

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance & Resources Committee
DATE	30 January 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	International Travel 2024/25
REPORT NUMBER	COM/24/029
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Julie Wood
REPORT AUTHOR	Jen Lawie
TERMS OF REFERENCE	General Delegation (5); 2.1.1 & 3.4

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for a visit to Stavanger in March 2024; and approval of proposed international travel by officers and elected members in order to support relevant City Growth activities in 2024/25.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Approves the Lord Provost/one Elected Member plus one officer to attend High Wind 2024 in Stavanger, Norway between 11-12 March 2024;
- 2.2 Approves international travel and overseas conference attendance to support City Development activity as detailed below, and subject to the maximum expenditure set out in paragraph 4.1:
- (a) The Lord Provost plus one officer to attend the World Energy Council Congress in Rotterdam, Netherlands between 22 – 25 April 2024;
 - (b) The Lord Provost plus one officer to attend the World Energy Cities Partnership AGM in Stavanger, Norway between 22 – 25 August 2024;
 - (c) One Elected Member plus one officer to attend the Hydrogen Dialogue Summit and Expo in Nuremberg, Germany between 4 – 5 December 2024;
 - (d) The Lord Provost/one Elected Member plus one officer to attend the World Energy Cities Partnership Board Meeting at CERA Week Conference in Houston, USA in March 2025;
- 2.3 Approves international travel and overseas conference attendance to support Tall Ships 2025 as detailed below, and subject to the maximum expenditure set out in paragraph 4.2:
- (a) Two officers to attend the Tall Ships Host Port Seminar (European location TBC), in July 2024;
 - (b) Three officers to attend Sail Training International and Tall Ships Conference (European location TBC), in November 2024;

- (c) Two officers to attend a Tall Ships Site Visit in Dunkirk, France, in Spring 2025;
- 2.4 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, 2.2 and 2.3 above, provided costs do 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; and
- 2.5 Agrees that the outcomes of overseas activity proposed for 2024/25 will be provided to this Committee by way of an annual Service Update.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

International Trade Activity

- 3.1 The Council supports international activity through a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU). We currently have six active MoUs with Barranquilla, Columbia; 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 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. Officers are engaging with Education Esbjerg, University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University and member cities on this activity.
- 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 Stavanger, Norway between 22 – 25th August 2024.
- 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 and Invest Aberdeen) to support inward delegations to the city and presence at overseas events. 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.

- 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 1 additional public and private stakeholders have been engaged; online quarterly meetings have supported knowledge-sharing; and webinars for businesses in both cities are being hosted in January 2024. This initiative is an example of our existing MoU serving as a springboard for additional economic opportunity and attracting external financial support.
- 3.7 Led by the Scottish Government's Nordic Office, Aberdeen, Esbjerg and Stavanger, as the three European cities of the WECP, have embarked on a 'North Sea Partnership'. Initial meetings through 2023 have defined project activity to focus on the facilitation of an interconnected North Sea workforce, the development of hydrogen supply chains and academic/innovation opportunities in each city. This Partnership will expand to include Groningen in the Netherlands, following their admission to the WECP at the AGM in November 2023.
- 3.8 To build on national hydrogen-focused MoU activity between Scotland and Hamburg, and the UK and Germany, and several inward delegations from German regions through 2022 and 2023, the Council is working with the Scottish Government to establish connections and realise opportunities to support hydrogen export potential.
- 3.9 The Council alongside Port of Aberdeen and Aberdeen Inspired will host the Tall Ships Races 2025. The Tall Ships Races rights holder, Sail Trailing International, organise seminars and conferences for Host Ports. As Host Port 2025, Aberdeen is required to send representatives to these events to gain insight, advice and create connections which will support successful delivery of the event. The events comprise seminars and talks which run concurrently and are related to different areas of the Tall Ships Races. Officers attend those related to their areas of responsibility and the contractual obligations of the Council, including operational delivery, trainee, volunteer and ship recruitment, event site planning, sustainability, cultural programme, and commercialisation and these streams mean that there is a need for 3 council officers to attend. In addition, our partners Port of Aberdeen and Aberdeen Inspired, using their own funds, will send additional representatives to these events to cover their programme obligations, including event marketing, maritime operations, ship technical requirements, and face-to-face meetings with ship operators as well as being present on Aberdeen's host port stand.
- 3.10 International travel and spend linked to the Council's current hydrogen projects is accounted for within the approved project budgets. The approvals also include delegation of authority to the Chief Officer – City Growth to agree related trips specified in project contracts.

International Travel 24/25

- 3.11 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 SDI, 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. WECP attendance at AGM and Board meetings.
 5. Activity with MoU partners 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 and 2.2 in support of City Development activity, aligns as below:
1. Under criteria 1 and 2: High Wind 2024 in Stavanger, March 2024;
 2. Under criteria 1 and 2: World Energy Council Congress in Rotterdam, April 2024;
 3. Under criteria 1, 2 and 4: WECP AGM in Stavanger, August 2024;
 4. Under criteria 1, 2 and 3: Hydrogen Dialogue Summit and Expo in Nuremberg, December 2024; and
 5. Under criteria 1, 2, 3 and 4: WECP Board meeting at CERA Week, Houston in March 2025.
- 3.13 Similarly, the overseas travel proposed in 2.3 relating to hosting Tall Ships 2025 aligns under criteria 1, as well as supporting the project's advancement and success. All activity with Sail Training International where officer attendance is requested will be discussed with the Chair of the Tall Ships 2025 Organising Committee and Co-leaders.
- 3.14 Where additional or alternative overseas travel by Elected Members of officers is requested beyond that referred in 2.1 and 2.2, but within approved budget, officers will appraise the request against the criteria in 3.11 and discuss with Co-leaders and Convenor of the Finance and Resources Committee for support.
- 3.15 The Council will continue to support inward delegations from MoU and WECP partner regions and facilitate involvement in these itineraries by appropriate Aberdeen businesses and stakeholders.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Committee approval is required in relation to the proposed travel to Stavanger in paragraph 2.1 which is estimated at £2,000. This cost will be met via the approved City Growth budget for International Travel for 2023/24.
- 4.2 Similarly, approval is required in relation to the proposed travel at 2.2, with estimated costs totalled below. These costs will be met via the City Growth budgets for 2024/25, subject to budget setting in March 2024.

Destination	Attendance	Dates	Estimated Costs
World Energy Council Congress, Rotterdam	Lord Provost + one officer	22 - 25 Apr 2024	£2,500
World Energy Cities Partnership AGM, Stavanger	Lord Provost + one officer	22 – 25 Aug 2024	£2,500
Hydrogen Dialogue Summit and Expo, Nuremberg	Elected Member + one officer	4 - 5 Dec 2024	£1,800
WECP Board Meeting at CERA Week, Houston	Lord Provost/Elected Member + one officer	Mar 2025, (exact dates TBC)	£7,000
TOTAL			£13,800

- 4.3 Finally, committee approval is also required in relation to the proposed travel at 2.3, with estimated costs totalled below. These costs will be met via the Council's Coastal Communities funding for 2024/25.

Destination	Attendance	Dates	Estimated Costs
Tall Ships Host Port Seminar, (European location TBC)	Two officers	July 2024 (exact dates TBC)	£2,400
International Sail Training and Tall Ships Conference, (European location TBC)	Three officers	Nov 2024 (exact dates TBC)	£3,000
Tall Ships Site Visit, Dunkirk	Two officers	Spring 2025	£1,200
TOTAL			£6,600

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 of 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 i.e. booking a train rather than 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 foster and maintain our international relationships may negatively impact economic growth, through reduced connections and opportunities for trade, export and investment for local businesses.	Aligning international activity with Scottish and UK government priority international markets for trade and exports. Aligning international activity with the Partnership's Priorities and the Council's ongoing projects in energy transition. Continued monitoring and market scanning of global advancements, particularly in relation to energy transition and net zero, to ensure we have fruitful connections	M	Yes
Compliance	Travel and accommodation	All travel and accommodation	L	Yes

	bookings, and subsistence arrangements, not in line with Council policies.	arrangements will be made via the Travel Team to ensure accordance with the Council's travel policies for members and officers.		
Operational	Safety and security risks of travel to certain locations.	<p>FCDO travel advice and any entry requirements remaining or introduced, 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 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 the total approved budget.</p>	L	Yes
Reputational	Reputational risks if the city does not actively maintain and participate in international relationships and the city's global profile as leading in energy transition will be diminished.	<p>Fulfilling the Council's obligation in terms of WECF membership to ensure continued international profile.</p> <p>Close working relationships with SDI, DBT and city stakeholders to ensure benefits maximised from all incoming and</p>	M	Yes

		outgoing international activity.		
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
<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 <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.
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</u>	
<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</p>

	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	Stage 1 Assessment has been completed.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	Not required.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 COM/23/24 International Travel 2023/24 – 29 March 2023
- 10.2 COM/23/223 International Travel (Tall Ships) 2023/24 – 5 July 2023
- 10.3 COM/22/251 Urgent Business Committee - 21 October 2022

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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