

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	4
Report No	G/6/25

Committee: Gaelic Committee

Date: 4 June 2025

Report Title: Update on the Scottish Languages Bill

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This is an update report on the Scottish Languages Bill, which can be viewed at www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/s6/scottish-languages-bill

1.2 This report provides information on preparatory work being undertaken by Highland Council ahead of the Bill receiving Royal Assent.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the report; and
- ii. Agree continued preparatory work to ensure Highland Council is able to respond to the new duties and opportunities presented by the Scottish Languages Bill.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

The Scottish Government provides funding to support both Gaelic and Scots. Scottish Government expenditure for Gaelic and Scots has remained relatively stable since 2010/11 with some increases for media, learning and Gaelic development throughout that time. The current 2023/24 budget for Gaelic and Scots is £29 million and is administered by the Gaelic and Scots Division, part of the Education Reform Directorate and wider Education and Skills portfolio.

The main impact of the Bill provisions is a shift in activity and a repurposing of resources in terms of effort and attention. The Scottish Government considers that provisions do not create wholly new costs or a requirement for wholly new spend.

The Scottish Government estimates that combined costs for Gaelic and Scots of the Bill provisions being introduced over a 5-year period is £694,500. This breaks down as follows:

Table 1 – Combined costs for Gaelic and Scots of Bill provisions (2024/25-2029/30)				
	Scottish Administration	Local Authorities	Other bodies, individuals or businesses	Total
Gaelic	76,500	323,000	120,000	519,500
Scots	47,000	128,000	-	175,000
Total	123,500	451,000	120,000	£694,500

Further detail is provided in the Scottish Languages Bill Financial Memorandum which is available at www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/s6-bills/scottish-languages-bill/introduced/financial-memorandum-accessible.pdf.

3.2 Legal

The Scottish Languages Bill will present Highland Council with a number of new statutory duties.

3.3 Risk

There are no risks associated with this update report.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)

No risks identified.

3.5 Gaelic

There are very positive implications regarding the preservation and development of the Gaelic language and culture across corporate, education and community sectors.

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 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Background: proposed Scottish Languages Bill

5.1 The Scottish Languages Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 29 November 2023.

The Bill gives the Gaelic and Scots languages official status in Scotland and makes changes to the support for the Gaelic and Scots languages in Scotland. This includes changes in relation to Gaelic and Scots education.

The Bill consists of three Parts as follows:

Part 1 Chapter 1 “Support for the Gaelic language” makes provision about the status of the Gaelic language and the functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as well as making provision about the functions of the Scottish Ministers and relevant public authorities in relation to Gaelic. It proposes the creation of a power to designate geographical areas as “areas of linguistic significance” and to give Scottish Ministers more powers to put duties on public bodies to promote, facilitate and support Gaelic.

Part 1 Chapter 2 “Education” makes provision to give Scottish Ministers the power to set standards and produce guidance for public authorities in relation to Gaelic education as well as requiring education authorities to support access to Gaelic medium education. This allows for differentiation between areas. There are various other proposed changes linked to Gaelic medium education covering:

- school transport.
- catchment areas.
- information-sharing.
- early learning and childcare.
- widening access to Gaelic education in further and higher education settings.

Part 2 Chapter 1 “Support for the Scots language” makes provision about the status of the Scots language, as well as making provision about the functions of the Scottish Ministers and relevant public authorities in relation to Scots.

Part 2 Chapter 2 “School education” makes provision about the functions of the Scottish Ministers and education authorities in relation to Scots language education in schools. This allows for differentiation between areas. This requires Scottish Ministers to promote and support Scots language education in schools and allows Scottish Ministers to produce guidance and set standards for education authorities relating to Scots language education in schools and receive progress reports from education authorities.

Part 3 is titled “Final provisions” and includes provision for ancillary powers and commencement.

5.2 On 22 January 2024 the Scottish Parliament announced a detailed call for views on the Scottish Languages Bill with a closing date of 8 March 2024.

Highland Council’s coordinated response combined submissions from both the Gaelic Committee and Education Committee Members as well as an internal workshop for the Gaelic Team.

6. Anticipated role of Highland Council

6.1 Local authorities will be expected to take a more strategic and proactive role in supporting Gaelic and Scots. This includes aligning local Gaelic Language Plans with national standards and strategic objectives set by Scottish Ministers.

- 6.2 The Bill introduces a new strategic approach to GME, aiming to address gaps and inconsistencies in provision across Scotland.
- 6.3 Local authorities will have the power to designate Areas of Linguistic Significance, in collaboration with Bòrd na Gàidhlig. These areas will allow for targeted delivery of Gaelic services and initiatives in communities with strong linguistic, educational, cultural or historical ties to Gaelic.
- 6.4 While Gaelic is a primary focus, the Bill also introduces measures to support Scots.

7. Preparatory work underway

- 7.2 The Bill has not yet received Royal Assent but preparatory work is underway to ensure Highland Council is able to respond effectively to the newly introduced duties.

Work thus far has included:

- Reviewing current [Highland Council 2024–29 Gaelic Language Plan](#) commitments.
- Reviewing census data to identify areas which would meet the evaluation standards for Areas of Linguistic Significance.
- Reviewing data relating to GME provision across Highland.
- Identifying services which could support the delivery of duties relating to the Bill.
- Scoping potential designation processes.
- Liaising with Scottish Government and other local authorities.

8. Next steps

- 8.1 Whilst the Bill is anticipated to receive Royal Assent in July 2025, the actual commencement date is not known at this point. Further direction from Scottish Government regarding the statutory duties from the Bill will inform planned engagement with community stakeholders following receipt of Royal Assent. The engagement period will allow for an informed approach with Highland communities. This will be key to the approach to determine the next steps.
- 8.2 Highland Council will monitor progress relating to the Bill and continue to liaise with Scottish Government officials in the Gaelic Unit. A further update will be provided to a future meeting of the Gaelic Committee.

Designation: Interim Chief Officer Early Years and Primary Education

Date: 17 May 2025

Author: Eoina Rodgers