

The Highland Council

Resource Committee

Agenda Item	26
Report No	RES/21/14

28 May 2014

Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions Meeting of the Political Bureau - 6 June 2014, Inverness

Report by Director of Development & Infrastructure.

Summary

This report updates members on the preparations being made and the costs involved for the Council hosting a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR) in Inverness on 6 June 2014. Costs are currently estimated at £21,000 and are based on 70 people attending the Bureau meeting and 50 staying on for the excursion on Saturday. The high percentage of people expected to stay on for the Saturday excursion reflects the level of interest of Europeans in visiting the Highlands. Funds to meet the cost of hosting this event have been sought from Visit Scotland and the Inverness Common Good Fund. The balance will be met from the EU projects budget 14/15, held within the Development & Infrastructure Service.

Committee is invited to:

- note the contents of this report;
- support the hosting of the CPMR Political Bureau in Inverness on 6 June; and
- approve expenditure to a maximum of £21,000 to deliver the event with the cost being met from the Development and Infrastructure EU projects budget 14/15, the Inverness Common Good Fund and the Visit Scotland Conference Bid Fund.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council is a longstanding member of the CPMR with a track record of proactive involvement in the work of the network. The Council Leader is the current UK representative on the ruling Political Bureau and is also a Vice-President of the CPMR.
- 1.2 The Political Bureau meets three times per year with one of the meetings being on the occasion of the Annual General Meeting. The other two meetings are held in host member regions. Highland has never hosted a Political Bureau.
- 1.3 The CPMR remains the pre-eminent lobbying organisation for local/regional government in the E.U. Such is the stock of the network, the European Commission regularly use the CPMR to both assist in the development of new initiatives and regulations and to ascertain the views of the regions on new E.U. proposals.

1.4 The event will bring together 30-35 of the leading politicians from across Europe. These are leaders of their respective regions and will be in Inverness representing either their respective countries' interests in the CPMR or the interests of the geographic Commissions of the CPMR (Atlantic Arc, Balkan & Black Sea, Baltic, Mediterranean, North Sea and Islands). The politicians will be accompanied by their aides which, along with speakers will bring the total number of visitors to around 70.

2. Benefits to the Council from hosting the Political Bureau.

2.1 This event is an excellent opportunity for the Council to showcase the Highlands and the Council to senior politicians from across Europe. The attraction of such a range of influential decision makers to Inverness presents the opportunity to sell the region as an attractive venue for both business and leisure.

2.2 The Council has a priority to "secure maximum benefit for the Highlands from EU funding programmes for 2014-20...and participate actively in key European organisations". Maintaining a senior and active role in the CPMR helps deliver this.

2.3 The CPMR has been instrumental in the debate to retain Transition status which has delivered more European funds to the Highlands & Islands during 2014-20 than would have been the case if this category of support did not exist (€192M rather than an anticipated €120M).

2.4 The CPMR has also been at the forefront of the debates on:

- promoting equality of access to energy grids for peripheral generators;
- differential levels of support for farmers on less favoured areas;
- highlighting the role of the regions in delivering EU funded regional development; and
- pushing the case for macro regional strategies as a means of delivering regional development.

2.5 The network will be a key vehicle to influence the European Commission on future funding for communications infrastructure for the peripheral regions to the heart of the EU. This issue is currently being pursued by Councillor Hendry. Success in this will influence the future balance of funds that will be directed to the development of peripheral communications networks as opposed to core networks. In light of the above, maintaining an influential position within the CPMR will be key to influencing Europe in the future.

2.6 Hosting this event will also bring direct economic benefit to Inverness via expenditure generated by delegates in hotels etc. On the basis of £364 multiplier used by International associations, 70 delegates staying for a minimum of two nights will generate a spend in Inverness of £51,000

3. The Political Bureau Meeting.

3.1 The following has been planned:

- Thursday 5 June - delegates arrive and a welcome reception.
- Friday 6 June – meeting of the Political Bureau in the Council Chamber.

A formal civic reception is planned for the evening of Friday 6 June in the Town House and an application for support from the Inverness Common Good Fund has been made to cover the cost of this.

- Saturday 7 June - excursion comprising trip down Loch Ness to Urquhart Castle, a hands on Highland Games display in the historic Northern Meeting Park, and walking tour through old Inverness.

4. Budget.

4.1 The cost of hosting this event as outlined at 3.1 above is currently set at £21,000. This is a maximum figure and may be less depending on:

- the number of delegates;
- number of delegates staying on to Saturday;
- the appraisal of the request for support from the Inverness Common Good Fund;
- success in seeking funding from the Visit Scotland Conference Bid Fund; and
- savings on meals, office set up etc.

4.2 The operational budget is made up as follows:

Translation costs	£11,000
Office costs	£400
Thursday reception	£1,400
Friday (teas & coffees)	£400
Friday lunch	£1,400
Civic reception (may be met by Inverness Common Good Fund)	£3,300
Saturday excursion	£3,000
Contingencies	£500
TOTAL (maximum)	£21,000

4.3 Funds to meet the cost of hosting this event have been sought from the Visit Scotland Conference Bid Fund and the Inverness Common Good Fund. The value of these approaches cannot be quantified at the time of writing but is expected to be in the order of £5,500. The balance will be met from the Development and Infrastructure EU projects budget 14/15.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Resource – This event is currently costed at a maximum of £21,000 with the funds being met from the Development & Infrastructure Service. Assistance has been sought from the Inverness Common Good Fund and the Visit Scotland Conference Bid Fund
- 5.2 Legal - The procurement of the goods and services to deliver this event will be carried out in line with the Council's Contracts Standing Orders.
- 5.3 Climate Change/ Carbon Clever - This event will have climate change implications due to the travel that will be required by delegates to travel from across Europe to Inverness. The CPMR suggests that delegates offset the carbon impact by making a contribution to carbon offset schemes in their own countries.
- 5.4 Risk - A risk assessment was carried out on the hosting of this event and the failure to secure sufficient accommodation that could be reserved to allow registration by delegates and the likely availability of suitably qualified translators were identified as the major risks to the successful practical delivery of the event.

Both of these have been delivered and removed as risks

A further risk of reputation to the Council in poor delivery will be mitigated by having all arrangements for the proposals set out at 3.1 in place and confirmed two weeks prior to the actual meeting and allocating a budget that is sufficient to cover the costs. The latter point is covered in the recommendations of this report.

- 5.5 Gaelic - Delegates will be exposed to the use of Gaelic by the Council in its work and its wider use in the Highlands, particularly during the Saturday excursion.

Recommendation

Committee is invited to:

- note the contents of this report;
- support the hosting of the CPMR Political Bureau in Inverness on 6 June; and
- approve expenditure to a maximum of £21,000 to deliver the event with the cost being met from the Development and Infrastructure EU projects budget 14/15, the Inverness Common Good Fund and the Visit Scotland Conference Bid Fund.

Designation: Principal European Officer

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Background Papers: N/A