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Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener
Finance and Public Administration Committee
Room T3.60
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

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Dear Kenneth

Thank you for your letter of 13 May to Ms Gilruth, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. As you are aware, following the changes in ministerial duties, the responsibility to respond now sits within the portfolio of Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic. Let me add, that I welcome the committee's interest in the Scottish Languages Bill and the detailed response received.

First let me note that the Gaelic and Scots division works closely with local authorities and public bodies and we all understand the points about spend and pressure for resources in the Gaelic and Scots sectors. Nevertheless, the Committee's letter does contain a focus on the relationship between the Bill provisions and new spend. In relation to this, I would like to suggest, it is important to take account of related and wider contextual elements. For example, new spend on Scotland's languages is currently taking place and as such is not a factor that should solely be associated with the Bill provisions. It is important to get good structures in place and the cost of Bill provisions can be considered separately from the year-to-year allocation of investment in the annual budget process. In bringing Gaelic and Economy together in the one portfolio as Deputy First Minister I recognise the opportunities that exist in Gaelic across communities and the mutual benefits that further harmonisation and inclusion can bring.

The Committee asked about activities being shifted and resources repurposed. My assessment in relation to this involves the recognition that there is already a level of Gaelic activity taking place in local authorities. For example, local authority officers are currently assessing authority functions, considering statutory guidance and Gaelic national plan priorities, preparing, translating and issuing consultation documents, finalising and implementing policies and actions. Also, as a result, authorities and bodies have committed to varying levels of support for Gaelic. These things are in place and familiarity with current

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activity and processes gives us the confidence to suggest that activities can be shifted, and resources repurposed.

We expect the current activity associated with Gaelic language plans will be similar to the future task and that the Bill provisions, in relation to these processes, are unlikely to create wholly new costs. By providing leadership, focus and priority across public bodies further progress can be made for Scotland's languages.

In view of this, Scottish Government might suggest that there is a more varied context which includes current statutory expectations and associated spend and growth of provision as a result of other factors unrelated to legislation. It will be in this wider context of current statutory provision, local development and priorities and new Bill provisions that local authorities and public bodies will make decisions about the nature of ongoing provision and how additional expectations can be accommodated. I welcome the Committee's comment on areas of linguistic significance and the developing interest in the inclusion of this provision in the Scottish Languages Bill. The detail of provision in these areas will, of course, depend on local decision making and that having regard to the strategy and standards. As noted above, local authorities that could consider this designation will already have a measure of spend in place and will know their communities and their needs. This designation could create collaboration opportunities for public bodies operating in these areas.

As above, I note the points about spend and pressure for resources in the Gaelic and Scots sectors. I recognise the question of the relationship between Bill provisions and new spend. In approaching this, however, we have taken a wider, dynamic approach which takes into account local prioritisation and developing provision, current statutory expectations and resulting activity and new provision resulting from the Scottish Languages Bill.

I am aware that there is considerable finance in place to support the provisions of the Bill but I hear the messages from the languages community that additional resources is required. I acknowledge that in a more relaxed financial climate this would be desirable. There are still important stages to consider with this Bill, namely the drafting of strategies and standards and how these will apply to areas of linguistic significance, for example. In relation to this, we will monitor this progress, we will ensure good structures are in place and that implementation proceeds within available resources. Again, let me note that the Committee's detailed consideration of these issues is welcome, and I would be happy to consider any further points and respond if it would be helpful.

KATE FORBES

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