



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# **International Relations: Parliamentary travel**

**26 September 2024**

**Reference: SPCB (2024) Paper 59**

## **Executive summary**

1. The SPCB is invited to consider and approve forthcoming overseas parliamentary travel. In accordance with paragraphs 62 and 64 of Section 2 of the Code of Conduct, the travel and other costs of a visit which are wholly met by the SPCB, or are approved by the SPCB prior to the visit, is exempt from registration as an overseas visit in the Register of Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament

## **Issues and options**

### **Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

2. The annual conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPC) will take place in Sydney, Australia, 3 - 8 November 2024. The 67<sup>th</sup> annual conference will bring together over 500 Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and decision makers from across the Commonwealth for this unique conference and networking opportunity.
3. The theme of the conference this year is “Engage, Empower, Sustain: Charting the Course for Resilient Democracy”. The conference will include various workshops, a world café session and a CPA General Assembly debate:
  - Workshop A: Building Bridges: Parliamentary Frameworks for Meaningfully Engaging with Indigenous Peoples.
  - Workshop B: The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliamentary Processes and Practices - Opportunities and Challenges.
  - Workshop C: Violence and Abuse of Parliamentarians – Case Studies from the Commonwealth.
  - Workshop D: How can Legislatures Best Support and Promote LGBTQ+ Participation?

- Workshop E: Human Trafficking, Refugees and Immigration across the Commonwealth: Open Doors or Building Walls?
  - Workshop F: Benchmarking, Standards and Guidelines: Strengthening the Institution of Parliaments through the Adoption of Best Practice.
  - Workshop G: Combatting Discriminatory Legislation: 365 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.
  - Workshop H: Creating Inclusive Elections for Persons with Disabilities (PwD).
  - World café session: Solving contemporary challenges in the Commonwealth.
    - From Ukraine, Sudan to the Middle East, challenges to global stability.
    - Overcoming or addressing the colonial past.
    - Time is running out on the SDGs.
    - Corporate lobbying against climate change.
    - Assisted Dying – the ultimate Human Right?
  - CPA General Assembly debate: Votes vs Likes – the Role of Parliament in Strengthening Democratic Resilience in an Age of Fake News and Synthetic Media.
4. In addition to the CPC, the [8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians \(CWP\) Conference](#) will take place on 4-5 November 2024. The theme of this conference is “Engaging, Promoting and Retaining Women in Power” and will include the following workshops:
- Workshop A: Future-Proofing Democracy: Innovations in Security and Support for Women Parliamentarians.
  - Workshop B: Joint Small Branches and CWP Workshop – Gender and National Climate Planning: Moving from Commitment to Scalable Action.
  - Workshop C: Promoting the Political Participation of Young Women and Girls.
  - Workshop D: The Retention of Women in Parliaments: How to Keep Women in Politics?
5. Furthermore, there will be meetings of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network and meetings of the CPA Executive Committee.

## **Delegates**

6. The Scottish Parliament is allowed to send one delegate to attend the conference. In addition to this, Stuart McMillan MSP, as regional rep on the CPA International Executive Committee (ExCo), and Jeremy Balfour MSP, as regional rep on the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Network (CPwD), will also attend the conference.
7. Six Members applied for the opportunity and Sarah Boyack MSP was selected by the Branch Executive Committee as the successful candidate.

To also note, Sarah was elected as acting regional rep on the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Network (CWP) just before submitting her application. This means that, in addition to attending the main and CWP conferences, she will be able to attend CWP Steering Committee meetings.

8. Steven Bell, International Relations Officer, will support the delegation and a personal carer will also travel with the delegation to support Jeremy Balfour MSP. David McGill will attend the associated Society of the Clerks Conference.

## **Nordic Council Session**

9. The Nordic Council is the official body for formal inter-parliamentary co-operation within the Nordic region. Formed in 1952, it has 87 members from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The annual Session brings together Speakers, Prime Ministers and Members from each member state as well as international guests to observe the proceedings.
10. The 2024 Session of the Nordic Council will take place in Reykjavik, Iceland on 28-31 October and this will be the third year that the Scottish Parliament has been invited to attend as observers.
11. The Session provides a unique high-profile platform for the Parliament to further engage, and to be seen to engage, with both national and devolved legislatures in the Nordic region. It builds upon our reputation as an outward looking Parliament, keen to share knowledge and best practice.
12. The Session allows Members to gain a better understanding of the workings of the parliaments within the Nordic region, meet their counterparts, discuss areas of interest to their committees and identify potential areas of collaboration. Alongside this there will also be opportunities to meet and share experiences and best practices with their counterparts from several countries within the Nordic region.

## **Delegation**

13. Nine Members applied for the opportunity to join the delegation and the Scottish Parliament has an allocation of three Members. The selected applicants are:
  - Claire Baker MSP, Convener of the Economy and Fair Work Committee
  - Ariane Burgess MSP, Convener of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee and Member of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
  - Kenneth Gibson MSP, Convener of the Finance and Public Administration Committee

14. Jennie Chinembiri, Head of International Relations Office will support the delegation.

## **Arctic Circle Assembly**

15. The Presiding Officer will lead a delegation including members of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) Committee to Reykjavik, Iceland, from 15 October to 20 October 2024 (inclusive) for a parliamentary visit to the Icelandic Parliament (Alþingi) and to attend the annual plenary of the Arctic Circle Assembly.

16. The delegation will spend a day in the Icelandic Parliament, meeting with the Speaker, watching question time, meeting the Prime Minister and meeting Members and officials to discuss matters of mutual interest in relation to parliamentary business and procedures and the facilities and support to Members.

17. The Arctic Circle Assembly is *'the largest network of international dialogue and cooperation on the future of the Arctic. It is an open democratic platform with participation from governments, organisations, corporations, universities, think tanks, environmental associations, indigenous communities, concerned citizens, and others interested in the development of the Arctic and its consequences'*.

18. Upon publication of the final conference programme, Members will identify other breakout and plenary sessions which they will attend. Bilateral discussions will also be arranged with other parliamentarians, Government Ministers, NGOs, academics etc. Participation will feed directly back to the committee's work programme.

19. Building on previous years' involvement at the Assembly, NZET Committee members will also deliver a breakout session with Bryndís Haraldsdóttir, Member of the Icelandic Parliament, and President of the Nordic Council 2024, entitled, *'Nature's Balance Sheet- Scottish Views on Private Finance and Natural Capital'*.

## **Delegation**

- Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, Presiding Officer
- Ben MacPherson MSP, Deputy Convener, Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) Committee
- Monica Lennon MSP, Member of Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) Committee

20. Mark Brough, Principal Private Secretary to the Presiding Officer, Peter McGrath Clerk to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) Committee

and Jennie Chinembiri, Head of International Relations Office will support the delegation.

## **Resource implications**

### **Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

21. CPA HQ pay for the following aspects:

#### Stuart McMillan MSP, Regional rep on the CPA ExCo

- Business Class ticket of £6,889.78
- Long-stay airport parking £91.99
- Mileage to and from Edinburgh airport £63.27
- Two nights' accommodation £441.54

#### Jeremy Balfour MSP, Regional rep on the CPwD Network

- Premium Economy ticket with extra legroom £2,120.58

#### Sarah Boyack MSP, Regional rep on the CWP Network

- Economy class ticket £1,654.58

#### Carer for Jeremy Balfour MSP

- Premium Economy ticket with extra legroom £2,120.58

22. All remaining aspects are covered by the SPCB. As such, the estimated cost for the parliamentary visit to the CPC in Australia is approximately £32,800 which covers the remaining travel, accommodation, conference registration fees, meals and appropriate incidental expenses for three Members, one accompanying official and one carer.

## **Nordic Council Session**

23. The estimated cost for the parliamentary visit to the Nordic Council Session in Iceland is approximately £7,100 which covers travel, accommodation, meals and appropriate incidental expenses for three Members and one accompanying official.

## **Arctic Circle Assembly**

24. The estimated cost for the parliamentary visit to the Arctic Assembly in Iceland is approximately £16,630 which covers travel, accommodation, meals, conference registration fees of £4,500 and appropriate incidental expenses for three Members and three accompanying officials.

25. All costs for the three trips will be met from the existing budget.

## **Governance**

26. The SPCB will recall that, within the International Strategy, which it agreed in September 2021, there is a requirement for the International Relations Office to outline to the SPCB why the visit is in person (as opposed to virtual); and the travel options and environmental impact considered by the delegation.

## **Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

27. The CPC offers a unique opportunity for delegates to engage with counterparts across the world and to promote the work of the Scottish Parliament. The conference is not offered virtually and as such Members need to be there in person in order to take part. Furthermore, all three Members are regional representatives and as such will gain access to and take part in exclusive meetings, after which they will need to report back to the regional members. In addition to this, they will also take part in the workshops and hold bilateral meetings with Members from other legislatures to discuss their work as parliamentarians.

28. The only viable travel option between Scotland and Australia is by air. The individual CO<sub>2</sub>e footprint for flying economy class (return) to Sydney from Edinburgh is 5,142.09 CO<sub>2</sub>e kg, Premium Economy is 8,174.82 CO<sub>2</sub>e kg and business class travel is 14,745.70 CO<sub>2</sub>e kg. Return economy class flights are an estimated £1,654.58 per person, premium economy are £2,120.58 per person and business class flights are £6,889.78 per person. Due to the journey taking over 25 hours and time constraints when arriving to Sydney, IRO would recommend Business Class flights on this occasion in order to ensure that the delegation are ready to take part in the conference immediately.

## **Nordic Council Session**

29. Participation by the delegation at the Nordic Council Session would not be possible online as the Session is not broadcast.

30. The only viable travel option between Scotland and Iceland is by air due to time constraints. There are no direct flights from Edinburgh on the necessary dates, so the delegation will travel from Glasgow. The individual CO<sub>2</sub>e footprint for flying economy class (return) to Reykjavik is 408.10

CO2e kg and the cost is £417.23. Business class travel was not considered.

## **Arctic Circle Assembly**

31. Participation at the Arctic Circle Assembly would not be possible online. In person attendance allows MSPs to participate in face-to-face bilateral meetings with other delegates, including Icelandic Prime Minister, Government Ministers and Members of the Arctic (and other) Parliaments. Conference organisers have also indicated that they cannot facilitate 'virtual breakout sessions' so attending sessions of interest and relevance to the delegation would not be possible. This would also prevent the delegation from delivering their own joint breakout session with Icelandic MPs.
32. The only viable travel option between Scotland and Iceland is by air due to time constraints. There are no direct flights from Edinburgh on the necessary dates, so the delegation will travel from Glasgow. The individual CO2e footprint for flying economy class (return) to Reykjavik is 408.10 CO2e kg and the cost is £474.33. Business class travel was not considered.

## **Publication Scheme**

33. This paper will be published in line with the SPCB's Publication Scheme.

## **Decision**

34. The SPCB is invited to consider the above travel and, in accordance with the Code of Conduct, approve the details of the travel and the associated costs provided.
35. The IRO will then notify the Members concerned they do not need to register this travel.

## **International Relations Office**

September 2024