

City of Edinburgh Council

Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee

15th May 2018

Item 7.6

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann) – Written Submission

This submission is made on behalf of Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann), the representative organisation for families with children in all stages of Gaelic-medium education in Edinburgh; and on behalf of Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce Parent Council.

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the City of Edinburgh Council's Gaelic Language Plan (2018-22).

The Gaelic language is not a political issue. It is a national language of our country and a fundamental part of our culture. Its revitalisation and protection relies on cross-party support and it is our expectation and hope that this will continue. The recent parliamentary debate on the National Gaelic Language Plan was a clear demonstration of the commitment of all national political parties to Gaelic.

The high response to the public consultation on Edinburgh's plan, and the overwhelming agreement that the positive vision is right for our city, is a demonstration that the Gaelic language enjoys support across the city.

Summary Position

We support the recommendation to approve the final Gaelic Language Plan for 2018-22 (the GLP). We trust that the GLP will gain cross-party support and that councillors will work together to implement its actions.

The GLP includes as part of its overarching principles that: ***we want to inspire equal respect, ensuring that the Gaelic language is delivered to an equal standard to that of English.*** (GLP p9) We see this as a fundamental principle that needs collective support from all parties.

Edinburgh Council's GLP fits in with the aspirations of the National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23, recently given unanimous support by all parties in the Scottish Parliament. The national aspirations are: to increase the speaking, using and learning of Gaelic. Edinburgh, thanks to the positive decision of this Council to establish a Gaelic primary school, has shown strong progress in learning, with the number of pupils entering Gaelic-medium trebling in the past four years. Work is now required to make similar progress in other areas.

We recognise that the GLP contains a number of important and valuable action points, particularly with regard to education, and these are very welcome. These commitments will expand provision at all levels of Gaelic education to accommodate existing demand.

The agreement to form a short life working group to address urgent key challenges is in particular a positive step forward.

These commitments, along with a number of other amendments, have resulted in this version of the GLP being a great improvement on previous drafts.

However, acknowledgement is needed that the production process of this GLP has not run smoothly over the past two years, nor has the input from the Gaelic community been taken on board on a timely basis.

The lack of commitment is shown by factors such as this being a full year late in production. The lack of a timely plan has a real impact on our children. Some children are being denied access to Gaelic-medium and others are not receiving their entitlement to a full immersion Gaelic education.

All parties should acknowledge the existence of these issues and must agree to reversing this lack of commitment and to a process of restoring trust with the Gaelic community. This aspirational version of the GLP is a good first step toward demonstrating that commitment.

Gaelic Language Plan 2018-22

The legal requirement to prepare Gaelic Language Plans was established in the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, which gives Bòrd na Gàidhlig the right to require any relevant public authority to prepare a Gaelic Language Plan. A Gaelic Language Plan must reflect the vision of the 2005 Act to secure *“the status of the Gaelic Language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language.”*

These GLPs must be reviewed and approved by the Bòrd, and must meet certain standards and be fit for purpose in order to gain approval. Bòrd na Gàidhlig may reject a plan which does not meet the required standard.

According to the law, in preparing its GLP, public authorities must consult persons appearing to it to have an interest. As members of the Gaelic community and parents and carers of children in GME in Edinburgh, we acknowledge the opportunities we have been given to input our views during the preparation of this plan. This GLP is the result of many hours of voluntary work alongside the work of Council officers.

Gaelic Education

Detailed comments on education are included in our appendices, which consist of documents previously submitted during public consultation periods.

We acknowledge that an expansion of Gaelic education will require financial investment by the Council. However, we must view this in the context of rising educational rolls across the city and the current investment that is required to provide all of Edinburgh's children with a high quality educational experience. All children in the city are entitled to a high quality education whether the language of instruction is English or Gaelic.

Local authorities, including the City of Edinburgh Council, also access additional central government funding for Gaelic development through the Gaelic Schools Capital Fund and through Gaelic Specific Grant. The refurbishment of Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce for example attracted a government grant of over £2m, a direct investment in the Edinburgh school estate.

We welcome the recognition that quality of delivery needs to be a priority alongside developing capacity. We welcome in particular the establishment of the sub-group to be focussed on recruitment and capacity. We ask that this group be supported and strengthened in order to deliver a plan for increased quality of education, alongside the roadmap for GME strategy due to be produced by August 2018.

We note the action to: *"develop a roadmap for moving the GME [secondary] unit to another school site to support increasing numbers of pupils."* (GLP p22) We understand the spirit intended in this action to *"ensure the quality and sustainable expansion of secondary GME"*. However, we would ask that the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee note when approving this plan that any move would only happen and be supported by parents if it clearly demonstrates an educational benefit and is the subject of a statutory consultation.

The preparation of education sections of the GLP has often been a frustrating and worrying experience for GME families. The lack of a strategic plan for the future of GME is an issue that has been raised and discussed on many occasions over the past decade, but the journey towards the production of such a plan has been slow.

In recent weeks we have seen an increase in drive and vision from the Council to improve and expand GME. We want to see this ambition consolidated and for the Council to begin to deliver on the required actions, and to acknowledge the urgency of these actions. We want all councillors to support the Council officers tasked with delivery of these actions.

We note that the GLP states that: ***in our role as Corporate Parent we need to ensure that our looked after children can access the same opportunities in Gaelic as those with other languages.*** (GLP p9)

There needs to be an understanding that this strategic plan, and solid commitments to progress, are not simply part of a technical exercise to allow sign-off on the GLP. There are more than 750 children in GME in Edinburgh, and they are depending on us to get it right for

their education, not in theory over a five year plan, but in practice in their places of education today. Without a proper plan in the GLP and a real commitment to timely implementation, we are failing our children.

Prejudice against Gaelic and Gaelic speakers has existed for centuries and has resulted in the language now being in a fragile state. We are all responsible for its revitalisation and we are all responsible for teaching the young people around us that prejudice has no place in Scottish society today. We are looking to the Council as a collective body, and to individual councillors, to begin to take a public stand against anti-Gaelic hate speech. Our young Gaelic speakers need to know that they are protected and valued members of society.

With the implementation of the actions of the GLP we want to see delivered a noticeable reduction in the prejudice against Gaelic and Gaelic speakers. We believe that the normalisation and better visibility of Gaelic in the city and the recognition of its equal respect in the eyes of the law will lead to a better understanding of the language, and will bring benefits to the confidence of Gaelic speakers and in areas such as culture and tourism.

Individual councillors and the Council as a collective body should defend its aspirational GLP and vocally support its promotion of Gaelic.

Conclusion

As a community we are looking forward to working with the Council to realise the aspirations contained within this GLP. Gaelic is spoken and used every day in Edinburgh and is the language of education of many of our young people. Gaelic is part of the diversity that makes up our city.

As Scotland's capital city, Edinburgh has a key role to play in the revitalisation of our language and culture, and the promotion and support of Gaelic education.

We trust that the GLP will gain the cross-party support and commitment that it requires to make it a success.

Comann nam Pàrant 15th May 2018