

Agenda Item	8
Report No	G/8/26

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Gaelic

**Date:** 3 June 2026

**Report Title:** Scottish Languages Act – Areas of Linguistic Significance

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

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Gaelic Committee on the implications of the [Scottish Languages Act 2025](#), specifically the new statutory framework for the designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance (ALS), and to set out the proposed approach for Highland Council.
- 1.2 A paper was presented to the Highland Council Corporate Management Team (CMT) in April 2026 seeking endorsement to proceed with a whole-authority approach to ALS designation. CMT agreed this approach, recognising it as the most coherent, compliant and sustainable response to the statutory guidance issued by Scottish Ministers in March 2026.
- 1.3 This report sets out the rationale for the whole-authority approach and outlines how it could be delivered through a place-based framework. The report also highlights the strategic opportunities this approach offers for Gaelic development, education, communities and economic growth.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - i. Note the provisions of the Scottish Languages Act 2025 relating to Areas of Linguistic Significance;
  - ii. Note that Corporate Management Team has approved a whole-authority ALS approach;
  - iii. Agree that a whole-authority designation, supported by a place-based delivery framework, provides the most proportionate and effective way to implement ALS in Highland;
  - iv. Agree to recommend to full Council that the Gaelic Committee's Scheme of Delegation is amended to allocate responsibility for oversight of Gaelic Areas of Linguistic Significance designation processes; and
  - v. Note that further reports will be brought to the Committee on delivery phasing, governance and consultation.

### **3. Implications**

#### **3.1 Resource**

The Scottish Government has identified £1.5 million funding to support ALS processes nationally. At the time of writing, funding arrangements are unknown. Initial resource requirements for Highland Council are expected to relate primarily to programme management, data and mapping, engagement and consultation, and integration with existing Gaelic Language Plan reporting. The scale of additional resource will depend on the pace of implementation and the expectations applied across different areas.

#### **3.2 Legal**

The Scottish Languages Act 2025 introduces statutory duties requiring local authorities to consider and designate Areas of Linguistic Significance within defined timescales. A whole-authority approach ensures compliance with the Act while avoiding multiple stand-alone designation processes.

#### **3.3 Risk**

Adopting a whole-authority approach mitigates the risk of fragmented designations, inconsistent interpretation of guidance and uneven application of policy expectations across the Highland region.

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

No risks have been identified.

#### **3.5 Gaelic**

There are significant positive implications for Gaelic through a strategic, co-ordinated approach that recognises linguistic, educational, historical and cultural connections across the Highlands.

### **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 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary**

##### **4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 1 April 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.**

##### **4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there potentially Island Rural Impacts identified. A full assessment of these impacts is currently being conducted, and the results will be brought to a future meeting of the Gaelic Committee.**

4.3.3	<b>Impact Assessment Area</b> Equality	<b>Conclusion of Screening</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and Young People – <i>no impact</i></li> <li>• Children affected by disability – <i>no impact</i></li> <li>• Older adults – <i>no impact</i></li> </ul>
	Socio-economic	<i>Positive</i>
	Human Rights	<i>No impact</i>
	Children’s Rights and Well-being	<i>Positive</i>
	Island and Mainland Rural	<i>Both positive and negative impacts identified</i>
	Climate Change	<i>No impact</i>
	Data Rights	<i>No impact</i>

## 5. Scottish Languages Act 2025 and ALS Requirements

- 5.1 The Scottish Languages Act 2025 creates a statutory framework for identifying and designating Areas of Linguistic Significance where Gaelic has a meaningful presence. [Statutory guidance](#) issued in March 2026 sets out the criteria and process for designation.
- 5.2 Under the Act, an area may be designated as an ALS if it meets one of two primary conditions:
- (a) The area contains a significant number of people with Gaelic language skills; or
  - (b) The area does not contain a significant number of Gaelic speakers but demonstrates one or more of the following:
    - ii. Historical connection with the use of Gaelic;
    - ii. Provision of teaching and learning through the Gaelic language;
    - iii. Significant activity relating to Gaelic language or culture.
- 5.3 The ALS provisions will commence for Highland Council on 1 September 2026. From that date, the Council has one year to complete designation for any areas that meet the statutory criteria.
- 5.4 2022 Census data shows that 8.07 percent of Highland’s population aged three and over reports some Gaelic language skills.
- 5.5 Eilean a’ Cheò (Isle of Skye and Raasay) electoral ward exceeds the statutory 20 percent threshold and must therefore be formally designated within the statutory timescale. [Census mapping](#) also demonstrates that a number of census output areas across Highland exceed the 20 percent threshold.

## 6. Rationale for a Whole-Authority Approach

- 6.1 The statutory guidance allows for local authorities to designate whole local authority areas as Areas of Linguistic Significance. This approach is considered to be particularly well suited to the Highland context.
- 6.2 A whole-authority designation would confirm a clear corporate commitment that Gaelic is supported across the Highland region, recognising that language use, learning and cultural activity are not confined to a small number of locations.

- 6.3 This approach ensures that any community in Highland could be considered for ALS-related support where it meets the designation criteria set out in the Act, including:
- The number of people with Gaelic language skills
  - Historical connections to Gaelic
  - Educational provision
  - Gaelic cultural activity
- 6.4 A whole-authority approach also provides a strong platform for economic development. Evidence from Irish Gaeltacht areas demonstrates that sustained investment in language-based policy can support:
- Growth in local and regional economies
  - Development of high-quality jobs in education, culture, media, tourism and the creative industries
  - Strong employment pipelines and skills pathways
- 6.5 In the Highland Council area, supporting Gaelic growth directly contributes to economic resilience by creating opportunities for skilled employment, encouraging population retention and strengthening links between education, culture and enterprise.
- 6.6 The development of ALS also aligns strongly with the Inverness-Highland UK City of Culture 2029 bid. A co-ordinated approach to Gaelic through ALS supports the visibility and use of Gaelic as part of Highland's cultural identity, strengthening Inverness's position as a cultural centre.

By supporting Gaelic language, education and cultural activity in a strategic way, ALS contributes directly to the bid's aims of showcasing the distinctive cultural offer of the city, increasing participation in cultural activities and supporting Inverness's national and international cultural profile.

The economic benefits of a vibrant Gaelic community and the positive impact on individual's wellbeing and mental health by participating in cultural activities including learning and speaking Gaelic similarly contribute to the aims of the bid specifically and the Council's longer-term approach to culture.

## **7 Place-Based Delivery Framework**

- 7.1 While designation would apply at whole-authority level, delivery would be proportionate and place-based, recognising that communities across Highland have different linguistic profiles, assets and needs.
- 7.2 A place-based framework would enable expectations and interventions to be applied based on identification of community needs, rather than through a one-size-fits-all model. Community-led engagement will also inform the ALS designation process, ensuring that local knowledge and community priorities are reflected alongside statistical and policy evidence.
- 7.3 For example:
- Isle of Skye: Strong Gaelic-speaking community, well-established Gaelic Medium Education, cultural activity and daily language use. This could reflect a higher level of ALS expectations and support.

- Sutherland: A strong historical connection to Gaelic alongside increased community-led Gaelic activity. This context may require targeted support focused on community development, learning opportunities and cultural regeneration.
- Inverness: An urban centre with strong and growing Gaelic activity, including established Gaelic Medium Education across early years, primary and secondary sectors, a significant concentration of Gaelic organisations, and active community use of the language. Inverness has deep historical connections to Gaelic and continues to function as a focal point for Gaelic cultural, educational and economic activity in the Highlands. This context could benefit from an approach that combines education provision, workforce development and support for community and cultural initiatives within an urban setting.

7.4 This approach allows Highland Council to respond flexibly and strategically, supporting Gaelic where it is strong, supporting it where there is renewed interest and recognising historic and cultural connections.

## **8 Governance and Next Steps**

8.1 CMT has agreed to proceed with the whole-authority approach and to establish appropriate governance arrangements.

8.2 Officers will bring forward further reports setting out:

- Delivery phasing and timetables
- Consultation and engagement plans
- Governance arrangements and committee oversight
- Resource and capacity implications

8.3 The implementation of the Act is also likely to give rise to a range of practical pressures and challenges for the Council. These may include increased demand for Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learner Education, implications for school planning and capacity, and ongoing challenges relating to teacher recruitment and retention within the Gaelic education workforce. There may also be wider expectations on services to enhance Gaelic provision in line with community and ALS requirements. The Scottish Government has indicated that funding will be made available to support implementation of the Act, including ALS processes, although full details are not yet confirmed. The Council will seek to utilise available funding in a targeted and proportionate way to support delivery, while continuing to assess resource implications as more detail emerges.

8.4 The Scottish Languages Act 2025 also introduces a wider range of provisions which will have implications for the Council as they are developed and implemented. These include new statutory guidance on Gaelic education, the introduction of Gaelic education standards, the development of Gaelic community standards and the preparation of a national strategy for the Scots language. The Council is mindful of these emerging requirements and will continue to engage with Scottish Government and partners to ensure an appropriate and co-ordinated response. Further updates will be brought to Members as detail is published and implementation progresses.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 22 May 2025

Author: Eoina Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer

Background Papers:

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

# Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

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**This Impact Assessment is marked as confidential or sensitive. If you intend to share this document please check with the Responsible Manager who this can be shared with.**

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## About proposal

**What does this proposal relate to?** Policy, Strategy, Action or delivery plan, Redesign or change to existing service

**Proposal name:** Designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance

**High level summary of the proposal:** Areas of Linguistic Significance (ALS) are a new statutory designation introduced by the Scottish Languages Act 2025.

They identify locations where Gaelic has either:

- A significant number of people with Gaelic language skills, defined legally as 20% or more of the local population (using census data)

or

- An important historical, cultural, educational or linguistic connection to Gaelic. This includes areas where:

In effect, an ALS is a geographically defined area where support for Gaelic will be recognised formally in law for targeted support and policy intervention.

**Who may be affected by the proposal?** Highland Council residents, particularly those living in areas where high levels of Gaelic skills are reported in the community.

Pupils enrolled in Gaelic Education.

Gaelic community members.

**Start date of proposal:** 01/09/2026

**End date of proposal:** 01/09/2027

**Does this proposal result in a change or impact to one or more Council service?** Yes

**Which Council services will be impacted by this proposal?** Corporate, People

**Does this relate to an existing proposal?** No

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**Service:** People

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## Responsible officer details

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**Sign off date:** 2026-04-01

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## Equalities, poverty, and human rights

### Protected characteristics

Select what impact the proposal will have on the following protected characteristics:

**Sex:** No impact

**Age:** No impact

**Disability:** No impact

**Religion or belief:** No impact

**Race:** No impact

**Sexual orientation:** No impact

**Gender reassignment:** No impact

**Pregnancy and maternity:** No impact

**Marriage and civil partnership:** No impact

**Protected characteristics impact details:** No impacts have been identified for people with protected characteristics because the designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance relates solely to place based linguistic and cultural factors, rather than characteristics of individuals or groups. The policy applies equally to all residents within a designated area and no evidence suggests it would advantage or disadvantage any protected group.

### Poverty and socio-economic

What impact is the proposal likely to have on the following?

**Prospects and opportunities:** Positive

**Places:** Positive, Negative

**Financial:** No impact

**Poverty and socio-economic impact details:** The designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance

may positively influence access to education, employment and training by strengthening local provision, attracting investment and improving co-ordination of Gaelic opportunities. However, there may also be indirect impacts where existing barriers such as transport, childcare, digital access or limited services in rural areas exist, meaning some individuals could benefit more than others.

Similarly, communities experiencing higher levels of deprivation or rural fragility may see benefits through targeted support and increased activity, but there is also potential for uneven impacts if infrastructure, such as affordable housing or public transport, cannot meet increased demand.

## Human rights

**Which of the below human rights will be affected by this proposal?** Article 10: Freedom of expression, Article 14: Protection from discrimination

**What impact do you consider this proposal to have on the human rights of people?** Positive

**Human rights impact details:** These human rights impacts will be positive because the public consultation will give individuals and communities meaningful opportunities to shape how Areas of Linguistic Significance are developed and delivered. This participatory approach helps to strengthen access to education, protect people from discrimination and support freedoms of thought, belief and expression - including the right to express oneself in one's own language, which will likely be reinforced through increased opportunities to use and learn Gaelic.

## Equalities, poverty and human rights screening assessment

**What impact do you think there will be to equalities, poverty and human rights?** No impact

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required?** No

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## Children's rights and wellbeing

**What likely impact will the proposal have on children and young people?** Children are likely to benefit from the designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance through increased access to extracurricular Gaelic activities and the potential expansion of Gaelic educational opportunities. Strengthening place based support for Gaelic, as envisaged through the Scottish Languages Act 2025, promotes wider availability of Gaelic learning, community programmes and cultural participation - all of which increase children's opportunities to develop Gaelic skills.. In areas where Gaelic Education or community based Gaelic activity already exists, the designation may further support growth in provision, helping children to access high quality learning pathways and enriched cultural experiences.

**Which of the below children's rights will be affected by the proposal?** You are working in the best interests of the child (Article 3), Children have a right to education (Article 28), Children have the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities (Article 31)

**Explain how the children's rights selected above will be affected:** The designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance is likely to have a positive impact on children's rights by expanding opportunities for them to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them through the planned public consultation. This aligns with children's rights to be heard in matters concerning their lives and communities. In addition, increased access to Gaelic cultural events, community activities and

learning opportunities strengthens children's rights to participate in cultural life and express their identity, supporting wider principles.

## **Children's rights and wellbeing screening assessment**

**What impact do you think there will be to children's rights and wellbeing?** Positive impact

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required?** No

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## **Data protection**

**Will your proposal involve processing personal data?** Yes

**Is any of this data already processed by the Highland Council?** No

**What purpose will the data be used for?** Public consultation responses to inform the designation process and site-selection.

## **Data protection screening assessment**

**What change will there be to the way personal data is processed?** No significant change to current processing

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required?** No

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## **Island and mainland rural communities**

**Does your proposal impact island and mainland rural communities?** Yes

**Could people in island and mainland rural communities be affected differently?** Yes

**How could the impact differ?** Island and rural mainland communities may be affected differently by the designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance due to their distinct geographic, demographic and infrastructural contexts. Many areas with strong Gaelic connections are located in remote or island settings, where challenges such as limited transport links, population fragility, reduced access to services and housing pressures may be more pronounced. As a result, while the policy has the potential to bring positive outcomes - such as strengthened Gaelic provision - it may also interact with existing issues in ways that differ from urban or accessible rural areas. An assessment is therefore required to understand how these unique circumstances could influence both the benefits and risks of implementation of ALS.

**Have any negative impacts been identified?** Yes

**Provide details of negative impacts, mitigating actions and the service that is responsible for them:** A potential negative impact is that, in some island and rural mainland areas, limited transport, housing availability, service capacity or staffing pressures could make it harder for communities to fully benefit from the designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance.

## **Island and mainland rural communities screening assessment**

**What impact do you think there will be to island and mainland rural communities?** Minor differences

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required?** Yes

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## **Climate change**

**Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO<sub>2</sub>e)?** No

**Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity?** No

**Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing climate?** No

**Provide information regarding your selection above:**

### **Climate change screening assessment**

**Have you identified potential impact for any of the areas above or marked any as not known?** No

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required?** No