

**Irish Sea Region Platform
23rd July 2008**

Report of Corporate Director (Regeneration)

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider whether the Council should become a member of the Irish Sea Regions Platform, as a basis for future partnership working with the regions around the Irish Sea on common issues and projects.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That the Council signs the declaration of Intent to become a member of the Irish Sea Region Platform

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Within the European Union there is considerable support in terms of policy and funding for the development of longer term partnerships at the macro level. Potentially such partnerships offer many benefits where regions have combined interests and are acting together to influence policy, seek solutions and access funding. The administrations around the Irish Sea have now established a partnership, the Irish Sea Region Platform, which brings together marine, spatial, economic and cultural interests. The Council has been asked to join this arrangement by signing a Declaration of Intent.

Other administrations in Europe are already finding this type of cross border collaboration to be useful. As an example, the administrations around the Baltic Sea are currently taking a similar approach and this has been well received in European institutions, including the Committee of the Regions.

The Irish Sea Region Platform was initially set up in 2007 and is made up of representatives from Ireland, North West England, Isle of Man and the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In reality there are six different 'states', each with its own distinct form of government, and economic characteristics - The Republic of Ireland, The Province of Northern Ireland, The Principality of Wales, the North West Region of England, Scotland and the Crown Protectorate of the Isle of Man. Although they all share a common resource - the Irish Sea, their policies, trade, business, commercial and cultural interests are quite diverse.

The initial focus of the Irish Sea Region Platform was to respond to the impending UK Marine Bill and indicated the need for new links and networks between the 6 different administrations around the Irish Sea. Whilst this collaborative approach was initially around marine spatial planning systems, it is very clear that there are other shared issues for the regions around the Irish Sea where a joint approach could deliver benefits.

The Platform, or partnership, will provide the 'region' with a collective voice which can be used to influence policy development and assist the 'region' to be recognised throughout Europe and globally as a recognised entity for economic activity. There is current collaboration on a range of issues which present both opportunities and threats to the development of the Irish Sea region.

Initiatives currently under development include:

- Ecosystem based marine spatial planning – maximising value of goods and services to sustainable development.
- Cities for Co-operation – cities and city regions connectivity
- Enterprise Strategy for the Irish Sea Region – assisting competitiveness in the creative and knowledge economies
- Irish Sea Cruise Programme – promotion of the Irish Sea as a cruising destination
Transport Framework –assessment of UK – Ireland transport challenges

2.0 Proposal Details

2.1 The Leader of the Council represents Lancashire on the North West Regional European Partnership (NWREP), which steers European policy for the North West region. NWREP is currently supporting the development of the Irish Sea Region Platform and has requested that North West coastal authorities consider signing a Declaration of Intent, which sets the scene for future collaborative working. The request will also be forwarded to other Lancashire coastal authorities via the Lancashire European Advisory Group.

As context for this proposal there is currently a strong encouragement to work across administrative boundaries from national government and from the European Union. In many cases this will be essential in order to gain access to external funding to support key initiatives but there are also advantages in sharing understanding, best practice and resources, developing solutions to common issues and working within a competitive Europe at the macro level.

Lancaster District has some important strategic assets and opportunities that are very relevant within the context of the Irish Sea region and can potentially gain added value from the opportunities to work with other strategic partners. These include the Port of Heysham, a potential new link road that opens up the East - West transport corridor, a reviving coastal town and an historic city, a rural area that acts as a gateway to the North, two Universities and a growing local economy. In addition, the Morecambe Bay Regional Park initiative also offers the potential to work jointly with partners based on community of interest regardless of artificial administrative boundaries and will have many common issues with the Irish Sea Regions Platform.

If the Council wishes to sign the Declaration of Intent, this does not imply support for any specific projects generated within the Irish Sea Region Platform. Such projects would need to be considered separately as part of normal Council decision making processes. However, some limited officer time would be required to monitor developments and to attend approximately six meetings a year.

3.0 Details of Consultation

3.1 It is likely that there would be future consultation requirements arising from specific project activity.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

4.1

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages	Risks
Join the Irish Sea Region Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential access to additional external funds. • Potential to participate in and influence regional, Irish Sea and European agendas. • Sharing of information and resources with other Irish Sea partners. • A platform for working on key issues with other strategic partnerships across Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some officer time required to monitor developments and attend meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity risks arising from access to funding and efficient/shared use of resources
Decline the opportunity to join the Irish Sea Region Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No officer time required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult to access EU funds such as Interreg • Reliance on regional bodies to influence policy on behalf of the District • Reduced access to information and no opportunity to share resources to develop key projects. • Exclusion from a potentially important network dealing with strategic issues of local interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of loss of access to funding opportunities

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 The location of the District within the Irish Sea 'region' and the links with Irish Sea partners in relation to marine issues, transport, economy, culture and heritage, indicate the potential to work very usefully in partnership on projects and issues that are directly relevant to the District. This seems, therefore, like a good opportunity to add value to the local agenda. A limited investment of officer time would be required to monitor developments and attend meetings although any specific projects arising would need to be considered as part of the Council's normal decision making processes.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Any project proposals that might arise would need to be fully appraised and would necessarily consider any impacts before approval.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications although there is the requirement for some limited officer time to monitor developments and attend up to six meetings per annum. This would be managed as part of day to day work in the Regeneration Directorate. Any specific proposals that might arise could have financial implications but these would be considered at that time as part of normal Council decision making processes.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to make.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to make.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Irish Sea Region Platform – Declaration of Intent

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