

Introduction

The chair opened the meeting with a welcome to Malcolm Burr, as this was his first meeting as a new member, and Julia Onslow-Cole who attended to speak about free movement of people.

Apologies were noted from: Dame Anne Glover, Charles Grant, Sir John Grant, Lord John Kerr, David Martin, Alyn Smith.

Update from First Minister

The First Minister gave a short update to members on developments since the last meeting. She reflected on:

- * where the Brexit process now stands following the UK General Election.
- * her statement to the Scottish Parliament last week
- * the work of the Standing Council going forwards, in particular an increased focus on making the impact of Brexit clearer

Members reflected that the EU had a very well organised position and there was still a very high degree of unity behind it. While the EU have policy detail on their propositions, there is no matching clarity from UK Government. Increasingly the day-to-day focus of the EU is elsewhere, with Brexit being viewed as under control and managed within agreed parameters and processes.

Members reflected with surprise on the lack of policy detail from the UK – one year on from the referendum – and reinforced the need to make Brexit meaningful and understood. The impact on small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) was also flagged up.

Freedom of movement and migration

Julia Onslow-Cole provided an outline of the global context of migration including tighter controls and changing business need and circumstance. She explained that in particular regions, migrant workers fill skills shortages e.g. construction in London. Regional migration systems could provide benefits i.e. better alignment to regional needs and better integration, although there are administrative implications. It was agreed this was an important issue for Scotland and engaging more with individual business would help identify needs and build the evidence base.

Negotiation priorities and engagement

Mr Russell provided a summary of recent engagement with UK Government, highlighting that he was pressing for a meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations [JMC(EN)]) alongside Welsh Government, but with no response so far. He also noted the importance of transparency.

Ms Hyslop presented a summary of the recent engagement undertaken by the Scottish Government with Member States. She asked that Standing Council members advise on any future opportunities for engagement or contacts which may be helpful. Members agreed to feedback as required.