

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance & Resources Committee
DATE	12 February 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	International Travel 2025/26
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/25/021
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Julie Wood
REPORT AUTHOR	Jen Lawie
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.1.1 & 3.4 and General Delegation 5

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for travel to Stavanger in March 2025; and approval of proposed international travel by officers and elected members in order to support relevant City Development and Regeneration activities throughout 2025/26.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Approves the Lord Provost (or one other Elected Member) plus one officer to attend High Wind 2025 in Stavanger, Norway between 3 - 5 March 2025;
- 2.2 Approves international travel to support conference and event attendance related to City Development and Regeneration activity, and the maximum expenditure relating to such travel and attendance, as set out in Appendix 1;
- 2.3 Approves international travel to support Tall Ships activity, and the maximum expenditure relating to such travel and attendance, as set out in Appendix 2;
- 2.4 Delegates authority to the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration to (i) approve necessary travel documentation, arrangements and associated expenditure for the travel noted in recommendations 2.1 - 2.3 above, provided costs do not exceed the budgets referred to in Section 4 of this report and that all arrangements are made in line with applicable Council travel policies; (ii) determine which officers should undertake such travel; and (iii) following consultation with the Co-Leaders, determine which elected members should undertake such travel, where either the members to undertake the relevant travel are not identified in the relevant minute of this Committee or where the Lord Provost is so identified as the member to undertake such travel but is unable to do so or elects not to do so; and

- 2.5 Agrees that the outcomes of overseas activity undertaken in 2025/26 will be provided to this Committee by way of an annual Service Update.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

International Trade Activity

- 3.1 Historically, the Council has supported international activity through a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU). We currently have two active MoUs with Kobe, Japan; and Hammerfest, Norway. MoU progress meetings with partners take place virtually (online).
- 3.2 The Council is a founding member of the World Energy Cities Partnership (WECP) which connects 18 global energy capitals. This network enables the Council and regional partners to engage and collaborate with fellow member cities to deliver the energy transition. The WECP byelaws state that *“those persons serving as the head of the municipal or provincial government of each Member City participate in the Board of Directors”*.
- 3.3 Currently, the Mayor of Esbjerg serves as WECP President and during this term objectives have been set to facilitate and increase business to business links between member cities and university collaboration to enable student exchange and work placement opportunities.
- 3.4 The WECP meets formally twice a year, once for a working Board meeting alongside CERA Week and once for its AGM. The CERA Week schedule reflects WECP presence with specific WECP-hosted panels and information sessions, a Mayors’ Reception and a Leadership Dinner to raise the profile of the network and its cities’ activities and projects in renewables. The WECP AGM is hosted by a different member city each year following a competitive bidding process and will take place in Calgary, Canada in Autumn 2025 (exact date TBC).
- 3.5 Additionally, officers liaise with Scottish Development International (SDI), the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and city stakeholders (Opportunity North East, Net Zero Technology Centre, Energy Transition Zone Ltd, Invest Aberdeen and Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce) to support inward international delegations to the city. This creates opportunities for local businesses to expand business to business links; local stakeholders and clusters to connect with international agencies with similar missions; and ensures alignment of city activity to national trade and investment priorities. Through the 2024/25 financial year to date, City Development and Regeneration supported or led 27 such delegations.
- 3.6 The Council and Kobe City Government in Japan continue to work together as ‘H2 Twin Cities’, an initiative supported by UK government’s Department for Energy Security & Net Zero and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in Japan. Through Programme Year 2, in addition to quarterly online knowledge-sharing meetings, Aberdeen hosted a Kobe City Government delegation for an in-person visit. Officers also participated in a Clean Energy Ministerial Webinar on H2 Twin Cities projects; an Urban Transitions Mission

Workshop; and meetings of the transport sub-group of the North East Scotland Hydrogen Ambition Group. In line with project work packages, dialogue has commenced with the Port of Aberdeen and logistics partners to identify projects that would advance the use of hydrogen in Aberdeen Port activities. This initiative is an example of our existing MoU serving as a springboard for additional economic opportunity and attracting external financial support.

- 3.7 Initiated by the Scottish Government's Nordic Office, Aberdeen, Esbjerg, Stavanger, and now Groningen - the four European cities of the WECP continue to collaborate as a 'North Sea Partnership'. Focused on the North Sea workforce, supply chains, and academic/innovation opportunities, the four cities strengthen collaboration through in-person meetings held adjacent to wider conferences. The next meeting of this group will be held in Stavanger in conjunction with High Wind 2025 on 4 March 2025.
- 3.8 Building on our established reputation for hydrogen project delivery, and as members of Scotland Europa, attending Clean Hydrogen Partnership related meetings and EU Hydrogen Week is integral in supporting and strengthening funding submissions in relation to the Clean Hydrogen Partnership H2 Valley. A Hydrogen Valley would deliver new and interconnected activities to make, move and use green hydrogen in Aberdeen city and the wider region.
- 3.9 The Tall Ships Races rights holder, Sail Training International, organise briefings, seminars and conferences for Tall Ships Races participants and Host Ports. As part of our role as Host Port in July 2025, it will be required that Aberdeen attend the Captains' Briefing being held in Dunkirk, France on 12 July 2025 and the Annual Conference being held in Europe in late-November 2025 to share insight, lessons learned and advice to support continued and successful delivery of the event in the future. The conference location has yet to be confirmed by Sail Training International. Chaperoning Youth Sail Trainees to and from participating ports directly before and after Aberdeen host, is part of the Council's duty of care to those participants, particularly those under 16 years of age.
- 3.10 As referenced in the International Travel 2024/25 report (COM/24/029), approved at Finance and Resources Committee on 30 January 2024, the Service Update on outcomes from international travel undertaken through 2024/25 will be circulated at the beginning of April 2025, once all proposed travel is complete.

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- 3.11 To appraise the benefits of the proposed international travel and activity, the following criteria are 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 for increased international trade by local supply chain, or to attract inward investment to Aberdeen, again in line with the Regional Economic Strategy.
 3. Where appropriate, overseas travel is supported by SDI, DBT, Chambers of Commerce and/or city stakeholders (e.g. Opportunity North East, Net Zero Technology Centre, Energy Transition Zone Ltd).
 4. WECP attendance at AGM and Board meetings.
 5. Activity with MoU partners or twin cities where attendance by Elected Members is requested and has been discussed with Co-leaders.
- 3.12 Based on these criteria, the overseas travel proposed in 2.1-2.3 in support of City Development and Regeneration activity, aligns as below:
1. Under criteria 1 and 2: High Wind 2025 in Stavanger, Norway;
 2. Under criteria 5: Regensburg Citizens' Festival in Regensburg, Germany;
 3. Under criteria 1, 2 and 4: WECP AGM in Calgary, Canada;
 4. Under criteria 1, 2 and 3: EU Hydrogen Week in Brussels, Belgium and meetings associated with the Clean Hydrogen Partnership;
 5. Under criteria 1, 2 and 4: WECP Board meeting at CERA Week in Houston, USA;
 6. Under criteria 1: Tall Ships Captains' Briefing in Dunkirk, France;
 7. Under criteria 1: chaperones for Youth Sail Trainees to/from Dunkirk, France and Kristiansund, Norway;
 8. Under criteria 1: Sail Training International Tall Ships Conference in Europe (location TBC).

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Committee approval is required in relation to the proposed travel to Stavanger in recommendation 2.1 which is estimated at £2,500. This cost will be met via the approved City Development and Regeneration budget for International Travel for 2024/25.
- 4.2 Similarly, committee approval is required in relation to the proposed travel and costs in recommendation 2.2, as detailed in Appendix 1. These costs will be met via the Civic, and City Development & Regeneration, budgets for 2025/26, subject to budget setting in March 2025.
- 4.3 Finally, committee approval is also required in relation to the proposed travel and costs in recommendation 2.3, as detailed in Appendix 2. These costs will be met via confirmed external sources of funding.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Scottish Government guidance ("Councillors' remuneration, allowances and expenses: 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 of sub-committees."* This guidance

is based on the Local Government (Allowances and Expenses) (Scotland) Regulations 2007.

- 5.2 Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure best value in terms of 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 (online), 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 flight for any in-country connections where possible and the itinerary allows or booking 'green' airfares only.

7. RISK

- 7.1 The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement.

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 international relationships may negatively impact economic growth, through reduced connections for trade, export and investment, and loss of reputation.	Aligning international activity with Scottish and UK government 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 advancements in energy transition, in	M	Yes

	Failure to carry out activities necessary to secure future major and international events	<p>part through supporting inward delegations to the city.</p> <p>Alignment of activity and outcomes with Event365 Plan and participation in all post-event evaluation and measurement as required by events rights holders.</p>	L	Yes
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>Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (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>	M	Yes
Financial	Actual costs exceed those estimated in this report.	<p>A recent costing exercise has been undertaken to inform those costs estimated in this report.</p> <p>No travel will be booked if it exceeds</p>	L	Yes

		the total approved budget. Costs for unconfirmed locations are based on travel to Scandinavian destinations.	M	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 transition and result in loss of trade and investment opportunities..	Fulfilling the Council's obligation in terms of WECP membership to ensure continued international profile. Close working relationships with SDI, DBT and city stakeholders to ensure benefits maximised from all incoming and outgoing international activity.	M	Yes
	Failure to carry out duty-of-care responsibilities for participants in the Tall Ships Races.	This activity is being supported by council officers who oversee and organise travel for schools and youth groups.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	Carbon footprint of air travel.	Travel plan has been streamlined to only include priority and necessary overseas trips.	M	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2023-2024</u>	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposed travel/conference attendance, and rationale of establishing and maintaining international connections and networks (particularly

<p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>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 <p>A Prosperous City</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop our economy in a genuine partnership with the private sector, third sector and residents • Work with partners to stimulate sustainable economic development, including a managed transition to a carbon neutral economy and work in partnership with the academic, business and other relevant sectors to ensure the long-term future of the energy industry <p>The proposed travel related to hosting Tall Ships 2025, will support the delivery of:</p> <p>The Arts Matter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aim to make Aberdeen a premier destination for festivals, productions, conferences, bands and events.
<p>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</p>	
<p>Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p>	<p>The proposals within this report conform with the objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy, the Net Zero Routemap and the H2 Aberdeen Strategy.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to International Travel Revisions 2024/25 (F&RC, 5 November 2024, CR&E/24/347) has been reviewed and no changes required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	Not required.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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