

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance & Resources Committee
DATE	29 March 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	International Travel 2023/24
REPORT NUMBER	COM/23/104
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Richard Sweetnam
REPORT AUTHOR	Jim Johnstone
TERMS OF REFERENCE	General Delegation (5)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval of proposed international travel and conference attendance by officers and elected members, required to support relevant City Growth activities in 2023/24.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Approves proposed international travel as detailed below, and subject to the maximum expenditure as detailed in paragraph 4.1. All approved travel will be reviewed when event schedules and programmes become available to ensure continued adherence to the criteria in paragraph 3.9 before bookings are made;
- (a) Two officers (one City Growth and one Invest Aberdeen) to attend WindEurope's annual conference in Copenhagen, Denmark between 25 – 27 April 2023;
- (b) Up to two officers to attend the World Hydrogen Summit in Rotterdam, Netherlands between 9 - 11 May 2023; and
- (c) The Lord Provost plus one officer to attend the WECF Board Meeting at CERA Week conference in Houston, USA in early March 2024 (dates TBC);
- 2.2 Delegates authority to the Chief Officer – City Growth to authorise necessary and appropriate travel documentation and associated expenditure for the travel noted in 2.1, provided the cost does not exceed the budget referred to in Section 4 of this report and that all arrangements are made in line with current Council travel policies;
- 2.3 Notes the outcomes of overseas activity undertaken in 2022/23 as detailed in Appendix 1 of this report; and
- 2.4 Agrees that the outcomes of overseas activity proposed for 2023/24 will be provided to this Committee by way of an annual Service Update.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Council supports international activity through a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU). We currently have six active Memoranda of Understanding with Barranquilla, Colombia; Kobe, Japan; Muroran City, Japan; Hammerfest, Norway; Pemba, Mozambique and Macaé, Brazil. MoU progress meetings with partners take place virtually.
- 3.2 The Council is a founding member of the World Energy Cities Partnership (WECP) which connects 19 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 bylaws 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 The WECP meets formally twice a year, once for a working Board meeting alongside CERA Week and once in the Autumn 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 in 2023 it will take place in Perth, Australia between 1 – 4 November. WECP has confirmed that it will be a hybrid meeting and therefore it is proposed that The Council’s attendance will be virtual.
- 3.4 Additionally, officers liaise with Scottish Development International (SDI) and Department for International Trade (DIT), the trade and investment agencies of the Scottish and UK governments respectively, to support inward and outward delegations to priority markets. This creates opportunities for local businesses to create 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.
- 3.5 During 2022/23, officers attended ONS, Stavanger and the WECP Board Meeting and wider CERA Week programme; and the Lord Provost attended the WECP AGM in Esbjerg. Appendix 1 provides a summary of these engagements and associated outcomes.
- 3.6 In November 2022, the Clean Energy Ministerial announced Aberdeen and Kobe, Japan, as the successful bid submission to its ‘H2 Twin Cities’ initiative. This outcome is an example of our existing MoU serving as a springboard for additional economic activity in support of Regional Economic Strategy (RES) priorities. Project teams from both cities will now work together to knowledge share and advance work package activities, bringing in city stakeholders including the Port, clusters, universities and colleges and private sector, with the aim of accelerating our hydrogen projects and transition to net zero.
- 3.7 As the only three European cities in the WECP - Aberdeen, Esbjerg and Stavanger, are keen to strengthen engagement through establishing a ‘North

Sea Cities Partnership' in 2023, supported by the Scottish Government's Nordic Office. The focus of the Partnership will include advancing areas of mutual interest and sharing challenges in order to realise a unified, inter-connected North Sea energy grid and, it is hoped, exploring opportunities for drawing on European funding. The kick-off meeting for this Partnership is proposed to take place during WindEurope's annual conference in April 2023.

- 3.8 International travel and associated spend in relation to the Council's approved current hydrogen projects is accounted for within these budgets. The approvals also included delegation of authority to the Chief Officer – City Growth to agree related trips specified in project contracts.

International Travel 23/24

- 3.9 To appraise the benefits of overseas travel and/or conference attendance, the following criteria are applied:

- 1) Engagement reflects the sectoral priorities in the RES – energy; food and drink; tourism; life sciences.
- 2) Engagement reflects and has potential to advance programmes of intervention in the RES – inward investment; innovation; inclusive economic growth ie. job creation; internationalisation ie. trade.
- 3) Where appropriate, overseas travel is supported by SDI, DIT and/or Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce or city stakeholders (eg. ONE, ETZ Ltd, NZTC) in order to ensure activity is aligned to the specific needs of businesses in the city.
- 4) WECP attendance at the AGM and Board meetings.
- 5) Activity with MoU partners ie. conferences, exhibitions, events, where attendance by an Elected Member is requested and has been discussed with the Co-Leaders.

- 3.10 Based on this, the following overseas travel is proposed as priority for the Council in 2023/24:

- 1) Under criteria 1, 2 and 3: WindEurope's annual conference in Copenhagen, Denmark between 25 - 27 April 2023;
- 2) Under criteria 1, 2 and 3: World Hydrogen Summit in Rotterdam, Netherlands between 9 – 11 May 2023;
- 3) Under criteria 4: WECP Board Meeting at CERA Week in Houston, USA in March 2024.

- 3.11 Where additional overseas travel by Elected Members or officers is requested beyond that referred in 3.10, officers will appraise the request against the criteria in 3.9 and discuss with Co-Leaders. A report will be brought to committee if a decision to travel is required.

- 3.12 The Council will support inward delegations from MoU/WECP partner regions and facilitate involvement in these itineraries by appropriate Aberdeen businesses and stakeholders.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Council approval is required in relation to proposed travel in 2.1 and 3.9, with estimated costs totalled below. These costs will be met via the approved City Growth budgets for 2023/24.

Destination	Attendance	Dates	Estimated Costs
WindEurope, Copenhagen	Two officers	25 – 27 April 2023	£4,000
World Hydrogen Summit, Rotterdam	Two officers	9 – 11 May 2023	£4,000
WECP Board Meeting, CERA Week, Houston	Lord Provost + One officer	March 2024	£6,500
TOTAL			£14,500

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 stipulates that Elected Members' travel can only be funded if it is classed as an 'approved duty'. Approved duties include *"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, regular 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 ie. booking a train rather than flight for any in-country connections (when 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 establish international relationships will negatively impact and reduce economic, trade and investment opportunities for local businesses in Aberdeen.	<p>Alignment with Scottish and UK government priority international markets for trade and exports.</p> <p>Alignment with the Partnership's Priorities and the Council's ongoing projects in energy transition.</p> <p>Continued monitoring and market research of net zero projects and advancements globally to ensure we have fruitful connections.</p>	M	Yes
Compliance	Travel, accommodation and/or subsistence arrangements not in line with Council policies.	All travel and accommodation arrangements will be 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 any entry requirements still associated with Covid-19 will be followed.</p> <p>A thorough risk assessment exercise is completed prior to any travel outside of the UK. This forms</p>	L	Yes

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?
		part of the pre-travel briefing. The Council has sufficient travel insurance in place.		
Financial	Actual costs exceed those estimated in this report.	A costing exercise has been undertaken to inform those costs estimated in this report. No travel will be booked if it exceeds the total approved budget.	L	Yes
Reputational	Reputational risks if the city does not actively maintain and participate in international relationships and the city's global profile, particularly as an energy and net zero leader, is lost.	Fulfilling the Council's obligation in terms of WECP membership to ensure continued international profile. Close working relationships with SDI, DIT and city stakeholders to ensure benefits maximised from all incoming international activity.	M	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 2022-2023</u>	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposals within this report – maintaining and establishing international relationships and

<p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>networks, particularly those focused on renewable energies - support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement:</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 and make the case to bring alternatively powered rail services to the City <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><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</u></p>	
<p>Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The proposals within this report will contribute to Economy Stretch Outcomes 2 and 3 as international relationships will increase investment and trade opportunities for local industries and businesses, which in turn creates 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
<p>Integrated Impact Assessment</p>	<p>Not required</p>

Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	Not required

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 COM/22/123 International Travel 2022/23 – 29 June 2022

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1: International Travel Annual Update 2022/23

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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