
Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	13 September 2022
Report By:	Head of Legal & Democratic Services	Report No:	LS/70/22
Contact Officer:	Iain Strachan	Contact No:	01475 712710
Subject:	Co-operative Councils Innovation Network		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a recommendation as to whether or not the Council should join the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network, further to the report considered by the Committee at its previous meeting on 9 August 2022.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee considers the assessment as to whether or not the Council should join the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network;
- 2.2 It is recommended that if the Committee wishes to join the network then it does so for an initial 2 or 3 year period with officers bringing back a report to the Committee in early 2024 or 2025, as the case may be, highlighting the benefits which have arisen during the initial membership period prior to Committee considering whether the Council membership should be further extended.

Iain Strachan
Head of Legal & Democratic Services

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 Cllr McCabe, as Leader of the Council, received an invitation for the Council to join the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network ("the Network"). This was the subject of a report to the Committee on 9 August 2022, with it being agreed an Elected Members' briefing from the Network would be organised, and a further report brought back to this meeting of the Committee.
- 3.2 The Elected Members' briefing took place on 18 August, at which 11 Elected Members were present.
- 3.3 The Network, established in 2012, describes itself as "the fastest-growing network in local government", having over 100 councils, organisations and supporters from across the UK. The Network states that member councils are committed to reforming the way they work by building an equal partnership with local people based on the values and principles of the International Co-operative Alliance. In particular, the Network promotes the transformation of communities through community action, community engagement and civic empowerment.
- 3.4 More information on the Network can be found on its website:

<https://www.councils.coop/about-us/>

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 From the information which is publicly available, together with that disclosed in the Elected Members' briefing, the benefits of joining the Network can be summarised as follows:-
 - Access for Elected Members and officers to a wide network of local authorities who share a common purpose;
 - Access to the Network's on-line resources, including case studies, <https://www.councils.coop/case-studies/>
 - The potential to bid for funding to work on a case study, alone or in conjunction with other members;
 - Access to conferences and training events to meet peers from other members;
 - The ability to access a framework of specialist suppliers established by the Network for its members; and
 - The opportunity to raise the Council's profile nationally across the UK.
- 4.2 There are, however, a number of other factors that also need consideration, which can be summarised as follows:-
 - the cost of Network membership, currently approximately £5,400 per annum, when considered against other competing use of resources in the context of the financial challenges the Council is facing;
 - in Scotland only City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council are members of the Network;
 - officers were only able to obtain feedback from officers in one of the other Scottish local authority members, which was that membership might not be an effective use of resources unless Elected Members and Officers are able and willing to commit to the Council being an active member, both in terms of attending events and training, but also contributing to Network publications and promoting the co-operative message;
 - the Council already has access to similar networks, in particular through its membership of COSLA, the Improvement Service, Scotland Excel and APSE, albeit the Improvement Service did not see any particular overlap, and viewed it as complimentary;

4.3 Taking all considerations into account, including the relatively low cost of annual membership, officers believe there is merit in taking up membership for a trial period. This would enable Elected Members and Officers to engage and assess if a longer term membership would be beneficial. With the notable challenges facing local government, financial and non-financial, the ability to access a new network such as this might provide the Council with some valuable insights, and as such this is an opportunity that should be considered.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO	N/A
Financial	X		
Legal/Risk		X	
Human Resources		X	
Strategic (LOIP/Corporate Plan)			X
Equalities & Fairer Scotland Duty			X
Children & Young People's Rights & Wellbeing			X
Environmental & Sustainability			X
Data Protection			X

5.2 Finance

It has now been confirmed by the Network that the current annual membership fee for joining would be £5,400 for 2022/23. Whilst there is no identified service area budget for this membership, officers believe that the "Project Capacity" earmarked could be used. The Network have advised that the membership fee has not been increased since 2016 and there are no current plans to do so.

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
Earmarked Reserve	Projects-Officer Capacity	2022/25	£17k		

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

None.

5.4 Human Resources

Whilst there is no direct Human Resources impact from the proposed membership of the Network, Elected Members and officers would need to engage with it, if the Council was to maximise the potential benefits of membership.

5.5 Strategic

None.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 Not applicable.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.