

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 8 December 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr I Brown	Mr D Millar (remote)
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Mr C Munro
Ms S Fanet (remote)	Ms L Niven (remote)
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Mr P Logue (remote)	

Non-Member also present:

Mr J Finlayson

In attendance:

Mr D Brown, Chief Executive
Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager
Ms M A MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer
Ms E Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer
Mr R MacKay, Development Officer, Education and Learning (remote)
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager (remote)
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr D Mackenzie, Skills Development Scotland

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

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr C Aitken, Ms M Nolan and Mr R Stewart.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 7 – Mr C Munro

3. Good News

A presentation was shared with the Committee and the Chair conveyed the following items of good news:-

- Duolingo was now available on all the Highland Council's chromebooks/Devices;
- Royal National mod success for Highland pupils were reported;
- Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar Eco School success – Primary 4/5 had worked hard to achieve Green Flag status for the school at the end of last session;
- Culturlann success – the Gaelic Cultural Centre had opened after the purchase of the East Church in Inverness;
- Sgioba na Gàidhlig were developing a training course for Gaelic Committee Councillors initially which would then be rolled out across the Council;
- Siuthad 2023 – jointly delivered by Skills Development Scotland and the Highland Council, over 120 pupils attended the GME Careers event, travelling from 7 Secondary schools across Highland;
- Gaelic Medium Education information sessions for parents had been held in Tain and Dingwall;
- Facal's Fearran place names project – Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig PR, Sgoil Stàfain and Àrd-sgoil PR;
- Spòrs Gàidhlig Outdoors event with Gairloch High School;
- Island Communities Impact assessment – Highland Council had developed a template to consider the impact of future developments on Island communities;
- SMO@50 – a concert to mark the event had taken place on 1 December 2023;
- An Deasbad Nàiseanta – congratulations were extended to Portree High School; and
- an attractive new Gaelic interpretation panel had been erected at the Hydro Ness scheme on the River Ness to improve Gaelic representation at the site. One side of the panel provided information about the river and its associated place-names, and the other provided Gaelic words and phrases connected with rivers.

Members applauded the fantastic activities, successes and achievements taking place. This demonstrated the work the Council was doing as part of Gaelic Language Plan 4 and the positive impact it was having for young people and communities. In regard to Duolingo, 1.5 million people were now learning Gaelic on Duolingo since it had been launched and this was to be warmly welcomed.

4. Presentation – Skills Development Scotland: Gaelic Skills Pathways and Career Opportunities

Mr D MacKenzie, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) gave a presentation to the Committee on Gaelic Skills Pathways and Career Opportunities during which it was explained that SDS were currently on its third edition of its Gaelic Language Plan, building on its previous editions. SDS actively promoted Gaelic Career pathways and promoted Gaelic in the workplace through various means, but particular mention was made of Siuthad 2023 – a Gaelic Careers event now in its tenth year. The aim of Siuthad was to encourage pupils to continue studying Gaelic and to show the range of

rewarding careers available. This was augmented by a YouTube video highlighting Siuthad 2023's success.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Mr MacKenzie was thanked for his interesting and informative presentation which had demonstrated excellent partnership working;
- it was good to see the wide range of organisations coming together to promote Gaelic;
- while aware of the opportunities that were available, it was important to also highlight those careers which might not be Gaelic focused, such as plumbers, joiners etc, to show Gaelic was present in everyday work. In response, it was confirmed that those involved in healthcare and Police Officers had presented to Siuthad to highlight the ability to use Gaelic on a day-to-day basis;
- it was queried, and confirmed, that job vacancies were advertised at Siuthad 2023; and
- when expanding services, it was suggested that when people needed support with healthcare, it was often easier for them to discuss issues in their native tongue.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. **Siuthad! Go On! – Gaelic Careers Event 2023**

There had been circulated Report No. G/18/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

Following on from the above, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report and their support of the Siuthad! Event; and
- ii. **AGREED** to continue to encourage and promote all Secondary schools in Highland who delivered Gaelic curriculum pathways to attend the event.

6. **Performance against Gaelic Language Plan 3 (GLP3)**

There had been circulated Report No. G/19/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

The report highlighted the good news as to how Highland Council was performing and, again, the excellent work of the Council in promoting Gaelic and implementing the aims of the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. However, the Council was only a month away from the launch of Gaelic Language Plan 4 (GLP4) and it was widely recognised that Highland Council was the leading Council in terms of per capita funding for Gaelic Medium Education. Consequently, some response from Bòrd na Gàidhlig would be welcomed as would an indication as to how they proposed to help the Council put GLP4 in place. GLP4 was a strong plan but some certainty from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as to when it would be accepted would be appreciated.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the report.

7. **BLAS Festival 2023**

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro declared a connection to this item as a trustee of a venue which hosted two Fèis BLAS events and as a family member

had appeared in one of these events but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. G/20/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was good to see BLAS continuing and that, over the years, it had gone from strength to strength. However, it was important that Fèis BLAS were promoted throughout Highland and it was reassuring that some of the artists went into local schools during the event;
- hosting an event benefited a community and it was queried as to the process to achieve that. However, it was explained that there were various factors including artist availability, if halls were appropriate and available funding. Events were also available online; and
- Members were encouraged to attend BLAS events and to witness the high quality of performances.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

8. Gaelic Education Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/21/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed around Croileagan Inbhir Pheofharain. The Council had an obligation to promote Gaelic but it was contended that it was failing to do so in Dingwall at present. Croileagan Inbhir Pheofharain had been established over 30 years ago and it had very much been a community effort. It was disappointing therefore that its premises could not be used and the children had been relocated elsewhere but to units where there was no total immersion of Gaelic. It was feared therefore that their language skills would be interrupted. In response, it was confirmed that the Council was in the process of recruiting two early years practitioners. However, in the interim, it was important to meet the Care Commission's standards and work was on-going to make the necessary changes to the building. As a result, initially the early years practitioners would have to work peripatetically. Nevertheless, the Council recognised the importance to ensure there was a streamlined pathway for 3-18 Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in Dingwall. It was important that Members and parents were kept informed of progress of re-establishing the Croileagan back in its premises and officers were working hard to have this up-and-running as soon as possible;
- it was important to appreciate that introducing Gaelic in the early years would encounter challenges and therefore cognisance was needed to take measure of them in order to support communities. Sustainability was important and was a focus of GLP4;
- Members were looking forward to the 3–18 GME Provision feasibility study for Inverness with the final report expected in February 2024; and
- in November 2023, the Council had received a request from parents for GME Primary Education in Lochaline. In line with statutory guidance an initial assessment was to be carried out with the Gaelic Committee being updated of progress at future meetings. This reflected the great efforts of individuals who

had worked hard to promote Gaelic and to ensure it had a presence in the area. The provision of GME in Lochaline had the potential to bring more children to the school but the availability of housing in the area was proving to be a challenge. GME provision would be a good opportunity to address the situation.

At this point the Chief Executive addressed the Committee, speaking in both Gaelic and English, where he emphasised the importance of the language to the economy of the Highlands.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the interim update on the Inverness 3-18 Gaelic Education Feasibility Study; and
- ii. the catchment consultation process and update for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Dingwall and Nairn Gaelic Medium provisions.

9. Gaelic Plan Fund and GLP Outcomes

There had been circulated Report No. G/22/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Gaelic Plans Fund had replaced what had previously been known as the Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund (GLAIF). These projects were important as it supported the other work the Council did in delivering opportunities to children and families and offering the opportunity for exposure to Gaelic;
- there were challenges and opportunities facing the Council in regard to how it supported GME. Funding was important but the Council could only deliver on projects where resources, such as staff, were available;
- these projects highlighted the additionality and what could be done in partnership with communities;
- Gaelic learners needed to be able to speak the language on a daily basis to progress and it was suggested that Corporate Communications could consider having a Gaelic Word of the Day; and
- Gaelic learners were keeping the language alive and it was hoped that when pupils left 3-18 GME they continued to speak Gaelic.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm