

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**GAELIC COMMITTEE**

**12<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2009**

Agenda Item	3.
Report No	G/06/09

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S DRAFT GAELIC LANGUAGE PLAN**

**Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service**

**Summary**

This report provides information to Members on the publication of the Scottish Government's Draft Gaelic Language Plan. This is now being consulted on, with the deadline for responses being 29<sup>th</sup> April.

Attached as an appendix to this report is a draft of The Highland Council's response to the consultation exercise.

Members are invited to consider and make recommendations on the proposed response to the Government's Draft Gaelic Language Plan.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Scottish Government (SG) was notified by Bòrd na Gàidhlig August 2006 of the requirement to prepare a statutory Gaelic Language Plan, and was asked to submit a draft of this Plan to the Bòrd for approval during June 2009.
- 1.2 The SG launched its Draft Gaelic Language Plan for consultation on January 29th 2009 and are inviting written responses by 29 April 2009.
- 1.3 The draft SG Gaelic Language Plan runs to some 110 pages and is therefore not appropriate for inclusion within this paper. Copies of the document have been made available in the Members' Library.

**2. Summary of The Highland Council's Response and Conclusions**

- 2.1 The summary and Conclusions of the Highland Council's proposed response to the SG Draft Gaelic Language Plan follows. The full response is attached to this paper as Appendix 1.

**2.2 Response Summary**

The Highland Council warmly welcomes the publication of the Scottish Government's draft Gaelic Language Plan (SG GLP). It is apparent that such a Plan, by a national Government, has the real potential to significantly support and enhance Gaelic development efforts across a number of fronts.

There are potentially areas within the draft Plan which could be enhanced in order to maximise the opportunities for Gaelic promotion and development.

In a number of instances it is suggested that the SG GLP could benefit from consideration and application of more 'specific' content, in particular to set out measurable targets and outputs and to remove the potential for inconsistencies of approach and delivery. One important example would be with regard to the principle of 'equal respect' for signage and corporate identity.

This Plan should be used to influence the outputs and activities of the whole range of public bodies throughout Scotland which are funded and controlled by the Scottish Government. In this way the Plan can have a far greater impact than within the Scottish Government as a corporate body. Of key importance in this regard are bodies with significant potential to address elements of the National Plan for Gaelic – such as Transport Scotland, where more bilingual signage can raise the visual profile of the language; or those involved in education, where substantial additional effort is required to recruit more Gaelic-speaking teachers.

The commitment to using the Plan as a 'yardstick' against which new policies, developed across Scotland, can be measured for their impact on the language is important and needs to be properly and widely implemented

Finally, that Gaelic Plans themselves are only a means to an end and that adequate resources, both staff and finance, needs to be made available to ensure their full and successful implementation.

### 2.3 Response conclusions

The Highland Council warmly welcomes the publication of the Scottish Government's Draft Gaelic Language Plan. The Council believes that the measures contained within the draft Plan have the potential to significantly move forward the development of the language.

The Council's response contains a number of recommendations and comments intended to enhance the final version of the Plan. The Council looks forward to the publication of this document and to working alongside the Government and other bodies to help secure the future of Gaelic.

### 3. Recommendation

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider and comment upon the proposed Highland Council response to the Scottish Government's Draft Gaelic Language Plan.
- 3.2 Members are asked to suggest any changes or amendments to the Highland Council response and to approve the response for submission thereafter.

Signature:

Designation: Director, Education, Culture and Sport Service

Date: 26 February 2009

Author: Donald MacNeill, Gaelic Development Manager

Ref: HF/DM

Background Papers:

## The Highland Council

### DRAFT Response

#### Consultation on the Scottish Government Draft Gaelic Language Plan

##### **Introduction:**

This document represents The Highland Council's response to the Scottish Government's Draft Gaelic Language Plan, published for consultation on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

The document will include an overall summary of the Council's response; answers to the specified questions; and a more general submission as provided for in question/section 4.2. Finally the required Respondent Information Form will be appended.

##### **Response summary:**

The Highland Council warmly welcomes the publication of the Scottish Government's draft Gaelic Language Plan (SG GLP). It is apparent that such a Plan, by a national Government, has the real potential to significantly support and enhance Gaelic development efforts across a number of fronts.

However we believe that there are a number of ways in which the draft Plan could be enhanced in order to maximise the opportunities for Gaelic promotion and development.

In a number of instances we believe the SG GLP would benefit from consideration and application of more 'specific' content, in particular to set out measurable targets and outputs and to remove the potential for inconsistencies of approach and delivery. One important example would be with regard to the principle of 'equal respect' for signage and corporate identity.

We firmly believe that this Plan must be used to influence the outputs and activities of the whole range of public bodies throughout Scotland which are funded and controlled by the Scottish Government. In this way the Plan can have a far greater impact than within the Scottish Government as a corporate body. Of key importance in this regard are bodies with significant potential to address elements of the National Plan for Gaelic – such as Transport Scotland, where more bilingual signage can raise the visual profile of the language; or those involved in education, where substantial additional effort is required to recruit more Gaelic-speaking teachers.

The Council believes that the commitment to using the Plan as a 'yardstick' against which new policies, developed across Scotland, can be measured for their impact on the language is important and needs to be properly and widely implemented

Finally, that Gaelic Plans themselves are only a means to an end and that adequate resources, both staff and finance, needs to be made available to ensure their full and successful implementation.

Scottish Government - Consultation Questions:  
**(using consultation document numbering for ease of reference)**

4.3.1 Identity: Are you content with the commitments in the Scottish Government's Plan?

We support the comments in the Draft Plan underlining the importance of placing Gaelic within the corporate identity of a public authority, for logos, letterheads, signage etc. However the Plan does not explicitly specify the means in which this should be done.

The key principle adopted by The Highland Council is one of 'equal respect' for Gaelic and English, where both languages are afforded equal font size and design prominence or impact, this latter point encapsulating issues such as capitalisation and colour.

We believe the SG GLP should be specific on these issues as experience suggests leaving such things open to interpretation can lead to significant variations in practice, and inconsistencies in approach.

In this section the SG GLP states: "we will audit all electronic templates used by the SG and *advise on opportunities* for bilingual use."; and, "We will *develop guidance* for staff on the use of....." (our italics). We believe that this section would benefit from specific recommendations in order to achieve consistency, and measurable targets or outputs in order to ensure progress.

The comments made above on the use of Gaelic on signage apply equally here, i.e. that specific guidance be given towards equal status and design prominence in order to achieve consistency.

Signage is critically important to raise the profile of Gaelic across Scotland and the Government's commitments here are to be particularly welcomed. However this is also one area where the Government could use its influence or direction of other public sector bodies to good effect, recommending them to follow a similar course of action. The potential this offers to place Gaelic before the Scottish population should not be underestimated.

4.3.2 Communications: Are you content with the commitments in the Scottish Government's Plan?

This section of the SG GLP contains a number of well set-out principles and action points which are to be welcomed, increasing the availability and mainstreaming of communicating with the Scottish Government in

Gaelic. There are only a number of relatively minor points upon which we would comment.

With regard to forms, consideration could be given to specific, achievable targets in this section, perhaps outlining how many forms would be made available bilingually within a given timescale or within the lifetime of the Plan. In addition the 'increased visibility' of Gaelic on forms ought to be done in accordance with the principles set out above of equal respect and prominence.

#### 4.3.3 Publications: Are you content with the commitments in the Scottish Government's Plan?

In general terms we welcome the contents of this section as again underpinning the increased profile and mainstreaming of Gaelic within the daily activities of the Scottish Government.

We particularly welcome the commitment to the use and place of Gaelic in dealing with issues and publications relating to "matters of national importance" and where material is to be "distributed to all households via pamphlets or leaflets." If applied properly and consistently this has real potential to increase the profile of Gaelic at a national level.

The SG GLP states: "We will increase the use of Gaelic in SG advertising and marketing campaigns." This also applies to the section on exhibitions. We would suggest that this commitment ought to be better defined and more specific. There is a risk that 'increased use' of Gaelic, if improperly done, would cast Gaelic in the role of a secondary language, or would be open to claims of tokenism. As above, if the principles of equal respect and design prominence are adhered to, then this risk is mitigated.

Further, within the section on exhibitions the SG GLP states that consideration will be given to the use of Gaelic for topics of "particular interest to those living within an area or areas where Gaelic is more prominent." We would suggest that a wide interpretation be given to the sort of topics that may be of 'particular interest', to include for example: transport, tourism, technologies, environment, agriculture, forestry and fishing.

#### 4.3.4 Staffing: Are you content with the commitments in the Scottish Government's Plan?

The draft Plan recognises the importance of adequate staff resources towards proper implementation and this is to be welcomed. Experience suggests that it is possible to underestimate the requirement for adequate staffing in order to fully implement such a Plan, and to properly support other staff and departments in this process. Perhaps this will become most evident when the Government seeks to influence the outputs and activities of other public bodies under the terms of this

Plan. Without adequate staffing it will be difficult to have the required impact.

The draft Plan repeats here the statement given in the Communications section, that Gaelic awareness training will be made available to 'front of house' staff. While this is clearly essential in the context of the communications section of the Plan, we would also suggest that such training be provided to senior staff and management on a systematic basis. This will provide them with a greater understanding of the Gaelic language and culture and help to underline why significant development efforts are necessary. Experience suggests that it should not be taken for granted that such awareness exists.

It ought to be easier to fully and adequately implement a Gaelic Language Plan if decision-makers within the organisation better understand the overall context and requirements.

We welcome the extended opportunities that will be provided to staff to learn Gaelic.

4.4.1 General: Is there any aspect of our work that you feel is not covered in our Plan that should be?

The policy commitments and activities of the SG are carried out at its own hand and via a wide range of agencies, public bodies (NDPB's), task forces, and Local Authorities via the SOAs. As such there is no more directly influential body in Scotland. This means that the SG GLP presents an exciting opportunity for the further and future development of Scotland's oldest indigenous language.

To achieve the maximum impact therefore, such a Plan must be visionary and robust. It must also be especially detailed as it is very likely to be viewed as a template by the range of public bodies and agencies outlined above if and when they are required to produce their own Plans.

It must represent a strong statement of what is possible to achieve, and truly establish the development of Gaelic as a national priority.

The measures and principles underpinning the Plan should also be used directly when negotiating output agreements and targets with the range of public bodies outlined above and we welcome the recognition given to this opportunity in several instances within the Draft Plan. These opportunities must not be missed.

In relation to this last point, The Highland Council wishes to highlight the following opportunities as examples where such direction and focus could assist with the further development of Gaelic and the raising of its' national profile:

Transport Scotland: The Council unequivocally welcomes the work undertaken by Transport Scotland in implementing the current trunk

road bilingual signage policy (referred to on pages 74 & 75 of the draft Plan). This has served to significantly raise the profile of written Gaelic for many people and we now believe that early consideration be given to the expansion of this programme.

All the NDPBs must be made aware of the SG Gaelic Language Plan with particular reference to the functions they carry out or deliver on behalf of the Government.

Careers Scotland/Skills Development Scotland: should be included as they have both strategic and delivery functions in relation to developing training and marketing Gaelic/ related careers especially for school leavers.

Education bodies: There is little more fundamental to the overall development of the Gaelic language than the availability of adequately resourced education across the whole range of provision, from supporting families to secure intergenerational transmission through playgroup, pre-school nursery, primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education.

Particularly important at this stage is the promotion of teaching through the medium of Gaelic at both Primary and Secondary levels. This is essential to allow the optimal development of a range of Gaelic careers, e.g., Education Support Staff, Corporate Administrators, Managers, Translators, Creative Industries and Linguists etc. A proactive approach is vital in order to convince young people across Scotland that a high-quality career in Gaelic is a viable option, and that Gaelic is a positive asset.

We believe the Scottish Government should consider further action, in terms of teacher recruitment. It is evident that there is a 'market failure' in the recruitment and retention of Gaelic medium teachers. Current financial and policy structures are not addressing this issue sufficiently rapidly and specific action is now needed, such as considering enhanced rewards packages for Gaelic teachers. If necessary this would need addressed with education unions, and the Highland Council would be prepared to support the Government in any such initiative.

#### 4.4.2 Do you think that Gaelic language plans are an effective means to promote the Gaelic Language?

Language Plans are an effective way to promote the Gaelic language, as the process requires organisations to consider the requirements of the language and to identify ways in which they can contribute to the development effort. However Language Plans of themselves are only one part of the equation with the availability of adequate financial and staff resources being just as important.

Organisations developing Plans must not be left in isolation as this is likely to be seen as a challenging concept to many. The level of

support being provided by Bòrd na Gàidhlig must, as a minimum, be maintained at current levels and ideally enhanced.

#### 4.4.3 Do you think that Gaelic language plans are an effective means to secure the future of the Gaelic Language?

Gaelic language plans have the potential to be significant tools in the effort to secure the future of the language. They will be effective only if:

- the right range of bodies are targeted
- co-operation between bodies on joint actions and activities is encouraged
- the targets which are set within the specific timescales are achievable but also suitably far-reaching and challenging
- all services, departments, divisions and units are informed about, understand, and are given guidance as to how the Plans can be implemented
- organisations take 'ownership' of their plans
- staff receive training
- there is an national Gaelic infrastructure and a pathway for Gaelic development
- the SG takes a lead role nationally
- appropriate resources are made available
- they are sustainable and developed through out future years

However care needs to be taken to ensure that the development of Plans in themselves does not over-shadow the need to raise the profile of Gaelic throughout Scotland, and to encourage everyone to value the language.

#### 4.4.4 Are there any benefits from the promotion of the language that you feel have not been covered and would like included in our Plan?

A revitalised Gaelic language has the potential to significantly benefit Scotland both economically and culturally.

In an economic sense it is a 'unique selling point' that can be used to market the country to visitors and investors. In a cultural sense it can contribute to a greater sense of national identity and pride.

#### **Response conclusions:**

The Highland Council warmly welcomes the publication of the Scottish Government's Draft Gaelic Language Plan. The Council believes that the

measures contained within the draft Plan have the potential to significantly move forward the development of the language.

The Council's response contains a number of recommendations and comments intended to enhance the final version of the Plan. The Council looks forward to the publication of this document and to working alongside the Government and other bodies to help secure the future of Gaelic.