



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# International Relations: Parliamentary travel

## By correspondence

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 66

## Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider and approve forthcoming overseas parliamentary travel. In accordance with paragraphs 62 to 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

### Nordic Council (Oslo)

2. Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP; Beatrice Wishart MSP, Deputy Convener of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee; and Ben Macpherson MSP, Deputy Convener of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee and Member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee will undertake an outward visit to Oslo, Norway from 30 October to 3 November 2023 to attend the 75th Plenary Session of the Nordic Council as international guests (observers).
3. 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 Session brings together Speakers, Prime Ministers and Members from each member state as well as international guests.
4. The Scottish Parliament received an invitation to attend this year's Session from Jorodd Asphjell, President (Norway); Helge Orten, Vice President (Norway); and Kristina Háfoss, Secretary General of the Nordic Council. In March 2023 the Nordic Council published their new [International Strategy](#), agreed by all Nordic Council Members, which highlights their emphasis on working with the Scottish Parliament:

“Build further on transatlantic relations and collaborations with parliaments in the UK and **Scotland**, the German Bundestag, and the Landtag in Schleswig-Holstein.” (page 8)

“..the Nordic Council prioritises in its international activities a number of other regions and actors: Ukraine, Germany and Schleswig-Holstein, the UK and **Scotland**, the US, and Canada, and the democratic opposition in Russia and Belarus.” (page 11)

5. Attendance at the Session for a second year demonstrates that the Scottish Parliament prioritises engagement with the Nordic region. 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 also builds upon our reputation as an outward looking Parliament, keen to share knowledge and best practice.
6. The Session also provides an opportunity to build on future committee-to-committee collaborations. It 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.
7. The Nordic Council has four committees as well as the Nordic Council Presidium:
  - Committee for Knowledge and Culture in the Nordic Region
  - Committee for a Sustainable Nordic Region
  - Committee for Growth and Development in the Nordic Region
  - Committee for Welfare in the Nordic Region
8. Each committee is made up of members from across all member states and they together produce recommendations for the national parliaments. The recommendations are then agreed at the annual Session.
9. The two Members 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.
10. The Session also offers an opportunity to hold bilateral meetings with international guests on a range of devolved policy issues. This year delegations from the following legislatures and organisations have been invited:
  - The Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (CPAR)

- NATO Parliamentary Assembly
- Baltic Assembly
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly
- Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)
- Benelux Parliament
- Scottish Parliament
- EU-Commission – The Nordic Commissioners
- UK Parliament
- DEEA: European Parliament's Delegation for Northern cooperation and for relations with Switzerland and Norway and to the EU-Iceland Joint Parliamentary Committee and the European Economic Area (EEA) Joint Parliamentary Committee
- The West Nordic Council
- European Parliament's Nordic Members
- U.S. Congress
- Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament
- Parliament of Canada
- German Bundestag
- National Assembly of Quebec
- State Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein

11. The DPO will lead the delegation and we will look to arrange bilateral meetings with her counterparts during the Session. The opportunity to meet with several Speakers and other parliamentarians at one event allows the DPO and Members 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**

12. The estimated cost for the parliamentary visit to Oslo is £5,500 which covers travel, accommodation, meals and appropriate incidental expenses for three MSPs and two accompanying officials (International Relations Officer and Private Secretary to the DPO).

## **Governance**

13. 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.

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

15. The only viable travel option between Scotland and Norway is by air due to time constraints. The individual CO2e footprint for flying economy class (return) to Oslo from Edinburgh is 420kg. Business class travel was not considered.

## **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 provided.

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

**International Relations Office**  
October 2023