

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance and Resources Committee
DATE	5 November 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	International Travel 2024/25 - Revision
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/24/347
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Julie Wood
REPORT AUTHOR	Claire Stevenson / Jen Lawie
TERMS OF REFERENCE	General Delegation (5); 2.1.1 & 3.4

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for travel and attendance at European engagements in November and December 2024, proposed as alternatives to travel previously approved in the International Travel 2024/25 report, COM/24/029, at Finance and Resources Committee on 30 January 2024.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Approves international travel and overseas conference attendance to support City Development and Regeneration activity as detailed below, and subject to the maximum expenditure set out in paragraph 4.1:
- a) One Elected Member plus one officer to attend European Hydrogen Week in Brussels, Belgium between 17th – 22nd November 2024; and
 - b) One officer to attend JIVE/REVIVE Demand Aggregation Workshop in Groningen, Netherlands between 3 – 4 December 2024;
- 2.2 Delegates authority to the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration to authorise necessary and appropriate travel documentation and associated expenditure for the travel noted in 2.1 above, provided costs do not exceed the budget referred to in paragraph 4.1 of this report and that all arrangements are made in line with current Council travel policies; and
- 2.3 Agrees that the outcomes of the overseas activity proposed in 2.1 will be provided to this Committee by way of the planned annual Service Update in March 2025.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

International Travel 2024/25

3.1 International travel deemed effective to support the projects and activity of City Development and Regeneration through the 2024/25 financial year was proposed to Finance and Resources Committee in January 2024, and approved subject to the budget setting exercise in March 2025.

3.2 Of this approved travel, officers have since received advice that attendance at the Hydrogen Dialogue Summit and Expo in Nuremberg, Germany is unlikely to align or deliver additionality for Aberdeen City Council and the wider region's hydrogen activity and ambitions. The alternative travel proposed in recommendation 2.1 is more relevant to ACC's current hydrogen activity and attendance offers the opportunity to demonstrate commitment to the Hydrogen Valley bid submitted in April 2024, TH₂ISTLE. The European Commission are hosting a week-long event in Brussels – 'European Hydrogen Week'. The Council are members of Scotland Europa who are based in Brussels and have advised that it would be strategically advantageous to be present at the event. Scotland Europa have also prepared an itinerary of meetings with significant partners whilst there. These meetings will be jointly held by the Co-Leader of the Council, Councillor Allard, and the Acting Minister for Climate Action Dr Allan. Strategic discussion and promotion of the region will enable increased engagement with our established European partners and potential partners. Aberdeen City Council, as lead partner along with 30 others submitted a formal bid to the EU Clean Hydrogen Partnership's small valley call for €9 million funding, which is additional to that committed by other private and public sector sources. More than 50 letters of support were provided as part of the bid, demonstrating strong evidence that the TH₂ISTLE project is key to the development of a hydrogen market in the region and nationally in Scotland and the UK. The Hydrogen Valley would deliver new and interconnected activities to make, move and use green hydrogen in Aberdeen City and the wider region.

ACC have been invited to present and share findings and insights derived from direct experience of implementing hydrogen technology in the City; particularly deployment of hydrogen fuel cell buses through the JIVE project and a fuel cell waste truck through the HECTOR project. The workshop will focus on the potential for hydrogen vehicles in cities, sharing the lessons learnt from deployments of hydrogen refuse trucks and buses across Europe. The audience will comprise a range of local and European stakeholders interested in hydrogen technologies including local authorities and policy-makers. This workshop will be attended by the Clean Hydrogen Partnership, offering a unique opportunity to present Aberdeen's success directly.

3.3 To appraise the benefits of international engagement and activities, including the overseas travel and conference attendance proposed to support these activities, the following criteria is considered:

1. Engagement aligns with and reflects relevant aspects of the Regional Economic Strategy. This may be through the opportunity to promote regional strengths (energy, skills, entrepreneurship and innovation); to address regional challenges (economy diversification; skills and labour supply; city centre redevelopment); to support delivery of objectives; or to progress growth and internationalisation of key and nascent North East industries (energy, food and drink, finance and business services, tourism, creative, digital and life sciences).
2. Engagement creates opportunities to attract inward investment to Aberdeen, again in line with the Regional Economic Strategy.
3. Where appropriate, overseas travel is supported by Scottish Development International (SDI), Department for Business and Trade (DBT), Scottish or Aberdeen and Grampian Chambers of Commerce and/or city stakeholders (e.g. Opportunity North East, Net Zero Technology Centre, Energy Transition Zone Ltd).
4. World Energy Cities Partnership (WECP) attendance at AGM and Board meetings.
5. Activity with Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) partners where attendance by Elected Members is requested and has been discussed with Co-leaders.

3.4 Based on this criteria, the overseas travel proposed in 2.1 aligns as below:

1. Under criteria 1, 2 and 3: European Hydrogen Week
2. Under criteria 1: JIVE/REVIVE Demand Aggregation Workshop

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Committee approval is required for the proposed travel at 2.1, with estimated costs totalled below. These costs will be met from within the approved International Trade, City Development and Regeneration budgets for 2024/25 and approved hydrogen project budgets. There is no ask for additional financial support for international travel.

Destination	Attendance	Dates	Estimated Costs
European Hydrogen Week, Brussels	One Elected Member + one officer	17 th – 22 nd November	£2,500
Demand Aggregation Workshop, Groningen	One officer	3 rd – 4 th December	£600
TOTAL			£3,100

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Scottish Government guidance details that travel and subsistence expenses may be claimed by Elected Members for approved duties, including *“the carrying out of any other duty approved by the local authority, or anything of a class so approved for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of functions of the local authority or any of its committees or sub-committees.”*
- 5.2 Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure best value as per section 1 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. The Council has travel policies for both members and officers. All travel should be booked in accordance with these policies to ensure cost-effective travel arrangements.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The report recommendations have a negative environmental impact, namely an increase in carbon emissions due to air travel. To minimise this, all meetings to fulfil MoU commitments take place virtually, and where travel is proposed as necessary, the itinerary will be full and valuable. Consideration could also be given to minimising the carbon footprint when booking travel - e.g. booking a train rather than a flight for any in-country connections where possible and the itinerary allows, or booking ‘green’ airfares only.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Failure to maintain and foster new international relationships related to hydrogen activity may negatively impact the region’s economic growth through reduced connections for trade, export and investment	Aligning international activity with Scottish and UK government’s priority international markets for trade and exports. Aligning international activity with local partners to maximise impact of Aberdeen’s attendance, reputation and messaging. Continued monitoring and market scanning of global	M	Yes

	and loss of reputation.	advancements in energy transition, in part through supporting inward delegations to the city.		
Compliance	Travel and accommodation bookings, and subsistence arrangements, not being in line with Council policies.	All travel and accommodation arrangements made via the Travel Team to ensure accordance with the Council's travel policies for members and officers.	L	Yes
Operational	Safety and security risks of travel to certain locations.	<p>FCDO travel advice and country entry requirements adhered to.</p> <p>A thorough risk assessment exercise is completed prior to any travel outside of the UK. This forms part of the pre-travel briefing.</p> <p>The Council has sufficient travel insurance in place.</p>	L	Yes
Financial	Actual costs exceed those estimated in this report.	A recent costing exercise has been undertaken to inform estimated costs in the report.	L	Yes
Reputational	Reputational risks if the city does not actively maintain and participate in international events and networks, which could diminish the city's global profile as leading in the energy	<p>Attendance at selected relevant international events, ideally with Scottish partners, to maximise impact.</p> <p>Close working relationships with SDI, DBT and city stakeholders to ensure consistent messaging around opportunities.</p>	M	Yes

	transition and result in loss of trade and investment opportunities.			
Environment / Climate	Carbon footprint of air travel.	Travel plan has been streamlined to only include priority and necessary overseas trips.	M	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

Council Delivery Plan 2024	
	Impact of Report
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>The proposed travel/conference attendance, and rationale of establishing and maintaining international connections and networks (particularly those focused on the energy transition) for the benefit of city businesses, support the delivery of:</p> <p>Building a Greener and Sustainable City</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with partners to deliver a just transition to net zero and plan to make Aberdeen a net zero city by no later than 2037, and earlier if that is possible • Support Aberdeen’s continued pioneering of Hydrogen technologies
Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	The proposals within this report will contribute to Economy Stretch Outcomes 2 and 3: international relationships which increase investment and trade opportunities for local industries and businesses will in turn, create training, reskilling and new employment opportunities.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	The proposals within this report will contribute to Place Stretch Outcome 13: knowledge and best practice sharing with our international partner cities who hold similar energy transition agendas and roadmaps will enable us to achieve Aberdeen’s carbon emission goals.
Regional and City Strategies	The proposals within this report conform with the objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy, the Net Zero Routemap and the H2 Aberdeen Strategy.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to International Travel 2024/25 report, COM/24/029, at Finance and Resources Committee on 30 January 2024 has been reviewed and no changes required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	Not required.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 International Travel 2024/25, COM/24/029 – 30 January 2024

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Claire Stevenson / Jen Lawie
Title	Team Leaders, City Development and Regeneration