



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# **International Relations: Parliamentary travel By Correspondence**

**Reference: SPCB (2022) Paper 68**

## **Executive summary**

1. The Corporate Body is invited to consider forthcoming overseas parliamentary travel and, in accordance with Section 2, paragraph 62 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament in relation to receipt by Members of travel, hospitality etc., approve the details of the travel and other costs associated with the outward visit below.

## **Issues and options**

Nordic Council (Helsinki)

2. Presiding Officer Alison Johnstone MSP; Convener of the Education Committee, Susan Webber MSP; and Convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, Clare Adamson MSP will undertake an outward visit to Helsinki, Finland from 31 October to 3 November 2022 to attend the 74th Plenary Session of the Nordic Council as observers.
3. The Nordic Council has 87 elected members. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have 20 members. Of these, two of the Danish representatives are from the Faroe Islands and two are from Greenland, while Finland has two representatives from Åland. Iceland has seven members.
4. Several International guests will also be in attendance, with the PO being specifically invited as there is a desire from the Nordic Council to strengthen the relationship with the Scottish Parliament. The Nordic Council encompasses 7 parliaments, a number of these the Scottish Parliament has strong historic and cultural links and a shared perspective on several areas. This visit by the PO and two members will be an effective way to enhance and further establish this for future inter-parliamentary co-operation.

5. Members will attend the Nordic Council Prize Awards ceremony; The Nordic Summit with the Prime Ministers and Heads of Government, themed 'The Future of Nordic Co-Operation and the Nordic Region's Role in Europe and the World; Plenary sessions relating to education, culture and constitutional matters and the international delegates seminar. Bilateral discussions will also be arranged with other Speakers and parliamentarians. Participation will feed directly back to the Committees' work programmes.
6. The two conveners will be able to make connections between their priorities of their committee workplans with sessions at the plenary. Alongside this there will be opportunities to meet and share experiences and best practices with their counterparts from several countries within the Nordic region.
7. The PO will lead the delegation, she has been invited to give a short speech to the Nordic Council. She will meet speakers from the Finnish, Norwegian and Icelandic Parliaments and attend a tour of the Finnish Parliament. The PO will also have the opportunity to meet other speakers and ministers at the networking events. The opportunity to meet with several Speakers at one event allows the PO to engage with other parliaments at one time allowing for mutual learning and sharing experiences on approaches to key procedural and corporate issues.

## **Resource implications**

8. The estimated cost for this visit is £7,500 which covers travel, accommodation, meals and appropriate incidental expenses for the Presiding Officer, two MSPs and three accompanying officials (Principal Private Secretary, Head of International Relations and International Relations Officer).
9. Three officials will attend to effectively supporting the PO and two members with multiple meetings with parliamentarians from several different countries.
10. Section 2, paragraph 62 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament states that certain overseas visits are excluded from the requirement to register where the travel and other costs are wholly met by the SPCB (in this case, from the IRO budget).

## **Governance**

11. The SPCB will recall that, within the International Strategy which it agreed in September 2021, there is a new requirement for the International

Relations Office (IRO) 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.

12. This is the first time we have been invited to attend the Nordic Council, it offers a unique opportunity to engage with Parliamentarians and Speakers from several countries in the Nordic region.
13. The Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officers play a unique role in developing relationships with other Parliaments which include, particularly during initial stages of engagement, face to face meetings with other Speakers and senior parliamentarians. The Nordic Council is a prime opportunity to meet with several Speakers and Parliamentarians from the Nordic Countries. As the first visit by a Scottish Parliament delegation of the new Session, several face-to-face meetings with Speakers from the Finnish, Norwegian and Icelandic Parliaments was considered appropriate and necessary on this occasion. A physical presence at the Nordic Council will also allow the Education Committee Convener and Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Convener to hold inaugural discussions with their committee counterparts.
14. Participation by the Education Committee Convener and Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Convener at the Nordic Council would not be possible online. In person attendance also allows MSPs to participate in face-to-face bilaterals with other delegates, including Parliamentarians and Government Ministers. They will also be able to observe the Plenary where topics such as mobility and freedom of movement, friendship schools and friendships between educational institutions, strengthening the Nordic- perspective in teacher training, anti-racist curricula and knowledge and culture in the Nordic region will be discussed amongst others.
15. The only viable travel option between Edinburgh and Helsinki is by air. The CO<sub>2</sub>e footprint (return) per person for flying (economy class) is 405 kg. Hotel accommodation booked in Helsinki is within walking distance of the Finnish Parliament, where the Nordic Council will be held.

## **Publication Scheme**

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

## **Decision**

17. 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 above.

18. The IRO will then notify the Members concerned that they do not need to register this travel.

**International Relations Office**

October 2022