

COSLA in EU lobbying success as communities can continue to work together across North Sea

On 29th May the European Commission presented its first EU Regional Fund proposals for post Brexit era (2021-2027).

Although the UK will not be part of it, there was considerable interest from local UK communities about continuing to cooperate with their counterparts on the European mainland through the INTERREG programme.

The Commission proposed yesterday that the UK Local Authority areas will be eligible to participate in EU cooperation just like other non-EU Member States such as Norway, Iceland or Switzerland as well as Liechtenstein, Andorra and Monaco. This is something that COSLA had been campaigning for since the referendum.

Welcoming the announcement COSLA President Cllr Alison Evison said: "This is excellent news. Our local communities will continue to be able to work and share best practice with their counterparts from the rest of Europe. This is something for which we have lobbied, including when I met EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier last October."

A significant amount of work in Brussels by Scottish councillors and MSPs has been undertaken to reach this proposal.

Cllr Tony Buchanan, leader of the Scottish contingent to the EU Committee of the Regions said: "Only a week ago we secure unanimous support in Brussels to our proposal that Scottish organisations and indeed those from across the rest of the UK, could continue cooperating with the rest of Europe as they do now. The Committee of the Regions has been very supportive of this in successive Resolutions on Brexit and discussion with Michel Barnier".

"The UK Government must now confirm that it is willing to opt into this programme. Last week the UK did request to join the post-Brexit EU Research programme as a non-EU partner. It has not yet confirmed that it is willing to opt into INTERREG.. Crucially as COSLA research has shown INTERREG money never leaves the UK: UK money is spent in UK bodies so they can cooperate with their counterparts from the rest of the EU."

Cllr Evison concluded: "I hope that the UK and Scottish Government will consider this proposal seriously and that the forthcoming White Paper for the post Brexit UK-EU relationship with the EU lists INTERREG as one of the issues that the UK will opt in."