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| Agenda Item | 8 |
| Report No | G/12/24 |

The Highland Council

Committee: Gaelic Committee

Date: 4 September 2024

Report Title: Bilingual Policy Update

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Committee on progress regarding The Highland Council's refreshed bilingual policy, entitled: *The Highland Council Guidelines for Bilingual (Gaelic and English) Signage and Other Texts*.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. discuss and note the work that has been undertaken in relation to the bilingual policy refresh and the proposed next steps ahead of its relaunch.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

The resource implications are within the current main budget stream which includes core Council budget and Gaelic Specific Grant.

3.2 Legal

The Highland Council has a requirement to implement its Gaelic Language Plan under Section 3 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005.

3.3 Risk

It is important that the Council has clear, up-to-date, and user-friendly bilingual policy guidance to enable compliance, and to ensure implementation of *The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 2024–2029*, as well as the *National Gaelic Language Plan 2023–28*.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)
None.

- 3.5 Gaelic
This report has positive implications regarding the preservation and development of Gaelic language and culture, as the bilingual policy ensures Gaelic has a visual presence on road, street and building signage across the Highland area, as well as in print and publications, and in other contexts.

4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 Integrated Impact Assessment – Summary

- 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening of the revised bilingual policy is due to be undertaken and its conclusions will be reported to a future meeting of the Gaelic Committee.

5. Overview of the Bilingual Policy Refresh

- 5.1 As part of its Gaelic Language Plan commitments, The Highland Council has undertaken to support the Gaelic language by raising its visual profile across the area. This includes continued commitments to bilingual signage and use of bilingual text in print and publications. *Guidelines on bilingual signage for Highland Council staff and additional Guidance for the use of Gaelic* was produced in 2010 and is currently available on the Council's intranet.

o [Guidelines on bilingual signage for Highland Council staff](#)

- 5.2 This document has been refreshed and renamed *The Highland Council Guidelines for Bilingual (Gaelic and English) Signage and Other Texts*. A previous report to the Gaelic Committee detailed proposed amendments and additions to the policy. These were approved by the Committee and subsequently incorporated into the document, which has been streamlined and contains clearly presented sections addressing Road Signage, Street Signage, Building Signage, and Print and Publications. Following the required Integrated Impact Assessment process (detailed at Sub-heading 4), the document will be redesigned into an attractive and user-friendly format by the Council's graphic designer. The refreshed Guidelines will complement *The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 2024–2029* (GLP) and will be relaunched as soon as possible following publication of the final graphic designed GLP.
- 5.3 The refreshed Guidelines contain various procedural amendments. Contact details have been updated, with email addresses replacing telephone numbers. References have been aligned with *The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 2024–2029* and the *National Gaelic Language Plan 2023–28*. Some practical points have been added to strengthen the policy and to reflect current practice.

Particular emphasis has been placed on the requirement to send sign templates back to the Council's Gaelic Translation Service for proof-reading prior to manufacture, thus ensuring that there are no errors or typos. This should protect against negative publicity and replacement costs.

6. Gaelic Language Plan – Corporate Service Aims

6.1 *The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 2024–2029 (GLP)* was approved by Bòrd na Gàidhlig in May 2024 and includes a section on corporate service aims. The corporate service aims are used with the intention of standardising key Gaelic services across the public sector, and Bòrd na Gàidhlig would like to see all public authorities achieve these through time. Each separate corporate service aim contains a desired outcome which is provided by Bòrd na Gàidhlig within their GLP template.

6.2 As the first public authority to have its Gaelic Language Plan approved by Bòrd na Gàidhlig (in 2008), The Highland Council has long-established commitments to the language across all of its services. Many of these desired outcomes are already being fulfilled by adhering to the policy document, *Guidelines on bilingual signage for Highland Council staff and additional Guidance for the use of Gaelic*. The commitments within the refreshed Guidelines will be in alignment with the commitments of the latest iteration of the GLP.

7. New and Novel Technologies

7.1 New and novel technologies such as translation software and artificial intelligence (AI) are developing rapidly worldwide. It is acknowledged that these new technologies have the potential to yield positive implications for Gaelic and could streamline workflows and increase efficiency. However, it should also be acknowledged that there are limitations to their use, particularly regarding contextual understanding, language complexity, cultural sensitivity, creativity and interpretation. This has recently been demonstrated by poor machine-translations of literature into languages including Gaelic, raising serious concerns in the publishing world. Whilst AI may be useful in providing the 'gist' of text, it cannot replace a professional translator and should not be relied upon for official texts.

7.2 It is intended that a section on emerging technologies and AI will be drafted for inclusion within the refreshed policy, which will state that there is a requirement to ensure the accuracy of translations by using the Council's in-house Gaelic Translation Service. This will help to ensure that statutory obligations surrounding the accuracy and consistency of Gaelic translations are adhered to.

8. Road Signage Policy

8.1 The Policy on the Use of Bilingual Traffic Signs is also currently under development. The policy will state that bilingual signs will be used for all new road signs, subject to stated exceptions. The only instances where exceptions to a bilingual sign will be considered are:

- where road safety is compromised; and
- where there are disproportionate practical implications (such as lack of available land for larger foundations).

8.2 A formal process for these occurrences is being developed, and will ensure that a robust assessment and consultation will be undertaken to determine that Gaelic is

only excluded in the stated exceptions. Following this, the Head of Roads Service will confirm the recommended design, and the decision will then be referred to the relevant ward business meeting for local members' comments.

The refreshed Guidelines will include a reference to the Policy on the Use of Bilingual Traffic Signs.

9. Dissemination

9.1 The refreshed document will provide opportunities to reinforce the bilingual policy – which is very much a cross-service policy – throughout the Council. This is essential for raising staff awareness of the Council's legal duties under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and will be useful to refer to at staff inductions and refresher training.

9.2 Following successful completion of the Integrated Impact Assessment, the refreshed and redesigned policy will be published on the Council's website and promoted across the Council's services.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance

Date: 16.08.24

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Background Papers:

Appendices: