

European and International Update

Summary and Recommendations

The purpose of the report is to present the provisional calendar for COSLA EU and international work in 2024, relating primarily to upcoming political engagements.

The Board is invited to:

- i. Agree the COSLA position with the update on the provisional calendar of events for 2024.

References

Previous reports on Europe and International Policy:

- Environment and Economy Board September 2023 - European Update and Local Impact of EU Exit
- Environment and Economy Board March 2023 - European Advocacy Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- Environment and Economy Board October 2022 - European and International Affairs

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Purpose

1. To outline planned activities of COSLA Brussels Office upcoming in 2024.

Current COSLA Position

2. COSLA has consistently shown strong support for continued positive and constructive European relations based on shared values. The Board has recognised the benefits in ensuring new trading arrangements are well applied, any potential negative impacts for local communities are mitigated, and therefore the need for local authorities to continue political dialogue and have a role in oversight.
3. Throughout 2023, COSLA members with European and international mandates participated in a wide number of engagements, promoting Scottish Local Government and making an active contribution to European democracy. This includes at the Council of Europe Congress for Local and Regional Authorities, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and global umbrella United Cities Local Government (UCLG).

What is changing?

4. COSLA organised a delegation visit of elected members to Brussels in January to mark 30 years of EU engagement. The purpose was to assess COSLA Brussels Office facilities and networks, consider elements for a strategic approach to EU and international work and demonstrate the contribution of Scottish Local Government to Scotland's external relations and cultural diplomacy.
5. The programme included business at the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR) and meeting of the CoR-UK Contact Group, set up to maintain political relations between UK and EU local and regional authorities post EU Exit. COSLA also hosted a small afternoon reception and networking event to mark the anniversary, together with European colleagues. Further, members attended Robert Burns Nights celebrations in Scotland House where Scottish Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture Angus Robertson met with members.
6. From these meetings, there emerged opportunity to work more closely with other UK organisations on effective oversight of EU/UK trading arrangements, and for Scottish partners including COSLA to potentially host the next meeting of the CoR-UK Contact Group in Edinburgh. This year COSLA will be working on possible options with Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, in line with shared ongoing commitment to constructive EU relations.
7. COSLA is currently working with the UK Government FCDO and British Embassy in Paris on the next edition of the UK France Local Government Forum. As with the previous edition in Nancy in 2022, the event is being supported by the local

government associations in the UK (COSLA, LGA, WLGA, NILGA) and in France (AFCCRE). Due to take place in a city in Northern England, it will aim to reinforce existing partnerships between towns and cities, provide space for local politicians to consider common challenges, and encourage new local partnerships. As well as participating in the organising committee, we expect to have a key place in the final agenda and to support a delegation of Scottish Councillors to attend the event.

8. With European Parliamentary elections taking place this year 6-9 June, the calendar for the second half of the year is more uncertain. However there a number of events for cities and local authorities taking place under the current Belgian Presidency of the EU. As well as EU thematic weeks that provide opportunity for local authorities to exchange with their peers. COSLA Brussels Office will scope and report opportunities on an ongoing basis, being able to advise individual councils and welcome visiting members at the House of Municipalities.

Proposed COSLA Position

9. It is proposed that COSLA continues to play a positive role in European and human rights-based organisations and use our political mandates to contribute to good global governance promoting the right to local self-government, the principle of subsidiarity and for strengthened local democracy. Further we will seek to bring local perspective to global challenges and contribute to global aims, while working to localise international agendas, increasing local relevance and the potential to support local outcomes.
10. The Board is invited to note the following non-exhaustive calendar of political events for 2024. There will be further additions that relate to the Chair’s position as Spokesperson for Sustainable Development in our European body CEMR.

15 Feb	CEMR Digital Solutions Conference, Tallinn
19 Feb	UCLG Retreat, Barcelona
18-19 March	10th European Summit of Regions and Cities, Mons
25-28 March	Congress Plenary Session, Strasbourg
6-7 June	Congress Meeting for National Associations, Strasbourg
Week of 17 June	CEMR Policy Committee, Brussels
22-23 September	UN Summit for the Future, New York
6-11 October	UCLG World Council, the Hague tbc
7-10 October	European Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels
15-17 October	Congress Plenary Session, Strasbourg
21-22 October	UK France Local Government Forum
November	CEMR Retreat, Barcelona tbc
11-24 November	UN Climate Summit COP29, Baku
December	CEMR Policy Committee, Karlsruhe tbc

Next Steps

11. It is proposed that this engagement continues in 2024 based on the approach outlined above. Officers continuously welcome direction from members on priorities and strategic actions for COSLA European and international work.