

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance & Resources Committee
DATE	10 February 2026
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	International Travel 2026/27
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/26/023
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Julie Wood
REPORT AUTHOR	Robin Dillaway
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 2026; and approval of proposed international travel by officers and elected members in order to support relevant City Development and Regeneration activities throughout 2026/27.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Approves the Lord Provost (or one other Elected Member) plus one officer to attend High Wind 2026 in Stavanger, Norway between 9 - 11 March 2026, as an addition to the travel agreed for 2025/26 at Finance and Resources Committee on 12 February 2025 and within existing budget;
- 2.2 Approves international travel to support City Development and Regeneration activity in 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 1, including event and conference attendance to support international partnerships, hydrogen activity, city events and Art Gallery and Museums;
- 2.3 Delegates authority to the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration to:
 - (i) approve necessary travel documentation and arrangements and associated expenditure for the travel noted in recommendations 2.1 - 2.2 above, provided costs to the Council do not exceed the budgets referred to in Section 4 of this report and provided all necessary external funding is obtained and that all arrangements are made in line with applicable Council travel policies;
 - (ii) determine which officers should undertake such travel;

- (iii) following consultation with the Co-Leaders and Lord Provost, determine which Elected Members should undertake such travel; and
- 2.4 Agrees that the outcomes of overseas activity undertaken in 2026/27 will be provided to this Committee by way of an annual Service Update.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

World Energy Cities Partnership (WECP)

- 3.1 The Council is a founding member of the WECP which connects 17 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”*.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 The WECP meets formally twice a year, once for a working Board meeting alongside the global energy conference CERA Week, and once for its AGM. The WECP AGM is hosted by a different member city each year following a competitive bidding process and will take place in Perth, Australia, between 9 – 13 November 2026. Both CERA Week and AGM schedules reflect WECP presence with specific WECP-hosted panels, information sessions and activities to raise the profile of the network and its cities' progress in renewables.
- 3.4 At the 2026 WECP AGM, member cities will be invited to submit bids to host the WECP AGM in 2027. Aberdeen last hosted the AGM in 2019. The opportunity to host the AGM in 2027 in Aberdeen, aligning with Offshore Europe 2027, is being explored subject to feasibility, partner support and external funding being identified. Coordinating these high-profile events could offer significant strategic and reputational benefits for Aberdeen. If deemed feasible, a proposal would be brought forward to a future Finance & Resources Committee.

Energy

- 3.5 Officers liaise with Scottish Development International (SDI), the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and relevant city stakeholders to support inward international delegations. 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. This initiative is an example of a historical MoU agreement serving as a springboard for additional economic opportunity and attracting external financial support.
- 3.7 Originally initiated by the Scottish Government's Nordic Office, Aberdeen, Esbjerg, Stavanger, and now Groningen – officers and stakeholders from the four European cities of the WECP meet 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 supplemented by quarterly virtual meetings. Mayoral-representation from all four cities has been requested to deliver a panel session at High Wind 2026 in Stavanger.
- 3.8 Pending successful conclusion of the grant agreement, the Th2istle Clean Hydrogen Partnership H2 Valley project, is expected to deliver new and interconnected activities to make, move and use green hydrogen in Aberdeen city and the wider region.

Events

- 3.9 The Tall Ships Races rights holder, Sail Training International, has requested that Aberdeen, as a 2025 Host Port, attend and support the Tall Ships 2026 Conference to share insight, lessons learned and advice to support continued and successful delivery of the event in the future. The European conference location and dates are pending an announcement by Sail Training International. It is recommended that an officer attend this conference in support of our ambition to host the Tall Ships races again in upcoming years.
- 3.10 In support of future city events, it is recommended that an elected member and an officer attend a World Rally Championship event in 2026, either Rally Estonia (16-19 July), Rally Finland (30 July-2 Aug), or Rally Italia (1-4 October).

International Travel 26/27

- 3.11 This report seeks approval of proposed international travel and event attendance (detailed in Appendix 1), which will enable officers to progress and deliver activity in the above areas. To appraise the benefits of proposed international travel and activity to achieve these aims, the following criteria are considered. In Appendix 1 the proposed travel is aligned with the appropriate criteria:
 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, University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University, and local business partners).
4. WECP attendance at AGM and Board meetings.

3.12 The Council's travel policies require all travel to be planned, approved and undertaken in the most cost-effective, safe and compliant way. Clear regulations on bookings, expenses, environmental considerations and responsibilities for both officers and elected members, are adhered to.

3.13 If new international activity for 2026/27 emerges that was not known at the time of this report, officers will appraise the request against the criteria in 3.11 and seek approval for travel at a future Finance and Resources Committee.

3.14 An annual Service Update is provided in April of each year, sharing outcomes from each international engagement of the previous financial year.

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 £1,200. This cost will be met via the approved City Development and Regeneration budget for International Travel for 2025/26.

4.2 Similarly, committee approval is required in relation to the proposed travel and costs in recommendation 2.2, detailed in Appendix 1. Each trip's funding source is specified and will either be met by City Development & Regeneration budgets for 2026/27 (subject to budget setting in March 2026), or from external funding sources that are currently being explored but not yet confirmed. Travel will only proceed once the necessary funding has been secured.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Scottish Government guidance ("Councillors' renumeration, 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 or 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, meetings take place virtually (online) when possible, 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 'greener' 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) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*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 reputational impact.	Aligning international activity with Scottish and UK government priority 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 advancements in energy transition, in part through supporting inward delegations to the city.	L	Yes
	Failure to carry out activities necessary to	Alignment of activity and outcomes with Event365 Plan and	L	Yes

	secure future major and international events.	participation in all post-event evaluation and measurement as required by events rights holders.		
Compliance	Travel, accommodation 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.	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) travel advice and country entry requirements adhered to. A thorough risk assessment exercise is completed prior to any travel outside of the UK. This forms part of the pre-travel briefing. Sufficient travel insurance in place.	M	Yes
Financial	Actual costs exceed those estimated in this report.	A recent costing exercise has been undertaken to inform estimated in this report. No travel will be booked if it exceeds the total approved budget. Costs for unconfirmed locations are based on previous experience.	L	Yes
Reputational	Reputational risks if the city does not	Fulfilling the Council's obligation in terms of WECP membership	M	Yes

	<p>actively maintain international networks, which could diminish the city's global profile in the energy transition, resulting in loss of trade and investment opportunities.</p> <p>Failure to carry out responsibilities as a 2025 host port for the Tall Ships Races.</p> <p>Potential impact on WRC Bid.</p>	<p>to ensure continued international profile.</p> <p>Close working relationships with SDI, DBT and city stakeholders to ensure benefits maximised from all activity.</p>		
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 2025-26		Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	<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 2045, 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 Tall Ships and World Rally, 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.
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<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
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, and the Net Zero Routemap.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to International Travel Revisions 2025/26 (F&RC, 12 February 2025, CR&E/25/021) has been reviewed and no changes required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	Not required.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 [International Travel 2025/26, CR&E/25/021](#)

10.2 [World Rally Championship Bid, CR&E/25/252](#)

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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