

**Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd  
The Highland Council**

**Buidheann Buileachaidh na Gàidhlig 11 Lùnastal 2016  
Gaelic Implementation Group 11 August 2016**

Agenda Item	<b>6</b>
Report No	<b>GIG 11/16</b>

**A Fairer Deal for BBC ALBA BBC Royal Charter Review Scottish Gaelic Broadcasting**

**Report by the Director of Care and Learning**

**Summary**

This report asks Members to homologate the response that the Highland Council submitted to the UK Government Public Consultation on the BBC Royal Charter Review; specifically the section relating to Scottish Gaelic Broadcasting.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 On June 22 2015, The Chief Executive of MG ALBA contacted the Chair of the Gaelic Implementation Group, and both the Chief Executive and the Director of Care and Learning in relation to submitting a response to the Director General of the BBC Lord Tony Hall and the Chair of the BBC Trust Rona Fairhead urging the BBC to ensure that under the new Charter audiences in Scotland get a fairer deal regarding the future of the BBC especially in relation to the case for supporting and developing Gaelic Broadcasting.
- 1.2 All responses had to be submitted to the Director General and the Chair of the BBC Trust by 15 July 2016

**2. Documents**

- 2.1 The UK Government will publish two draft documents which will set the framework for the BBC for the next 11 years:
  - The BBC Charter; and
  - BBC Agreement which is an agreement between Government and the BBC.

**3. Gaelic broadcasting**

- 3.1 The future of Gaelic broadcasting needs policy promises:
  - That there will be a BBC television channel and a BBC radio station in Gaelic;
  - That the Gaelic TV channel should be properly resourced, with the BBC showing parity of esteem for the two indigenous languages channels which it supports - BBC ALBA (Gaelic) and S4C (Wales);

- That the BBC will provide at least 10 hours per week of high quality programmes for BBC ALBA, just as it does for S4C; and
- That the BBC's funding of BBC ALBA will be a corporate commitment, and not a funding item to be found from BBC Scotland's already stretched budget.

#### **4 Response**

4.1 **Appendix 1** attached, is the response submitted by the Council Leader and the Chairperson of the Gaelic Implementation Group.

4.2 **Appendix 2** attached, is the response received from the Chairperson of the BBC Trust.

4.3 **Appendix 3** attached, is the response received from Lord Hall the Director General of the BBC Trust.

#### **5. Implications**

5.1 There are no implications associated with this report at present.

#### **Recommendation**

The Group is invited to:-

- (i) Agree to homologate the response at **Appendix 1**; and
- (ii) note the responses at **Appendix 2** received from the Chairperson of the BBC Trust and **Appendix 3** from Lord Hall the Director General of the BBC Trust.

**Designation:** Director of Care and Learning

**Date:** 27 July 2016

**Authors:** Morag Anna MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer



Director General of the BBC  
Lord Hall of Birkenhead  
BBC Audience Services  
PO Box 1922  
Darlington  
DL3 0UR

MD/MM

15 July 2016

Dear Lord Hall

**The BBC Royal Charter: BBC ALBA**

The Highland Council would like to take the opportunity to urge the BBC to ensure that under the new Charter audiences in Scotland get a fairer deal regarding the future of the BBC especially in relation to the case for supporting and developing Gaelic Broadcasting.

The Highland Council is one of the lead authorities in delivering Gaelic Medium Education, and also working in partnership within tertiary education to develop innovative extra-curricular programmes for young people through the medium of Gaelic to ensure that their Gaelic language skills are being utilised out-with the formal classroom and education system.

The Highland Council provide additional support and resources to the development of the Gaelic Media, Arts, Heritage and Culture which we view as crucial to supporting the linguistic development and promotion of the language as it embeds Gaelic within an extra-curricular platform and also within a modern digital context.

In relation to Gaelic broadcasting we acknowledge that BBC ALBA is currently achieving a great deal and delivers a good service within the context of the limited broadcasting hours and the resources available at their disposal, but, in order to support the strategic aims of the Highland Council in relation to Gaelic and cultural development, it is important that BBC ALBA fills the gaps in its service provision, especially in the areas of news, children's programming, drama and comedy - all of which are culturally and creatively important to our communities. We support the channel partners' ambition to increase the original output of BBC ALBA to 3 new hours of programming per day which would create opportunities to develop the talent base, and lead to increased levels of citizenship and a higher quality, more comprehensive service for Gaelic users in Scotland. Highland Council does liaise and work with other lesser used language and we realise that the Welsh language broadcaster S4C has 8 hours of original Welsh language hours each day and the Irish language

**Councillor Margaret Davidson**  
Leader of The Highland Council

The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX

broadcaster TG4 5 hours of original Irish programming each day, in comparison to the 1.9 original daily hours which BBC ALBA currently broadcasts.

In particular we believe that the BBC should commit to providing a minimum of 10 hours per week of Gaelic television programmes to BBC ALBA, a modest amount for a television channel but still a significant increase on the BBC's current contribution of around 4.2 hours per week. Highland Council strongly believes that a weekly investment of 10 hours per week of high quality programmes for the lifetime of the forthcoming Charter is both achievable and realistic. It compares with the current in-house contribution of BBC Wales to S4C. Every television channel has a minimum programming requirement, and the Gaelic channel BBC ALBA should be offered similar rights and opportunities as those afforded by the BBC to the Welsh language channel.

We are of the opinion if additional broadcasting hours were granted this could lead to increased quality news coverage, additional, attractive and appropriate programmes aimed at the many children and young people learning Gaelic which would produce direct benefits for the Highland area and the rest of Scotland as it would support the whole language learning landscape across all sectors.

### **Why a Fairer Deal for BBC ALBA**

The BBC's Annual Report 2014/15, details a licence fee income of £3.7billion based on the monthly licence fee is £12.13: 35p per month is spent on S4C, 6p on Radio Cymru and 3p on BBC ALBA and only 2p on BBC Radio nan Gaidheal. The shortfall for Gaelic Radio and Television requires to be addressed by a fairer proportion of the licence fee being allocated to Gaelic Broadcasting.

The Highland Council believes that Gaelic broadcasting requires more resources and investment in order to support the growing number of young Gaelic speakers. Research has shown that BBC ALBA has weekly reach among users of Gaelic of 74%, a national reach in Scotland of 15% and some 100k iPlayer views each week. Without investment this is unlikely to be sustainable.

If there was an increased investment it could go a long way to address the issues which affects the current programming on BBC ALBA, for example:

- over reliance on repeats
- lack of current affairs, news coverage at the weekend
- the need for a new and innovative programme schedule for children and the youth sector; and, finally
- from an education and expressive arts perspective there is a requirement to create a clear pathway for entertainment, learning and comedy as the range of programming in these sectors is limited.

**Councillor Margaret Davidson**  
Leader of The Highland Council

The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX

The Highland Council also realises the direct economic benefits relating to increasing the daily output as this would also support and assist in developing job opportunities in specific communities in the Highlands.

### **A policy commitment and funding not at the expense of BBC Scotland**

The Highland Council is of the opinion that the BBC's commitment to Gaelic should be explicit and include strategic aims and clear objectives within the new Charter and related Agreements. The commitment should be to a high quality Public Service Broadcasting Gaelic Television Channel and Radio Station which the BBC and Gaelic users are proud of, enjoying parity of esteem with the quality service which is currently being delivered by S4C in Wales. We strongly recommend that the new Charter and related Agreements are clear in their commitment and that the funding to ensure this is centrally allocated and is not at the expense of BBC Scotland's English language programming for audiences in Scotland, which is also a vital part of what the BBC does in the Highlands.

### **Creative sector**

The Highlands and Islands of Scotland are unique and it is therefore imperative to have productions from these areas which will initiate and support a creative critical talent pool that will produce alternative perspectives.

We believe that the BBC should actively seek to contribute to the growth of the creative industries sector through the existing networks within the Highlands and Islands and also be proactive in generating new partnerships with the existing organisations based within the area.

The rapid growth in media technologies offer huge opportunities for developing international audiences in relation to Gaelic broadcasting especially in Canada, America, Australia, and New Zealand, many of whom have a strong connection to the Highlands or an affinity with its music and culture.

The Highland Council is keen to stress the direct economic benefits relating to increasing the daily output and the level of new programming as these would assist in developing demand for new skills and consequently provide education, training, and employment opportunities in island, rural, and urban areas across the Highlands.

We recognise what BBC ALBA has achieved since its inception 8 years ago, but we stress that it is imperative that the forthcoming BBC Royal Charter takes due cognisance of the Gaelic language in relation to Gaelic broadcasting. A fairer deal is required for BBC ALBA, and with the BBC's commitment, the BBC and MG ALBA can build on the next stage of the channel's life confident in the knowledge of the esteem in which the BBC holds Gaelic broadcasting and the resources which it is prepared to commit to it.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to comment and request that you take our views on board. I would be happy to discuss further if that would be of assistance to you.

**Councillor Margaret Davidson**  
Leader of The Highland Council

The Highland Council, Glenurduhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX

Leis gach deagh dhùrachd – Best Wishes

Yours sincerely

Councillor Margaret Davidson  
**Leader of the Highland Council**

cc: Chair of the BBC Trust, Rona Fairhead

**Councillor Margaret Davidson**  
Leader of The Highland Council

The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX

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British Broadcasting Corporation  
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bbc.co.uk/bbctrust

**BBC** Trust

From the Chairman  
Rona Fairhead CBE

Councillor Margaret Davidson  
Leader  
The Highland Council  
Glenurquhart Road  
Inverness  
IV3 5NX

21 July 2016

Ref: 3930545

Thank you for your letter of 15 July setting out your concerns for increased funding for BBC Alba. It is very helpful to be made aware of your views.

The Trustees and I fully appreciate the important role that Gaelic broadcasting plays in supporting Scotland's cultural heritage and its economy. We are close to completing a review of the BBC's services for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and this includes the Gaelic services BBC Alba and Radio nan Gaidheal. This is based on a range of evidence from audiences in each nation, including many people who value the Gaelic services. We expect to report our review conclusions in August and can alert you to this if you wish.

We understand that you feel that the BBC has potential to do more with Gaelic broadcasting. However, I hope you will understand that the Chairman and the Trust are distinct from that of the BBC's management. The Trust's role is to set the overall framework for the BBC, including the Editorial Guidelines, but it has no involvement in day-to-day decision-making including the initial consideration of any changes to the funding levels of BBC services. These matters are for the BBC Executive Board, led by the Director-General.

I understand that you have also written the Director-General and that his office have arranged for a reply to be sent to you directly on behalf of the BBC, which you may have already received.

I hope this is helpful and thank you again for taking the time to write.

Rona Fairhead  
Chairman

Getting the best out of the BBC for licence fee payers



From the Director-General

18 July 2016

Councillor Margaret Davidson  
The Highland Council  
Glenurquhart Road  
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IV3 5NX

Dear Councillor Davidson,

Thank you for your letter.

I fully agree with you about the importance of the BBC's Gaelic language broadcasting, and the benefits it brings to audiences throughout Scotland.

Since its launch in 2008, BBC ALBA has gone from strength to strength and, together with MG ALBA, we're keen to ensure this continues into a new Charter period. As you may know, the weekly reach of BBC ALBA continues to grow among the Gaelic community, increasing from 72.6% in 2014/15 to 73.6% in 2015/16.

Implementation of the White Paper proposals is now well underway and we'll have more detail on how we intend to improve our overall service provision in Scotland later this year. The licence fee settlement, while welcome, does bring funding challenges which we'll have to take account of during our planning. I'll ensure you are kept informed of developments as the Charter process continues.

Thank you again for your letter, and for your support for BBC ALBA and our Gaelic language provision.

Best wishes,

Tony Hall  
Director-General