

## **Scottish Local Government - Future International Engagement**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

This report takes stock of an international engagement scoping exercise carried out together with councils. It also seeks the Convention to consider COSLA representation in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and to agree the proposal for Cllr Macgregor to become CEMR Co-Spokesperson on Employment matters. Finally, it provides an update on the establishment of the new UK-Committee of the Regions Contact Group.

This paper invites Convention to:

- i. Note the intention to bring back a draft International Engagement Strategy to the next meeting to demonstrate the opportunities that might be available looking forward;
- ii. Agree COSLA representation of a full and a substitute member in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;
- iii. accept the proposal of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions that Cllr Gail Macgregor become the new CEMR co-Spokesperson on Employment; and
- iv. note the establishment of the UK-Committee of the Regions Contact Group.

### **References**

International Engagement – Convention March 2019

**Dr. Serafin Pazos-Vidal**  
**Head of Brussels Office**  
**COSLA**  
[serafin@cosla.gov.uk](mailto:serafin@cosla.gov.uk)

**October 2020**



## **Scottish Local Government - Future International Engagement**

### **Purpose**

1. This report provides an overview of the existing European and international engagement for COSLA and makes a number of recommendations for future work post Brexit. The paper also considers our political representation in some of these bodies.

### **Current position**

2. COSLA has longstanding engagement in European and international arenas, most commonly together with sister organisations from other countries and through our European and international umbrella bodies - the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and United Cities for Local Government (UCLG). COSLA nominates and provides the secretariat for two members of the CEMR Policy Committee, one member (the COSLA President) in the UCLG World Council and two members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Our engagement with the EU Committee of the Regions will be maintained post Brexit as a result of the recent establishment of the UK-Committee of the Regions (CoR) Contact Group.

### **Proposed COSLA position**

#### **Scottish Local Government International Engagement**

3. The COSLA Convention of March 2019 agreed a scoping exercise to map existing and potentially available opportunities of international engagement for Scottish Local Government.
4. COSLA Leaders then agreed that this should be an open-ended exercise. The primary aim was to raise awareness of the wide range of opportunities and examine the added value and practicality of existing or additional engagements, both on an individual basis and collectively as Scottish Local Government. It need not result in additional or reduced international engagement but provide information for each Council and COSLA to autonomously decide their way forward.
5. In summary, an extensive consultation has shown there is wide engagement at present being carried out by individual councils and COSLA. However, most is currently tied to EU policies and access to EU funding. Feedback from councils suggests that beyond that there is little awareness of the many other opportunities (even those that require little resourcing such as providing information through COSLA to OECD, Council of Europe, UN etc). Councils have thus found the overview and signposting provided by COSLA to be useful.
6. Consideration was also given to the activity of the various Local Government international bodies such as Council of European Municipalities and Regions or United Cities and Local Governments, among others. Reference was also made to the other UK local authority associations and their intentions post-Brexit in terms of international engagement. This has demonstrated the value of COSLA retaining an active presence in these organisations, both to Scottish Local Government as a whole and to individual councils.

7. Once the full implications of Brexit are understood in the new year, the suggestion is that officers bring back a draft International Engagement Strategy to Convention to demonstrate the opportunities that might be available looking forward.
8. Meantime, there are a number of appointments that require to be made.

#### Nominations - Congress to new mandate 2021-26

9. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is an international pan European organisation representing subnational governments in the wider European continent. It is unrelated to the EU and the UK together with Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and others are also members.
10. One of the key roles of Congress is to monitor the application of the European Charter of Local Self Government. Members will be aware that the Scottish Parliament is currently considering transposing this into Scots Law, via Andy Wightman MSP's Private Member's Bill.
11. COSLA nominates, and through our European office, provides support to two Congress members, full and alternate. The Scottish Parliament does the same with two MSPs.
12. The next term of office of Congress will start, as a result of COVID-related delays, next March. However nominations need to be sent by the end of this year. Our present nominees are Cllr Brannan-McVey (North Lanarkshire) and Cllr Buchanan (East Renfrewshire) as her substitute. These nominations were made by Convention prior to the 2017 elections.
13. Convention is invited to consider COSLA's nominations to Congress for one full and one substitute member. The next opportunity to do so will be in 2024.

#### Nomination - CEMR Spokesperson on Employment

14. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is COSLA's pan-European body and the main platform for our cooperation with our sister organisations from the wider European continent as well as internationally as regards the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Organisation of Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) and the various agencies of the United Nations for local development and sustainable development goals.
15. COSLA is a very active member in CEMR. Cllr Heddle is our representative in the Policy Committee, equivalent to our Convention, and is also currently CEMR Spokesperson on Territorial Development.
16. Cllr Macgregor has also been an active member of the European Social Dialogue, the body that brings together Local Government employers and trade unions to discuss pan-European Employment legislation. In recognition of that active role and the wish to ensure that there is continued cooperation in social and employment matters between the UK and the EU post Brexit, CEMR has proposed that Cllr Macgregor becomes CEMR Spokesperson on Employment matters, a role that she will share with the Mayor of Fuenlabrada (Spain) Mr Javier Ayala.
17. No additional resources are required and CEMR will cover any supplementary cost involved in this role.
18. Convention is invited to consider whether to accept this invitation from CEMR for Cllr Macgregor to take on the role of CEMR Employment Co-Spokesperson.

#### CoR Contact Group/UK Joint Committee

19. In order to continue the political dialogue and cooperation between local and regional bodies of the UK and the EU post-Brexit, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has taken the initiative to launch an UK-CoR Contact Group. This is an informal and internal body within CoR that will seek to engage on a case by case basis with elected members of the associations of local authorities of the UK and the Devolved Administrations. COSLA has contributed significantly to the development of this body.
20. The first meeting of the UK Committee of the Regions Contact Group will take place on 16 November. The COSLA President, alongside her counterparts and the Presiding Officers of the devolved parliaments are expected to attend via video conference. The CoR will invite UK representatives for each individual meeting, taking place about twice a year and focusing on a particular topic of common interest.
21. The purpose of this informal forum is to discuss the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and the EU from a local and regional perspective, while keeping existing partnerships and developing new ones.
22. As agreed by the March 2018 Convention, COSLA will be represented by the Presidential team, spokespersons, and where applicable, former CoR members, depending on the main item of the agenda of a given meeting. So far no additional significant cost is foreseen.

**October 2020**