

## REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 22 AUGUST 2019

### RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION – SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

#### 1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 Consider and endorse the proposed submission to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) consultation on Scottish Local Government International Engagement.

#### 2 Background / Discussion

2.1 Following agreement by the COSLA Convention in March 2019, COSLA has opened a scoping exercise on the international engagement of Scottish Local Government. As part of this exercise, a consultation has been launched with a deadline of 23 August 2019. It seeks responses to the following questions:

- 1) How does Scottish Local Government engage internationally at present?
- 2) How would Scottish Councils like to engage post-UK exit (EU/Internationally?)
- 3) What are the opportunities that exist on an individual and collective basis?
- 4) What are the potential partnerships with sectors, organisations and countries?
- 5) What are the capacity and resource constraints (and assets)?

2.2 A draft response has been prepared and is set out at **Appendix 1** to this report for consideration.

2.3 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

#### 3 Scheme of Governance

3.1 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section F.3.3.2. of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as this relates to an external consultation on a policy matter falling within the delegation of the Committee.

#### 4 Implications and Risk

4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because this report is for noting only and does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

- 4.2 There are no staffing and financial implications arising from this report.
- 4.3 The following risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a [Corporate Level](#): Changes in government policy, legislation and regulation; Working with other organisations (e.g. supply chains, outsourcing and partnership working). The following risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a [Strategic Level](#): Economic Development.
- 4.4 The recommendations in this report do not require a Town Centre First Assessment.

**Stephen Archer**  
**Director of Infrastructure Services**

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24 July 2019

## APPENDIX 1 – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

### QUESTION 1. How does Scottish Local Government engage internationally at present?

Q.1.1. How does your Council/organisation engage internationally at the moment?

Q.1.2. Do you plan to diversify or reduce engagement in the event of Brexit?

Q.1.3. Are there international bodies that you would be interested in engaging with, but you/your organisation cannot do it on its own?

Q.1.4. Is it necessary to foster more cooperation within the wider Local Government sector or is cooperation already sufficient?

Aberdeenshire Council is presently a member of international partnerships including the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR); North Sea Commission (NSC); and KIMO International. Both Elected Members and Officers actively participate in the work of these partnerships. There are not presently any other international bodies which Aberdeenshire Council foresees co-operating with. Cllr. Argyle was recently appointed to the position of Vice President of the North Sea Commission and Cllr. Thomson as Vice Chair of the NSC Marine Resources Group. Claudia Cowie, Team Leader – Sustainability & Climate Change also acts as Advisor to the NSC Energy & Climate Change Group.

There are no plans at present to diversify or reduce engagement in the event of Brexit, although this will be subject to periodic review and may be amended depending on the final form which Brexit takes. It is likely that international engagement work through partnerships will become more important with the UK being outside of the formal decision-making structures of the EU. There will be a continuing need for co-operation in areas of common interest (e.g. North Sea and Climate Change co-operation).

### QUESTION 2. How would Scottish Councils like to engage post-UK exit (EU/Internationally)?

Q.2.1. Are you aware of the initiatives mentioned above? Would you/your organisation be keen to engage in any of them?

Q.2.1. Is there merit in developing shared awareness of current participation levels in the various fora and programmes and hosting of international events?

Aberdeenshire Council is aware of the Covenant of Mayors, being one of the eight Scottish Councils who have signed up to the initiative. Participation in

other initiatives would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis taking into account available resources and the costs and benefits of doing so. The sharing of information on Local Authority participation in initiatives and international events could be usefully facilitated through COSLA.

### **QUESTION 3. What are the opportunities that exist on an individual and collective basis?**

Q.3.1. Are you aware of these international organisations and events? Would you/your organisation be keen to explore any of them further?

Q.3.2. Are there specific thematic policy areas or specific activities your Council would like to advance, either individually or working with others, including with COSLA?

Aberdeenshire Council is aware of the work of the United Nations of relevance to Local Authorities (e.g. the Sustainable Development goals) and Council of European Municipalities and Regions work facilitated through COSLA. The Council has also presented its carbon budget during a COSLA event during the 2018 EU Sustainable Energy Week. The work of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) organisation appears to focus on promoting the benefits of Local Government and democracy. As such, it would appear more relevant to COSLA as a body representing the collective interests of Local Government than individual Local Authorities. The Council's main thematic policy areas of interest for international partnership working include economic development, the environment, energy and climate change, fisheries/marine resources and transport.

### **QUESTION 4. What are the potential partnerships with sectors, organisations and countries?**

Q.4.1. To what extent is it possible to strategically plan future engagements, share resources and feedback?

Q.4.2. Many forms of participation require only information input. Would it be realistic to create a new system to collect and disseminate this information?

Q.4.3. How should a more coordinated, inclusive, cooperative and partnership-based approach to international engagement be developed?

It is important to recognise that individual Local Authorities are primarily engaged in international partnerships to promote the interests of their area, rather than Local Government collectively. They also incur costs in the form of membership subscriptions and participation costs, hence it may not always be appropriate for information to be shared with other Councils who

are not formally engaged with international partnerships. There is a risk that the open sharing of information could act as a disincentive to Councils to actively participate in international partnership working if they believe that they are getting the benefits for no cost.

It is often active participation which has proved to be of greatest benefit in terms of influencing policy developments and the development of collaborative projects with international partners, rather than dissemination of information. Many organisations do regularly issue position statements and press releases openly. It may be helpful for COSLA to analyse, summarise and circulate these policy positions amongst COSLA members.

**QUESTION 5. What are the capacity and resource constraints (and assets)?**

Q.5.1. If finance is the main barrier for a Council to engage internationally, are there other factors?

Q.5.2. Should the UK or Scottish Government provide a form of block grant for Local Government to engage internationally, be that at political level, policy exchange or on international development projects?

Finance is one barrier to participation to international engagement, with others including the availability of staff resources and the time commitment to actively participate in meetings. A significant commitment is required to obtain the maximum benefits of international partnership working, which requires the building of relationships with other regions over a sustained period of time. Many Local Authorities lack the resources to sustain this work and it can take time for the benefits to be fully realised (e.g. through the development and delivery of joint projects over a number of years). Any support for international engagement work through the provision of funding from the UK or Scottish Government would be welcomed and help to overcome this resource pressure which may limit or prevent Councils from engaging internationally.

