

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	8.
Report No	EDU/22/25

Committee: Education

Date: 27 August 2025

Report Title: Scottish Languages Bill Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Scottish Languages Bill was passed on 17 June 2025. The Bill, as passed, is now available on Parliament's webpage [here](#). The Bill will now go through a process to seek and obtain Royal Assent.
- 1.2 The Bill for the first time grants both Gaelic and Scots languages official status in Scotland and aims to protect, promote and support the use of both languages in public life and education. Some of the key measures in the Bill include:
- New duties and powers related to Gaelic education.
 - Educational standards for Gaelic and Scots
 - Supporting the creation of Areas of Linguistic Significance (ALS) in Gaelic communities
 - Enabling parents in every part of Scotland to apply for Gaelic nursery and early years places for their children
 - Scottish Ministers must prepare a national Gaelic strategy
 - Ensuring that more qualifications are available in Gaelic
 - Introducing targets on the number of people speaking and learning Gaelic
- 1.3 This report outlines the key provisions of the Scottish Languages Bill and their implications for local authorities, with a particular focus on Gaelic education. It summarises the statutory duties introduced by the Bill, the strategic opportunities for Highland Council and the operational considerations required to support the implementation of the Bill.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note the report; and
 - ii. Agree the next steps outlined in section 9.

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 stated intention is to achieve a shift in activity and a repurposing of resources in terms of effort and attention. Consequently, 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.

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.

However, given the new legislation is intended to lead to new standards, expectations and provision of GME and GLE, as set out in more detail at section 7, there is certainly potential for it to put un-budgeted pressure on existing resources.

3.2 Legal

The Scottish Languages Bill will present Highland Council with a number of new statutory duties, and these are set out in this report.

3.3 Risk

There is a risk that the legislation may create expectations and entitlements that cannot be met due to ongoing recruitment challenges in Gaelic Medium Education (GME). At this stage it is unclear what sanctions may be used if the Council is unable to satisfy a parental request, but it is hoped this will become apparent once the statutory guidance has been published.

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

There are no risks associated with this report.

3.5 Gaelic

The Bill introduces new statutory duties relating to Gaelic education and language planning. There is a risk of non-compliance if these duties are not met, particularly in responding to parental requests and aligning provision with national standards. However, the Bill also presents opportunities to strengthen Gaelic provision and reinforce Highland Council's leadership in this area.

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 an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Gaelic Education in Highland Council

- 5.1 Highland Council is a national leader in Gaelic education, with a strong and growing commitment to providing Gaelic Medium Education (GME).

Scale of Provision

- 20 GME primary schools (including 3 standalone provisions)
- 2 primary GM requests currently recruiting.
- 14 secondary schools providing GME.
- 17 secondary schools providing GLE.
- 17 GME ELC settings including a partner centre.

Strategic Commitment:

The [Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 2024–29](#) outlines the current practice and objectives relating to Gaelic Education. These include:

- (i) Increasing the use of Gaelic
- (ii) Increasing the learning of Gaelic and
- (iii) Promoting a positive image of Gaelic

6. Gaelic Education: Provisions in the Bill

- 6.1 The Bill introduces several important changes regarding Gaelic Education:

Statutory Duty for Local Authorities

Local authorities now have a clear legal duty to provide Gaelic education where there is demand.

Ministerial Powers

Scottish Ministers can:

- Set national standards for Gaelic education.
- Issue statutory guidance that local authorities must follow.

Parental Requests

The process for requesting GME is strengthened and clarified, making it easier for parents to initiate provision.

National Gaelic Strategy

The Scottish Ministers must prepare a national Gaelic language strategy which includes targets relating to promoting, facilitating, and supporting the use of the Gaelic Language. Targets set out in the national Gaelic language strategy may, in particular, relate to:

- (a) number of people using the Gaelic language in households
- (b) number of children living in households using the Gaelic language

- (c) number of businesses, schools or other bodies using the Gaelic language as the main language
- (d) education and training in or through the medium of the Gaelic language
- (e) activity relating to the Gaelic language or Gaelic culture

Powers for Scottish Ministers to set Gaelic Language Standards

Scottish Ministers may by regulations specify standards and requirements relating to promoting, facilitating, and supporting the use of the Gaelic language which are to apply to relevant public authorities in exercising their functions. These regulations may include provision about:

- How the functions of relevant public authorities are to be exercised in Areas of Linguistic Significance
- The development of the Gaelic language
- Education
- Community planning
- Community development
- Economic development

- 6.2 Bòrd na Gàidhlig must report to Scottish Ministers on progress relating to the objectives and targets included in the National Gaelic Language Strategy

7. Implications for Local Authorities

7.1 Statutory Duties and Responsibilities

Under the Scottish Languages Bill, local authorities are now legally required to:

Assess and Respond to Demand for Gaelic Education

Local authorities must establish clear processes to:

- Identify community interest in Gaelic Medium Education (GME)
- Respond to parental requests for GME at early years, primary and secondary levels.
- Ensure provision is made where demand is reasonable and sustainable.

Implement National Standards and Guidance

Local authorities must:

- Align GME provision with national standards set by Scottish Ministers
- Follow the revised statutory guidance on curriculum, staffing, and quality assurance.
- Participate in national planning and reporting frameworks, as developed by Scottish Ministers.

7.2 Operational and Strategic Implications

Resource Allocation

Local authorities may have to:

- Invest in teacher recruitment and training for GME.
- Expand or adapt facilities to accommodate GME growth.
- Support the development of Gaelic learning materials and digital resources.

Monitoring and Reporting

Authorities must:

- Submit regular progress reports to Scottish Ministers
- Demonstrate compliance with Gaelic Language Standards
- Track uptake, attainment, and community engagement in GME.

Cross-Sector Collaboration

Local authorities are encouraged to:

- Work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Education Scotland, and Gaelic organisations.
- Integrate Gaelic into wider community planning and development strategies

7.3 Strategic Opportunities

Leadership Role

Highland Council, as a national leader in GME and GLE, is well-positioned to build upon best practice in collaboration with other local authorities and to review models of provision against the standards and guidance to ensure targeted and best use of resources in schools.

Community engagement

The Bill supports a place-based approach; empowering communities to help shape Gaelic provision locally.

8. Preparatory work

8.1 Internal workshop

An internal Sgioba na Gàidhlig workshop was held to discuss the Scottish Languages Bill. The workshop focused on:

- Increasing understanding of the Scottish Languages Bill and its implications for Gaelic in the Highland region.
- The review and interpretation of the latest census data on Gaelic language skills to inform planning and priorities.
- Mapping current Gaelic activity across Highland Council services to identify areas of strength and gaps.
- Identifying key stakeholders and organisations involved in Gaelic development across the region.
- Establishing next steps for contributing to the implementation of the Bill and supporting the Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan.

9. Next Steps

9.1 The following next steps are proposed:

- Await publication of guidance from the Scottish Government to guide the implementation of the Bill and to ensure Highland Council's compliance with its requirements.
- Engage with national guidance and emerging standards to ensure Highland Council remains abreast of best practice.

- Bring a further report to Committee once the guidance has been published and more is understood about the actions the Council will need to take to ensure compliance with the legislation.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

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Author: Eoina Rodgers, Policy Officer – Gaelic Development

Background Papers: [Scottish Languages Bill \(as passed\)](#)