



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 15 May 2024

Session 6



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**EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
15th Meeting 2024, Session 6**

CONVENER

*Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
- *Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)
- *Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
- *Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)
- *Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
- *Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
- *Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)
- *Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

- Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach (Bòrd na Gàidhlig)
- Donald Macleod (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)
- Iain Macmillan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig)
- Jennifer McHarrie (Bòrd na Gàidhlig)
- Joanna Peteranna (Highlands and Islands Enterprise)
- James Wylie (Orkney Islands Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Pauline McIntyre

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 15 May 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:01]

Scottish Languages Bill: Stage 1

The Convener (Sue Webber): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the 15th meeting in 2024 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. We have apologies from Stephanie Callaghan.

Our first agenda item is evidence from two panels of witnesses on the Scottish Languages Bill at stage 1. I welcome our first panel. Thank you very much for joining us.

I ask our witnesses to introduce themselves and say which organisation they are representing. I will go round my screen; at the top left is Donald Macleod.

Donald Macleod (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar): Madainn mhath. Thank you for asking me back. I am Donald Macleod and I am chief officer for education and children's services with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Joanna Peteranna (Highlands and Islands Enterprise): Madainn mhath. I am Joanna Peteranna; I am area manager for the Outer Hebrides with Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

James Wylie (Orkney Islands Council): Good morning. I am James Wylie; I am corporate director for education, leisure and housing for Orkney Islands Council.

The Convener: Getting the sound a bit louder in the committee room would be helpful.

I thank the witnesses for participating. I would like to put on record that we have invited SOLACE to attend several times, but it has been unable to do so. Following that, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities was invited to participate, but, due to the last-minute nature of the invitation, it was unable to field a representative.

We will go straight to questions. Members should direct questions to a specific witness. It would be helpful if anyone else who wishes to respond could put an R in the chat bar, which the clerks are monitoring. I will do my best to bring you in when I can. Pam Duncan-Glancy will kick us off this morning.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Thank you, convener, and good morning to our

witnesses. Thank you for the information that you shared with us in advance of the meeting. My first question is broad: how will the bill support Gaelic and Scots in the medium and long term?

Donald Macleod: From Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's perspective, the bill is vital in protecting the medium and long-term future of Gaelic language. We recognise that Gaelic language is a fundamental aspect of our education delivery and a cornerstone of our socioeconomic position and our future in the islands. Gaelic has for many years been important to us and we want the bill to secure, as the questioner mentioned, the medium to long-term future of the language.

The education provisions in the bill are important in that respect and, to some degree, we would like to see them strengthened and also to look at the right to Gaelic-medium education and the role of Gaelic learner education in terms of strengthening that educational position. Also, the bill's provisions on areas of linguistic significance are very important to us in the island communities. I would like to see more strength in the bill regarding areas of linguistic significance to ensure that we are recognising the language's importance to our communities' priorities.

We still have work to do around managing what our communities aspire to in relation to the future of the language and the important role that it plays in population retention, the growth of our economy and supporting young people to stay in their islands and live, work, earn and learn in our communities.

We recognise that the bill is hugely important in defining the role of language in the future of our island economy and our island communities.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you for that. In your submission, you said:

"Education by itself will not guarantee the future of Gàidhlig as a living, developing, widely used language. Accordingly, the main emphasis of the Bill should be directed towards reviving Gàidhlig in community settings."

You have touched on some of that. Could you say a little bit more about what else you would expect to see in the bill in that regard?

Donald Macleod: It is absolutely right to pick that out from our submission.

A lot of our emphasis has been on Gaelic in the education setting, which is important, but we are increasingly looking to use and support Gaelic beyond the school environment and the pathway through that three to 18 journey, and onwards into further study and employment.

We would like to see the bill strengthen the role of all organisations in the communities, including charitable and community organisations and employers, to make sure that there is a rounded

approach to Gaelic as a holistic language. That would take it beyond being a language of the classroom that is to do with qualifications and school alone—which are, of course, important—towards becoming a genuine economic and community asset, so that employers, community groups and individuals in our communities see the value of it and wish to use it in everyday life and to protect it for the future.

In some areas, we have seen potential decline in community use of the language. The bill gives us an opportunity to work with our communities, particularly through ALSs, to ensure that we strategically revive the day-to-day use of the language in our communities. We have the opportunity to use the bill, and to strengthen it further, to make sure that there are measures in it in relation to plans, standards or duties that ensure that the language is expected and becomes a standard practice for use in our communities.

The Convener: James Wylie is keen to come in before you move on, Pam.

James Wylie: To support what Donald Macleod said, from our perspective in Orkney, we support the principles of the bill in many ways. In the 2011 census returns, a significant number of people from Orkney highlighted that they spoke Scots.

We see the bill as having the potential to provide protection to language in Scotland. From an Orkney perspective, it is—as Donald highlighted—about the culture and heritage that goes with the language. The way in which we live and the history of the islands could be protected, if we get the detail correct.

In our submission, we highlight that it is about language variation as opposed to dialect. Right across our archipelago, we have different aspects and use of words, depending on which island you are in, and we need to protect that. It has a significant impact on our economy and in education and that whole pathway. However, it is about not only the spoken word but the whole culture that we engage in, including our sport, music and arts.

We therefore support the principle of what is in the bill as helping to protect the language.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you for that, James and Donald.

I will come to Joanna Peteranna to pick up on the point that has been made about wider issues, including culture. In your submission, you said:

“There are many wider contributory considerations in addition to Gaelic which are required for the communities and therefore the language to flourish, including factors such as housing availability, transport connections and digital connectivity. Acknowledgement of this within the Bill would be welcome.”

What do you think that the bill will do to support Gaelic, and what additional provisions would you like to see in the bill to address the issues that you highlighted?

Joanna Peteranna: I will start by noting that I echo much of what Donald Macleod and James Wylie have said.

Key to the bill is the view that language does not exist in a vacuum and that it should not exist purely in the classroom, as Donald touched upon. It needs to thrive within communities, and thriving communities require all that wider social and economic infrastructure. It is about seeing something in the bill that recognises the requirement for that wider community infrastructure, particularly with the opportunity to designate and focus on areas of linguistic significance. It is about making sure that housing, digital and transport connectivity and so on are all in place to make those attractive places to live and work. That would be very much welcomed.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I have one final question.

The Convener: I think that we need to move on, if that is okay.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Madainn mhath, panel.

Professor Conchúr Ó Giollagáin described the situation of Gaelic in traditionally Gaelic-speaking communities as being in crisis.

I will first come to Joanna Peteranna. How would Highlands and Islands Enterprise reflect on and respond to that comment? Do you agree?

Joanna Peteranna: I think that it is difficult to determine what a “crisis” is.

As Donald Macleod touched on in his earlier comments, I would also reflect on the fact that we have seen a decline in the amount of Gaelic that is being used within communities in some places. We are also seeing a lot of young people using Gaelic and going through Gaelic medium education, but that not then being translated into Gaelic being used in the home and workplace and so on, when they come out the other end of that. Without doubt, if the Gaelic language is to continue to be a language that is alive and well in communities, and not just an academic language, we need to see much more use within community settings.

Ruth Maguire: What work is Highlands and Islands Enterprise doing in terms of the economic asset that Gaelic undoubtedly is?

Joanna Peteranna: We do a lot of work with businesses and communities in all the Gaelic-speaking areas to encourage consideration of its use in the workplace. We encourage employers to consider actively recruiting Gaelic speakers in

their businesses. We also consider the opportunity for Gaelic to add authenticity to the provenance of product offerings, particularly in the cultural sector, but also in food and drink, and in tourism. That can add value because it highlights those products or services as being something from a particular place, which we know is very attractive to buyers, particularly international buyers.

Ruth Maguire: That is interesting.

I also ask Donald Macleod for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's response to the statement that Gaelic is in crisis.

Donald Macleod: Like Joanna, I note that "crisis" is maybe a more sensationalist use of language to describe the situation that we are in. We maybe need to be a bit more pragmatic in looking at the different aspects of data that we have. In certain parts of our island community, Gaelic is still a strong language that is being used in everyday life. However, as I mentioned in my previous response, we are concerned that we are seeing aspects of decline in the language. We now have a long-standing and stable system for Gaelic learning and Gaelic-medium education, but we do not have stability in relation to the future of the language in the community.

That comes back to what James Wylie said about needing to make sure that we have sports activities, cultural activities, music, events and aspects of community life that are conducted through the medium of Gaelic, and that we are constantly demonstrating the acceptable use, and normalising the use, of Gaelic as an everyday language in our communities.

09:15

We have sometimes encountered degrees of concern about very correct and traditional use of the language and people being afraid to use it or intimidated about using it. Language is constantly evolving, and Gaelic is no different from any other language in respect of young people in particular and different generations of people using it and evolving its nature. We have to accept that Gaelic should be the same and we should not be discouraging people from using evolved aspects of the language.

I would not go so far as to say that we have a crisis, as the professor said, but I think that we have to take the opportunity that the bill presents to ensure that we are arresting decline and working strategically so that we have a holistic community approach to ensuring that the language is used and valued every day.

Ruth Maguire: I suppose that there is quite a distance between crisis and arresting decline. Is arresting decline urgent enough?

Donald Macleod: I suppose that things are different in different communities in our islands. I can see that there is merit in adding a sense of urgency. That is why we welcome in particular what the bill aspires to do. I think that labelling situations as a crisis can sometimes be unhelpful to moving on positively. There is a lot of good work going on, and it can be disillusioning to organisations that work across the Gaelic community to feel in their everyday work that their work is not achieving what everyone wanted it to achieve. Maybe we need to take a more positive approach. Arresting decline may be playing things down a little, but good, strong work is happening, and we want to build on that in a positive way rather than be critical of the decline.

Ruth Maguire: Finally, is your local authority providing opportunities for children, young people, families and the whole community to take part in art, culture and sport through Gaelic?

Donald Macleod: Yes—absolutely. That is a key part of recognising that we need to take the language beyond the classroom. We are, for instance, trying to provide formal opportunities for parents and community members to learn Gaelic, whether that be virtually or face to face. We are trying to support the greater use of Gaelic in community activity. We are looking at how we support youths and the community to undertake sports and arts in Gaelic. There is rich participation in events such as the Mòds—the Gaelic cultural and music events—Gaelic sports events and events such as FilmG, in which there is high participation. However, we also recognise that we have to move the approach beyond the individuals who participate in those things to have a wider audience, and to try to make Gaelic into something that is more of an everyday presence.

We have almost a two-stream element at the moment. We need to be very proactive in creating specific events that give the opportunity for a Gaelic-immersive experience, but we are also trying to move Gaelic into a more accepted everyday language that will be spoken in the shop, on the bus or down the street.

Ruth Maguire: I am sorry—I know that I said "Finally", but I have just a tiny final question. Some of the things that you have spoken about tend to be geared towards the learner community. In the Western Isles, you will hear Gaelic in the shops and when people are working and doing things. Are the two communities coming together? They are maybe not separate. Do you know what I mean? Is there a mixture?

Donald Macleod: I would say yes. However, it works best where the communities come together. That goes back to my earlier point about our needing to accept that everyone is in a spectrum of fluency, as they are with any language, and we

have to be more comfortable in encouraging the learner speaker to be confident in trying out the language, and praising them and recognising that they are having a go. That has sometimes been a bit of an issue. It depends on the kind of event that people are at and how it is promoted. We need to ensure that the experience is as inclusive as possible and that using the language is never discouraged.

Ruth Maguire: Okay. Thank you. That is helpful.

The Convener: I want to pick up on something. Donald Macleod and Joanna Peteranna talked about taking the language beyond the classroom, but said that that has not translated into Gaelic being used in the home and the workplace. You want the normalisation of Gaelic in everyday communities to arrest and stop the decline in its use, you want to encourage people to try out the language at sporting events, and you want it to become an accepted everyday language. Those are just some of the things that I have scribbled down. However, the bill does not help to make that any more possible, does it? You are already doing that.

Donald Macleod: That is where strengthening the bill around areas of linguistic significance could be really important, alongside, as I said last week, work on how the standards are defined and on the measurements and the accountability of authorities and other bodies with responsibilities for Gaelic. There is a strategic approach at the moment, to some degree, but it can also be ad hoc. If the bill has teeth in relation to areas of linguistic significance and includes a meaningful framework that will drive those improvements in a structured and strategic way, married with a robust plan and well-defined measures and accountability, we could see a more co-ordinated approach to the arresting of decline and fostering of growth in the use of the language.

The Convener: Colleagues will dig in more around those areas of linguistic significance. Joanna Peteranna, do you have any comments on my question regarding the bill's function?

Joanna Peteranna: First, I completely agree with what Donald Macleod has just said, and I will add something to that. The power of designating an area of linguistic significance is that it also highlights to members of communities, who might not realise how important our places are in terms of the survival and the future thriving of a language, the role that they play but perhaps do not see. I am thinking in particular about some of the older members of the community, who have a rich knowledge of the language. We need to create that community confidence, and that is where a designation of—*[Interruption.]*

The Convener: We might need to get Joanna's connection checked out—it has gone a little awry.

We move to questions from Bill Kidd.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): My question is for all three witnesses, but I will address it to James Wylie first. Are you content with the approach that the bill takes towards providing ministers with the range of powers to create duties on public bodies in relation to the delivery of Gaelic and Scots?

James Wylie: We have concerns about the power and exactly what the bill means in that regard. As we highlighted in our response, as a local authority that has never had Gaelic as part of its culture, we fully accept that, right across the vast majority of the rest of mainland Scotland, Gaelic was part of the culture. However, our concern is that it has never been part of the culture in the northern isles. Listening to the evidence in the past three meetings, it has been interesting to hear assurances that things would be done in discussion with the local authorities. We have highlighted that we would want that discussion to take place within our communities as well. However, we still have concerns about the fact that there is a lack of detail about what that would actually mean and what enforcement would take place.

With regard to Scots, we have a concern about the bundling of things into the term "Scots". From an Orkney perspective—the same is probably the case from a Shetland perspective—we would say that we have a language variant and not a dialect. Our language is based on strong links with Faroese and Icelandic tradition, so we would be looking to see a clear acknowledgement of that clear language. From our perspective, we want to see more detail that links specifically to supporting our specific language, so that it is not just lumped in with a wider concept.

Bill Kidd: I understand what you are saying, but do you think that the bill, as it stands, would actually create duties on public bodies to deliver Gaelic or Scots, depending on which part of the country you are in?

James Wylie: I think that it is getting there, but it has to be very clear. As I said in our introduction, from my perspective, it is about providing protection, and I believe that the bill is getting there. As I said, I just want to be absolutely clear that we will not be forced to do things that we should not be doing as part of our culture. I would say that it is getting to that point.

Bill Kidd: I will come back to that in a wee bit—thanks very much for that.

Joanna Peteranna, do you have any thoughts on that?

Joanna Peteranna: I am sorry—I think I missed part of the question due to my connection.

Bill Kidd: I will say it again. What is your opinion on the approach that the bill takes towards providing ministers with the range of powers, which they might believe that they need, to create duties on public bodies in relation to the delivery of Gaelic and Scots?

Joanna Peteranna: The bill provides a good framework, but my thinking is that it probably still needs to be strengthened in the detail around what those duties would actually be, how they would be monitored and what would be delivered as a result of conferring them on bodies. I do not think that that is particularly clear so far, and we would certainly welcome that area being strengthened.

Donald Macleod: As a local authority, we very much welcome the idea of duties being recognised within the bill. I will make two points. First, I recognise that the bill might not define the specific duties because of the ability to vary them over time. That is where secondary legislation or statutory guidance would be really important in defining for local authorities, through consultation, what those duties are, how they are fulfilled and measured, and what accountability is associated with them.

The second point is a point that I made last week to the committee. It is a diverse area of policy, and we need to think about how we marry the expectation of setting duties with local decision making and local accountability, while recognising the variation of Gaelic and Scots across the nation. Somehow, we have to marry the imposing of duties with the ability to form and shape policy locally, while reflecting local context. As we see in the room today, language policy in, for example, the Western Isles, Orkney, Dumfries and Galloway or Aberdeenshire can be very different.

Bill Kidd: That is perfectly understandable. Thanks very much to all three of you for that.

On the back of that, a wee bit of controversy is maybe creeping in here. This has been discussed already. Should local authorities not have to make provision in areas where communities show little interest in Gaelic and Scots?

James Wylie: We have a responsibility to protect the languages. As a result, we need to be in a position where, in consultation with the Scottish Government, we are working to see what is right for our communities. From our perspective in Orkney, as far as I am concerned, we would, as a local authority, be working to drive forward a plan for the development and sustainability of the Orkney language.

In answer to your question, there is a need for us, in consultation, to drive that forward. If a local authority was not doing that, it would need a very strong argument in order to say why. However, the local authority—and the community in which it operates—should still have the right to that robust conversation with Scottish ministers. It should not be an absolute enforcement; it should be a discussion in which we work our way through the why and the purposes behind what we are doing.

09:30

Bill Kidd: Thank you very much for that—that is interesting.

Joanna Peteranna: I agree with what has been said. I think that there should be no absolute—*[Inaudible.]*—community that is making—*[Inaudible.]*

The Convener: Joanna, I am sorry—

Joanna Peteranna: Have I lost my connection again?

The Convener: If I am being kind, it is very intermittent.

Can we get broadcasting to have a look at that? We might have to go to audio only.

While we are investigating that, can we bring in Donald?

Donald Macleod: That is me unmuted. It is an interesting question because, again, it comes round to the diversity of the use of language across the nation, both Gaelic and Scots, in equal measure.

As I mentioned earlier, ultimately, we would welcome the strengthening in the protection of languages that the inclusion of duties would give to the bill. Our authority would have no issue with that but, looking at it across the nation, there is a concern. From speaking with local authority colleagues from other areas, I know that there is concern about the potential risk of the imposition of duties to provide provision for which there is no market. That comes back to the point I was making earlier around trying to marry the duties with mechanisms, in order to have, as James Wylie described, a robust dialogue and degrees of local decision making.

As we are aware, there is provision in existing legislation for communities to request Gaelic-medium education. That is a bureaucratic and challenging process and there is merit in that being less bureaucratic and more streamlined, but there is a need to marry the wishes and aspirations of communities within their local authority area with the duty to make a provision to meet that need. For me, there is maybe a supply and demand aspect to that.

The Convener: We will go back to Joanna, on audio only. I hope that that is a bit better.

We have an image—let us see how we get on.

Joanna Peteranna: I will try again—I have switched my camera off now.

The community decision making is critical. It is important that the actual communities get a voice in the decision about whether they are or are not an area of linguistic significance. It should not be purely down to an agency, such as a local authority, to make that decision on behalf of the community; it must be based on robust community engagement.

Bill Kidd: All three of you spoke strongly on behalf of the rights of communities over someone just making a decision for them. That was extremely interesting, and there was a bit of unity in that.

The Convener: We move to questions from Willie Rennie.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am struggling with what the area of linguistic significance is and what it will actually do. Donald Macleod was talking about the secondary legislation that might fill in some of the gaps. If I arrive in an area of linguistic significance, what will I see, feel and hear that is different, other than a sign on an entrance to a village? I hope that Donald can tell me what it will look like.

Donald Macleod: That is one of our concerns, which has, I hope, been echoed in our submission. For instance, the “National Gaelic Language Plan 2023-28” talks of creating three Gaelic communities that are separate to areas of linguistic significance. We do not completely understand how what is in the national Gaelic plan at the moment would relate to areas of linguistic significance.

Our position is that we recognise the huge potential in the bill for areas of linguistic significance to be major policy drivers in ensuring accountability for local authorities, statutory bodies, employers and community groups to have enforceable Gaelic plans that will lead to a strategic approach to the development and growth of the language in the community.

That has to be linked to standards, measures and accountability to give it strength. There are concerns that without having a definition—perhaps not in the bill itself but certainly in secondary legislation—of what an area of linguistic significance actually is, that might become no more than a sign at the entrance to a village. It has to be more than that.

We also have concerns about how areas of linguistic significance might be defined and what

the criteria for identifying such an area might be. I have read a number of the consultation submissions. There is a lot of talk about the percentage of language speakers in a population, but that is a very narrow definition. I think we have to look at a suite of different measures and indicators that could highlight an area of linguistic significance.

In an area such as the Western Isles, where Gaelic is spoken throughout the whole local authority area, we would not want to set our communities against each other. We have to look at our whole island community as a potential area of linguistic significance. We do not want to rule out more urban areas, such as the centre of Stornoway, where there are many Gaelic speakers but maybe not enough to reach a threshold or a percentage of the population. We want an inclusive approach that allows local authorities to work closely with their communities to determine whether they want to become an area of linguistic significance, whether they meet the criteria and whether there is a robust and enforceable plan, that the community themselves contribute to, for things that will happen in that community. It should absolutely not just be a sign at the entrance to a village.

Willie Rennie: You have given me lots of stuff there, but you have not told me what it will feel like. You are in charge. Let us say that you are in charge of driving the policy and that you are making suggestions to the community. What would you suggest should be done?

Donald Macleod: People should be able to see and feel an absolute presence of the language in everyday life and in all aspects of what goes on in that community. That should be first and foremost. I am speaking from a Gaelic perspective, and it should be Gaelic-first experience. In every encounter that happens, and in every facet of life, Gaelic should be the first language used. A resident in or visitor to an area of linguistic significance should be able to access Gaelic-first resources and be able to learn the language in that area. There should be a co-ordinated approach, so that education is tied in with socioeconomic factors to ensure that there are employment pathways into Gaelic-speaking roles so that there is Gaelic capability in the workforce. It should be an authentic community.

Willie Rennie: Is anything stopping you from doing that now?

Donald Macleod: Ultimately, resources are. That is another area of concern for us. At the moment, an area of linguistic significance comes with no real, tangible resourcing, particularly financially. There is a cost to creating that sort of environment and provision. As well as the cost of

resourcing, there is the need to consult communities, which has not happened yet.

Although there is not really anything that formally stops communities doing it, the bill gives an opportunity not to compel, but to strongly encourage, communities to take that forward and to strengthen the language.

Willie Rennie: With the convener's permission, I will bring in Liam Kerr, who might have a question about that.

The Convener: James Wylie is keen to respond.

Willie Rennie: I will bring James in too.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am grateful to my colleague Willie Rennie.

Donald Macleod, on that point, designating an area of linguistic significance is a choice for the local authority, and you have just acknowledged that there will be a cost attached to making that choice. You spoke about Gaelic resources and access to learning, education and employment pathways.

You acknowledge the cost, and there will be a cost to consultation. Given that local authorities are not awash with cash on any analysis, is it likely that any local authority will choose to use the power?

Donald Macleod: That is a genuine concern. The financial memorandum recognises an estimated cost of about £50,000 for an authority to go through the process. I am perhaps not remembering the figure—I read it a wee while back—but there is an estimated cost that an authority may incur, from its own resources, to pursue consultation and the establishment of an area of linguistic significance.

As we have been discussing with Mr Rennie just now, to do something meaningful will require financial resource. Absolutely, local authorities are in as challenging a financial position as they have ever been in.

Speaking for my own authority, we have a long-standing and deep commitment to protecting and developing Gaelic, Gaelic-medium education and all aspects of Gaelic. The proposal is something that we would strongly support, and we would want to find the resources for it.

For other local authority areas, where the position on languages may be more marginal, I would tend to agree that there are issues around incentivising the approach that could become difficult. That is not the position that our authority would be in, however, in such a heartland area of the language.

James Wylie: You asked how it would feel, Mr Rennie. Someone arriving at the ferry terminal in Orkney would have boarded a ferry that had a name that fitted with the language. The announcements on the ferry services would be made in the Orcadian language: people would hear it. They would get off the ferry and the street names would be in the Orcadian language—although it is not just about the street names. The music, sports and the arts bring people together through the abundance of festivals that go on in this area, across the whole archipelago, bringing together people who are using a language that all are hearing. From my perspective, it is those points that are the most powerful. When we bring communities together, with the language being spoken and people hearing it, that is where words drip through the whole of our community.

We are using the language as language 3 in our school buildings, so we are building capacity in all our children to understand and use Scots. Returning to the earlier point, people will hear it as a language for all, and they will see it across most things that they do. How does that fit into an area of linguistic significance? I would suggest that we are there. Would we put ourselves forward and spend all the money? That would be up to our elected members, but it is a lot of money for something that is possibly already here. What the bill does for us is to try and protect that and—as Donald Macleod has quite rightly highlighted—that may well help to ensure that, once we get clear criteria behind everything, the sustainability of the languages across the country is supported in their development.

From an Orkney perspective, I would say that we have probably already achieved some of that. You can come to Orkney and tell me whether we have.

The Convener: You are a very good advert: I am keen to get myself up there fairly soon.

Please carry on, Willie.

Willie Rennie: Do you wish to add something, Joanna Peteranna?

Joanna Peteranna: Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this. Just to add to what has already been said, we also need to consider the potential cost to the economy of not doing some of the activities that we have just spoken about. I will speak on behalf of Gaelic, which is what I know about, but I am not discounting Scots from this.

We are aware that the Gaelic language adds to our economy through some of things that I mentioned earlier: the products, services, tourism, food and drink and other things that use Gaelic as part of their business. If we do not protect the language and do not take action to ensure that it is

still a real, live language within our communities, some of that economic value could be lost. This is not just about the cost that is put in; we have to consider the opportunity cost of not taking action.

09:45

Willie Rennie: I will summarise. You have made a compelling case for what it could look like. However, we have also acknowledged, I think, that that could happen already and that the bill will not really make much difference in that regard—finance will be a major hurdle. If the bill is to be significant, it will probably need some degree of compulsion, requirement or standard, but I do not see that emerging from the bill.

The Convener: Ruth Maguire has a wee supplementary question.

Ruth Maguire: I do. I do not want to go over the top of Willie Rennie's summarising of the situation, but I want to go back a little. My question is for Donald Macleod in particular. I am more interested in what an area of linguistic significance would look like to somebody who lived there, rather than to a visitor. As a Gaelic speaker in one of your villages or in town, would I expect the right for my child to do all their secondary school subjects through the medium of Gaelic? Would my grandparent in a home have a care assistant who spoke Gaelic when caring for her?

Of course, the bill cannot address some of those challenges in and of itself, but I want to get a sense of whether the community should decide, rather than the local authority. Your local authority is in the heartlands, but other local authorities—for example, Highland Council—cover a greater area. Should the community itself decide? As a resident of your area, what could I expect?

In addition, what is preventing those things from happening now? Some challenges, such as recruitment and housing, are universal; they are faced in many rural areas.

The Convener: We will go to Donald Macleod first.

Donald Macleod: [*Inaudible.*]

The Convener: Donald, you are on now.

Donald Macleod: Sorry, I was muted again.

Ruth Maguire raises very interesting points. Some of our initial responses may have been more about the sense of a visitor coming into that community, so I understand her perspective of wanting to explore what it should be for a resident.

I agree whole-heartedly that, if an area of linguistic significance is to be successful, it has to happen in consultation with the community about what that community wants from that area of

linguistic significance. If that is about being able to have a full curriculum in secondary education, having a care home in which everyone speaks Gaelic, or having a cultural arts centre that fosters and develops the language, that should be the plan—I assume that there would be an implementation plan for an area of linguistic significance.

That plan has to be defined in consultation with the community. As much as it may be administered and overseen by a local authority, a local authority should not impose on a community the details and the actions of a plan for an area of linguistic significance. It has to happen in consultation with what that community wants, what it feels is lacking at the moment, and its priority for strengthening and developing the language. I agree with that completely.

As I mentioned, a plan would almost certainly have to be developed for an area of linguistic significance, but that plan has to be realistically costed and resourced. Ultimately, that is the concern. I am talking about the barriers that stop those things from happening now: aspects of co-ordination and strategy, of financial resource and of a lack of compulsion. As much as there are issues around the bill, it could have the strength of creating some compulsion to make things happen. However, when it comes to how we could do it, the bill is not quite there yet—particularly on duties, measures, smart targets and resourcing. If a requirement falls on a local authority that does not have the resource to do it, it will not happen.

Ruth Maguire: That is very helpful.

The Convener: To carry on with that thread, how should our public bodies be held accountable for the support and services that they might provide in relation to the Gaelic language? You spoke about care homes and art centres. Is the panel content with the proposals that are in the bill to allow those things to happen?

Who would like to go first?

Donald Macleod: I am happy to come in on that.

The Convener: If you do not mind, Donald, as your mic is already on.

Donald Macleod: Yes, because my mic is already on.

What the bill aspires to do in relation to Bòrd na Gàidhlig—the responsibility for a national Gaelic plan coming to the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig having responsibility or greater enforcement ability for the Gaelic plans of organisations, public bodies and private enterprises—would be an important strengthening.

There is still the issue about Bòrd na Gàidhlig being all things to all sectors and communities. That is mentioned in several consultation responses. I am not 100 per cent settled on the idea that a language commissioner should have responsibility for the governance and duties on organisations with a Gaelic plan to enforce the delivery of them, but there has to be some marriage between a Scottish Government plan and a Bòrd na Gàidhlig function, be that governance and enforcement, or potentially the role of a language commissioner.

The Convener: I suppose that we now have a Deputy First Minister who is responsible for the Scottish languages, so that may assist in that.

Joanna Peteranna: I agree with the point about there being some tension between the various roles of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and that the bill seems to seek to address some of that, which is excellent. I echo Donald Macleod's point about the requirement for there to be an implementation plan put in place, and there should be some metrics associated with that. There should be a dose of pragmatism that budgets are not infinite and therefore priorities need to be identified, and those priorities might look very different in different places. Where the language is more alive in the community, the priorities may look more like the care home example that was given, but in other places it might look quite different. The ability for different places to make their own plans and set their own metrics but then be held accountable for delivering them with resources to back that up is where we need to get to.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I will come to James Wylie first. Like the convener, I was very heartened by your description of Orkney. It is a place that I have not been yet, and I certainly intend to visit.

We touched on this earlier, but I want to explore what is missing in the policy landscape for supporting Scots, or Orcadian. To what extent does the bill address that?

James Wylie: From our perspective, what is missing is the formal aspect that I referred to earlier about the protection of specific languages. I am sorry to repeat myself, but I will keep doing it whenever I get the opportunity. Orkney has the internationally renowned institute for northern studies, which is associated with the University of the Highlands and Islands, and it has done huge amounts of research into the topic. We support the principle of the bill, because we are looking for our language to be protected and to make sure that there are standards around that expectation.

I highlighted in my answer to Mr Rennie, as you mention, that there is a huge amount going on in Orkney that allows that language to thrive and

sustain itself. Although we have not yet seen the detail behind it, the bill is starting to get into those expectations, principles and standards. That is what the bill would do that makes it slightly different to what we have now. However, not having yet seen those standards, I cannot really comment on that.

Michelle Thomson: So that I am clear, do you think that more is missing from the policy landscape, apart from standards? I am trying to drill into what the bill might enable and what is missing or where the gaps are. Has everything else been covered, or is it just standards that are missing?

James Wylie: As we said in our response, quite a lot is covered in the bill, but there is also quite a lot that is missing and where we need to be able to tease out the detail. Certainly, from our perspective, it is about the sustainability of the language and ensuring that it has protection. I have spoken about the areas of linguistic significance and how Orkney is already there in what it has achieved, but including that as formal policy in the bill would allow other areas to be protected and languages to be sustainable, which would be welcome.

Michelle Thomson: I will bring in Donald Macleod to answer the same question. What is currently missing from the policy landscape to support Scots? How will the bill address any gaps?

Donald Macleod: I am afraid that I will be able to answer only from the perspective of Gaelic; I do not have the experience to be able to comment on Scots. As I mentioned previously, provisions in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 establish access to Gaelic-medium education. It can be exceptionally bureaucratic and challenging to create that access in some areas. There is a gap there; the bill may be able to simplify and streamline the process for education.

The bill potentially addresses a gap by creating a greater community focus on the Gaelic language so that it would exist beyond education, which is a point that has been made many times. Existing legislation focuses heavily on education sectors as a means to secure the future of language, but the bill creates the potential for greater duties to be placed on local authorities, not just education authorities, as a whole, and there is greater scope for them and communities to be involved. I am not saying that, as it stands, the bill does that perfectly, but it fills a potential gap in creating greater accountability.

We have concerns that the bill may not go far enough—there is the potential to define rights as opposed to duties. However, it goes a long way to try to create a more holistic approach and a

community-wide responsibility and duty to protect and grow language.

Michelle Thomson: I will not bring in Joanna Peteranna at the moment. I will go back to a question for James Wylie about Orcadian. In the work that you have done in your communities, what does success look like and how do you measure it?

James Wylie: From my perspective, success is where things just happen; it is not forced: communities are coming together to put on events in the language and it is being spoken naturally. As Donald Macleod has highlighted, success is about making sure that language is supported in our schools and that we are providing for all young people to experience the Orcadian language throughout the learning process. I highlighted the institute for northern studies. There is an opportunity for the language to be developed from early learning and childcare through to PhD level. The impact of that would be measured through outcomes and by looking at what qualifications can be achieved in the language.

As far as I am concerned, as I highlighted to Mr Rennie, success is in the fact that people live and breathe the language. As I said, it would mean that you could board a ferry and all the mentions would be in the language, street names would be in the language and you could hear people speaking it—it is a very natural process. I would see that as a positive outcome.

10:00

Michelle Thomson: We heard earlier about the limited financial resources that come with the bill. Notwithstanding that lack of financial resources, are there ways in which the bill will be helpful in providing additional support?

James Wylie: We heard from last week's panel about the work that is going on in Education Scotland. We are aware that we have Bòrd na Gàidhlig as a structured organisation. In my last head teacher post, I ran a Gaelic-medium unit and know the power that can come from that.

Some points were made last week about the work of Scots language organisations and of Education Scotland. There is a need to look at that and beef it up. I hope that, because of the bill, we will start to see more prevalence for the Scots language and for the other languages that I keep going on about, and that there will be a more detailed structure to help and support that.

As a result of our commitment, as a council, to the Orkney language, culture and heritage, and despite the major cuts that have happened in the past 10 to 12 years, we have always funded things such as music tuition and free instrument hire,

because we understand that that is part of the culture and heritage of our local authority. That was supported by the Government decision to fund that, but we have also done the same with sport and physical activity, with that part of the culture and heritage here being fully funded by the council. We have continued supporting that in a very difficult landscape.

In answer to your question, I would like to see more detail and structure to support the development of Scots and of the other languages in this country.

The Convener: We come to questions from Ross Greer. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry; I was not aware that Liam Kerr has a supplementary question.

Liam Kerr: James Wylie, I would like to stay on the point that my friend Michelle Thomson has raised. Your submission raises concerns that the bill uses the concept of what you call "Standardised Scots", as seen in the translation of the bill, as opposed to recognising variants such as Orkney Norn. Can you develop that concern to help the committee understand it? Particularly, what does educating in Scots mean in practice for the likes of Norn or, indeed, Doric?

James Wylie: I can speak from an Orkney perspective. Norn has a different syntax and sentence structure. It is different. It is not just a case of slightly different words in different dialects; the whole construction of sentences is different and we would argue that that is what makes it a language. That is why we would like to see the bill give special recognition to the northern isles, taking both Orkney and Shetland into consideration and respecting the fact that there is a different language. In answer to your question, that is not just about different words; it is about sentence structure and syntactic development.

Liam Kerr: That is an extremely important point, which begs a further question. You spoke earlier about getting the detail of the bill correct. What precisely did you mean by that? What requires to be changed in the bill to ensure that the different aspects of Norn are protected and not subsumed under a standardised category of "Scots"?

James Wylie: I would argue that it should have a completely separate category to itself. If the bill is recognising language in Scotland, we should recognise that Norn is a language, as opposed to just a dialect, and that it should be separate in the bill.

In addition, I would argue that the subtleties of the approach that the bill takes to Scots should be taken with regard to Orkney Norn as well, because, if the bill is intended to support the heritage of our language and to ensure that it thrives, we need to get the approach right at the

outset from our own perspective, rather than just lumping in the Orkney Norn language with Scots.

Liam Kerr: My final question picks up on something that Michelle Thomson explored earlier. You mentioned in your submission that there is a risk that the creation of a standardised Scots will come at the expense of Orkney Norn language and culture, and I presume that countering that will require resource and will involve cost. You also mentioned that the additional costs and staffing pressures have not been considered.

From looking into the process, do you have any idea what the financial consequences of the bill as drafted would be for Orkney Islands Council? In any event, do you think that Orkney Islands Council—given all the support that you have already put towards Norn—is in any position to take on extra costs to protect Norn that might arise from the bill?

James Wylie: At this moment in time, Orkney Islands Council is not in a position to take on any additional costs for anything. Like everybody else, we are in a position in which we cannot increase spending and have got to decrease spending. Obviously, that means that we have to do things differently, but there are issues with that, given the context of the archipelago in which we work.

We have 12 islands with individual schools on them that are linked by ferries, and the mainland, which has 11 schools on it. Therefore, the bill has logistical implications, which we raised in our consultation response in relation to Gaelic and what we would have to do if the provision of Gaelic-medium education was requested and promoted. As I mentioned earlier, I ran a Gaelic-medium unit that had a huge catchment area, and we bussed children to it. However, I cannot do that in an Orkney context—I cannot transport children by ferry to a single Gaelic-medium unit; that would take too long. Therefore, we would need to provide such facilities on all those different islands.

From an Orkney Norn perspective, there is cost associated with continuing professional development for staff—that issue was raised last week, I think. However, we would not be starting from zero, which is what we would be doing with Gaelic; rather, we would be building on a foundation that we already have in place. Further, as has already been highlighted in this morning's feedback, we have staff in all our schools who speak Orkney Norn and who therefore provide a community of language speakers that can support the language in schools. With Gaelic, we would be starting from zero, so it would involve a huge cost to us.

Liam Kerr: Thank you.

The Convener: I apologise for missing you out earlier, Mr Kerr—the filing system on my desk is a bit chaotic this morning.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Good morning. James Wylie, I want to pursue with you the issue that Michelle Thomson raised about how to measure success, and what success looks like.

Do you take into account the outcomes in the national performance framework when you are measuring success locally in this regard, or are there not really relevant indicators for your local context, particularly in relation to success around language in an Orcadian context?

James Wylie: It is not something that we do at the moment, but that does not mean that it could not be picked up. As with all the work in the bill, should it come to fruition, we will need to go back to pick up on that and review everything that we do. There are definitely areas in which we could look at quantifying impacts and so on.

That comes back to the points that we made in our response about our concern over the resource and costs that are associated with the suggestion that we will have to submit plans and carry out assessments. Last week, we even heard that, once the expectations have been set out and the criteria are in place, our performance against them will perhaps also be measured by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. That is another aspect that we would need to work on.

We are talking about areas that have very limited resources, so we need to be careful to ensure that what we are measuring is actually going to see an impact. From our perspective, we probably have some work to do on that.

Ross Greer: Thank you. I will put the same question about measuring success to Donald Macleod and Joanna Peteranna. In the current policy landscape, before we take into consideration what the bill would do, are you clear about how you are supposed to be measuring success in your areas and what the metrics are? Is that something that you are able to do? Is the data available for you to confidently assess whether or not success is happening?

Donald Macleod: I will come in first on that. The answer to that question, in blunt terms, is, ultimately, no. The existing measures do not necessarily capture the nuances of Gaelic. If we are talking about an education setting, the national measures struggle to capture Gaelic in a meaningful way, particularly where there are areas of small cohorts, and because of the measures that sit alongside English education and the fact that it is always dwarfed by that. Therefore, it is very hard to capture the real changes and growth in Gaelic language use and performance in Gaelic.

Last week, I mentioned the important point that the measures that exist for Gaelic tend to be quite basic and very quantity focused—they relate to things such as the number of speakers or learners, the number of enrolments and the number of people who are achieving a certain level. We do not have measures that are robust enough with regard to quality. Although quantity measures are really important, when we talk about standards and accountability, we must also ensure that we build in quality measures. There might be roles for organisations such as HMIE or other accountability bodies in that regard.

Number and quantity measures alone give us some information but, without context, they can become quite meaningless and open to subjective view. That information can be supported by having measures of quality of experience and quality of language acquisition, and measures that look at not just the number of speakers or learners but how the language is being used, how frequently and at what standard.

Ross Greer: Thank you—that was really useful.

What impact will the bill have on your ability to measure success and on what success is defined as? Will the bill in itself have any significant impact on the challenges that you have just mentioned?

Donald Macleod: The bill alludes to that through the establishment of standards, accountability and duties but, in and of itself, the bill does not define how that will be done. I recognise that the bill and the wording of the bill would not be that specific. However, again, we are talking about an area where secondary legislation or statutory guidance around the bill will become very important. That will need to be developed in consultation with stakeholders, because we need to know—with regard to how the duties and requirements of the bill will be measured—exactly what those standards are going to be, how they are going to be measured over time and how the data is going to be used to enforce accountability or, possibly, negative consequences.

The bill gets into that space and recognises that something has to happen, but there is not yet the granular detail on what that would mean in real terms for education authorities or local authorities more widely.

The Convener: For your information, Ross, James Wylie also wants to come in on that.

Ross Greer: Yes, I will bring James and Joanna in in a second, but I have a final question for Donald on that.

One of the challenges for us—across a range of legislation—relates to the balance between what we put in primary legislation to give definitive clarity versus what we want to put in secondary

legislation and statutory guidance to allow for flexibility of approach and, in particular, localised approaches. Is there anything that could be included in the bill to provide more clarity or, ultimately, is it the case, as you have just indicated, that that should be left to the more flexible approach that secondary legislation gives us?

10:15

Donald Macleod: Yes, I think that that is right. I do not think that there are aspects that are missing from the bill; the issue is what will be in the secondary legislation or statutory guidance that will allow for definition. Much more consultation has to happen around that.

When it comes to the context for the bill, a golden thread running through it is about the diversity of the nation. The bill is different from a lot of other legislation, which might be more applicable Scotland wide. There are unique geographical elements to the bill, which apply in lots of different ways, and having more detail in the bill would make that more challenging. Recognising that the detail needs to be in secondary legislation or the statutory guidance is enough for me. I do not think that anything should be added to the bill to make the position clearer, because of the constraints that that would create.

James Wylie: The key points have been made. However, in relation to outcomes and measures of success, as we said in our response, in the 2011 census, 41 per cent of Orcadians reported that they spoke the language, which, in my view, is a significant measure. A lot of that was achieved through the work that Professor Donna Heddle—who is an outstanding academic in that field—did in promoting it. She tried her best to get a box on the census for Orkney Norn, but that did not happen. Asking people whether they believe that they speak the language would provide a significant measure of success.

Ross Greer: I will put the same package of questions to Joanna Peteranna. Is Highlands and Islands Enterprise clear on how it should be measuring success currently? Will the bill change anything in relation to how you measure success?

Joanna Peteranna: As part of our organisational metrics, we capture the support that we put into Gaelic projects and Gaelic organisations. We do not currently do that for Scots and other Scottish languages, but I think that it would be quite straightforward for us to do that in the future.

On what success looks like for us, I come back to the point about having thriving communities. Success is to do with population and the number of businesses and third sector organisations that

are operating in communities and employing people or creating jobs that make use of language, whether that is explicitly or implicitly the case with those roles.

On what are appropriate measures of success, I come back to the point that each community is different, and each community will have very different priorities. Therefore, it is critical that, in the future, any measures of success are determined as part of the work on community planning. As communities are consulted and decide on the right way forward for their area, the measures of success need to go alongside what each community has set as its priorities.

Ross Greer: Are there any provisions in the bill that would change how HIE measures success?

Joanna Peteranna: As the bill stands, I do not think so.

The Convener: The last question is about your views on the financial memorandum. On 13 May, the Finance and Public Administration Committee wrote to the cabinet secretary to raise a number of concerns associated with the measures that are proposed in the bill, as well as about funding and support for Gaelic and Scots more generally. It asked the Scottish Government to reflect on the issues that had been raised in evidence on the adequacy of the funding.

What are your thoughts on that issue and on the view that the bill will constitute

“a shift in activity, a repurposing of resources in terms of effort and attention”

but will not require significant additional funding?

Who would like to go first? Would it be okay to start with you, Donald?

Donald Macleod: Absolutely. In earlier responses, I touched a little on our concern, as a local authority, about the financial memorandum. I understand the context of how the bill could result in reprioritisation or repurposing of existing funds to ensure that they align with the priorities of the bill, but, for me, there are two issues with that.

First, the aspirations of the bill might go beyond the potential for that amount of resource, particularly in the areas of growth and education, and in relation to areas of linguistic significance, which we have spoken about. That will require additional financial resource, particularly in resourcing plans.

Secondly, with regard to repurposing resources, those resources are already doing work in the development of language, so repurposing them might come with risk, and I do not know what degree of risk assessment has been done on what the repurposing of funds could result in. For example, the funding that we receive employs a lot

of staff in the development of Gaelic-medium education and the support of Gaelic language, so repurposing those funds could significantly disrupt that.

Another thing that I spoke about at the committee last week was the fact that local authorities, both in general and specifically in the realm of Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic language, are operating on one-year budgets and one-year grant allocations, and it is very difficult to plan strategically when our funding is determined only year on year. The reality is that we have to do so almost within 10 or 11 months. With such tight financial restrictions, it is difficult to plan strategically for the security and development of language, in line with the aspirations of the bill.

I am not sure that that answers your question in full, but that is an important area.

The Convener: Throughout this morning's session, you have spoken at length about the fact that, if it is to do something meaningful, the bill will require significant resource. You have made reference to that throughout your evidence. Thank you for that.

Joanna Peteranna: I have a couple of points to make on that. I agree that, in order to make meaningful progress, additional resource will be required because, otherwise, the progress will be too slow.

From a Highlands and Islands Enterprise perspective—again, I am focusing on Gaelic-speaking areas, because that is what I am familiar with—we already have what we refer to as our target areas, which are the places that generally face a multiplicity of challenges, including rurality and population. There is a strong overlap between those particularly challenged areas and places that could become areas of linguistic significance. Therefore, as an organisation, we are already targeting resource at many of those places, and the bill could bring greater alignment with our partners, so that we bring our collective weight to bear in those places.

James Wylie: We have to stop kidding ourselves that repurposing is going to achieve the outcomes that we are looking for. As Donald Macleod and Joanna Peteranna highlighted, if we want to achieve the bill's aims, as you read out, it will have to be funded.

As I have already highlighted, from our perspective—I am sure that the situation is exactly the same across the country—we are in significantly challenging times. The concept of simply repurposing resources in order to achieve great outcomes from the bill is not going to work; it needs to be properly funded.

The Convener: Thank you for that succinct response. That brings to a close our first evidence session of the morning. It has been very informative, and I thank all our witnesses for their time.

I suspend the meeting until 10:40, to allow for a change of witnesses.

10:24

Meeting suspended.

10:40

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back. We will now take evidence on the Scottish Languages Bill from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. I welcome everyone—thank you for joining us. Will you introduce yourselves?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach (Bòrd na Gàidhlig): Madhainn mhath. Is mise Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach, ceannard Bhòrd na Gàidhlig. I am Ealasaid MacDonald, chief executive of Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Jennifer McHarrie (Bòrd na Gàidhlig): Madhainn mhath. Is mise Jennifer McHarrie, and I am director of education at Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Iain Macmillan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig): Madainn mhath. Is mise Iain Mac a' Mhaoilein. I am Iain Macmillan, director of development at Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Convener: Thank you. We will start with an opening statement from Ealasaid. I apologise for that pronunciation; I will get it right as we go on.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Absolutely no one should worry about the pronunciation of my name. That is not a bother at all.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach continued in Gaelic:

'S e àm cudromach a tha seo dhan Ghàidhlig agus bheir na co-dhùnidhean a nì sinn an-diugh buaidh mhòr air ar cànan san àm ri teachd. Agus nuair a chanas mi “ar cànan”, tha mi a' ciallachadh cànan na h-Alba. Tha Bòrd na Gàidhlig a' cur fàilte air a' bhile seo. Tha e na cheum air adhart ann an slighe reachdail na Gàidhlig agus chuireamaid gu làidir an aghaidh moladh sam bith nach bu chòir dha a dhol air adhart.

Dhan fheadhainn againn a bha an làthair aig cuirm gus 50 bliadhna de Shabhal Mòr Ostaig a chomharrachadh oidhche Ardaoin, chuir e ri sunnd an tachartais gun robh an naidheachd air tighinn am bàrr gum bi ball anns a' Chaibineat aig a bheil Gàidhlig leis an dleastanas airson a' chànan. Cuideigin a tha an da-rìribh a' bruidhinn agus a' tuigsinn ar cànan. Tha sinn an dòchas gun tèid gu math le Ms Fhoirbeis san dreuchd aice agus tha

sinn a' dèanamh fiughair ri bhith ag obair còmhla rithe.

Tha sinn an dòchas gun atharraich seo an dòigh-obrach a thaobh na Gàidhlig taobh a-staigh an Riaghaltais agus gun tèid beachdachadh air a' Ghàidhlig thairis air portfoliathan, far as urrainn dhan chànan a bhith na phàirt de na fuasglaidhean, agus gum bi cothrom air dòigh-obrach poileasaidh aonaichte. Dhèanadh seo tòrr gus an cànan a neartachadh.

Agus, tha am bile seo na phàirt den obair gus an cànan a neartachadh aig ìre poileasaidh. Bidh prìomh eileamaidean den bhile, a' gabhail a-steach atharrachaidhean air gnìomhan Bhòrd na Gàidhlig agus bun-inbhean airson phlanaichean, gar gluasad air adhart gus dèanamh cinnteach gu bheil na siostaman a th' againn a' cumail taic ris a' chànan. Agus tha e deatamach gun tèid na h-eileamaidean foghlaim den bhile a chur an gnìomh. Tha feum air soilleireachd air a' phrìomh mholadh, sgìrean cànan sònraichte, agus bidh obair na comataidh ro-chudromach ann a bhith a' dèanamh seo.

Ach, cha bhi an reachdas seo na fhuasgladh air na ceistean a tha romhainn aig ìre leasachaidh coimhearsnachd, a dh'fheumas modal tasgaidh ùr agus follaiseach gus na targaidhean ann am plana nàiseanta ùr na Gàidhlig a libhrigeadh.

Feumaidh mi iomradh a thoirt air ar tagradh a thaobh meòrachan ionmhais a' bhile, far a bheil sinn a' daingneachadh cho cudromach 's a tha e modal ionmhais a bhith mar phrìomh eileamaid ann an soirbheachas an reachdais seo. Mar a thuirt sinn san tagradh sgrìobhte againn:

“Gus a làn bhuaidh a choileanadh, feumaidh taic a bhith aig a' Ghàidhlig air feadh an Riaghaltais le maoineachadh cothromach a tha a rèir dleastanasan reachdail Bhòrd na Gàidhlig”.

Chan e cànan a-mhàin a th' anns a' Ghàidhlig. Do mhòran, mi fhìn nam measg, tha i na dhòigh-bheatha, aig cridhe mo cheangal ri mo chultar, mo dhualchas agus mo mhiannan airson mo theaghlach agus mo choimhearsnachd.

Do dh'Alba, tha i na prìomh eileamaid den chomann-shòisealta anns a bheil sinn beò, de ar n-eachdraidh agus bidh i air leth cudromach dhuinn san àm ri teachd. Tha i na stòras sòisealta, eaconamach agus cultarail. Tha i gun phrìs is gun samhail.

Tha an reachdas seo na cheum air adhart. Cha toir e dhuinn a h-uile fuasgladh a tha a dhith oirn, agus feumar prìomhachas a thoirt ri bhith a' dèiligeadh ris a' mhodail maoineachaidh mhi-fhreagarrach, ach bidh e na phrìomh cheum ann a bhith a' gluasad air adhart solar airson na Gàidhlig.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

This is an important time for Gaelic, and decisions that we take today will have a real impact on the future of our language. When I say “our language”, I mean a language for all of Scotland.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig welcomes the bill. It is a step forward in the legislative journey of Gaelic and we would strongly resist any suggestions that it should not proceed.

For those of us who attended the reception on Thursday evening of 50 years of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the mood of celebration was aided by the news that the new Cabinet will include a Gaelic speaker, who will have responsibility for the language: she is literally someone who speaks and understands our language. We wish Ms Forbes well in her role and look forward to working with her. That will, we hope, change the approach to Gaelic within the Government and will see Gaelic being considered across portfolios, where it can be part of the solution and allow a joined-up policy approach. That would go a long way, in strengthening our language.

The bill is part of the work of strengthening the language at policy level. Key elements of the bill, including changes to the functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and standards for Gaelic plans, will move us forward so that the systems that we have in place support the language. It is crucial that the education elements of the bill be enacted. Clarity is required on the central aspect—areas of linguistic significance—and the work of the committee will be crucial in ascertaining that.

However, the legislation will not solve the issues that we face at community development level, which require a new and transparent investment model that can deliver the targets in the new national Gaelic language plan. I must reference our submission on the financial memorandum to the bill, in which we underline the importance of a financial model being a core element of the success of the legislation. As we state in that submission:

“In order to achieve its potential impact it must be supported across Government with fair and equitable funding and commensurate with the statutory responsibilities of Bòrd na Gàidhlig.”

Gaelic is more than a language. For many people, myself included, it is a way of life. It is at the core of my being and is linked to my culture, my heritage and my aspirations for my family and my community.

For Scotland, it is a key element of the society in which we live and of our historical past, and a key driver of our future. It is a social, economic and cultural asset that is priceless and unique.

The bill is a step forward. It will not provide all the solutions that we need—a priority must be to

address the inadequate funding model—but it will be a key tenet in moving forward the provisions for Gaelic.

The Convener: I move to questions from members. We will kick the second panel off with Pam Duncan-Glancy, again.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Good morning. Thank you for the information that you have given us in advance, and for your opening statement. It is much appreciated.

My first question is quite broad. It is simply this: how will the bill support the Gaelic language in the medium and long term?

10:45

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Legislation is very important for status. The last legislation that we had on Gaelic was the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005—which is why we are sitting here today. It is time to underpin the work that has been going on.

As we have said in our opening statement and in other submissions, the bill is perhaps not the answer to all the challenges that Gaelic is facing, but it is a step forward in some key areas—in particular, in education, in which the bill will bring us into line, which is very important.

In a wider sense, there is prioritisation of the language as a national asset, and acknowledgement of its importance to the culture, heritage and communities that it serves. It is very important for the communities where Gaelic is spoken and, indeed for those where it is not spoken strongly but is supported, that such law exists and that it strengthens the language. Sometimes things need a catalyst in order to move them forward and to make progress in policy terms. I argue that the bill will do that.

Iain Macmillan: As Ealasaid said, the main thing is the legislative change that will bring Gaelic education fully within education legislation, so that it is fully part of the education performance system and structure. That is a significant element. Clarifying that means that Gaelic is not seen just as an extra, but as a fundamental part of our education system in this country. That is a benefit that will give us the opportunity to focus development activities beyond the classroom and playground and into communities. It gives us more focus.

A lot of advances have been made in Gaelic education, but we sometimes forget that the success of Gaelic education and all the focus on it puts some developments that have happened in communities somewhat in the shade. Sharing the spotlight between Gaelic education and the

communities outside schools is a significant move forward.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Do you think that the bill will do that?

Iain Macmillan: The bill certainly clarifies that Gaelic education is very much part of the education framework and the education quality framework.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: In your submission, you noted that engagement within the community could wane and trust could be eroded if the bill does not adequately engage with the challenges within the community. Does the bill recognise that enough? If not, what else could it do?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: There is always a danger of not connecting with your communities properly, particularly in creating legislation that will have an impact. There is work to be done to ensure that the communities feel the impact that the legislation could have, and that they understand what the bill is seeking to achieve.

It is clear what the education element of the bill is seeking to achieve, and we welcome that. We will probably in a wee while get on to areas of linguistic significance, but there is a real danger in not connecting properly with what communities want—although there is also an opportunity to listen to communities and to create a model that is appropriate for those communities.

There is a danger, when we talk about Gaelic, of talking about one community, but Gaelic is not one community—it is lots of different communities. I was brought up on South Uist in the Western Isles, and I now live on Lewis. You might think that they are very similar places, but they are not. They are very different experiences, but they are both in the Western Isles, which we expect to be designated as an area of linguistic significance. Whatever that means, however you implement that and however you engage in creating legislation and moving it forward, it is very important that communities' voices are heard.

It is not just bodies such as ours that are important. We have a range of key delivery bodies that do the active work on the ground, and it is important that their voices are heard. I know that you have had many submissions from many people. There is acknowledgement that it is important that what happens comes from the ground up, with an understanding that communities very often know better than we do what is appropriate for the areas where they live.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you. That is much appreciated. We will come on to that subject in another line of questioning shortly.

Unless anyone wants to add anything, I will leave it there for the time being.

Ruth Maguire: Professor Ó Giollagáin described the situation in traditionally Gaelic-speaking communities as being “in crisis”. This morning, Donald Macleod from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar spoke about the need to “arrest... decline”. Where does Bòrd na Gàidhlig sit between those two elements? How would you describe the situation for Gaelic?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: We listened to that evidence and the discussion about the use of the word “crisis.” There is an investment crisis in Gaelic that does not match the policy aspirations that have been set out for the language. You can have great policy, but if the funding model is not adequate, the policy will fail, whereas weak policy can make a difference if it has money behind it.

In our response to the bill and the financial memorandum, we set out the situation that Gaelic is facing. Simply and bluntly put, we are on the same money today as we were when we were inceptioned. That means that we are taking a cut every year, although expectations are growing as to what we should be able to deliver across our communities.

Ruth Maguire: When you say “we,” are you talking specifically about Bòrd na Gàidhlig?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Yes, I am referring to Bòrd na Gàidhlig—although you could take the model and look across the Gaelic bodies and Gaelic investment. I know that different funding streams have come in, but no big one is coming to the rescue, despite how underfunded we actually are.

We are at crisis levels now—that statement is not unrealistic—and £5 million, give or take £1.25 million, is the funding with which we were created. At the time of Bòrd na Gàidhlig's inception, it was argued that £10 million would be adequate, but that was cut in half. I doubt that, back then, we would have expected still to be at that level of funding now.

That money goes back into our communities to deliver activity and growth at community level, but it also has a wider range of impacts and is an economic, social and cultural driver, as I have said many times. Sometimes, we can measure that impact and, at other times, we cannot quantify how important it is.

Our delivery bodies have been delivering at an absolutely phenomenal rate and should be congratulated for that. People should be applauded for the work that they do and the investment that they have put into Gaelic over many generations. However, we are at a point where the issue has to be addressed.

The financial memorandum uses the word “stable” for our funding. The use of that word is

incorrect, because the word “stable” suggests that we are on the same level of money but with an inflationary rise, but we have not been getting that.

Ruth Maguire: Let me pause you for a wee second. Would you assert that, if Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s funding had increased, we would have stronger Gaelic and that there would be more Gaelic speakers in the community? My initial question was about Gaelic as a whole, rather than the bòrd specifically, although I appreciate that that is where you are coming from.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnaillach: Yes, I think that we would say that. We have evidenced that there is demand among groups. We have just put out money from our community fund: we could fund only 39 per cent of the applications that came in, and looking at who we turned down is quite soul destroying. There is a demand and a wish to take Gaelic forward in our communities, but we are unable to provide the support that the community needs.

Ruth Maguire: It might be helpful to have a brief flavour of those sorts of things, because it sounds as if you are saying that, if there were more of the activity that is going on now, things would be better. It is not that we need to do things differently, but that we need more money. Is that what you are saying?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnaillach: There is a wide range of activities. Iain can perhaps comment.

Iain Macmillan: The use of the word “crisis” has been useful and has helped to focus our minds. We have a tendency to make do with what we have. I have been working in the public sector for more than 40 years, and we have had difficulties and challenges, I think, from the first day that I started in local government in 1980—which was not a happy time for public funding. We have always had challenges and have always made do with what we had. Use of the word “crisis” has stopped us in our tracks a bit and has given us the opportunity to reset how we do things.

As I said in my previous answer, Gaelic education has been successful. The number of pupils in Gaelic education is a testament to that success. Taking Gaelic education fully into the education system will allow us to focus more attention on communities. The bill and its provisions make that focus more open: we are making a statement that we are looking after Gaelic education and allowing it to grow and become fully part of the system, and that we are now going to focus our attention, to the same extent, on our communities. We need to do that.

Ruth Maguire: Ealasaid said that the money from Bòrd na Gàidhlig goes straight into communities. Can you give me a flavour of what sorts of things it is used for?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnaillach: The money is used for a wide range of things. A list came to us, and it is all community oriented. I do not have the list here, but we can provide it.

Ruth Maguire: I am sorry; I have trodden on a fellow member’s question. I will leave it there.

The Convener: Carrying on with that theme of community-level funding, we move to questions from Willie Rennie.

Willie Rennie: My question is about areas of linguistic significance. You will have heard the earlier evidence, which helped us to make a little progress on what those will look like. I would like to hear what you think an area of linguistic significance would look like and how it would be different. More important, how would we make that happen? What levers would we pull and why cannot we just do that now?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnaillach: Those are good questions. You asked a question the other week about coming off the ferry at Lochboisdale. That got us all talking about what an area of linguistic significance would look or feel like.

First and foremost, it would be different depending on the area, because the community should determine what “linguistic significance” looks like for it. I hope that that will be at the core of policy development and that policy will be implemented with recognition that Gaelic is important in an area. That would probably be easier to implement in the Western Isles than in other areas, such as a community in Glasgow that might wish to be designated as an area of linguistic significance. There is work to be done on that.

There should be strong agencies that are informed and that understand the impact and importance of the policies that they are making for the language. You would want strength from the key delivery bodies, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other active Gaelic agencies. Again, it is easier to argue for that in the Western Isles where the agencies are very active, but how would someone in another area get a sense that they are part of that?

At the crux is the question that I am most often asked about areas of linguistic significance, and that debate is helpful. I get asked what the designation means and what difference it will make. If, like me, you live in an area of linguistic significance that expects to have that designation, you have to ask what will make a difference to that local area. That takes us all the way back to the funding model. What does it mean to have that designation without any sort of backing behind it? That could be detrimental. There must be a sense that designation makes a difference.

Acknowledgement of the status of the language is important, but communities would expect a different level of engagement on the ground, which we would welcome.

Willie Rennie: There is quite a lot of bureaucracy, and quite a lot of processes and plans. In previous meetings, we have talked about the fact that the language is being spoken in school but that it is not being taken home and is not being spoken in the pub or the shop.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: I take issue with that slightly.

Willie Rennie: Do you? Ah, right—okay.

11:00

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Perhaps not so much speaking as Bòrd na Gàidhlig's chair but speaking as somebody who lives in a Gaelic community and speaks Gaelic regularly.

On my previous trip home to Uist to see my mother, I did not speak English for the whole weekend. The other week, when I was in Stornoway doing my regular Saturday chores at the butcher, the baker and the Co-op, I did not speak any English either.

A few weeks ago, I was at an event in Stornoway with a group of young adults, as I will call them; they were all aged from 17 to 19. They were a' mi-mhodh—misbehaving—and a bit of banter was going on. That banter was in Gaelic. There was nobody there pressuring them into doing that, and they were not at school; that was just their natural way of communicating with each other.

We have seen that at various events that have been going on recently. For example, a few weeks ago, St Peter's hall in Daliburgh was packed out for an event from Tobar an Dualchais, and everybody there was speaking Gaelic.

There are a lot of people who converse in Gaelic daily. That is not to dismiss the challenges and the lack of understanding that we face, but we have to take the positive points as well. That is really important.

Willie Rennie: Has that activity increased or decreased in recent years?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: From my perspective, it has increased in the past few years—

Willie Rennie: Is that just you, though?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: No—I am just saying that that is my perspective; I can only argue from that. I have children who go through Gaelic-medium education and I am part of a community. I bop around from community to community, and I hear it. I think that Covid has had an impact as

well, in that people see the language as something precious and desire to look after it.

Also, I think that we are getting a bit stronger in saying who we want to be and who we are. The communities that I am part of are changing. We are all very lovely, but we are much stronger now. For instance, I am not changing to English when people come into the room. If somebody joined a conversation, my natural reflex would be to change my language. We are getting better at not doing that, and we are teaching our young people that, too. We are teaching them to be confident and strong. Gaelic-medium education is having a real effect in that respect.

We are putting out confident speakers. That is not always the case—some people are not—but we are taking a generation and telling them that it is okay to speak Gaelic, and how important that is to the community and the future of the language.

We do not want to weigh them down by saying, "Oh, it'll die out otherwise". We are simply saying, "Think of the positives here. What does it give you to be bilingual, and not just bilingual, but bilingual in a language that belongs to your country, so you can contribute to it on a wider scale?"

Gaelic is a big asset to Scotland—whether you speak it or not, you will feel the benefit of it. We need to get that message through a lot more.

Willie Rennie: What is actually the problem, then? Give me some tangible things that show what the problem is.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: We have a lot of problems. Jennifer McHarrie may want to touch on education.

Jennifer McHarrie: There are some key challenges that we hear about, and the bill can potentially provide some solutions for those. People who are going through their educational journey often start by enrolling in GME, and when they reach secondary level or continue into the senior phase, the options across the country can often be limited. That is one of the key issues: the variation across the country in the offer of Gaelic-medium education.

The bill talks about standards and things like that, which could potentially help to alleviate some of those issues or point us in the right direction towards having a bit more of a consistent offer across the country.

Some secondary schools designate Gaelic—as in the fluent subject—as a core subject, so there is a guarantee that pupils will always have that provision as they go through their secondary education. Some schools do not have that, so children are then faced with one option, and they think, "Well, I want to study geography, but that is

in the same column as Gaelic.” They are having to choose whether to carry on with it.

That was touched on in previous sessions by the representative from Comann Luchd-teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean. We would not expect children to choose between continuing with English and some other subject. However, for Gaelic-medium education, that can be the case. Anecdotally, we have been made aware of occasions on which people in the school say, “Well, you can always come back to your Gaelic. If you drop it just now, you can pick it up.” However, it is immersion education, so continued exposure to the language is important. The variation across the country in the GME offer and the challenges that local authorities face in that regard is one of the key issues.

Willie Rennie: You are indicating that it is perhaps in the education system where the big weakness is, rather than in the community. Is that what you think?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: There is a willingness in the communities. There is certainly a demand in the communities for help and support to ensure that community-level engagement can happen. Communities need that support, and they do not have the support that they deserve at the moment.

Willie Rennie: What does that support look like? We are talking about areas of linguistic significance. What practical support do people need to ensure that Gaelic is spoken in the community?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: You are all going to think that I am a broken record. At the end of it all, there must be an investment model—

Willie Rennie: Yes, but for what?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: For the community development work that needs to go on—

Willie Rennie: But what does that mean?

Iain Macmillan: May I come in on that? What the community needs is a voice. We have talked about Gaelic-medium education. That is working and improving. There are more young people going through Gaelic-medium education. We have a system for public bodies that requires Gaelic language plans and delivery on those. We have a national Gaelic language plan and we are talking about a strategy in the bill. What we do not have is a voice for the communities. The communities need that voice so that the public bodies that provide them with services and have Gaelic language plans are actually providing the services and using Gaelic in a way that the community believes it requires.

Willie Rennie: That does not sound expensive—to have a voice. Are you not the voice?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Yes. We are quite clear with regard to the financial memorandum that we should be brought up to at least where we would be with inflation, which would be a funding increase of £3.5 million. We can demonstrate a demand from our communities for that level of funding right now with regard to the applications that we have and the engagement that we have with them.

Ruth Maguire: I have a supplementary question to some of Willie Rennie's questions about areas of linguistic significance. Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach, your personal reflections are helpful for the committee's understanding. Last weekend, I was in Skye and the family spoke nothing but Gaelic. An interesting question is: where, in your day-to-day work and life in Lewis, do you need to speak English?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Gosh, there are very few places where I need to speak English these days, because people see me and they know what my job is. I might occasionally have to speak English at the doctor's or dentist's surgery, depending on who is there. Those places are very limited, but there is also a confidence issue with Gaelic speakers. We want to exude that it is a Gaelic-speaking place and that people are comfortable speaking Gaelic.

Ruth Maguire: At the moment, I am more interested in the perspective of people who live there rather than that of bodies or visitors. How would they know that their language was completely supported and protected? It is because they do not have to change their language. I do not go anywhere where I have to speak anything other than English—I do not even have to think about it. However, Gaelic speakers will have to change the language that they use—perhaps if they have to go to a medical appointment. Would being an area of linguistic significance mean that there were levers to improve that situation?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: You would hope so, yes, and that Gaelic opportunities would be made available to such areas. That is difficult because there are lots of people who live in areas of linguistic significance who do not speak Gaelic but are supportive of Gaelic and wish the best for it. We are not always talking about only Gaelic speakers when we talk about this legislation. There is a wide range of support for the language nationally.

Yes, you would want there to be drivers such as that. You would want your children to be able to engage in after-school activities that are not only English focused. It is difficult to find places for your

children after school, other than at an after-school club, where they can engage and be encouraged. The work of some of our key delivery bodies such as Comunn na Gàidhlig and its Sradagan initiatives are central to that, and—dare I say it?—with more investment, it would be able to roll out that model further across and into areas of linguistic significance.

Ruth Maguire: The committee is trying to really understand and get underneath the changes that are needed and the difference that the bill will or will not make. Is money the sole answer?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: It is not solely money. We have made it very clear that we welcome the education elements. We think that the fact that the Government is to be made responsible for preparing a Gaelic strategy is integral. I raised in my opening statement how important it is that Gaelic is not siloed, and it feels like it is siloed just now in the education department—that is relevant to the question that Pam Duncan-Glancy asked the previous panel of witnesses.

Gaelic transcends the various departments. Housing is a major issue in areas where Gaelic is spoken and which would be classed as being areas of linguistic significance. However, what consideration is taken of Gaelic in relation to housing? Those are elements that are important and need to be looked at and, if the strategy became the responsibility of Government, there would be a better chance of the considerations being dealt with across all departments. Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in a monitoring role, would then provide a link into the communities—we welcome that. The status that the bill would give in that regard is very important.

Ruth Maguire: Convener, do you want me to move on to questions about the role of Bòrd na Gàidhlig?

The Convener: We have to bring in Liam Kerr and Pam Duncan-Glancy before we get to that.

Liam Kerr: I want to pursue the issue of the areas of linguistic significance, which I asked the previous witnesses about. Given that the designation of an area as an area of linguistic significance is a local authority choice and that we have heard about how little resource there is in local authorities generally, with no additional funding coming, as you mentioned earlier, is there a risk that local authorities will not avail themselves of the new designation process?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Yes, there is probably a risk that they will not. However, that is why it is important to set it out in legislation, so that communities know that they can ask for that to happen.

We feel that there is a difficulty with just having local authorities able to designate. A community should also have the right to request that their area be designated as an area of linguistic significance. The Western Isles is an obvious example of somewhere that could become such an area, and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has already said that it would like to be one. However, with regard to communities in the Highlands area, such as the Isle of Bute, and in places such as Glasgow, Edinburgh or Aberdeen, the issue of what drivers there might be to force a local authority to make a designation that could have a real impact on the language and the community that it seeks to serve starts to get more interesting.

Liam Kerr: In response to Ruth Maguire, you suggested that there are already areas of linguistic significance—they are just not capitalised, as it were. If that is right, and if, as you were discussing with Willie Rennie, there are not many things that the bill demands be done in relation to an area that is designated as an area of linguistic significance, does the bill give any meaningful new powers to the local authorities over what they can already do in a—non-capitalised—area of linguistic significance?

Iain Macmillan: I do not think that it gives local authorities any new powers. The things that it does, and should do, relate to those communities rather than to the local authorities. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has said that it would like the whole of Eilean Siar to be designated as being an area of linguistic significance, and that is correct. Like Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach, I live in that community, and I agree that it should receive that designation, because more than 50 per cent of the population speaks Gaelic. However, the reality is that, with the focus just being on the public body and the local authority, we have, to some extent, lost sight of the needs of the actual community. I know that my friends in local government would always argue that, as the politically representative local body, the council represents the communities, and it does—but only in the areas that it is statutorily responsible for and that it will take account of.

11:15

Liam Kerr: I am very grateful for that answer. To be clear, in the bòrd's view, the section of the bill concerning the areas of linguistic significance is lacking in that it places too much on the local authorities and ignores the local community. Is that a fair reflection?

Iain Macmillan: Yes. I understand why the focus is on the local authorities, because we are talking about areas, but when the local authority has one view and the community has a different view, how do you reconcile the two?

In our written response, we have included a question about which level of government makes a final decision, but, within that, there must be room for the community itself or for the communities themselves. One of the challenges that we have in Eilean Siar, in particular, is in deciding how we define a community. I know from my time working in local government that defining communities was a very dangerous and treacherous place to be, because it was guaranteed that, however you defined a community, you would get it wrong and you would upset somebody.

In its response, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has questioned the work that we are currently doing with communities to develop community-based Gaelic language plans. We are using the powers and opportunities that we have just now to bring a focus on to communities to build their confidence. We have taken that opportunity significantly in Uist, where we have built on the work of the repopulation zone working group, which is led by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. We have built on that work to enable a Gaelic plan to be developed for the whole of Uist, which is a real departure from the way in which things would always have been done in the past, whereby we would have had separate plans for South Uist, Eriskay, Benbecula and North Uist, and probably for Berneray as well.

We have taken the opportunity to encourage the third sector bodies in Uist and those that are involved in Gaelic to come together, and they have grasped the opportunity to develop a Gaelic language plan for the wider community. That is a positive step forward, and I expect that that will provide us with strong evidence as to some of the detail that we should consider at future stages of the bill as it progresses through Parliament.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I want to take that discussion a little further. What, specifically, do you think is required in order to have a place-based, community-led approach to supporting Gaelic that would include public services, the third sector and the private sector, which Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach said was important? Ideally, I would like you to indicate whether that should be done through legislation or whether you already have the powers and the space to do that.

Iain Macmillan: I do not think that that exists at the moment. Public finances are constrained, and public bodies will do only what they are required to do. The danger in progressing any of this relates to the raising of expectations. We need to raise the confidence of communities with regard to what they are doing with Gaelic, but, at the same time, we must balance that against the realities of what the public bodies will do in response.

For example, Gaelic language plans have been at a fairly consistent level across the country. However, the expectation that people have of

Gaelic language plans in places such as Eilean Siar, parts of the Highlands and parts of Argyll and Bute is that they should be doing a lot more in Gaelic and for Gaelic and should be more focused.

Gaelic language plans from communities are a way of helping us to join up our public services in response to the situation of Gaelic in those communities. I take the example of the health service in the Hebrides. If you go to Ospadal Uibhist agus Bharraigh, you will hear Gaelic spoken quite regularly. The interesting thing is that the health board does not boast about that or take the credit for it. It should be taking the credit for it, but it does not want to, probably because it is a bit wary about whether it will be able to sustain that into future generations. However, it will only sustain that if it takes credit for how good a job it is doing just now and sets out to sustain that. The only way to do that is to make sure that your community has a voice, which is not so much about holding the health board to account as about saying, "Well, you are doing it just now." That is the level of activity that we want to maintain.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I will press you on that point. The bill team said that some of those issues would be addressed in the strategy, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise said that some of those issues should be addressed in the bill. What do you think?

Iain Macmillan: I do not need to tell you how difficult it always is to find the right balance between what you should have in primary legislation and what you do in regulation or in the components of that. The way that I look at it is that primary legislation opens the door to possibilities. The details of what I then have to do to put one foot in front of the other and walk through that door is not something that needs to be in primary legislation.

It is like the discussions that we have had about standards and the detail behind the bill. At this level, in the primary legislation, we need the means by which we consult all parties who will be affected by the regulations or standards. We need to find a way to open the door through the primary legislation.

Ruth Maguire: I have a couple of questions about the role of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. I want to ask your view on some comments that the committee received. These are not my words, but I will quote them:

"Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a small, underfunded public body that has little status or power in Scotland's wider public realm."—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 1 May 2024; c 37.]

Do you think that the bill will sufficiently and appropriately strengthen the board's position?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Yes. I would take slight issue with those comments. I speak on behalf of an organisation that I came into seven months ago—and what a committed team it is—and I know that everybody who works in Gaelic does so with an element of personal feeling. It is a labour of love on occasions, which many of us who work in public service understand.

We are underfunded, though—I do not take issue with that comment. That will not surprise anybody. We are small; we have 18 full-time equivalent posts at the moment. When you look at the work of and the expectations that are on Bòrd na Gàidhlig—I do not mean the expectations of the Parliament or the Scottish Government, which we work closely with, but the expectations that our communities have about what we can deliver—you can feel the weight at times, because it is important.

The bill goes some way to address some of those matters. There are slight changes in moving forward beyond a national plan and into a national strategy. I hope that it is called a national strategy; we make the point in our submission that it is a national thing. I have made the point that, even if someone does not speak Gaelic, they benefit from our outputs.

We understand the changes to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's role, and we would monitor the situation. That change is welcome. We also welcome the approach that we would report to the Parliament, which is lacking just now. That will strengthen the accountability for Gaelic across the nation, and it is important that the Parliament takes its role in ensuring that we are all held to account for the work that we do. We welcome those elements.

I go back to my favourite topic, which is that the investment model needs to match that. We make it clear in our submission that we have reservations about the ability to make the changes under the current funding. There would have to be discussions and movement on that. However, in principle, the answer to your question is yes.

Ruth Maguire: Has there been a tension between the supportive development work that the bòrd does and holding public bodies to account?

Jennifer McHarrie: A comment that was made at the committee that resonated with me was the comparison about Bòrd na Gàidhlig being a social worker and police officer at the same time. That certainly comes into play in our work with public bodies or organisations. Our officers work with them to develop language plans, but there is also an expectation that we monitor their progress.

In education, we perhaps create hopes or desires for increases in the number of people learning Gaelic as a subject in school, for example. We can promote and encourage that. The statutory guidance for education, which sits with us, says that local authorities have a duty to promote and support the language. However, we cannot compel local authorities to do that. They can deliver whatever language they like as part of their one-plus-two offer, even though we would like Gaelic to be one of them.

There is a balance of expectations to manage. People often come to our members of staff to ask what we can do about something that is happening in their local authority area or whether what is happening in a school could happen elsewhere. Ultimately, we want to be helpful, and we are, but we have to say that the responsibility is with the local authority that is delivering the education, although it is Gaelic. Sometimes, we can be caught between the two.

Ruth Maguire: As well as there being a tension, I suppose that there is also an opportunity to build things if you have relationships. Power or getting stuff done is not always about compelling people to do things.

Jennifer McHarrie: I agree. Language plans are not supposed to be an instrument. We are not the language police. We do not want people to do something just because they have a language plan. Over the years, we have definitely seen more organisations doing things because they recognise that Gaelic is important to their area and organisation, and because it feels like the right thing to do. They recognise that they have speakers in their areas, rather than just doing something because they think that they have to.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: It is also about showcasing opportunities. It is interesting when you see an area come on a journey. I know that there is criticism of the plans and question marks as to how effective they are, but many organisations have come on a journey and are on their second, third or fourth iteration of their plan. If you were to talk to the team who dealt with them at the beginning of the first one, you would see the difference along the journey that they have taken.

A good example is that, when Renfrewshire Council first bid to host the Royal National Mòd, there was limited engagement with Gaelic in the local authority area. The council put an awful lot of work in. The legacy of that has been engagement. Ten years later, the Mòd came back. I should declare an interest: I was working at the council at the time of the first one. What a difference there was, not just in the acknowledgement of the people who had learned or engaged with the language but in the acceptance of it in the local authority area. When I spoke to an ex-colleague, I

saw how important the council's plan was in that development and the journey that it had taken.

The opportunities definitely exist. You get more from a carrot than a stick on many occasions. That is the way that we would prefer to work with Gaelic. It is a positive thing—in fact, it is a great thing. You are very lucky if you have it, and everyone else should want to have it in their area and want the benefits that it brings. That is how it should be showcased, and we try to do that work with our plans.

11:30

The Convener: I will stick with that theme. Earlier, you talked about having only 18 full-time posts—your organisation is small. Does the board currently have the capacity to monitor progress for the Gaelic language across all of Scotland? Are you sufficiently independent enough to hold the Scottish Government to account for progress in that area?

Iain Macmillan: The answer to that is yes.

The Convener: Is that the answer to both questions?

Iain Macmillan: We are independent enough to hold the Scottish Government to account. If we had more resource, we could do more, and we could do things quicker.

The Convener: We know that the resource that is set out in the financial memorandum is not going to be coming. In the context of the bill, do you have the capacity to monitor progress?

Iain Macmillan: What I see as being particularly useful in respect of plans and holding organisations to account is the link between the Gaelic language strategy, the standards and the Gaelic language plans. If we get the standards right and we have clear standards that can be applied to Gaelic language planning in public organisations, that would take out a lot of the negotiation that we have with each individual public body on each iteration of their plan about what their plan should include.

At the moment, we have corporate service aims, and we have to negotiate with every single public body to include fairly standard corporate service aims in every iteration of their plans. If those corporate service aims were included in standards in secondary legislation to the bill, we would not have to negotiate that all the time—that would be a given. We would spend less time developing the plans, and we could spend more time ensuring that the plans were implemented.

It is interesting that Jennifer McHarrie referred to Bòrd na Gàidhlig being a mix of a social worker and a police officer. We are not there just to

police; we are there to work in partnership. We talk a lot about working in partnership in the public sector. We should spend more time making sure that plans are achievable, that they genuinely have SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound—targets in them that are achievable and not just measurable, and that we can see whether there has been progress.

Language plans are not the only answer to developing Gaelic, but they are an important part of the framework in an environment in which public bodies will do what they are required to do. That is becoming more and more the case.

The Convener: Are you saying that the language plans from the public bodies should remain part of the policy landscape alongside all the proposed national strategies, the guidance and the standards?

Iain Macmillan: Yes. I see all of those working together. I think that that is what the bill looks to achieve—to knit them together so that they work together more effectively.

The Convener: With that in mind, how effective have public bodies' Gaelic language plans been in supporting the long-term and widespread use of Gaelic?

Iain Macmillan: I think that it is safe to say that they have been a significant part of the progress that has been made. I imagine that any of us who look at individual plans and individual authorities would say, "Yes, but we could be doing more." Perhaps we could be doing more and doing it quicker. However, given the resources that are available and that individual organisations, the Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig all have various activities to prioritise, achieving outcomes is a big challenge for us all.

Jennifer McHarrie: In areas that would not be described as traditional Gaelic areas, where there are not high numbers of speakers, the plans can make a difference in relation to the workforce in the local authority, the setting up of community groups, and GME and activities for Gaelic learners. Without such plans, there might not have been the impetus to get those things off the ground and up and running. Therefore, the plans have made a difference.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Clear standards will assist in that regard, because they will take things forward and remove the sense of people thinking, "So-and-so's plan is different from mine. Why am I being asked to do this?". There will be an acknowledgement that there are standards that everybody has to meet, and the priorities in a local area can then be considered. That is very important.

If it is okay, I will go back to the convener's point about whether we are independent enough.

The Convener: Yes—super.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: I think that it is very clear that we are. We work very well with our Scottish Government colleagues in holding each other to account. We have regular robust discussions, and we consistently challenge each other. We are all working to the same aims, in the most part, although we might have different ideas about how we reach the definitions. We are exceptionally independent.

The Convener: Do you have an example of when your sheer resilience and independence resulted in success?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: I am new in post, and it must be said that it has not been quiet since I took up post. We have had a number of discussions. For example, we had to engage closely with the Government when the Gaelic development officer scheme came under threat from the potential removal of top-up funding. The easy thing for us to have done would have been to just accept that the funding was gone, but we have been challenging the Government, and the Government has been challenging us, too. It is very important to recognise that there has been challenge on both sides.

Bill Kidd: I suppose that you are all the best people to talk about the lessons from the experience of Gaelic development since 2005 and 2006. How can the lessons from developing Gaelic across the country, particularly in areas where it is particularly strong, be used to help to guarantee the future development of Gaelic? Perhaps those lessons could be used for the Scots language, too. How will you use those lessons? You must have found that certain things work better than others. What do you use to get people interested and maintain the development?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: The focus should be on communities. There should be engagement with communities to ensure that they feel that they are at the heart of everything that we do, rather than us just thinking that they are, because there can often be different answers to that question. Communities have to be part of this, and people's lived experience has to be taken into account. As we change things and move forward, they have to be at the core of everything, and they have to feel that they are at the core of everything.

As you move forward with the committee's work on the bill, it is important that you hear and experience community voices. I recommend that you go to a community to discuss the bill with the people there. I imagine that you will want to bring people in, but hearing directly from community

voices might be what is missing from stage 1 of the bill at the moment.

We have a number of key delivery bodies, including Comunn na Gàidhlig, Fèisean nan Gàidheal and An Comunn Gàidhealach. Members will be familiar with all those names. You will hear them during your work on the bill, and you will also be familiar with them because of activities and things that go on in your constituencies. They will inform you about the importance of being connected to the people who speak the language and who will take it forward and be community drivers.

We have to take that experience into account. There is other experience that we have to consider at the policy level. I doubt that anybody who was involved in the drafting of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 expected it to be 20 years before further legislation came in. We have to learn from that about how the policy and legislative machines work, and about how we can engage across them.

In the models that we work with currently, we are definitely developing much more integrated approaches to policy and partnership. In answer to the previous question, we acknowledged how small Bòrd na Gàidhlig is, but we are mighty on occasion because of the partnerships that we have and the work that we do with others. Our work is valued, and how we engage with people is valued, and that is key as the legislation progresses.

Iain Macmillan: We cannot always do all things holistically and at the same time. We also have to be prepared for success. I do not think that the country was as prepared for the success of Gaelic-medium education as we could have been. We need to be ready if the plans actually work. I imagine that the number of children going through Gaelic-medium education is significantly higher than what some people would have expected. I am not sure what the view was in Parliament when the act was passed, but that success brings demand for more activity and more services to support it and to ensure that we take full advantage of the things that we have done well.

Some of it is about having a long-term view of what we can achieve. It is seriously challenging that we still manage our finances year by year; that is not helpful. We have been working on changing that with our key delivery bodies and some of our schemes, and we are looking towards a five-year horizon in which we plan more strategically so that there is a wider benefit.

Even on strategy we are still talking about five-year cycles. I am sorry, but for language protection and language development, we should be looking 20 years ahead. I know that that is difficult

because of electoral cycles and everything else that we have to work with, and if we need to have five-year strategies, that is fine, but they should still sit within a wider framework that takes us much further forward and is confident enough to say, “By the way, what do we do when this works or when elements of it work?”

I do not think that we are always as prepared for success as we should be. It is a step-by-step process, but we need to identify which step to take first.

Jennifer McHarrie: To add to your comment about lessons from 2005 onwards, none of us was working at Bòrd na Gàidhlig in 2005 but, having been involved and seen things, I think that in the past there was a focus on quantity and numerical targets but now is the time to look at quality as well.

Going back to education, I think that there is the potential for statutory guidance to be at the ministerial level rather than with public bodies. There is an opportunity to measure quality across educational organisations. It is about measuring not only the number of people who are enrolled in GME but their experience through their educational journey from early years through to secondary and beyond into further education, should that be the case.

11:45

Bill Kidd: That is very helpful. What all three of you have said shows that you are aware of what you and the organisations have been doing over time and the success that that has had, and that it is about working out from that where you go next.

The most important thing that you have said is that it is not really based around talking at people and communities, but talking with them and bringing them together. That is useful.

The Convener: There are lots of nodding heads from the bòrd.

I will now bring in Ross Greer with some questions.

Apologies. I have done it again. That is twice today that I have forgotten Liam Kerr. I am going to be in trouble later. Liam Kerr, please. My apologies.

Liam Kerr: It has been noted.

I have a brief question based on what Bill Kidd asked about. The 2005 act set up Bòrd na Gàidhlig and gave it responsibility for promoting Gaelic. It seems clear that the bòrd has done that with a great deal of passion and commitment. However, 20 years on from that, the situation has been described as a “crisis”, as the policy has not been matched by funding and, perhaps,

Government support. Scots does not even get a board. What will be the impact of that if establishing a Gaelic board still leads to a crisis 20 years on?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: I would be reluctant to provide a prescription for Scots, because people who speak Scots and who are involved in that know best what is right for their language; I am not well versed enough in that. I would say that status and acknowledgement of the language is very important. A clear path for the way forward would be what they would want to seek.

I would hate to put words in anyone’s mouth. We are Bòrd na Gàidhlig and we focus on working with Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas, but our Scots colleagues are on a very important journey. It is not the case that what works for Gaelic will work for Scots and vice versa. They will have their own areas that they seek to focus on.

At the time, Gaelic-medium education was very much a priority—and rightly so, in my opinion. We see the benefits of that today, regardless of whether that is the exact model our Scots colleagues would want. We will engage with our Scots colleagues at any point if they wish to.

The Convener: Now we can move to questions from Ross Greer.

Ross Greer: One of the challenges that we have had historically, and have at the moment, is the lack of a national framework for measuring success in relation to Gaelic. We have the Government’s Gaelic language plan, and the plans and strategies that the bòrd has produced. However, beyond plans, we do not have clear national agreement on a framework for measuring success. The Government’s Gaelic language plan references the national performance framework not because there are clear indicators in it but to show the interaction between Gaelic and a range of other indicators, such as housing, communities and so on. What has been the barrier? Why are we not sitting here with a clear, nationally agreed framework for how we measure success in relation to Gaelic language?

Iain Macmillan: I am not sure that that is an easy question to answer, although I understand that it is not supposed to be. I suggest that one of the challenges in looking at success in relation to Gaelic is that it is linked directly to the strength and success of the Gaelic communities themselves.

The big opportunity that we have with the bill is for the Government to take ownership of the strategy. With that approach, there is—or there should be—a better opportunity for Government to link all the attributes of government together. That includes a whole raft of economic drivers—we talk about housing and jobs, for instance—in

communities. Bòrd na Gàidhlig cannot influence those.

At times, it is wrongly perceived that, because it is about Gaelic, we have to look to Bòrd na Gàidhlig and to additional funding—to something extra coming in from the side. In Gaelic communities, however, Gaelic is very much part of the community.

As Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach said at the beginning, Gaelic is very much part of who we are. It is very difficult to define the impact of Gaelic on who we are and our lives. Gaelic was my first language—I had to learn English when I went to school. I am of an age where we did not have television at that time, so it was probably a lot easier not to be corrupted by English at an early age. That is in effect what it is: a corruption of our culture, our language and our heritage. However, being bilingual has a huge benefit, and I am thankful for who I am, where I am from and the privileges that I have had because of the two languages that I speak naturally; whether I speak them well or not is a matter of opinion.

There is an opportunity for Government to join everything up if it takes ownership of the strategy. However well intentioned we might be in leading the development of a national Gaelic language plan, and despite the fact that ministers can change the strategy and will, finally, approve it, that is not the same as taking ownership of the strategy. To go back to what I said, that has to be the longer-term approach.

Maybe that would take away some of the excuses; there are fewer excuses if it is clear who is taking ownership. It is easier for people to be held to account, because it is about how we make government, in the widest sense, work better so that all the individual parts work together to create the right environment in order that we can see success.

Ross Greer: You make an important point about ownership, and a clear sense of ownership and accountability being a way to improve outcomes.

My next question is about whether the bill makes it clear how we measure that. It is going to give the Government much more accountability, and it will, we hope, put more scrutiny on the Government. However, from our perspective, and from a wider societal perspective, the question is, what are we scrutinising the Government for? How do we collectively as a society judge whether we have been successful, and how does the Government itself do that?

I am looking for your perspective on whether the bill itself makes that clear. Do you look at the bill and think, “It will be clear to me, five or 10 years from now, how we measure success based on

what is in here”? Alternatively, could there be something else, either in the bill or external to it, to make it much clearer how we are going to measure success?

Iain Macmillan: The strategy should make it clear how we measure success, but the bill should contain a requirement that the strategy has to do that. We need to be explicit about that in the primary legislation in order to ensure that the secondary steps come back with the answer. We need to be clear about what it is that we are trying to achieve. That in itself will determine the timescale in which we should be doing things. I still think that there is a question in that regard around the setting of the strategy and looking at the outcomes. Realistically, is there any point in having for having a strategy for five years if we cannot measure the outcomes for 10 years?

Ross Greer: Does anyone else have a perspective on what a framework for success looks like?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: That is a very important question. The current model involves a national plan and, in our annual report, as Bòrd na Gàidhlig, we report on our own key performance indicators and how we are delivering against our corporate plan, which is very important. However, there are wider issues in the strategy that require to be looked at and measured. A measurement framework is a key element that should be looked at in taking things forward. It is all very well working through all the time but reporting on progress is important, and that data and information will be crucial as we look to the long term in the 20 years ahead of us.

Ross Greer: Where should that sit in relation to the bill? We cannot be incredibly prescriptive with our measures of success in primary legislation because we do not know where we will be in 20 years on all sorts of fronts. However, the bill is an opportunity for us to create some requirements in that space.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: That is where the strategy should say that it will determine that there should be a measurable framework and look at it beyond the bill in the secondary legislation. However, it is important that it is in there and referenced.

Ruth Maguire: I will continue with the theme of outcomes. I am sometimes struck that, in this place, we almost talk in a different language when we talk about performance frameworks and so on. Should we hear from communities about what success would look like? Iain Macmillan you said, in essence, that it is just part of you—that you just speak Gaelic. Perhaps we need to know from folk what the blockers are, where they come up against issues, where things grate or where they

feel that they are not able to use their language fully or that it is not being given respect? I know that those things are not always easy to measure, if we just ask people in normal language, but it might be valuable to do that.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnaillach: That is valuable; it is the voice of communities. We sit here talking about frameworks, national plans, corporate strategies and all the rest of it. Those things are important and we should not lose sight of them, but there is sometimes a disconnect with how communities look at what we are doing, the importance of that and their place in that.

We understand that we are producing the foundations in policy and law. Last week, one group tweeted that this bill is as far away from them as John O’Groats. It is a Gaelic saying. I am not sure why there is a Gaelic saying about John O’Groats but there is and it means that you are miles away from them. I have sympathy with that, I really do, and it is important. That is why I recommend that you go to speak to communities.

If you spoke to young Gaelic women in the Western Isles—I say women but I am also talking about families—they would talk about childcare being one of the biggest barriers that they are facing on multiple levels. You immediately think about that on an economic level but, actually, on a language level, the ability to put their children into childcare will allow them to carry on. Those are the discussion points that the community will raise.

It is vitally important that the voice of the communities is heard and, again, that it is heard directly and not necessarily only through bodies such as the committee. We will raise points and we all have lived experience of Gaelic, which I am sure is beneficial, but it is exceptionally important that you hear that from the communities.

Jennifer McHarrie: On being a voice, as you will know, there have been a huge number of consultations or calls for evidence or feedback to Parliament, and responding to those has been part of our work for the past few years. We will always reply and raise questions. Pretty much what we do day in, day out is think, “What about Gaelic? What’s the impact on Gaelic? Where does Gaelic feature in this policy? It should be part of everything from the outset.” We will respond, but there is also an element of encouraging other groups and other people—someone sitting in their house on their own—to respond to these things and make their voices heard. Although we can give a response and ask key questions about where Gaelic features in any policy decision, it is still important that there is a chance for people to make their voices heard.

We can see in the number of responses to the consultation on this bill and other bills that a lot

more people feel that they want to engage and put across their opinions.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnaillach: Sometimes, you have to ask people. These consultations, particularly this one, are a tough read and tough to go through, so if you want to hear from people you have to go and ask them what issues they are facing, particularly those who are in communities that might feel that they are quite far away from where we are sitting today.

12:00

The Convener: Yes, I suspect that people have lives outside of the Scottish Parliament and legislation. I know—is that not a surprise to all of us? Making them aware and getting them tuned into things is key. Thank you.

Michelle Thomson: Good morning and thanks for joining us. I want to take a sense check on the financial memorandum. Your written submission gives some fairly stern commentary on some of the issues that you cover often, such as resource, the seeking of more investment and the potential diminishing of trust within communities if the associated funding is not in place. I am a bit confused about how that relates to the financial memorandum, which sets out the fact that things are moving from one body of good practice, in the existing plans, through what is in essence a refocusing. First, how rigorously have you been through the financial memorandum, and what additional commentary can you therefore give? Secondly, what discussions have you had with the Scottish Government that articulate at a detailed level the concerns that you have illustrated in your written submission?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnaillach: It is widely accepted that we put in quite a strong response to the financial memorandum. When you read it, you understand why. An important point is that our money has been flat. We take issue with the word “stable”; it has been flat, yet the expectation of what we will deliver is high.

It is not just about us. For example, MG Alba, which runs BBC Alba in partnership with the BBC, has the same issue. It has been on flat money since its inception. That means developing in different ways. What we are able to achieve is really constrained and we are now at the point at which it has to be addressed.

The financial memorandum is important to us as a vehicle through which to have our concerns heard more widely, outside of Government. We consistently have that conversation with the Scottish Government. We are consistently explaining to it and—I will be honest—asking for more money, but there is always a business case against it.

We could achieve real things in our communities if we had the investment. We welcome the additional things that we get on occasion, but none of that is ever put into our core, which sits at £5 million. That makes it difficult to plan and to engage.

We are moving to a longer-term funding model with our key delivery bodies, but we have to base that on our current model. As we move forward, we will be looking at what things we will have to stop doing if there is no further investment. That is a good conversation to have on occasion, but not when it is driven solely by a financial requirement—and that is where we are.

We have robust discussions with the Scottish Government, in which we make very clear what we could do and why we need the additional money. I accept the argument that public finances are constrained just now, but that has not been the case for the past 20 years. We have definitely been the poor relation and we should have had some investment. It is only fair and just that the funding model moves and that we are at least given an uplift for inflation—which would be £3.5 million—on our current core funding.

Michelle Thomson: You have given a general sense of how long-term funding constraints have affected you, and I do not disagree. I know from my other life on the Finance and Public Administration Committee that your commentary is the same as that of a multitude of other sectors and organisations. However, I was trying to explore the extent to which you have had active discussions with the Scottish Government on the specifics that are contained in the financial memorandum.

Let us assume that the bill goes through, that the refocusing takes place and that you have to do that work on your existing resource. Have you had discussions on what that would look like? The financial memorandum suggests that it can happen within your existing envelope. Have you gone down to that level of discussion with the Scottish Government?

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Not on the specifics that are in the financial memorandum, no. However, we have brought it up in discussion—

Michelle Thomson: So your commentary is really about—

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: We have an on-going discussion.

Michelle Thomson: That helps to make it clear that your commentary is about the general funding envelope.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach: Yes.

Michelle Thomson: Thank you.

The Convener: That is all we have time for, so the public part of the meeting is at an end. I thank everyone for their time. We will consider our final items in private.

12:05

Meeting continued in private until 12:36.

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