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| Agenda Item | 21 |
| Report No | ECI/27/2024 |

The Highland Council

Committee: Economy and Infrastructure

Date: 2 May 2024

Report Title: Membership of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) and North Sea Commission (NSC)

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on options on engagement in Europe. In considering how best to engage in post-Brexit Europe, there is a need for clarity on what the Council was seeking to achieve from membership of any European organisation and weigh this up against the costs involved. This report sets out the key policy areas that the two organisations referred to are involved with, and having been involved in the past, Members will appreciate the benefits of membership, particularly in relation to information sharing on best practice and networking. The development of the Green Freeport may also present a good opportunity to promote Highland as a place to do business, and to learn from experiences in the other Member regions.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to **agree** whether to seek membership of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) and North Sea Commission (NSC).

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – There are no funds currently specifically identified to meet the costs of the membership of the organisations set out in this report. If Members are minded to apply for Membership, there are earmarked funds set against the Economic Prosperity Fund that could be utilised on an annual basis.

3.2 **Legal** – There are no legal implications. Membership would not place the Council under any legal obligation to take part if specific initiatives, given that these are voluntary and non-binding co-operative arrangements.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** - Being part of a network may identify matters of mutual collaboration, or the sharing of good practice that could be used to support other initiatives being considered by the Council.

- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – As set out in the report, the workstreams of the CPMR and NSC contain strong focus on energy transition and tackling climate change.
- 3.5 **Risk** - There are no risks to membership, other than the ongoing financial commitment to support travel to meetings and the cost of supporting Members who may wish to take part.
- 3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – No implications.
- 3.7 **Gaelic** – No implications.

4 Background to the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) and North Sea Commission (NSC)

- 4.1 CPMR is an independent network of over 150 European Regions representing 200 million people, from both within and outside the European Union representing peripheral maritime regions. The network works to bring these regions together for discussion and debate on areas that are of common concern (agriculture, fisheries, transport, sustainable development, competition and EU regional policy) and ensures these issues are acknowledged at a European level. It operates as a think tank and as a lobby for regions, and all member regions meet once a year in a General Assembly that adopts policy guidelines and the budget. The Political Bureau is the main decision-maker of the CPMR and meets twice yearly. It proposes policy guidelines for the General Assembly and implements decisions.
- 4.2 CPMR aims are as follows:-
 - to minimise the disadvantages encountered by Europe’s peripheral locations;
 - to promote Europe’s maritime dimension; and
 - to exploit the benefits of being close to European citizens at a regional level

Main Policy Areas:-

- striving for enhanced territorial cohesion;
- enhancing the European Maritime Dimension;
- ensuring accessibility and connectivity in peripheries;
- committed to energy transition and tackling climate change;
- promoting a territorial approach to global issues; and
- channel Alliance to foster sustainable economic development across the English Channel in a post-Brexit world

There are six sub-regions:-

- **Atlantic Arc:** Parts of Ireland, France, Spain, Portugal, and all of Wales;
- **Balkan and Black Sea:** Parts of Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and Georgia;
- **Baltic Sea:** Parts of Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, and all of Estonia;
- **Inter-Mediterranean:** Parts of Morocco, Spain, Italy, Greece, Estonia, Sweden, and all of Cyprus;
- **North Sea:** Website showing Highland, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Fife, plus parts of Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway as members; and
- **Islands Commission:** Mediterranean, Atlantic and Baltic Islands. Formerly Scottish Islands prior to withdrawal

4.3 The North Sea Commission is one of the six geographical areas of the CPMR. Its mission is to strengthen partnerships between regional authorities which face the challenges and opportunities presented by the North Sea. In addition it seeks to promote common interests, in relation to European Union institutions, national governments and other organisations dealing with issues that are relevant to the North Sea.

Objectives:-

- to promote and create awareness of the North Sea region as a major economic entity within Europe;
- to be a platform for developing and obtaining funding for joint development initiatives; and
- to lobby for a better North Sea region

Cooperation focuses on 4 priority areas and involves policy development and political lobbying, development of transnational projects and exchange of knowledge and best practice, in the areas of:

- a productive and sustainable North Sea;
- a climate neutral North Sea region;
- a connected North Sea region; and
- a smart North Sea region

4.4 To renew membership would be €7770 for CPMR and €5171 for NSC. This equates to around £11,000 per annum.

5 Membership Options

5.1 In 2019 Members agreed that the Council would leave these organisations. The changes in terms of the UK's membership of the EU does not mean that the Council can not still contribute and there may be benefits in terms of sharing good practice, maintaining relationships with European regions and promoting Highland as a place to invest. If Members are minded to agree to re-establishing membership of the NSC, funding could be earmarked from the reserves currently held as part of the Economic Prosperity Fund (specifically for Regional Economic Development projects).

5.2 Members are therefore asked to consider whether they wish to proceed with Membership, on the terms outlined above.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 10 April 2024

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Background Papers: Website for CPMR can be found [here](#)
Website for the NSC can be found [here](#)

Appendices: None