3 For many parents, the local Gaelic Birth to Three group is their first experience of Gaelic and where they receive information on Gaelic Medium Education (GME), how it operates, the benefits of bilingualism for their child and how to access GME in their local area.

5.4 Initially the groups were in more rural and sparsely populated areas, e.g. Tongue, Bettyhill, Bonar Bridge, Mallaig, Gairloch, Ullapool, Plockton, and Lochcarron. Those groups did not have a Gaelic speaking playleader with the necessary skills to run and use the language.

#### **6. CALA**

6.1 The CALA project support to the groups included providing a wide range of training on topics such as Child Development, Risk Assessments, Outdoor Play, Heuristic Play, Treasure baskets, Committee Skills, Child Protection and Gaelic Bookbug. In addition, training was provided to keep staff up to date with local and national guidance such as "Realising the Ambition." A regular bilingual newsletter, an online blog and an e-learning course on setting up a Gaelic Toddler Group were developed and made available on the CALA e-learning zone.

6.2 Through weekly visits to the groups, the CALA Gaelic Toddler Workers aimed to provide a range of support, first and foremost of which was delivering Gaelic language play activities, stories and songs within the group whilst modelling Gaelic language usage to improve language acquisition and parental usage in the home.

- 6.3 As a result of this training alongside peer mentoring, the partnership was able to create a professionalism, transparency and consistency of provision which has increased the capacity, sustainability, and the professionalism of the groups.
- 6.4 The close collaboration with the Gaelic Team's Community Learning and Development Officers in running promotional events and Fun Days significantly increased the profile of local groups and publicity has improved their presence within communities. Service delivery took account of the related priorities and outcomes within the Council's current GLP and the National Gaelic Plan.
- 6.5 Management of the project was carried out through regular meetings between the Council's Gaelic Community Learning and Development and the CALA Project Manager whilst Council and BnaG Education Officers conducted overall monitoring.
- 6.6 During the decade 2011 to 2021 BnaG gradually decreased the size of its Early Years team and by 2022 they did not employ any Early Years staff directly. BnaG have continued to provide both insurance and funding for Early Years groups.
- 6.7 The size of the area covered by the Council's Birth to Three project gradually increased and groups which have been supported at various stages of the project have been based in Thurso, Bettyhill, Kinlochbervie, Gairloch, Ullapool, Bonar Bridge, Tain, Dingwall, Inverness, Nairn, Newtonmore, Lochcarron, Plockton, Drumnadrochit, Fort William, Acharacle, Mallaig and Ballachulish. The average participation was approximately 100 children per week
- 6.8 Several groups have since gone into abeyance affected by the local area demographics as during the period 2011 to 2021 children in the under 1 year age group declined by 25% across the Highland Council area. (Statistics from the National Records of Scotland)

## **7 CALA Project Position 2023/24**

- 7.1 The project brought much needed stability to the Birth to Three sector in Highland by bringing in trained and experienced Gaelic speakers to provide, structure, sustainability and increasing numbers transferring to GME
- 7.2 The dependency on year-to-year BnaG Gaelic Language Act Funding, created several challenges for the project, as there was no certainty around both the continued receipt of funding and the level of funding which might be awarded.
- 7.3 This uncertainty created a risk-factor for the Project and its staff which in turn affected both staff retention and recruitment.
- 7.4 In 2022, BnaG and The Highland Council agreed that CALA would remain a partner providing membership and training support however CALA would no longer be the employer of the staff.

## **8 National View**

- 8.1 Across Scotland the Gaelic Birth to Three sector receives support to varying degrees and with differing arrangements in place. The Highland area has the largest provision of Gaelic Parant is Pàisde groups in Scotland.

## 8.2 Next Steps.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig have recently commissioned a report which will include national research to evaluate the current variety of models of support for the sector. The report will make recommendations for this important sector going forward. This overview and comparison of current delivery models includes areas where there no officers, the CALA and HC project, other local authority posts supported by BnaG, an evaluation of the Comann nam Parant pilot, and examples of successful 0 to 3 models from other countries with minority language provision. Resource implications required to take forward the recommendations will also be detailed.

The recommendations and outcomes from this research being undertaken by Professor Wilson Macleod and are expected by the end of October 2023.

Designation: ECO Performance and Governance

Date: August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023

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Background Papers:

Appendices: