



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# Report of the visit by The Scottish Parliament delegation to the 74<sup>th</sup> session of the Nordic Council, Helsinki, Finland

31 October – 3 November 2022



*Presiding Officer Alison Johnstone MSP, Clare Adamson MSP  
and Sue Webber MSP outside the Finnish Parliament*

## **Introduction**

1. This is the report of the visit by the Scottish Parliament delegation to the Nordic Council. The delegation comprised of:

- Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament;
- Clare Adamson MSP, Convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee; and
- Sue Webber MSP, Convener of the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

2. The primary purpose of the visit to Helsinki was to attend the Nordic Council session and meet with representatives, including Speakers from a number of the parliaments within the Nordic Region. The Scottish Parliament had been invited previously but had been unable to attend.

3. The Scottish Parliament has collaborated with the Nordic Council previously at both a parliamentary and official level. There was strong cooperation at COP26, where the Scottish Parliament and Nordic Council jointly hosted an event in the Blue Zone of COP 26.

4. A communications plan was agreed for this trip, including a short video message tweeted by the Presiding Officer as she left for the Nordic Council. This activity has had the most amount of engagement in this session from the Presiding Officer's twitter account.

5. The cost of this visit was £6,969.65 which covered the cost of travel, accommodation and expenses for the three parliamentarians and three accompanying members of staff.

6. The delegation wishes to thank all those who facilitated the meetings and engagements across this visit, and for the time and information they so willingly shared. There was genuine warmth and friendship across all programme activities which contributed to reinforcing the strong bond between Scotland and the Nordic Region. Particular thanks would like to be given to the Nordic Council staff for their organisation of the conference and the Speaker of the Eduskunta, the Hon Matti Vanhanen, and his officials for hosting the conference in their parliament.

## **Purpose**

7. The Scottish Parliament has indicated its desire to build on past engagement with the Nordic region by attending the Nordic Council. This forum has allowed the Scottish Parliament to indicate its desire to further strengthen its friendship and links with the Nordic Council and Nordic Parliaments and find further opportunities to share knowledge and experiences of core parliamentary issues at both a political and official level.

8. As with all visits, the approach was to link its purpose and outcomes to the Scottish Parliament's [International Strategy](#) which identifies activities it considers as strategically important. In addition to the engagements highlighted above, the delegation also participated in discussions across the visit relating to current policy and political issues in Scotland.
9. Bilateral engagements were set up for the Presiding Officer with the President of the Norwegian Parliament, Speaker of the Finnish Parliament, Speaker of the Icelandic Parliament, Secretary General of the Nordic Council and the President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.
10. Along with other international attendees, the Presiding Officer was invited to give a short speech to the Plenary. She outlined Scotland's similarities to the Nordic Region and the Scottish Parliament's desire to co-operate further with its parliaments and with the Nordic Council.
11. A bilateral engagement was also set up for the Convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee with Anders Adlercreitg, Member of the Eduskunta, to discuss the computer gaming industry. A summary of the discussions were later shared with the Committee.
12. Similarly, in her role as Convener of the Education Children and Young People Committee, Sue Webber MSP met elected representatives from across the Nordic region at the various networking events. They discussed the similarities in challenges their countries are facing and shared approaches to overcome these challenges. A summary of the discussions were later shared with the Committee.
13. At the end of the session, the Nordic Council hosted an international delegates seminar and reception, which focused on 'Security in the Nordic Region, Europe and the World and the Role of Parliamentary Co-operation'. During the reception the delegates exchanged policy and procedural practices with various of their counterparts, including Jorodd Asphjell and Helge Orten, the next President and Vice President of the Nordic Council.
14. The Convener of the CEEAC Committee hopes to build on these meetings by inviting Jorodd Asphjell, the next President of the Nordic Council, to address the CEEAC Committee on Norway's priorities for the presidency.
15. Furthermore, after the conference staff will look at the possibility of setting up bilateral relationships between officials in the Scottish Parliament and officials in the various Nordic Parliaments.

## Programme

16. A copy of the visit programme is annexed to this report. The following summarises key issues discussed across the various meetings.

### Tuesday 1 November 2022

17. Prior to the conference starting, the Presiding Officer met with Mr Johannes Schraps, current President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) and Head of the BSPC delegation of the German Bundestag. They discussed gender balance in committees, family friendly policies, new ways of working and encouraging respectful debates.

18. The Presiding Officer hopes to build on this meeting and broaden the Scottish Parliament's presence by seeing if it is possible to attend a Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference meeting in the future.



*Presiding Officer with Mr Johannes Schraps, current President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) and Head of the BSPC delegation of the German Bundestag*

19. The Presiding Officer was also due to meet with Mr Birgir Ármannsson, Speaker of the Icelandic Parliament, but unfortunately the Speaker had to cancel his visit to Helsinki at the last minute.

20. The Conference began by recognising the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Nordic Council and delegates heard from the Speakers of all present Nordic Parliaments. All of the sessions had interpretation.

21. This was followed by a session with the Nordic Prime Ministers and Heads of Governments. This session allowed for a question-and-answer session from the floor.

22. The President of Finland then addressed the assembly. Again, there was the opportunity for questions from the Nordic Council members.

23. Throughout the assembly there were various chances for members to ask follow up questions to the speakers.

24. In the evening the delegation was invited to attend the Nordic Council Prize Ceremony and the Finnish Government's reception. The prize ceremony recognised individuals for their contribution to film and culture within the Nordic Region and was broadcast live.



*Presiding Officer Alison Johnstone MSP, Clare Adamson MSP and Sue Webber MSP taking part in plenary sessions.*

## **Wednesday 2 November 2022**

25. In the morning, the Presiding Officer met with Mr Masud Gharahkhani, President of the Storting, the Parliament of Norway. They discussed encouraging respectful debates, disinformation, the energy crisis and collaboration between the two parliaments.



*Presiding Officer with Mr Masud Gharakhani, President of the Storting, the Parliament of Norway*

26. The first session of the day was held with the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation, followed by the Nordic Council of Ministers' budget and a question-and-answer session.

27. Discussion then took place around *Crisis preparedness in the Nordic Region* followed by *Welfare in the Nordic Region*.

28. International guests were then invited to address the plenary. The Presiding Officer conveyed the warm greetings of the Scottish Parliament and stressed the importance of co-operation with a region with such strong cultural and historical ties to Scotland.



*Presiding Officer Alison Johnstone MSP addressing the Nordic Council Session.*

29. In the afternoon, the Presiding Officer met with Matti Vanhanen, Speaker of the Eduskunta, the Parliament of Finland. They discussed procedures of Parliament, the Scottish Parliament's current gender sensitive audit, the war in Ukraine, question times and respectful dialogue.



*Presiding Officer with Mr Matti Vanhanen, Speaker of Eduskunta, Finland*

30. The delegation then attended an evening seminar and reception on *Security in the Nordic Region, Europe and the World and the Role of Parliamentary Co-operation*. The event provided the participants with input from experts on the recent security developments in the Nordic region and beyond. The event also offered an opportunity for an exchange of views between the international guests and the Nordic Council.

31. Following the reception, the Presiding Officer flew back to Scotland in order to chair parliamentary business on the Thursday.



*Presiding Officer with Jorodd Asphjell the next President, Helge Orten, the next Vice President and Kristina Háfoss, Secretary- General of the Nordic Council.*

### **Thursday 3 November 2022**

32. On the Thursday, the sessions focused on Culture and Education and Clare Adamson MSP and Sue Webber MSP attended the sessions in their capacity as Conveners.

33. The morning session looked at *Knowledge and Culture in the Nordic Region*, focusing on friendship schools, strengthening the Nordic Perspective in teacher training and proposals for an anti-racist curriculum.

34. Next they discussed *Welfare in the Nordic region*, focusing on a human rights-based narcotics policy in the Nordic region and proposals on aesthetic injections and other surgical cosmetic procedures.

35. Following this a session on *Growth and Development in the Nordic Region* focused on a certification scheme for sustainable tourism and the electrification of shipping and ports.

36. The final session discussed *A Sustainable Nordic Region*, looking at ecocide legislation, Nordic co-operation to control invasive species, a proposal to make the Nordic Region a leader in Europe in the capture, transport and storage of CO<sub>2</sub> and the establishment of Nordic and national Youth Climate Councils.



*Clare Adamson MSP and Sue Webber MSP taking part in plenary sessions.*

37. The delegation then gathered to fly back to Edinburgh.

## **Annex A: Programme**

### **Monday 31 October 2022**

13.05 Depart Edinburgh

15.50 Arrive in Oslo Gardermoen

17.20 Depart Oslo Gardermoen

19.40 Arrive in Helsinki Vantaa

### **Tuesday 1 November 2022**

13.00 Register for the conference

13.30 Presiding Officer meeting with Mr Johannes Schraps, current President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) and Head of the BSPC delegation of the German Bundestag

The full Nordic Council Session 2022 programme can be found [here](#).

**14.30 – 14.45 Opening of the Opening of the 74th Plenary Session** (Interpretation in English)  
(*The Plenary Hall of the Finnish Parliament*)

**14.45 – 17.30 Plenary** (Interpretation in English)  
(*The Plenary Hall of the Finnish Parliament*)

14.45- 16.30 Nordic Summit with the prime ministers and heads of government

16.30- 17.20 Guest speaker President of Finland Sauli Niinistö and debate

17.20- 17.30 Iceland's programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers

**18.45 – 22.00 Nordic Council Prize Ceremony and the Finnish Government's reception**  
(*Mannerheimintie 13 A, 00100 Helsinki*)

## **Wednesday 2 November 2022**

9.15 Presiding Officer meeting with Mr Masud Gharahkhani, President of the Storting, the Parliament of Norway

**09.00 – 12.00 Plenary – morning** (Interpretation in English)  
(*The Plenary Hall of the Finnish Parliament*)

9.00 – 10.00 Statement from the Ministers for Foreign Affairs

10.00 – 10.20 Foreign policy

10.20 – 11.00 Report by the Ministers of defence

11.00 – 12.00 First debate on new members' proposals

15.40 Presiding Officer meeting with Matti Vanhanen, Speaker of Eduskunta, Finland

**14.00 – 17.30 Plenary – afternoon** (Interpretation in English)  
(*The Plenary Hall of the Finnish Parliament*)

14.00 – 15.00 Question time with the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation

15.00 – 15.30 Reports from the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation

15.30 – 15.45 Nordic Council of Ministers' budget

15.45 – 16.25 Crisis preparedness in the Nordic Region

16.25 – 16.55 Welfare in the Nordic Region

16.55 – 17.30 International co-operation (Speeches by international guests)

**17.45 – 19.45 The Nordic Council Presidium and the Chairs of the Committees’ Seminar and Reception for the International Guests**  
*(The auditorium of Pikkuparlamenti, the Finnish Parliament)*

17.45 – 17.50 Welcome and opening remarks by Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, President of the Nordic Council, Vice Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Finnish Parliament

18.00 – 18.10 Ms Iro Särkkä, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

18.10 – 18.20 Mr René Nyberg, Ambassador

18.20 – 18.40 Discussion / Q&A

18.40 – 18.45 Closing remarks by Mr. Helge Orten, Vice Head of the Norwegian Delegation to the Nordic Council

18.45 – 19.45 Reception and buffet dinner hosted by the Nordic Council

**Thursday 3 November 2022**

**08.30 – 15.00 Plenary** (Interpretation in English)  
*(The Plenary Hall of the Finnish Parliament)*

08.30 - 10.00 Knowledge and culture in the Nordic Region

10.00 – 11.00 Welfare in the Nordic Region, cont.

11.00 – 11.30 Growth and development in the Nordic Region

12.30 – 13.45 A sustainable Nordic Region

13.45 – 14.15 The Presidium

14.15 – 14.30 The Nordic Council’s internal affairs

14.30 – 14.45 Elections 2023

14.45 – 14.55 Norway’s programme for the Nordic Council in 2023

14.55 – 15.00 Closing of the Session

16.45 Depart Helsinki

17.40 Arrive in Edinburgh