

Item 8 - Question Time

Response to Mr J Crawford

I have travelled abroad on Council business four times in the fifteen months since my election in May 2012.

In my role as Leader of Highland Council, Chair of the UK Transitions Regions Network and the UK representative on the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), I am required to travel to progress the interests of Highland people.

This business abroad has brought and contributed to the following benefits to the region:-

- £174m to the region from 2014-20 from the Regional Development and Social Funds alone, and our success in retaining the 'Transition' category of funding for these programmes. The value of the Rural Development and Fisheries Funds has yet to be announced. This means specific ring fenced funding for the Highlands & Islands and the higher rate of funding per head of population than would otherwise be the case.
- Re-igniting the debate in Europe on the future communications needs of peripheral regions such as Highland and the Highlands & Islands. The budget for this between 2014 to 2010 is €30bn; there is now a growing support across Europe for this to be brought back to the EU agenda.
- The retention of the focus on territorial cohesion in the EU Budget and the regulations on regional development. This ensures that account needs to be taken by Government of the development needs of rural and peripheral regions such as Highland in developing the programmes, probably leading to multiple local projects across Highland, which will guide the expenditure of the Regional Development Funds.
- Lobbying for and gaining European support for issues of great importance such as protection of air links, coastal and maritime protection and notably presenting to the General Assembly on specific issues of transport connectivity relating to Highland.
- Changing the adopted lobbying position of the CPMR on the Regional Aid Regulations to the more relevant and direct benefit of businesses in Highland and the Highlands & Islands.
- Raising the profile of the Council and of Highland as a pro-active player in the European arena. This means that interventions from the Council are listened to and the President and Secretary General looks for interventions from me in debates which reflects the status of the region. In addition, the Council is asked to input to the work streams of the network e.g. the core group on regional development which means that the Council has advance notice of work being carried out and is in the position to preferentially influence the lobbying positions of the CPMR.

The total cost of this travel, including accompanying Officials, is £5059.