

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
GAELIC COMMITTEE – 21 MAY 2009

Agenda Item	6.
Report No	G/17/09

Local Mods

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service

Summary

At the meeting of the Gaelic Committee in August 2008 a report was requested covering the Local Mods held within the Highland Council area. This paper outlines the current situation regarding the Local Mods and the aspirations of An Comunn Gàidhealach, the overall umbrella body, for their future sustainability and expansion.

Key Points: Of the 20 Local Mods which take place across Scotland every year, 8 take place within the Highland Council area. In common with the pattern across the country some of these are more successful than others.

An Comunn Gaidhealach, the umbrella body organising the Royal National Mod, and supporting the Local Mods via Development Officers acknowledge a situation where numbers of participants are declining. Key difficulties include securing volunteers to form local management committees.

An Comunn's aspirations for the Local Mods, as important foundations for the National Mod, include greater support and monitoring as well as consideration of the Local Mod format, perhaps to enhance the range of competitions to widen the appeal and participation, particularly amongst the young.

1. Background

- 1.1 With the revival of an event in Aberdeen, there are currently 21 Local Mods taking place across Scotland every year. Of these 8 take place within the Highland Council area. In common with the pattern across the country some of these are more successful than others.
- 1.2 The Local Mods are primarily organised and run by Local Committees, under the overall umbrella of An Comunn Gàidhealach, who also organise the Royal National Mod.
- 1.3 Over recent years, for reasons which are difficult to pinpoint exactly, participation at Local Mods has been declining. There are a range of possible contributory factors which may be well understood by Members, including: difficulties in retaining active and enthusiastic local organisers in some locations; fund-raising difficulties; 'competition' from other events and attractions; a format of competitions which might benefit from some rejuvenation; possibly, over a longer timescale, the decline of Gaelic-speaking populations.

- 1.4 Quite apart from being important in their own right, the Local Mods play an important 'feeder' role for the Royal National Mod. They provide an opportunity for competitors to air their test pieces as well as allowing competition organisers, stewards and judges to develop their own experience and abilities. For the benefit of the National event it is important that they can be sustained and developed.
- 1.5 The list of Local Mods within the Highland Council area is: Sutherland & Caithness; Easter Ross; Inverness; Lochaber; Ardnamurchan; South West Ross; Skye; and Wester Ross.
- 1.6 Highland Council has provided some modest support towards Local Mods over a number of years. Channelled through An Comunn Gàidhealach, this sum of ca. £8300/annum is intended to assist with the core costs of running Local Mods in the Highland Council area. It is also the case that in some instances Council premises, such as schools and halls will be made available to Local Mod organisers.
- 1.7 An Comunn Gàidhealach also provide administrative and organisational support for the Local Mods through Development Officers, based in Inverness, Stornoway and Oban.
- 1.8 Comparisons are often drawn between the situation facing Local Mods and the rapid and continued growth of the Fèisean movement. While the growth of the Fèisean certainly does highlight the extremely strong interest in Gaelic and traditional music in the Highlands and across Scotland it is not necessarily the best comparator. The fundamental nature of the Local Mods as competitions, where the bulk of entrants require some Gaelic language ability means that the potential pool of people able to access the events is significantly smaller than those able to more easily access the Fèisean.

2. Future Sustainability and Development

- 2.1 Although the picture in recent years has been of some decline there are reasons to be optimistic that the fundamental 'landscape' of Gaelic development is changing and that more vibrant and popular Local Mods could be delivered. Initiatives such as the new Gaelic Digital TV Channel; the approval of the Gaelic Language Act, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the availability of funding; and the steady growth of Gaelic Medium Education all point to a stronger foundation upon which enhanced Local Mods and other events can be sustained.
- 2.2 An Comunn Gàidhealach acknowledge a situation where the Local Mods have not been the focus of attention. Ensuring the growth and survival of the Royal National Mod has been a priority within the last decade or so, with the result that there has been less of a focus on the local events.
- 2.3 An Comunn say they have always recognised the significance of the Local Mods, but are now in a position where they are able to consider a more focussed approach to their development, addressing issues such as:

- Changing the ‘usual’ timing of events from Autumn to the end of the summer term to make it easier for school groups to participate:
- Considering a wider range of events and competitions, such as traditional or contemporary music events;
- Providing greater support to local committees to encourage recruitment of organisers;
- Offering greater assistance towards fund-raising, highlighting best practice such as commercial sponsorship in order to boost Local Mod profiles and participation
- Assistance in securing and developing judges for Local Mod events

3. Opportunities for Highland Council support.

- 3.1 Members will be aware that discussions are underway with An Comunn Gàidhealach on the future of support for the Royal National Mod within the Highland Council area. These discussions are at an advanced stage and it is hoped they can be concluded very shortly. These discussions will include consideration of Local Mods and any aspirations The Highland Council may have for their development and growth.
- 3.2 Other commitments that may prove useful in achieving the sustainability of Local Mods could include: a more consistent approach to the availability of Council premises for Mod events; a greater priority being afforded to Local Mod participation within the Council’s schools, for example using existing music tutors within the school system to encourage and assist pupils prepare for competitions; providing modest financial support to schools to allow pupils to attend Local Mods – for example covering or subsidising the cost of transport to Mod venues if this is required. These suggestions would be relatively easy to implement.
- 3.3 It should be noted that the Council did apply to Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in association with An Comunn Gàidhealach, for GLAIF funding towards the costs of Local Mod development. This was rejected by Bòrd na Gàidhlig on the basis of duplication – in that they already provide funding to An Comunn for this purpose.
- 3.4 In many localities, as highlighted above, local Fèisean have sprung up over recent years. While there may be some tensions between the more traditional approach of the Local Mods and the Fèisean there may also be opportunities for mutually-beneficial co-operation worth exploring and it may be that Council staff could seek to broker such discussions.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 Members are asked to note the comments of this report, including the suggestions made about ways in which the Council could continue or enhance its support towards Local Mods.
- 4.2 Thereafter Members are invited to endorse this approach, approving Officers to seek ways in which Local Mods can be supported, or making further recommendations in this vein.

Signature:

Designation: Director, Education, Culture and Sport Service

Date: 11 May 2009

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Ref: HF/DM

Background Papers