



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

**Report of the Visit by the Scottish Parliament Delegation to the Legislative  
Assembly of British Columbia and New York City**

**4 – 10 April 2024**



## Introduction

1. This is the report of the visit by the Scottish Parliament delegation to Victoria, British Columbia, and New York from 4 to 12 April 2024 for bilateral discussions in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia and participation in the annual 'Tartan Week' events in New York City. The delegation comprised of:

- Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, Presiding Officer
- Evelyn Tweed MSP
- Maurice Golden MSP
- Michael Marra MSP

The delegation was accompanied and supported by Mark Brough, Principal Private Secretary to the Presiding Officer, and Steven Bell from the International Relations Office (IRO).

2. The purpose of the visit was fourfold: to observe parliamentary business in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia and to discuss parliamentary and corporate procedures and practices, including the Assembly's recent review of the parliamentary culture and any lessons that can be shared; to discuss policy issues which further enhance the understanding and knowledge of members of the delegation; to further strengthen the friendship between the Scottish Parliament and Legislative Assembly of British Columbia; and to represent the Scottish Parliament at the annual 'Tartan Week' events in New York City.

3. As with all International Relations Office outward visits, this visit sought to meet the aims of the Scottish Parliament's [International Strategy](#), namely:

- to promote the Scottish Parliament, its practices and processes as an open, accessible, and participative legislature amongst other parliaments and international organisations.
- to develop the Scottish Parliament's reputation, skills, knowledge and abilities, through this work and its relations with other legislatures and organisations, to represent the people of Scotland in holding the Scottish Government and public bodies to account.
- to enhance the Scottish Parliament's institutional and international reputation through meetings with other parliamentarians and policy makers; and
- to support and promote, through the Scottish Parliament's participation, activities which could bring wider economic benefit and added value to Scotland.

4. The Presiding Officer, on behalf of all members of the delegation, wishes to put on record her sincere thanks to all those who gave up their time to meet with them in Victoria and New York. She would particularly like thank the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, the Hon Raj Chouhan MLA, and the Clerk

of the Assembly, Kate Ryan-Lloyd, for their time, generosity and friendship during what was a busy period of parliamentary business.

## **Background**

5. The annual Scottish Parliament outward visit to North America commenced in 2000 and, since then, successive delegations have met with key policymakers and parliamentarians in both Canada and the US.
6. The annual visit to North America aligns with the aims of the Parliament's International Strategy as outlined in paragraph 3 of this report. It also provides opportunities for the continuous professional development of MSPs through meetings and discussions with their elected counterparts and senior officials in other legislatures and organisations.
7. The Presiding Officer was accompanied on the 2024 visit by Michael Marra MSP, the Deputy Convener of the Finance and Public Administration Committee; Evelyn Tweed MSP, member of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee and a former member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee member; and Maurice Golden MSP, member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee member. Meetings were held relevant to MSPs' committee roles and other general interests and are detailed below.
8. The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia was one of the nine legislatures cited in the research commissioned by the Consultative Steering Group which developed the blueprint for how the Scottish Parliament works. This visit to the Legislative Assembly during the 25th Anniversary year of the Scottish Parliament therefore provided an opportunity to compare progress and developments in both unicameral Parliaments since 1999. This was the first official, cross-party delegation to visit the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, led by a Presiding Officer, in the devolution era.
9. Prior to the visit to Victoria, British Columbia the delegation was in New York City to attend meetings and to represent the Scottish Parliament at the Tartan Day Parade and associated events.

## **Programme**

10. Over the course of two and a half days in New York City and three days in Victoria, British Columbia (with two full days in the Legislative Assembly) the delegation attended a combined total of twenty-six meetings and five networking and other events (see Annex for full list). A summary of these meetings and events are provided below in a broadly chronological order.

#### **Thursday 4 April 2024**

#### **St Andrew's Society of the State of New York: National Tartan Day Reception**

11. The delegation's first official engagement immediately upon arrival in New York was a reception hosted by the St Andrew's Society of the State of New York. The Presiding Officer was invited to make a speech highlighting the many bonds, historical and current, between the people of the United States and Scotland.
12. The reception afforded the delegation an opportunity to meet with members of the Society as well as many of New York's academic and business leaders. Members of the New York based Scottish diaspora also attended. There was great interest in political events in Scotland and, more generally, the work of the Scottish Parliament.
13. The President of the St Andrew's Society of the State of New York, Richard J Porter, delivered a speech thanking the Presiding Officer for the Scottish Parliament's continued support of this annual event. It was, he noted, *"very important for the US Scots diaspora to keep these links alive....and the support of senior Scottish political leaders is very much valued"*.

#### **Friday 5 April 2024**

#### **New York City Council's Committee on Finance**

14. Michael Marra MSP, in his capacity as Deputy Convener of the Finance and Public Administration Committee, met with the Chairman of the New York City Council Committee on Finance, Councilman Justin Brennan (Democrat) in his legislative office. The general topic of discussion was the fiscal and budget scrutiny arrangements for sub-state governments.
15. The discussion covered the ability of sub-state governments to set and administer taxes; including the governance arrangements for taxes which are shared between city and State. The powers of the New York City government to introduce new taxes, and how this compares to the taxing abilities of the Scottish Government, were also discussed.
16. It was noted that New York City is facing similar challenges to Scottish cities in the move to online working and the knock-on effect this brings vis-à-vis the large increase in redundant commercial property. While the bounce back to pre-COVID levels of tourism to NYC was welcome (with over 95% of pre-COVID visitors during the past year), the number of unoccupied office buildings, and available square footage of office space, was a concern. Possible solutions to address this are currently being discussed including the reforming of zoning laws, specifically single use zoning.
17. **Mr Marra wishes to put on record his thanks to Councilman Brennan for both his time and willingness to engage so constructively. The similarities of the**

**challenges faced in both jurisdictions was of great interest and the outcome of these discussions will be fed back to Finance and Public Administration Committee colleagues.**



(Photo: Michael Marra MSP and Councilman Justin Brennan in the historic New York City Council Chamber)

### **New York City Tourisms and Conventions (NYCTC)**

18. Evelyn Tweed MSP met with Alexandra Silversmith, Vice President, Government Affairs and External Relations; Tiffany Townsend, Executive Vice President, Global Communications; and Rachel Insler, Vice President of International Marketing and Operations at the New York City Tourism and Conventions (NYCTC) in their Midtown Manhattan offices.
19. New York City (NYC) Tourism and Conventions is the official destination marketing organisation and convention and visitor bureau for the five boroughs of New York City. Its mission is to build equitable, sustainable economic prosperity and community through tourism for the mutual benefit of NYC residents, businesses and visitors. It represents the interests of nearly 2,000 member organisations across the spectrum of businesses and organisations in NYC.

20. The focus of the meeting was to hear further how the organisation promotes NYC as a tourist destination to both a domestic and international audience; how the sector is faring post-COVID; challenges and opportunities facing the sector and how the compares to the tourism sector in Scotland.
21. It was noted that the New York City faced similar problems to Scotland in terms of encouraging people back to visit after the pandemic. NYC tourism was hit hard due to the high number of COVID cases in the city, particularly early on during the pandemic, however things have now improved greatly. Ms Tweed was informed that NYC is now back to 97% of pre-pandemic visitor numbers at 62 million last year; spending over \$40 billion on hotels, restaurants, shops and cultural institutions across the five boroughs. They are expecting to get back to pre-pandemic highs by 2025.
22. This growth was partly due to large campaigns run by NYCTC to encourage tourists back at traditionally quieter times of the year, such as during the post-holiday winter months. Examples of these campaigns include “NYC Restaurant Week” in February or “Broadway Week”, where 2 for 1 specials on Broadway shows are offered in September; or “Hotel Week” in January which offers heavily discounted hotel rates.
23. Evelyn Tweed MSP provided NYCTC colleagues with a brief overview of the tourism sector in Scotland noting in particular the role of VisitScotland in proactively promoting the sector. It was further noted that tourism is a hugely important part of the Scottish economy, supporting over 229,000 jobs and contributing over £4.5 billion to Scotland’s gross value added in 2022 (excluding transport related industries).
24. Unlike in NYC, ancestral or diaspora tourism features as an integral part of VisitScotland campaigns. These have been consciously broadened in recent years to reach younger travellers, including those with ancestral links. VisitScotland also works with commercial tourism in-market such as tour operators and travel agents, providing them with tools and information to help inspire bookings to Scotland.
25. Ms Tweed was informed that the NYCTC provides scholarship programmes for small businesses to enable them to travel abroad and promote their businesses. The organisation was described as “connectors of businesses to NYC”. In terms of marketing, the NYCTC has calculated that the city receives a \$43 return for every \$1 spent on marketing.
- 26. Evelyn Tweed MSP informed NYCTC officials that she will update both VisitScotland officials and colleagues in the Scottish Parliament with details from her discussions. International Relations Office officials to also pass on relevant details to relevant subject specialists in SPICe, including contact details of those with whom Ms Tweed met, should they wish to follow up further.**



(L-R: Alexandra Silversmith, Vice President, Government Affairs and External Relations; Evelyn Tweed MSP; and Tiffany Townsend, Executive Vice President, Global Communications, New York City Tourism and Conventions)

## **Carnegie Corporation**

27. The Presiding Officer, the Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, met with Jeanne D’Onofrio, Chief of Staff, Office of the President of Carnegie Corporation and Geri Mannion, Managing Director of Carnegie Corporation’s ‘Strengthening Democracy’ programme. The meeting provided an opportunity to hear further details about the Corporation’s work promoting democracy, specifically through its ‘Strengthening Democracy’ programme.
28. The Presiding Officer was advised that the aim of the programme is: to support the civic integration of immigrants; to support the protection of voting rights and promotion of voter participation of all citizens of the US; and *“to foster a fair, diverse and vibrant democracy that welcomes and offers opportunities for all.”*
29. Ms D’Onofrio and Ms Mannion then gave a brief overview of the five key components of the programme: alliance building; field building; policy development; strategic communications and nonpartisan voter engagement and voting rights.
30. The meeting concluded with the Presiding Officer thanking the Carnegie Corporation for the many years of collaboration with the Scottish Parliament through events such as the Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy Medal ceremony held in Holyrood in 2005 and 2013 to the Andy Warhol exhibition of 2013. An invitation was extended to the new President, Dame Louise Richardson, to visit the Scottish Parliament when her schedule allows for discussions around further collaboration.



(L-R: Geri Mannion, Managing Director, Strengthening US Democracy and the Special Opportunities Fund; Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, Presiding Officer; Jeanne D'Onofrio, Chief of Staff, Office of the President, Carnegie Corporation)

### **New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC)**

31. Maurice Golden MSP met with Anne-Sophie Mahle, Director of International Partnerships and Bennu Amen, Project Manager, Partnerships and Strategic Engagement at the New York City Economic Development Corporation to discuss NYC and the circular economy and the diversification of business in NYC.
32. The EDC are essentially a Scottish Enterprise type organisation funded by a gift of real estate by New York City which they use to invest and leverage finance. There is a particular focus on incubators to scale small companies and/or university spin-offs. Main sectors are life sciences, construction, financial services and transport and they are currently involved in a major expansion of EV charging points throughout the city. It was noted that the scale of their investments far outweighs what is provided in Scotland which, given the size of their respective economies, is not unsurprising.
33. Ms Mahle and Ms Amen provided Maurice Golden MSP with an overview of the [Green Economy Action Plan](#) which was just published in February 2024 and contains sixty-three commitments to decarbonize New York City. This was followed by a discussion around the new [Climate Innovation Hub](#), a \$100 million investment to build a hub for business development, incubation and research commercialization around climate tech in the city.
34. Finally, there was a brief discussion around the EDC's [Circular Construction Guidelines](#) and the [offshore wind sector](#) in New York City and the role it will play in New York City's transition to clean energy over the coming decades (New York City and the State of New York are committed to 100-percent clean electricity by 2040 and carbon neutrality by 2050). **Maurice Golden MSP undertook to feed the outcome of his discussions with the EDC to colleagues in the Scottish Parliament**





(L-R: Anne-Sophie Mahle, Director of International Partnerships; Maurice Golden MP; and Bennu Amen, Project Manager, Partnerships and Strategic Engagement, New York City Economic Development Corporation)

### **American Scottish Foundation: Tartan Day Observance**

35. The Presiding Officer was once again delighted to attend and speak at the Tartan Day Observance in Bryant Park. The event was hosted by the American-Scottish Foundation (ASF) President, Camilla G Hellman, and ASF Chairman, Ken Donnelley. The annual event is seen by many as the first major gathering of the Tartan Week festivities and an opportunity to “*remember what Tartan Day is about and what it means*”. There were readings from the Senate Resolution commemorating Tartan Day in the United States as well as excerpts from the Declaration of Arbroath. Highland dancers and music by pipe bands, the ‘Highland Divas’ and others, were also included as part of the event.
36. Other speakers at the lunchtime event included the Scottish Government’s Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson MSP; the UK Government’s Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, John Lamont MP, and Charles, Lord Bruce. Delegation members Evelyn Tweed MSP, Maurice Golden MSP and Michael Marra MSP joined spectators in Bryant Park to observe proceedings.



(Presiding Officer joins pipers and dancers in Bryant Park for a photo after speeches conclude)

### **New York City Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice (MOCEJ)**

37. Following the lunchtime Tartan Day Observance events in Bryant Park, Evelyn Tweed MSP made her way downtown, via subway, to her next meeting with Kathleen Schmidt, Deputy Executive Director; and K.C. Alvey, Policy Advisor, New York City Office of Urban Agriculture, Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice. Evelyn Tweed MSP attended in her capacity as a member of the Economy and Fair Work Committee.
38. The meeting was an opportunity for Evelyn Tweed MSP to be briefed on New York’s strategy for creating a healthy, resilient and sustainable city and the support the MOCEJ provides to small and medium enterprises (SME’s) in the city as part of the just transition agenda.
39. The meeting began with the Deputy Director providing background to the establishment of this relatively new office by the Mayor, its aims and objectives. In January 2022, Mayor Eric Adams created a new configuration of the City’s climate team, bringing together people working on climate resiliency, sustainability, and environmental coordination and remediation.
40. The office aims to advance environmental justice, which they define as *“the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all persons, regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income, with respect to environmental regulations and actions and the distribution of environmental benefits”*. The MOCEJ collaborates with agency partners, stakeholders in many sectors, elected officials, and New York communities as they *“work to improve and save lives in the greatest city in the world”*. The Deputy

Director advised Ms Tweed that the city is also working to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

41. It was mentioned that the office was working hard on having a discussion with the public on the climate crisis to ensure people understood why certain behaviours had to change. A holistic approach was being considered at a strategic level but also from the *'bottom up'* to make sure that communities that were most affected by flooding, and other negative environmental events, were fully involved in decision making and that it was understood why certain programmes were being proposed e.g. parks built in areas where flooding is a problem to deal with both the flooding and to enhance the natural environment.
42. The city also wants to make sure that extra jobs as a result of any schemes or programmes taken forward by the MOCEJ were targeted to more disadvantaged sections of the community and tied to the green economy action plan. It was further noted by the Deputy Director that New York was *"the first big city to put together a comprehensive climate plan."* Deputy Director Schmidt concluded by speaking to the city's [PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done](#) and the major challenges and opportunities it addresses. **Evelyn Tweed MSP undertook to feedback all she had discussed and learned from this meeting to her colleagues on the Economy and Fair Work Committee.**

### **New York City Department of Veterans' Services**

43. Maurice Golden MSP met with James Hendon, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Veterans' Services. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the challenges facing veterans and the wider armed forces community in New York City; assistance provided to help transition from the armed services to civilian life; promoting employability of veterans; and health, housing and other issues specific to female veterans of the armed forces.
44. Commissioner Hendon began the meeting with a brief overview of the staffing arrangements within his department. He advised that there are a total of thirty-eight staff under his guidance there to support veterans in New York City.
45. Throughout these discussions, it was noted by Maurice Golden MSP, that many of the issues faced by veterans in the City were similar to those faced by veterans in Scotland; namely that many veterans did not identify as such, either because they did not participate in active duty or because of the perceived stigma around being a veteran. This issue was addressed by the Commissioner by changing how they identify veterans and the vocabulary used in doing so. For example, instead of asking "are you a veteran?" they used the more neutral "have you ever served?" This small change in language led to more positive responses. The Commissioner wanted to ensure veterans gained access to benefits they were entitled to.

46. There was also an acknowledgement from the Commissioner that the armed services were not doing enough to prepare veterans for civilian life. There were also issues of employers not recognising the holistic skills that a career in the armed services brings, therefore resulting in issues around access to employment, post service. The Commissioner was, therefore, interested to hear from Maurice Golden MSP about the employment support provided to veterans in the UK through the [Career Transitioning Partnership](#) between the Ministry of Defence and a career development company.

**47. Maurice Golden MSP undertook to feedback the outcome of his discussions with Commissioner Hendon to colleagues in the Scottish Parliament.**

### **New York City Civic Engagement Commission (CEC)**

48. The Presiding Officer's final meeting of the day was with Oscar J. Romero Jr, Chief Information Officer (CIO), NYC Civic Engagement Commission (CEC); Wendy Trull, Senior Strategy and Programme Officer; Benjamin Solotaire, Advisor; and Chair and Executive Director, Sarah Sayeed PhD. Maurice Golden MSP accompanied the Presiding Officer to this meeting.

49. The meeting provided an opportunity for Mr Romero and his team to brief the Presiding Officer on the CEC's 'trust in democracy' research as well as the citizen assembly models used by the CEC as part of their citywide participatory budgeting efforts, and other citizen engagement initiatives. The CEC were also interested to hear from the Presiding Officer about deliberative democracy initiatives currently being taken forward by the Parliament's Participation and Communities Team (PACT), including the background to the formation of this relatively new office.

**50. Maurice Golden MSP has subsequently raised the work of the CEC with colleagues on the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee. It was noted that there are similarities with the process of public participation but the outcome - investment in a project rather than a policy - is an interesting one and could be a complimentary approach for the Scottish Parliament to follow.**

### **Tartan Week Reception and Networking Event and Pre-Parade Ceilidh**

51. The full delegation attended a Scottish Government & Scottish Development International sponsored Tartan Week reception and networking event, hosted by HM Consul General in New York, Hannah Young, at her residence. Also attending were alumni of Scottish universities, Scottish participants in NYC Tartan Week events and US based friends of Scotland in NYC. The event aimed to '*highlight Scotland's reputation as a centre for talent, innovation, and sustainable growth*'. This was followed by the Tartan Week Pre-Parade Ceilidh in Battery Park, hosted by the New York Caledonian Club.

52. The delegation wishes to put on record their sincere thanks to both the British Consul General in New York and the New York Caledonian Club for all they do to bring together Scots, Scots-American and friends of Scotland during Tartan week and throughout the year.

### **Saturday 6 April 2024**

#### **Kirkin' of the Tartan Service**

53. The delegation attended the St Andrew's Society of the State of New York Kirkin' of the Tartan service at its 'traditional home' of the Brick Presbyterian Church. The non-denominational service was this year conducted by Deacon James Noble and Father Matthew Sanfilippo. The Presiding Officer was pleased to be asked, once again, to give a reading at the service. The delegation met with members of the Society and others attending the service afterwards, including New York State Senator Liz Krueger and New York State Assembly Member for the 73<sup>rd</sup> District, Alex Bores,

#### **Tartan Day Parade**

54. Organised by the National Tartan Day New York Committee, the Parade plays an integral role in marking National Tartan Day (April 6), a day declared by the U.S. Senate in 1998 to officially recognise the "*outstanding achievements and contributions made by Scottish Americans to the United States.*" The NYC Tartan Day Parade, which is free to all those who participate, represents the highlight of a week-long series of Scottish-themed festivities designated as "NYC Tartan Week," includes over 3,000 bagpipers, Highland dancers, clan organisations, Scottish dog breeds, and more, marching up Sixth Avenue amongst tens of thousands of spectators in person and online.

55. The NYC Tartan Day Parade and NYC Tartan Week continue to attract the best Scottish and Scottish-American artists, entrepreneurs, organisations and more, in an effort to promote, support, and develop deeper personal connections with Scottish heritage in America. The Scottish Parliament is a long-time participant in the Parade and marches at the helm, just behind the Grand Marshal.

56. The 2024 Grand Marshal was the Glenrothes born actor, Dougray Scott. Previous Parade Grand Marshals have included: Gail Porter (2023), Karen Gillan (2022), Sir Billy Connolly (2019), KT Tunstall (2018) Sir Sean Connery (2002), among others. As in previous years, the 2024 delegation joined the Grand Marshal and members of the National Tartan Day New York Committee for a private dinner afterwards.

57. The delegation would wish to put on record their sincere thanks to the National Tartan Day New York Committee, and all other volunteers, for all the hard work they do to make this annual event such a success. The Scottish Parliament's continued involvement in, and support for, this event is appreciated by the organisers as it helps

to both raise its profile and, according to one senior member of the organising committee, “shows Scots Americans that their efforts to promote Scottish Heritage and culture in the US is appreciated by those from home”.



(Pre-Parade Line Up, L-R Maurice Golden MSP; Evelyn Tweed MSP; The Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, Presiding Officer; and Michael Marra MSP)

## Monday 8 April 2024

### Meeting with the British Consul General in Vancouver

58. After a full two days of business meetings and cultural engagements in New York City the delegation travelled to Victoria, British Columbia for a series of meetings in the Legislative Assembly. After several visits to the Scottish Parliament by previous Speakers, Members and officials from the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, this was the first official visit by a Presiding Officer led delegation to a west coast Canadian legislature.

59. Prior to the start of the official parliamentary programme, the delegation met with the British Consul General in Vancouver, Thomas Codrington. This provided an opportunity for a private, confidential briefing on recent political developments in British Columbia and Canada and, combined with written briefing prepared by SPICe, helped “set the scene” ahead of face-to-face meetings in the Legislative Assembly. Additionally, further background information on drugs policy in Canada, including the decriminalisation pilot currently underway in British Columbia, was requested by a delegation member and a wider discussion on that issue was also included.

60. The Presiding Officer and members of the delegation welcomed this opportunity to contextualise the meetings that lay ahead. They were particularly grateful for Consul General Thomas Codrington for making the trip from his base in Vancouver to Victoria to brief them and wish to take this opportunity to once again pass on their sincere thanks to him.

**61. The value of the Consul General’s briefing was such that the delegation felt that a similar briefing at the start of every outward parliamentary visit should, where possible, be included in every programme. IRO officials to take this forward.**



(L-R: Mark Brough, Principal Private Secretary to the Presiding Officer; Michael Marra MSP; Thomas Codrington, British Consul General in Vancouver; The Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, Presiding Officer; Maurice Golden MSP; and Evelyn Tweed MSP)

### **Courtesy Call on the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, The Honourable Janet Austin, OBC**

62. The Presiding Officer, on behalf of all Members of the Scottish Parliament, paid a courtesy call on the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, the Honourable Janet Austin, OBC, at Governor’s House.

63. The Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia directly represents the King of Canada, who is the legal Head of State in British Columbia. As Vice-Regal representative, the Lieutenant Governor acts as chief public representative and has the highest-ranking position in the Provincial Government.

64. In addition to passing on the respects and good wishes of the Scottish Parliament to the people of British Columbia, the meeting also provided an opportunity to update the Lieutenant Governor on recent political developments in Scotland and the UK. With an interest in equalities issues for all the people of British Columbia, the Lieutenant Governor was also very interested to hear about the outcomes of the recent Gender Sensitive Audit of the Scottish Parliament from the Presiding Officer,

including the establishment of an Advisory Group for overseeing the implementation of the recommendations.

65. The Lieutenant Governor described in further detail the different aspects of her role. In addition to the Vice Regal and constitutional aspects of the role, representing the Crown in British Columbia, she also has what was described as a ‘celebratory’ role and ‘promotional’ role. An example of the former would be recognising distinguished British Columbians by presenting orders, decorations and medals, including prestigious award programmes that carry the name of the Lieutenant Governor; and for the latter promoting the heritage, art and culture of the province while hosting members of the Royal Family, heads of state, ambassadors, consuls general and other distinguished visitors. She also supports programmes to educate and inculcate respect for the history, culture and achievements of British Columbians.

### **Meeting with the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) for Sustainable Economy, Tim Lesiuk**

66. Evelyn Tweed MSP, in her capacity as a Member of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, met with the Assistant Deputy Minister for Sustainable Economy, Tim Lesiuk. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the ‘just transition’ policies of the British Columbia (BC) Government, including support provided by the BC Government to small and medium enterprises in the province as part of the just transition agenda.

67. With BC having longer, hot seasons, warmer year-round weather and more drought; these changes in the climate are, according to the Minister, *“making it easier for wildfires to start and spread.”* There are also concerns that as the climate continues to warm, drought and resulting water scarcity will become more common.

68. The Government of BC is committed to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 16% (below 2007 levels) by 2025; 40% by 2030; 60% by 2040 and 80% by 2050. CleanBC is the government’s plan to lower climate-changing emissions by 40% by 2030.

69. The largest emitting sectors in BC are transportation at 38% of emissions, upstream and downstream oil and gas at 21%, and manufacturing and heavy industries (including smelting, cement, and chemicals) at 16%.

70. It was noted that the Scottish Government has a commitment to reduce car kilometres by 20% by 2030, and a commitment to phase out the need for new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030 (although it is only UK Government that has the power to prohibit the sale of certain vehicle types). Current UK policy has a date for when the purchase of new petrol and diesel vehicles will no longer be permitted of 2035. The UK Government has a zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate in place. This requires all vehicle manufacturers to ensure that 80% of their new cars (70% of vans) sold in



2030 (in Great Britain) must be ZEVs, reaching 100% in 2035. The Scottish Government is also aiming for a public network of 6,000 charge points by 2026.

71. The Minister informed Ms Tweed that the fallout from climate change is affecting the lives of British Columbians in several ways. There is an increase in extreme temperatures, with longer and hotter summers and heat waves being more intense and frequent. Flooding is also an issue throughout the year, with *“more storms and extreme rainfall events... with changes in the flow of water overwhelming rivers, streams and soil, leading to flooding and landslides.”*
72. The Minister advised that although there is a strong focus on climate commitments, they were detecting apprehension among some investors. The BC Government is *“promoting a holistic approach”* to dealing with the climate crisis but, while *“much of the public do not understand the issues... more work was required”*. The Minister advised that the government in BC. was putting a lot of effort into training and retraining workforce of oil, gas, mining and the forestry sector; similar to what is happening in Scotland.

### **Meeting with Minister of Finance, the Hon Katrine Conroy MLA**

73. Michael Marra MSP, in his capacity as Deputy Convener of the Finance and Public Administration Committee, met with the Hon Katrine Conroy MLA, Minister of Finance, for a discussion on the BC Government’s approaches to dealing with the budget deficit; taxes devolved to BC and how that works within the Federal system; and public service reform and public sector pay policy in BC.
74. It was noted that the BC provincial government has a more significant range of tax powers than the Scottish Government. It sets tax rates for the province for both Income tax and Sales tax. The former is paid on earned income in BC by resident individuals and by Corporations with a permanent establishment in BC, with the latter paid on motor fuel tax, carbon tax and tobacco tax when purchasing or leasing goods and services in BC. Businesses may also be required to be registered to collect some or all of these taxes.
75. Property taxes are paid when you own, lease or gain an interest in a property located in BC. An annual property tax applies when you own or lease a property or manufactured home in BC. When you purchase or gain interest in property that is registered at the Land Title Office, you or your legal professional must file a property transfer tax return and you must pay property transfer tax, unless you qualify for an exemption.
76. An employers health tax is also paid as an annual tax on an employer’s BC remuneration paid to employees and former employees in a calendar year. Other taxes are the ‘speculation and vacancy tax’, ‘natural resources tax’ and ‘insurance tax’.

77. It was noted that BC also has more significant borrowing powers than the Scottish Government, and holds authority to borrow through issuing bonds, debentures, treasury bills and other forms of debt securities. Borrowing can be undertaken directly by the government or through crown corporations and government agencies.
78. In Canada, the Federal government makes transfers to Provincial governments to support, among other things, programmes in healthcare, education, social assistance and infrastructure. Federal government also makes “equalisation payments” to less wealthy provinces to ensure they can deliver reasonably comparable services at reasonably comparable levels of taxation. BC typically doesn’t receive these equalisation payments as it is considered to be a “have” province with a relatively strong economy and fiscal capacity.
79. Discussion turned to the general economic conditions in BC and the policy measures being applied to address these. Particular challenges can be found in the area of net zero / climate change. As noted above, although there is a strong focus on climate commitments, they were detecting apprehension among some investors – there is a real challenge in realising capital investment. The BC Government was putting a lot of effort into training and retraining workforce of oil, gas, mining and the forestry sector.

**Meeting with Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) Jeremy Hewitt, Climate Action Secretariat, Ministry of Environment**

80. Maurice Golden MSP met with Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) Jeremy Hewitt from the Climate Action Secretariat at the Ministry of Environment. ADM Hewitt was accompanied by officials from the Ministry at this meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss British Columbia’s progress towards an innovative and sustainable circular economy, including the policies being taken forward by the BC Government to achieve this.
81. The Minister began with a brief overview of the Climate Action Secretariat (CAS). The CAS sits within the BC Ministry of Environment and aims to drive change to achieve British Columbia’s greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. CAS supports municipal and regional efforts to achieve carbon neutrality, leads international, national and regional initiatives to promote trans-boundary approaches to climate action and works with industry to promote low carbon business opportunities.
82. CAS also helps British Columbia prepare for and adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The secretariat works directly with provincial ministries and agencies to help them consider climate change as they protect the health and safety of residents, maintain public infrastructure, manage natural resources and achieve environmental, social and economic sustainability.

83. The Minister confirmed that, using 2007 as the baseline, the BC government's overarching climate change targets commit to reducing GHG emissions by: 16 percent by 2025; 40 percent by 2030; 60 percent by 2040; and 80 percent by 2050.
84. It was noted that BC is, essentially, facing the same challenges as Scotland on climate change, namely both are struggling to implement transformational change to reach net zero and, instead, are implementing actions on plastics (banning single use items, for example). Although worthwhile, it was noted that such initiatives are not transformational. It was further noted that BC has, unfortunately, not been able to decarbonise its electricity generation because it already had that, via hydro, in their baseline. As a result of this baseline, their emissions have remained static – roughly the same position as in Scotland. **Mr Golden agreed to feed back all he had learned from this meeting to MSP colleagues in the Scottish Parliament.**

**Tuesday 9 April – Wednesday 10 April 2024**

**Meetings with the Honourable Raj Chouhan MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, and Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly**

85. The primary focus of the wider visit to North America was the official programme of meetings and engagements in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. The Presiding Officer, on behalf of the whole delegation, would once again like to reiterate their sincere thanks to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Hon Raj Chouhan MLA, and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Kate Ryan-Lloyd, for their time, openness and constructive engagement during what was a busy period of parliamentary business.
86. Over the course of the two days in the Legislative Assembly, the Presiding Officer and members of her delegation met with the Speaker and Clerk on a total of five separate occasions and what follows is a summary of those discussions.
87. As background to this visit, in 1998 the Constitution Unit of the then Scottish Office conducted a comparative study of nine unicameral Parliaments to see how well, or otherwise, they worked and what practices and procedures in those Parliaments would potentially work well in the new, devolved Scottish Parliament. The nine Parliaments examined were those in New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark, Queensland (Australia), Quebec, British Columbia, Bavaria, Catalonia and Lower Saxony.
88. As an example, the report identified the existence of a comprehensive committee system in the Legislative Assembly of BC (and others), both to review legislation and initiate investigations of their own accord, as a significant factor in ensuring legislation operates well as a check on the passage of new laws and the review of current ones. This was subsequently recommended as a model for the Scottish Parliament to replicate.

89. The visit to the Legislative Assembly in the Scottish Parliament's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year was particularly timely as it offered a chance to reflect on changes to practices and procedures in both unicameral legislatures over the preceding quarter century. The visit also coincided with a review of the parliamentary culture of the Legislative Assembly, conducted at the instigation of Speaker Chouhan, and whose Working Group recently published its unanimously agreed findings in the '[Working Together to Build a Better Parliamentary Culture at the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia](#)' report. The report made 17 recommendations including, but not limited to:
90. **A) Family friendliness:** Developing policies for family-related leave, exploring childcare support and services to Members, including accommodating childcare needs within the Assembly's childcare facility and other types of family support.
91. The Speaker advised that a modular childcare facility on the precinct is currently in development and has been prioritised as a key initiative in the Assembly's next strategic plan. The Legislative Assembly has applied for funding and, upon confirmation of that funding, a project plan on the construction phase will be developed and brought to the Legislative Assembly Management Committee (LAMC) – equivalent to the SPCB – for approval. Research on other potential childcare and family supports and services is in development with a target completion date of the new childcare facility of summer 2025.
92. Orientation and training for new Members: Provide an initial, mandatory orientation to newly elected MLAs at the outset of a new Parliament that covers the roles and responsibilities of an MLA, including the following topics: parliamentary procedure and practice; managing a constituency office; IT, social media, and cyber security; personal and office safety and security; conflict of interest; and financial management and expenses.
93. The Speaker advised that this recommendation went on to state that this training should be delivered to all newly elected MLAs as one group, rather than by Party caucus, and should include former and/or longer serving Members to share experience and provide mentorship.
94. The above recommendation also stated that the Legislative Assembly should provide mandatory learning in a flexible format to all MLAs throughout the first year of a new Parliament on Canadian and BC indigenous history, working with local First Nations; gender and diversity; cultural competency, anti-racism and anti-oppression; and mental wellness and resiliency.
95. In terms of the above recommendations, the Speaker and Clerk advised that the Legislative Assembly has established an Election Readiness and Transition Programme that includes orientation, professional development and learning opportunities for Members. The programme is being structured to support incoming

and outgoing Members during a general election as well as throughout the parliamentary term. The programme is expected to be in place by autumn 2024.

96. **B) Hybrid arrangements:** Amending the Standing Orders to provide for permanent hybrid arrangements, including through policies on remote participation. The Speaker advised that this recommendation had already been taken forward following discussion with House Leaders.
97. **C) Behaviour:** Establishing clear guidance on unacceptable and unprofessional behaviour and to provide mandatory training on respectful workplaces. The Clerk advised that an Independent Respectful Workplace Office (IRWO) has an obligation to deliver this training. As part of the orientation and professional development programme being developed for Members, the Legislative Assembly will be working with the IRWO to ensure initial training is delivered in the first year of a new parliament with plans for additional training on an ongoing basis.
98. Regarding behaviour in the Chamber, the Speaker advised that discussion is currently underway with House Leaders to establish clear and updated guidance, with cross-party support, on unacceptable and unprofessional behaviour in the Chamber, and re-state this guidance at the beginning of every parliamentary session, with House Leaders and caucuses playing an active role in enforcing these guidelines.
99. **D) Time limits on questions and answers:** Formalising and implementing time limits in the Standing Orders for individual questions and answers during Oral Question Period and fully authorising the Speaker to enforce those limits and turn off microphones if Members go beyond the limits. The Speaker advised that this recommendation is currently under discussion with House Leaders.
100. Explicitly articulate a list of approved leaves and absences for Members that accommodate family responsibilities, including by requesting amendments to the Members' Remuneration and Pensions Act and developing corresponding policies as appropriate. The Speaker advised that the Law Clerk is currently undertaking a statutory review of legislation that relates to the operations of the Legislative Assembly, including the Members' Remuneration and Pensions Act. The Working Group's recommendation will be scoped into the review to form part of a statutory review package that will be brought to the LAMC. Pending LAMC's review and approval of potential changes, LAMC will need to request the Minister responsible bring forward amendments for the Legislative Assembly's consideration. A potential list of leaves and absences is currently underway. It is hoped this task will be completed by the start of the next parliamentary Session.



(L-R: Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia; Evelyn Tweed MSP; The Honourable Raj Chouhan MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia; The Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament; Michael Marra MSP; and Maurice Golden MSP)

### **Official Introduction in the House; Observe House Proceedings and Question Period**

101. During their two days in the Legislative Assembly, the delegation was pleased to have the opportunity to observe two Question Periods from the Speaker's Gallery. They were particularly honoured to receive an official welcome from the Chair by the Speaker during these proceedings and were very grateful for the warm welcome received from MLAs on the Chamber floor.
102. Every Monday and Wednesday, beginning just after 13:30 and every Tuesday and Thursday, beginning just after 10:00, MLAs participate in Oral Question Period, commonly known as Question Period, a 30-minute period of rapid-fire questions and answers.
103. All MLAs have the right to ask for information from the Cabinet and to hold Cabinet ministers responsible for their actions and decisions. Any MLA may rise to ask a Cabinet Minister a question about their portfolio, meaning the different areas of public policy that a minister is responsible for.
104. Under the Standing Orders, MLAs can only ask questions that are urgent and important, and they must ask or answer questions both briefly and precisely. They cannot use the time to present their own opinions or begin a back and forth argument.
105. As in the Scottish Parliament, MLAs must direct their questions through the Speaker to the Cabinet Minister officially responsible for the matter (e.g. hospitals, roads, or education) and must adhere to certain guidelines. Unlike in Holyrood,

however, they must not ask questions about proposed new laws or government funding requests, because these are handled through regular debates. As is common in most legislatures, they must not refer to matters currently before a court or waiting to go to court.

106. It is up to the Speaker to make sure that Question Period runs smoothly. The Speaker decides the order in which MLAs will ask their questions and how long a member can take to ask or answer a question. If a question or answer goes on too long, the Speaker will bring the Member to order.
107. Likewise, the Speaker has the authority to decide if a question is out of order (not related to the activities of government, for example, or containing unparliamentary language) and they may ask to have it rephrased or they might simply move on to the next question. The Speaker also determines if the MLA who asked the question should be allowed to ask a supplementary question for further clarification or information. If the Speaker allows a supplementary question, the MLA must pose it right after the Cabinet minister's response, not later in Question Period.
108. The delegation was informed that Cabinet ministers do not usually know in advance what questions they will be asked during Question Period. When a Cabinet Minister is asked a question, they may answer the question, take the question "on notice" (which means answer it at a later date, usually once they have the necessary facts and figures), allow another Cabinet minister or the Premier to answer in their place, or they may choose not to respond to the question at all. Most often, a Cabinet Minister will stand and respond to the question at the time it is asked.
109. Prior to the start of the formal Question Period, there is an 'Introduction by Members' whereby individual MLAs recognise constituents, constituency groups and other individuals in the Public Gallery. It is also used as method of getting words of thanks, congratulations or any other messages out into the public realm and is used by Members from across the political spectrum.
110. This general 'Introduction by Members' session was followed by an introduction of new Bills then 'Statements' (under Standing Order 25B) which basically marked national or provincial days or events of significance. During the time the delegation observed Chamber business, announcements in recognition of Cancer Awareness and Daffodil Month; Urban Reforestation Project and Contributions of Chinese Canadians and Sikh Heritage Month, and others, were made.
111. Members of the delegation reflected on this unique session as a possible addition to, or replacement of, Motions lodged in the Scottish Parliament recognising achievements of local constituents or constituency groups, for example.
- 112. The delegation really appreciated this opportunity to witness first-hand how other legislatures operated. One member of the delegation suggested that the**

**Question Period they observed might be implemented each sitting day as a possible substitute to Topical Questions (30 minutes per day in addition to the existing First Ministers Questions). It was stated by one member that “there is so much we can learn from the BC Parliament and this should feed into consideration how we structure our own proceedings”.**

### **Meeting with Mr Artour Sogomonian, Clerk Assistant, Parliamentary Services**

113. The full delegation met with Mr Artour Sogomonian, Clerk Assistant, Parliamentary Services, for a discussion on ‘onboarding and offboarding’ of Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs).
114. The meeting began with a general overview of the induction and orientation programmes provided for new Members at the last elections, and a background to these programmes. This included a brief recap of the recommendations of the Working Group in British Columbia in relation to the induction of new MLAs. These included: the provision of an initial, mandatory orientation to newly elected MLAs at the outset of a new Parliament that covers the roles and responsibilities of an MLA; the provision of training to all newly elected MLAs as one group (rather than by caucus) including participation by former and longer serving MLAs; providing optional learning on an ongoing basis; and conducting feedback and evaluation sessions with Members at the mid-point and end-point of a Parliament.
115. Mr Sogomonian then provided a presentation on the Legislative Assembly’s ‘Election Readiness and Transition Programme’. The programme aims to provide Members and their staff with an effective transition process through the coordination of a modern, fully developed, and scalable election readiness programme that will be continuously improved and readily available ahead of the provincial general election.
116. The programme aims to be effective through Members and their staff experiencing a timely and largely seamless transition into their new roles. It also aims to result in a coordinated transition that eliminates redundant information and mitigates against information overload.
117. It is envisaged the new programme will remain current and use modern technological capabilities, where applicable, as well be adaptable enough to successfully transition any number of newly elected Members. The programme also aims to establish baseline performance data and will routinely seek feedback to improve delivery over successive election cycles and be readily available, so it can be successfully used for all elections: scheduled or ‘snap’ elections.
118. The programme mentions setting up a Legislative Assembly Academy which will focus on two areas: constituency office operations (and what is required to get an office up and running, recruit staff, successfully manage caseloads etc) and a second part which focuses on parliamentary rules and procedures, practiced through the



creation of a 'mock Parliament'. The Legislative Assembly Academy also aims to provide Members with a 'transitional assistance' course which provides them with an overview of the transition supports available to them at the conclusion of their term in office and how to access them. Examples highlighted were a \$9,000 re-training allowance as well as receiving salary for up to 10 weeks, post-election.

119. Finally, the meeting concluded with Mr Sogomonian informing the delegation that two new 'transition' guides will be published later in the year: one to assist Members who will be seeking re-election and one for those Members who are not. These guides have subsequently now been published and can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

**120. International Relations Office (IRO) to forward these guides to officials in the Scottish Parliament tasked with the provision of resources for MSPs standing in the 2026 Holyrood elections as well as those who are not standing, as appropriate. IRO to also follow up with officials in the Legislative Assembly upon publication of 'onboarding' materials with a view to once again sharing these with Holyrood officials as they prepare materials ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections.**

121. Mr Sogomonian was joined by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Kate Ryan-Lloyd, for a discussion around hybrid arrangements in the Legislative Assembly, and its future. It was noted that an amendment to Standing Orders was adopted in March 2024 which authorised hybrid proceedings on a permanent basis. This was enacted *"in order to afford all Members with the means to fulfil their parliamentary functions and safeguard the rights, privileges, and immunities of individual Members regardless of their physical location, in exceptional circumstances,"*

122. Following the Standing Order amendment, Mr Sogomonian advised that guidance was then issued by the Speaker. This guidance applied to all proceedings of the House, including committee meetings.

123. It was noted that the same rules of conduct apply to Members participating remotely to those doing so 'in person'. If dialling in, Members are expected to connect from a suitable indoor, private location. Connecting from a public area or from a vehicle was "not appropriate". Members are also requested to ensure that their focus, behaviour and actions reflect those of being physically located in the Chamber, and therefore not engage in multi-tasking or private activities or conversations.

124. Members participating remotely are to also ensure that their conduct with respect to appropriate dress, electronic devices, beverages and props follows the guidance found in the Standing Orders and the Speaker's booklet titled, *"Order and Decorum in the Chamber: Rules of Respect and Courtesy for Members"*

125. Members must not consume food when making remote contributions and, importantly, also be physically located in British Columbia. It was further noted that

they should be mindful that visitors in the public galleries can observe Members both physically in the Chamber and those connected remotely and should, therefore regulate their actions accordingly.

126. The delegation was informed that if a Member is not meeting the stated requirements, the Speaker or Chair retains full discretion not to recognise a Member and to instruct the Clerk not to call on a Member during a division.

### **Meeting with Ray Robitaille, Sergeant-at-Arms**

127. The delegation met with Mr Ray Robitaille, Sergeant-at-Arms and his team for a discussion around managing protests in the Legislative Assembly's precinct; the general security landscape in both BC and Scotland, including respective 'Members' Safety and Security' programmes.

128. Given the sensitive nature of these discussions, details have not been included in this report however the following general areas were covered: annual demonstration numbers in both BC and Holyrood and the nature of these demonstrations; challenging scenarios faced by the police and security teams on the parliamentary estate; resourcing of security (human and financial); intelligence gathering; and threats faced by Members, online and in person, including any mitigation measures undertaken.

### **Meeting with Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia**

129. The delegation met with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, Kate Ryan-Lloyd, for a discussion around childcare and family friendly initiatives in the Legislative Assembly. The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Hon Raj Chouhan MLA, also joined this meeting upon conclusion of his chairing commitments.

130. Ms Ryan-Lloyd provided an overview of some recent changes in the Assembly since the previous election, namely that thirty-seven out of eighty-seven Members are now women. With travel commitments being a big part of the role of an MLA, there has been a reduction in late night sittings (7:30pm being the latest they will now sit on a Wednesday evening).

131. The delegation was informed that, since 2018, Members can bring infants into the Chamber and that the Canadian Federal Parliament has just approved up to twelve months maternity leave. The Assembly is currently constructing a new 'modular' childcare facility for the children of Members, Members' staff and parliamentary staff. Up to twenty percent of spaces at this new facility will be made available to the local community. This will be a 'paid for' service operating from 7:30am to 6:00pm, five days per week. It is hoped that this new facility will be completed in twelve months at a total cost of around \$2.4 million (CAD). Given the high profile nature of the Assembly

grounds, one of the principal challenges faced will relate to security – keeping children and all site users safe is paramount.

132. To address the security concerns, key mitigation strategies will include: proximity to secure facilities; clear sightlines within and around the structure; safety protocols will be established with the non-profit operator; security elements will feature in the building design; and they will utilise on-site security.

**133. IRO to keep track of this project and, upon completion, forward on details to colleagues in the Parliament's Facilities Management Office and others involved in the provision of a creche at Holyrood, to see what lessons can be learned.**

### **Meeting with Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) Francesca Wheler, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions**

134. Upon conclusion of the delegation's final meeting with the Speaker and Clerk, Evelyn Tweed MSP, in her capacity as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee (and its [inquiry](#) into the Scottish Government and COSLA's Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022-2032), met with Assistant Deputy Minister in the BC Government, Francesca Wheler, for a discussion on suicide prevention strategies in BC, including the inequalities which contribute to suicide.

135. ADM Wheler provided a background to the establishment of the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions in 2017. It was created with the intention of building a seamless, coordinated network of mental health and addictions services "*that works for everyone in British Columbia*", as well as to lead the province's response to the toxic drug crisis.

136. It was noted that in 2020, about 3,800 Canadians died by suicide. In British Columbia, an average of about 550 people died by suicide annually between 2008 and 2018. The ADM advised that men and women aged 50-59 were the most likely to die by suicide and, of all deaths, about 75% were men.

137. Similar to the situation in Scotland, it was noted that the following groups may be at higher risk of suicide: people with a mental illness; men; trans people; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people. Poverty and deprivation are also factors in higher suicide rates. In BC, members of the indigenous community are also at higher risk.

138. In BC (as in Scotland), there has been a focus on housing, including a high focus on complex care and wrap around care. BC has established 'foundry hubs' for young people aged 12-24 where they can access primary care, mental health support, wellness services and even cooking classes. They see this as an innovative approach to help ensure problems can be caught early.

139. Finally, the meeting concluded with a brief discussion around the drug crisis prevalent in BC. Drugs are, unfortunately, relatively easy to bring into the province by both boat (due to a long coastline) and road (an open border with the USA). The Minister advised that drug deaths are particularly high due to the supply of the highly addictive and dangerous fentanyl which is often laced with other equally dangerous substances. BC started a three-year decriminalisation project in 2023 which allows adults to possess 2.5 grams of heroin, fentanyl etc without being arrested. It was noted, however, that the BC Government is already coming under considerable pressure to roll back on this.

**140. Evelyn Tweed MSP undertook to update colleagues on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee on the findings from her discussion with Assistant Deputy Minister Wheler, as part of its inquiry into suicide in Scotland.**

### **Feedback**

141. *“The study tour helped me develop both professionally and as a parliamentarian. It was incredibly useful to meet experts in a range of fields from climate change to citizen engagement in addition to the Scottish diaspora and serving parliamentarians. I have utilised the information gleaned from several meetings in my role on the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee. Notably, the NYC Civic Engagement Commission operate a project-based citizen engagement system which is being considered by our Committee as part of our ongoing engagement work.” - Maurice Golden MSP*

142. *“As a fairly new MSP, I thought the trip was important to find out more about the various committee inquiries I am involved in, including that challenges we face in Scotland are very similar to those in other countries. It was also good to hear about innovative strategies that others were progressing that we might consider at home.” – Evelyn Tweed MSP.*

### **General Conclusions**

143. It is the view of the International Relations Office that this visit successfully met its key aims as set out in paragraph 3 of this report. Meetings were held on a variety of topics directly related to parliamentary business, Members’ roles as parliamentarians, and policy areas directly relevant to Members’ committee roles or other general areas of interest.

144. The knowledge learned on this visit will be shared by Members with colleagues in the Scottish Parliament. The opportunity to discuss in-depth (and witness) proceedings in another similarly sized, unicameral parliament allowed delegation Members to reflect on the practices and procedures of Holyrood: what could be improved and, equally, what is working well. As Maurice Golden MSP stated, *“there*

*is so much we can learn from the BC Parliament and this should feed into consideration of how we structure our own proceedings”.*

145. Engagements in New York City also offered a much-valued opportunity to meet with US Scots and other members of the Scottish diaspora. Maurice Golden MSP commented, *“it was amazing to meet the Scottish diaspora during Tartan Week.....the warm strength of feeling towards Scotland could be felt and it is clear there are strong bonds between Scotland and the USA”.*
146. The visit brought a number of professional development opportunities for Members, enhancing Members’ knowledge in a number of (parliamentary) procedural and policy areas. The professional development function of outward visits such as these, in addition to providing delegates with an opportunity to work collegiately on a cross-party basis and represent the Parliament as an institution, should not be underestimated.
147. It is recommended that the Parliament’s involvement in the annual Tartan Week visit to North America continue, provided a similar business case addressing the key aims of the international strategy can be met, and that the cost of undertaking such a visit does not exceed the current £30,000 cap (in place since 2008). It is further recommended that the primary focus of any future potential visit once again be a knowledge exchange with a Canadian legislature.

**International Relations Office  
September 2024**

## Annex: Programme

### Thursday 4 April

15:50 Arrive Newark

18:00 St Andrew's Society of the State of New York: National Tartan Day Reception

### Friday 5 April 2024

09:00 Meeting with Councilman Justin Brannan, Chairman of New York City Council's Committee on Finance

09:30 Meeting with Alexandra Silversmith (VP, Government Affairs & External Relations), Tiffany Townsend (EVP, Global Communications) and Rachel Insler (VP, International Marketing + Operations), NYC Tourism and Conventions

10:00 Meeting with Jeanne D'Onofrio, Chief of Staff, Office of the President of Carnegie Corporation and Geri Mannion, Managing Director of Carnegie's '*Strengthening Democracy*' Programme

10:00 Meeting with Anne-Sophie Mahle, Director of International Partnerships, and Nicole Spina, Green Economy Team; New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC)

12.20 American Scottish Foundation Event: Tartan Day Observance

14:00 Meeting with Elijah M. Hutchinson, Executive Director, NYC Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice

14:00 Meeting with James Hendon, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Veterans' Services

14:45 Meeting with Oscar J. Romero Jr, Chief Information Officer (CIO), NYC Civic Engagement Commission (CEC)

16:30 Scottish Government & Scottish Development International Tartan Week Reception and Networking Event: Hosted by HM Consul General Hannah Young

20:00 New York Caledonian Club Tartan Week Pre-Parade Ceilidh

23:00 Event concludes

### Saturday 6 April 2024

10:00 St Andrews Society of the State of New York: Kirkin' of the Tartan Service

11:00 St Andrews Society of the State of New York: Pre-parade brunch

14:00 Tartan Day Parade

14:20 Observe Parade with Grand Marshal

16:00 American Scottish Foundation Post-Parade Party

20:00 New York Tartan Day Committee: VIP Private Dinner

22:00 Dinner concludes

### Sunday 7 April 2024

16:30 Depart JFK to Seattle

19:50 Arrive Seattle

20:50 Hotel check in

## **Monday 8 April**

- 08:00 Depart Seattle
- 11:00 Arrive Victoria
- 11:45: Meeting with the British Consul General in Vancouver, Thomas Codrington
- 12:45 Lunch with British Consul General, Thomas Codrington
- 14:45 Courtesy Call on the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, The Honourable Janet Austin, OBC
- 15:00 Meeting with the Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation, the Hon Brenda Bailey MLA
- 15:00 Meeting with Minister of Finance, the Hon Katrine Conroy MLA
- 15:30 Meeting with Assistant Deputy Minister Jeremy Hewitt, Climate Action Secretariat (Ministry of Environment
- 15:30 Private Tour of Government House

## **Tuesday 9 April 2024**

- 08:55 Arrive Parliament Buildings
- 09:00 Welcome and Meeting with the Honourable Raj Chouhan MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, and Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
- 09:40 Introduction of the Delegation from the Legislative Assembly, Parliament of New South Wales
- 10:05 Official Introduction in the House; Observe House Proceedings and Question Period
- 11:15 Meeting: Onboarding and Offboarding Members of the Legislative Assembly
- 12:00 Luncheon Hosted by the Honourable Raj Chouhan, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.
- 13:30 Meeting: Special Committee to Review Private Members' Business
- 14:00 Meeting: Experience with Hybrid Parliament and Its Future
- 14:45 Joint Guided Tour of the Parliament Buildings with the New South Wales Legislative Assembly Delegation
- 15:30 Depart Parliament Buildings
- 19:00 Dinner Hosted by the Honourable Raj Chouhan, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.
- 21:00 Dinner concludes

## **Wednesday 10 April 2024**

- 08:55 Arrive Parliament Buildings
- 09:00 Meeting: Visitor Access and Managing Protests and Disruptions
- 10:15 Meeting: Overview of Members' Safety and Security Programme
- 11:00 Meeting: Childcare and Family-friendly Initiatives
- 11:30 Q&A with Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
- 12:00 Luncheon Hosted the Honourable Raj Chouhan, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
- 13:35 Observe Question Period
- 14:45 Meeting with the Speaker, the Hon Raj Chouhan and Clerk, Kate Ryan-Lloyd:

15:30 Q & A Session and Wrap Up with the Speaker, the Hon Raj Chouhan and Clerk,  
Kate Ryan-Lloyd  
15:45 End of Official Programme  
15:50 Meeting with Assistant Deputy Minister Francesca Wheler, Ministry of Mental  
Health and Addictions

**Thursday 11 April 2024**

11:45 Depart Victoria to Toronto  
19:19 Arrive Toronto Pearson

**Friday 12 April 2024**

17:30 Depart Toronto Pearson

**Saturday 13 April 2024**

05:15 Arrive Dublin  
06:30 Depart Dublin  
07:50 Arrive Edinburgh