

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT – CROSS PARTY GROUP ON GAELIC

Minute of the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Gaelic, held in Room Q1.03, Queensberry House, Holyrood on Wednesday 27th November 2013 at 4pm.

Present: *Angus MacDonald MSP, (Convener); Jamie McGrigor MSP; Donald MacNeill, (Secretary); Coinneach MacÌomhair (Comunn na Gàidhlig); Iain Aonghas MacAoidh (Bòrd na Gàidhlig); Tormod A Dòmhnallach (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar); Coinneach A Moireach (Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd); Mata MacIver (UHI); Diane MacIntyre (Scottish Parliament); John Newton (Falkirk Gaelic Forum); Kenny Smith (Falkirk Gaelic Forum); Melissa Miller; Anne Black, (Fòram Lànraig a Tuath); Alex MacDonald (Fòram Lànraig a Tuath); Wilson MacLeod (Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann); Mairead Lobban; Fionnlagh MacLeòid (Moray Language Centre); David Brew (MG Alba); Lindsay Paterson (Edinburgh University); Fiona O’Hanlon (Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann); Beathag Mhoireasdain – simultaneous interpretation.*

In an opening address prior to commencing the meeting Agenda, the Convener raised the issue of MSP attendance. The CPG meeting was coinciding with important Parliamentary business that could not have been predicted when the meeting date was agreed. However he also said that he would like to see more MSP attendance at the CPG meetings.

1. Welcome & Apologies

Apologies had been received from: John Finne MSP; Rhoda Grant MSP; Jean Urquhart MSP; Dr Richard Simpson MSP; Ashley Powell (Oilthigh Obair Dheathain); Anne Dessey; Hamish Fraser (The Highland Council);

2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting, held in the Scottish Parliament Building, Holyrood, Edinburgh on Minute of Meeting of Wed 15th May 2013 were approved. Proposed by John Angus MacKay; Seconded by Kenneth Murray.

3. Matters Arising.

Arising from the Minute, Màta MacIver asked what the latest position was in relation to a Gaelic language version of the independence referendum ballot paper. The Convener replied that the Scottish Government was firmly of the view that such an amendment could not be made, but that he was writing to the Government asking them to continue to look at the issue so that Gaelic could possibly be used in future votes.

John Angus MacKay also reported on the success of the ‘Gaelic week’ in the Scottish Parliament (*May 2013*) with a strong degree of MSP support evident. There was general support for the development effort, but a desire for more information on the effectiveness of the work.

4. Presentation/Update on Census data - including geographical analysis:

Introducing the topic, John Angus MacKay said it would be useful if staff from the GROS (*General Register Office for Scotland*) had come to the presentation to help them better understand what is needed.

He said there were apparent differences in the way people answered Census questions in comparison to the 'Public Attitudes to Gaelic' survey last year. This needed to be understood.

In general terms there were declines in the number of speakers in Island areas, and a growth elsewhere: Gaelic was moving from being a language of rural areas.

A discussion followed on some of the points of detail in the Census and presentation, including:

- That it was possible to get 'street level' data on location/density of Gaelic speakers;
- That traditional, established patterns were changing;
- That the increase of GME seen in the 1990's needed to be mirrored if the target of doubling P1 intake was to be met - and that detailed discussions with Local Authorities would follow to ensure vacant GME spaces were filled;
- That there were opportunities to increase the proportion and number of GME pupils in the Western Isles;
- That a deeper understanding of the Census information was essential in order to better plan ongoing activity;
- That there were issues with language competencies, and that this might influence people's responses to language questions in Census and other studies.

5. AOCB

Finlay MacLeod, Moray Language Centre, addressed the meeting on the importance of Gaelic learning in the home, and stating his view that school learning alone will not secure the future of the language.

He outlined a view that potential parents needed to undertake a 2 year (full-time; 40 week/year) language course in order to have the fluency to properly raise children in Gaelic.

It was agreed that his paper would be circulated to CPG membership. (*It has not been received for circulation.*)

--

The issue of Additional Needs Support for GME was discussed, and the meeting was told that a contract had been let to Archie MacLullaich, Consultant Psychologist, to undertake an Audit. The provision of Speech and Language Therapy support was also discussed, along with the importance of Health Boards being aware of the issue.

The Convener said that he would be happy to meet with the Health Secretary and Education Minister to be sure they were aware of the issues.

--

The issue of teachers in GME provision was raised, in context of GME qualified teachers being drawn away by opportunities for promotion in 'English medium' teaching. The point being made that this, along with the supply of new GME teachers was something that needed to be addressed.

--

Representatives from the Nth Lanarkshire Gaelic Forum addressed the meeting on the difficulties they were facing in promoting sustainable Gaelic development in their area. Despite the local authority having a Gaelic Plan, it was difficult to make progress, and the Forum/community felt that they were being unsupported.

A local survey had been carried out, and it was agreed to circulate this to Group members. *(the survey has not been received for circulation.)*

6. Date of next meeting

No date was fixed for the next meeting, but it was agreed it would take place in May/June 2014