The Highland Council

Agenda Item	**4**
Report No	**G/17/25**

Committee: **Gaelic**

Date: **19 November 2025**

Report Title: **Celtic Nations Cup Report**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive - People**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an overview on the creation and subsequent development of FC Sonas and Alba FA.

1.2 This report includes a specific focus on the Celtic Nations Cup tournament which was held in Inverness on 21 June 2025. This highlights the work of Alba FA in supporting the delivery of the Gaelic Language Plan (GLP) through increased visibility of the Gaelic language, youth participation and community engagement.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

i. note the report; and
ii. recognise and note the development of the Celtic Nations Cup and encourage its role in promoting Gaelic and bringing communities together.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource
The delivery of the GLP is funded by The Highland Council, Scottish Government and various Bord na Gàidhlig funding streams.

3.2 Legal
Under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, The Highland Council has an obligation to implement and accurately report GLP commitments

3.3 Risk
There are no risks arising as a direct consequence of this report

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)
There are no Health and Safety implications arising as a direct consequence of the report

3.5 Gaelic
There are positive implications regarding the preservation and development of the Gaelic language and culture across corporate, economic, 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. The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan (GLP) 2024–29

5.1 The Highland Council GLP 2024–29 was agreed by the Gaelic Committee and full Council prior to being approved by Bord na Gàidhlig on 7 May 2024. Progress towards the objectives of the GLP are monitored in the Performance Risk Management System (PRMS).

5.2 The Celtic Nations Cup supported the Council's Gaelic Language Plan by celebrating Gaelic as both a community language and an economic asset. It brought people together from across the Celtic nations, creating a sense of belonging and pride in Gaelic and Celtic culture. Local community groups and businesses were involved through the events, helping to keep the language visible and valued. The tournament also boosted the local economy, with the team and visitors from Cornwall supporting the event. It showed how Gaelic can bring people together and support local businesses at the same time.

5.3 The following themes of the GLP were supported by the Celtic Nations Cup:

Theme 1: Communities and Home, specifically under Strategic Priority 1.1, which aims to increase support for all Gaelic users and learners in their communities and networks.

Theme 3: Business and the Economy
Use Gaelic in businesses and social enterprises, and as an economic asset in Scotland.

The event contributed in delivery towards the desired outcomes of theme 3.

- Promote Gaelic as a valuable economic resource.
- Encourage its use in:
    - Creative industries
    - Tourism
    - Food and drink sectors
    - Social enterprises
- Support businesses that use Gaelic to:
    - Enhance their brand identity.
    - Increase community engagement.
    - Contribute to the Highland economy

6. FC Sonas - founding and development of Alba FA

6.1 This year sees 40 years of Gaelic medium education in the Highland Council area; two former pupils who attended GME in Inverness, Calum Ferguson and Donnie Forbes, went on to combine both their passionate commitment to the Gaelic language and football by founding a Gaelic community football club, FC Sonas. They felt that football can help Gaelic not only survive but prosper by taking Gaelic beyond the classroom and into the community.

FC Sonas initially started in delivering football camps to GME pupils in Inverness with support from Highland Council's Gaelic team. Covid and the subsequent lockdown periods did not deter their growth, and FC Sonas were funded by the Highland Council Gaelic team to deliver on-line sessions. This included;

- 6 football videos commissioned for football/health related fun activities that the whole family could participate in.
- A further series of football/ health related videos commissioned to help teachers and club leaders plan sessions for children. The above videos were available for GM primary and secondary pupils on a Highland wide basis.
- A series of online interactive conversations with GM primary schools.

The original football camps initially delivered in Inverness were extended to camps held in Fort William and Skye due to the high level of participation and positive feedback from families.

FC Sonas were invited to deliver international summer camps in Canada linking both countries/nations together through their shared Gaelic language heritage.

FC Sonas continued success led to the formation of Alba FA as the organisation responsible for developing Gaelic community football clubs across the country and

running Gaelic national teams. As well as FC Sonas in Inverness-shire there are now Gaelic community clubs based in Uist and Glasgow.

Alba FA have continued to develop their youth support programs and with support from the Highland Council offer weekly Gaelic football after school sessions in Inverness, Connon Bridge and Fort William for both primary and secondary pupils.

The Primary school sessions are part of the wider Scottish FA Extra-Time programme where Alba FA have partnered with the ICTFC Community trust to tackle underlying inequalities in accessing sporting and youth activities through the medium of Gaelic. The programme delivers weekly Breakfast Clubs and After school football through the medium of Gaelic to pupils at Bun-sgoil Ghaidhlig Inbhir.

In addition to the weekly clubs, Alba FA organise community events such as the Celtic Nations tournament, held in Inverness on June 21st, 2025. This event included sessions for GM pupils prior to the game against Kernow FA Men's team, bringing together a shared heritage through football. It was attended by families and the larger Gaelic community bringing an element of intergenerational togetherness. Other community events have included football camps and games during Seachdain na Gàidhlig and the Royal National Mod.

Alba FA has helped to support schools where Gaelic teaching posts have been consistently difficult to fill, ensuring continuity of Gaelic immersion provision during school hours and helping maintain positive role models and Gaelic language opportunities for pupils. Their flexibility to support in schools, their commitment to Gaelic makes them an invaluable partner in our efforts to strengthen and sustain the language in Highland.

Alba FA continues to look ahead and are looking to develop their team of Voluntary Coaches and Young leaders to support with the growth of the new After-School Football Activity Programme. Gaelic medium pupils in the senior phase of school, some of the young people no longer have timetabled Gaelic due to subject choices and are gaining leadership experience by volunteering with Alba FA to support coaches deliver clubs. This gives young people who have experiences in Gaelic medium but no longer study the language the opportunity to continue using their language and provides a valued community connection. The strong partnership between the Highland Council and Alba FA leads to increased participation in communities, embedding the Gaelic language as part of everyday life.

6.2 This infographic, created by Alba FA, gives an overview of the numbers engaging across school and community sessions in 2024/25.



Appendix 1 provides detail from Alba FA on the Celtic Nations Festival.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 10 October 2025

Author: Dolina Grant, Gaelic Community Learning and Development Officer

Background Papers:

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Celtic Nations Festival, Alba FA

Fèis nan Dùthchannan

Ceiltich

Uair àirde na Grèine, Disathairne 21mh an t-Ògmhios 2025

Celtic Nations Festival
Alba FA
vs Kernow FA

Inverness, Highlands.

An t-Ògmhios | June 2025



FOREWORD

It gives us great pleasure to write this report after a highly successful 2025 collaboration between the ALBA FA and KERNOW FA supported by The Highland Council Gaelic team.

Thanks to funding kindly provided by the Highland Council, the Alba FA was proud to welcome cornwall-based Kernow FA to the Highlands for an inaugural Celtic Nations Cup match that brought two of the six Celtic Nations together through football and heritage.

Leveraging football as a vehicle to celebrate and share the Gaelic language, the Celtic Nations Festival included a Community Youth Session, a Cultural Highland Gathering and an historic match as the Alba FA played its first match on home soil in front of 305 spectators.

Since the restructuring of FC Sonas and the launch of the Alba FA last year at the Euro 2024 in Germany the project has gone from strength to strength. This was highlighted by 83 young Gaelic players attending the Community Youth Session and setting a new record attendance exceeding our previous highest set a few months earlier during Seachdain Na Gàidhlig (76).

This was a showcase of our initiative, demonstrating that football can be a tool to connect our communities, inspire the next generation and grow new Gaelic opportunities in sports.

Calum MacFhearghais
Co-Founder
Alba Football Alliance

Fèis nan Dùthchannan
Ceilteach
Uair àirde na Grèine, Disathairne 21mh an t-Ògmhios 2025

NOTE TO OUR FUNDING & HOSTING PARTNERS

We extend our heartfelt thanks to **THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL** for generous funding towards hosting the Celtic Nations Festival. The support was instrumental in making the event a resounding success and a memorable Gaelic experience for all involved.

Your commitment to enhancing local events and promoting community engagement is truly commendable. Your support also showcased the Alba FA as a vibrant and enthusiastic development for sports and entertainment connected to heritage.

By supporting us, you've helped create a platform for youth to engage with the Gaelic language through sport and experience the thrill of football. This contribution highlights a commitment to celebrating Gaelic and enhancing the cultural life of the Highlands.







KEY EVENTS



Youth Session 11:30AM - 13:30PM
Players: Inverness, Lochaber, Ardnamurchan, Nairn & Ross-shire
83 Children Attended (Alba FA Record Participation)



Highland Gathering
Cheryl Heggie Highland Dance & Piper Innes Scullion



Celtic Nations Cup
Alba FA vs Kernow FA
Fan Attendance - 305
Multigenerational Gaelic Interactions



Cup Presentation
Presented by HIE Chief Executive Stuart Black



Cultural Exchange
First-ever sports event bringing together Celtic Nations

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Ceilteach
Uair àirde na Grèine, Disathairne 21mh an t-Ògmhios 2025

REVENUE

HIGHLAND COUNCIL FUNDING	£2643.43
TICKET SALES	£1021.64
ALBA FA FUNDS	£350.91
	£4015.98

EXPENSES

FACILITY HIRE & MEALS	£1562.50
MEDIA & PROMOTION	£1010.82
MATERIALS (Cup, Signage, Equipment)	£1442.66
	£4015.98






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RECAP

The festival kick-started with a pre-match football session (U6-U14 GME) with participants travelling from **Inverness-shire, Ross-shire and Lochaber.** This event brought players together from across Alba FA community programmes for an inter-generational football experience. Young players had the chance to play on the pitch and meet the Alba FA senior team, who stepped into coaching roles to create Gaelic connections and a build a buzz for the Celtic Nations Cup clash.

This was followed by a **Pre-Match Highland Gathering** as gates opened to a welcome from **piper Innes Scullion** followed by a **Cheryl Heggie Highland Dance performance**. Supporters enjoyed the build-up as the teams warmed up and line-ups were announced, with a Gaelic music playlist in the background.

The teams then walked out for the national anthems **“Cornwall My Home”** and **“Cànan nan Gàidheal”** to mark the beginning of the cultural exchange match. The Alba FA Men’s National Team represents Scottish Gaelic speakers, while the Kernow FA Men’s Team reflects Cornish culture and the region of Cornwall.

On the **summer solstice**, we connected through football, language, and shared heritage as we celebrated two Celtic Nations coming together through football.






Fèis nan Òùtchannan
Ceiltcach
Uair àirde na Grèine, Disathairne 21mh an t-Ògmhios 2025

IMPACT

"Taing mhòr airson an deireadh sheachdain. Bha balach beag agam ann comhla ri minibus làn clann bho Bun-sgoil Àth-Tharracail agus bha là air leth aca."

The above quote provided by a parent encapsulates the impact of the Celtic Nations Festival with a **mini-bus from Acharacle making the 216 mile round trip** to attend as player mascots. Young players did not only participate in the community football session, but were also allocated roles as mentioned player mascots, ball boys and ball girls, alongside a group of 'Alba Ultra Fans' who were giving a drum and Gaelic songs to sing to cheer on their Gaelic team.

This allowed the next generation to have an active experience within the events and feel a part of their community. **Intergenerational interactions** are essential to provide positive role model figures and diverse language exchanges that process the usage of Gaelic into social settings.

This event was a summer climax for the Alba FA and Highland Councils After-School Football Activity Programme which provided regular weekly access to Gaelic participation opportunities. Across 3 regions - Inverness, Lochaber and Ross-shire - a reach of 150 players was recorded totalling an average of **33.06% of all GME pupils** signing up for FREE weekly sessions. The pilot programme was a massive success which we hope to expand for the new academic year.







Fèis nan Òùtchannan
Ceilteach
Uair àirde na Grèine, Disathairne 21mh an t-Ògmhios 2025

PROJECT SUMMARY

"Tòrr spòrs is fealla-dhà! Nuair a thòisich mise sa GME (1992) cha robh ann ach daoine aosda mun cuairt a cleachdadh Gàidhlig. Tha mi cho toilichte gu bheil deagh-eisimpleirean òg aig na clann agam a nis a tha dèanamh rudan mar cluich ball-coise tro meadhan na Gàidhlig. Sgoinneil!".

This year marks 40 years since the establishment of GME in the Highlands. On this landmark anniversary, we were proud to showcase **a new chapter in the Gaelic language movement. Progressing the language from the classroom to the playing field** brings Gaelic into everyday social settings, building on the strong educational foundations laid by our schools.

The Alba FA team demonstrates Gaelic as a living, breathing force and that given the right environment to do so, the language can continue to adapt and thrive in contemporary society. With senior players travelling out of their own pocket from **North & South Uist, the Isle of Lewis**, **the Isle of Skye**, **Glasgow** and I**nverness** this team is a reflection of the **Gàidhealtachd.**

After the match, young players gathered around the Alba FA team for autographs, shirts, photos, and to share their thoughts on the game. Why? We have no Messi or Ronaldo. They understand that this is **their team**, a team they can shape, where they are heard, and where they can proudly **express their Gaelic identity.** In the world of bright lights and opportunity, this is uniquely Gaelic.






2025 TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Hamish MacDonald, Community Club Player:

“Tha mi an dochas gum bi seo a tachairt a h-uile seachdain mar ann an league. ‘S e cothram uabhasach math a th’ann airson Gàidhlig a bruidhinn agus airson a h-uile a’tighinn ri chèile airson spòrs”.

CelticNationsReportBBC



PROMOTION



Sales Ended

Saturday, 21 June

Alba FA vs Kernow FA

We're excited to invite you all to our first Alba FA match hosted in the Highlands! (3PM Kick-Off).

By **Alba FA** Follow

Sales Ended

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Date and time

Sat, 21 Jun 2025 12:00 - 17:00 BST. Doors at 11:30am

MEDIA

The P&J

Calum Ferguson on the power of football to promote Gaelic ahead of Alba FA fixture in Inverness

A Scotland team made up of Gaelic speakers will face the Kernow Football Alliance next weekend.



Alba Football Alliance players Calum Ferguson, left, and Harry Nicolson, right, alongside Innes Scullion who is Alba FA's operations manager. Photo courtesy of Dylan Lawrence.



by Callum Law

June 16 2025, 6:00 am

The Inverness Courier

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Footballers from Clachnacuddin, Forres Mechanics and Inverness Athletic named in Alba FC squad for 'Celtic Nations' clash in Inverness

By Niall Harkiss - niall.harkiss@hnmedia.co.uk

Published: 12:03, 19 June 2025

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Bid to create Scotland team made up of Gaelic speakers

25TH JUNE GAELIC SCOTLAND NATIONAL TEAM FOOTBALL SPORT SCOTLAND



By Craig Williams
Reporter

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The Tartan Army

FLUENT GAELIC & LEARNER PARTICIPATION

COMMUNITY SESSION	83
ALBA MNT PLAYERS & COACHES	23
ALBA FA COMMUNITY COACHES	10
EVENT VOLUNTEERS	36
TOTAL	**152**

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BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

What the next 40 years could hold…

Supported by HIE we travelled to Iceland for this year's innovation week and visited **Breidablik one of Iceland's largest multi-sports grassroots clubs.** In the 1990s, Iceland faced a crisis of youth drug use. Traditional prevention methods, focused on warnings and awareness campaigns, were proving ineffective. In response, the **Planet Youth** model was developed: a pioneering, evidence-based approach that shifts focus from individual behaviour to the broader *environment* surrounding young people.

Youth wellbeing depends on healthy ecosystems - **schools, sports clubs, families and community centres -** so too does language survival. It flourishes when embedded in daily life, social bonds, and shared identity. In Iceland, strong partnerships between local councils and community sports groups have transformed facilities, increased participation, and embedded cultural identity into everyday activity. By working together, they have created spaces where language, sport, and community thrive side by side.

The Icelandic model offers us a proven path, and with their population smaller than the Highlands and Islands, we can do the same here. A partnership between the Alba FA, Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) could bring together our Gaelic communities - from Inverness, Ross-shire, and Lochaber - under a shared vision. Could the UHI astro pitch development offer an opportunity for a **Gaelic Sports Hub?**







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BHO GACH NEACH AIG ALBA FA TAPADH LEIBH

THA SINN A'COIMHEAD AIR ADHART RI BARRACHD COM-PÀIRTEACHAS LE COMHAIRLE NA GÀIDHEALTACHD.

#IsSinneAlba | #WeAreAlba

