

Summary of Policy Board meeting 1 July 2016

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| Present: | Clr Barney Crockett | Aberdeen City Council |
| | Amye Robinson | Aberdeen City Council |
| | Clr Geva Blackett | Aberdeenshire Council |
| | Martin Brebner | Aberdeenshire Council |
| | Clr Lynne Devine (Chair) | Angus Council |
| | Mairi Evans MSP | Angus Council |
| | Shelley Hague | Angus Council |
| | Professor Michael Keating | Centre for Constitutional Change |
| | John Davidson | Dundee City Council |
| | Clr Will Dawson | Dundee City Council |
| | Joanne Scobie | ESEC Secretariat |
| | Sharon Douglas | Fife Council |
| | Clr David Ross | Fife Council |
| | Jon Jordan | Hyer |
| | Clr John Kellas | Perth & Kinross Council |
| Serge Merone | Perth and Kinross Council | |
| Apologies: | Stuart Bews | Aberdeen City Council |
| | Rhonda McFarlane | Angus Council |
| | Diane Milne | Dundee City Council |
| | Rory Young | Dundee City Council |
| | Clr Martin Oliver | Falkirk Council |
| | Clr Tony Martin | Fife Council |

Update from Professor Michael Keating following EU referendum result

- The previous week, on 23 June 2016, the UK electorate voted to cease being a member of the European Union. The vote for the whole of the UK was 52% to leave and 48% to remain. In Scotland, 62% of voters voted to remain, including all Local Authority areas. Professor Michael Keating of the University of Aberdeen and director of the Centre of Constitutional Change gave an overview on what the result could mean for Scotland.
- Professor Keating commented on the tone of the referendum campaign, during which unsubstantiated claims were made by both sides, and which focused on three issues; migration, economy and sovereignty.
- He outlined some possible scenarios for the UK relationship with the EU once the UK is no longer a member; Europe-lite (wants continued access to the Single Market but without free movement), Little Englander (protectionist, xenophobic, core UKIP position) and Globalist (WTO framework and deregulation).

- For a full report on Professor Keating's presentation, please see the ESEC report which was sent to members on 11 July 2016.

Debate on implications of EU referendum result

- Following the presentation from Professor Keating on the possible options for the UK's relationship with the EU, members held a debate on the implications and next steps.
- It was noted that there may be other options available for Scotland, as following the referendum the First Minister met with officials in Brussels to discuss what alternatives may be on the table for Scotland, but none of this will be known until Article 50 is triggered.
- The possibility of a second referendum has also been raised, as the one on 23 June was advisory rather than binding. It was suggested that a second referendum of membership would make a constitutional crisis even worse, but holding one on revised terms might be more legitimate but would be very complicated.
- If Scotland was in the EU and England was out of it, this would case a difficult situation. For example, would there be a hard border given that Scotland would allow free movement of people, while England would not.
- It was pointed out that Norway – which is not an EU Member State – is very active in Brussels, and has high visibility, partly because they want to make up from not being a full member. This could be an example for Scotland, and ESEC as an organisation, in how to engage and be visible with EU institutions.
- Regarding funding programmes, the immediate assurances is that it is business as usual but in the longer term there is real concern on the continuation of programmes, especially for projects that have not been signed off. For the Interreg transnational programmes, decisions are due to be made on projects in late September, and these decisions may indicate how projects with UK partners are being considered.
- In some funding programmes, it is possible to participate as a non-EU Member State, however this requires paying into the central pot and/or allowing access to workers or students. Even in this case, the UK would not be invited to the meetings designing the programmes and therefore will lose out on influencing priorities.
- It is too early to predict outcomes and the timing of Brexit, but in the meantime it is agreed by those around the table that as individual Local Authorities and for ESEC as an organisation, it will be very important to work harder on informal contacts with our EU networks, while at the same time sharing information and intelligence among the group in order to ensure everyone is up to speed and therefore able to react quickly to announcements.

Update from Cllr Barney Crocket on HyER project

- Cllr Crocket gave a presentation on Hyer, an association which represents the interests of European regions and cities active in the field of hydrogen, fuel cells and electro mobility in Europe. It has 21 members in 10 countries. It is seeking to extend its membership.
- Aberdeen City Council is very engaged with Brussels and with the EU, and the message for Local Authorities is that they have to play a more active role, communicating their activities and specialisms.

- The association's activities cover various themes. It is looking at e-mobility and how sustainable transport will move forward. This is a very big agenda and the speed of change will be very fast.
- Eventually diesel will be disallowed in the EU and they have met with top EU officials as it is very important to be involved in the process.
- It is interesting to note that it is not necessary to be EU members to play a role in Brussels, both Norway and Iceland are very active.
- HyER regularly holds seminars in Brussels. The last one was landmark and had lead advisors from DGs MOVE (transport), Environment and Energy, and there will be one in Aberdeen on 6 July. An invitation has been sent out to ESEC members.
- It was noted that hydrogen has huge potential for rural transport, as the technology for storing it is very convenient and hydrogen itself can be taken from waste.
- Local Authorities with an interest in the hydrogen economy are strongly advised to consider joining HyER. Funding in this area has become something of a one way process and the association provides an opportunity to share your objectives, as well as having regular meetings with EU officials.
- For more information on Hyer, please see the presentation which was sent by email to members on 16 September.

ESEC event in the Scottish Parliament

- Mairi Evans has offered to host an event in the Scottish Parliament which will help to raise the profile of ESEC and will support our ambitions in trying to recruit new members. It was suggested to co-organise the event with WOSEF as we seek to work more closely together. Invitees will include policymakers and those we want to ask as associate members. There is a fee of £1000, which would be split with WOSEF.
- Further input is requested from members on the potential theme of the event.
- The date is yet to be confirmed but will be in late 2016 or early 2017. Scotland's Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) will be invited so the event will have to take place when MEPs are back in Scotland.

Options for future hosting of ESEC Secretariat

- Angus Council has hosted ESEC for two terms already and had intended to offer the hosting of the secretariat to another authority but the result of the referendum has created some uncertainty around this.
- It is thought that for the time being, and at least until more is known about the timing around Brexit, then Angus Council should apply to its committee for an extension to host ESEC, in order to avoid any upheaval and to allow for the consortium to concentrate on activity around Brexit.
- It was suggested that members could firm up arrangements for Joanne to spend time at other members' offices as even though she is hosted by Angus, she has the equipment to work in any location.

Overview of draft unaudited accounts

- Last year the Policy Board agreed to delegate the the consideration of the unaudited annual accounts to Angus Council’s Scrutiny and Audit Committee and the ESEC Board meet late September (and before the 30th September) with the aim to approve the audited accounts, prior to formal signing off by the auditors.
- The attached unaudited accounts are therefore for information only, as the audited accounts and annual report will be presented to the Policy Board for formal approval at the next meeting on 23 September.

Any other competent business

- Cllr Evans thanked all members for their support during her time as ESEC chair. She said she will continue to maintain close links with the group, including via the proposed event, and in her new role as an MSP she will seek to continue working on local government and EU matters.

Date of next meeting

- The audited accounts and annual report are required to be signed off before the end of September, so the next meeting will be on 23 September.