



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

International Relations: Parliamentary travel

By correspondence

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 54

Executive summary

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

Issues and options

Arctic Circle Assembly, Visit to the Parliament of Iceland (Alpingi) and British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) Plenary

Arctic Circle Assembly and visit to the Alpingi

1. Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) Committee Members, Monica Lennon MSP and Mark Ruskell MSP, will undertake an outward visit to Reykjavik, Iceland from 18 October to 22 October 2023 (inclusive) for meetings in the Icelandic Parliament (Alpingi) and to attend the annual plenary of the Arctic Circle Assembly.
2. 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*'.
3. 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.

4. Building on previous years' involvement at the Assembly, NZET Committee members will also deliver a breakout session entitled, *'Net Zero and Nature: Views from Parliamentarians from Scotland and the Nordic Region on the challenges of meeting wind energy and biodiversity ambitions'*. In consultation with NZET Committee Members and Clerks, IRO will identify two parliamentarians from the Nordic region to jointly participate in this session.
5. The delegation will also meet with members of the Alþingi's Environment and Communications Committee. Building on a visit to Holyrood by the committee in January 2023, this meeting provides a further opportunity to develop that relationship and discuss issues of mutual interest and relevance to the committees. It is expected that one Member of the Environment and Communications Committee will also participate in the above-mentioned breakout session.

British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA)

6. Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP will represent the Parliament at the 65th plenary of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) in County Kildare, Ireland from Sunday 22 October to Tuesday 24 October (inclusive). Also attending the plenary will be the four 'Full' Members of the Parliament's delegation on the BIPA: Emma Harper MSP, Tess White MSP, Pauline McNeill MSP and Ross Greer MSP.
7. The function of the BIPA is to promote co-operation between political representatives in Britain and Ireland. Its members engage in a wide range of non-legislative parliamentary activities, through bi-annual plenary meetings and ongoing committee work. The BIPA consists of Members from the UK and Irish parliaments and the parliaments of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.
8. In addition to bi-annual plenary meetings, there are three sub-committees in which MSPs participate: Committee B (European Affairs), Committee C (Economic Affairs) and Committee D (Environment and Social). Meetings of the above three subject committees will also be held in County Kildare and attended by the MSPs on those committees. Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, as delegation lead, will also attend a meeting of the BIPA's Steering Committee.

Resource implications

9. The estimated cost for the visit to Iceland is £8,400 which covers travel, accommodation, conference registration fees, meals and appropriate incidental expenses for two MSPs and two accompanying officials (Clerk to the NZET Committee plus one International Relations Officer).
10. The estimated cost for the visit to Ireland to attend the BIPA plenary is £3,500 which covers travel, accommodation and appropriate incidental expenses for the Deputy Presiding Officer, four Members and one accompanying official from the International Relations Office.

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 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. Participation by the Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) Committee members 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 Government Ministers and Members of the Nordic (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 Nordic MPs.
13. The only viable travel option between Scotland and Reykjavik is by air. The CO₂e footprint (each way) for flying economy class to Reykjavik from Glasgow is 204 kg. There are no direct, return flights from Edinburgh that coincide with Assembly sitting dates so flights to/from Glasgow have been chosen for Members on this occasion. Hotel accommodation booked in Reykjavik is within walking distance of both the conference venue and Icelandic Parliament.
14. Similarly, participation in plenary sessions of the BIPA, specifically those held outwith a Parliamentary Chamber, would not be possible online due to the logistical, technical and staffing challenges this would present to the conference organisers. Oireachtas officials have confirmed to the IRO that this would again be the case at the forthcoming plenary in County Kildare.
15. Travel options between Edinburgh and Dublin are by air or by train/bus and ferry. The CO₂e footprint (each way) for flying economy class is 51 kg compared with approx. 20 kg for train and ferry. The travel times (each way) are 1 hour for flying and 11 hours for train/bus and ferry.

16. Attendance at the biannual BIPA plenary session currently requires Members to be absent from parliamentary business one sitting day per week (Tuesdays). To attend the full plenary session and travel by train/bus and ferry to County Kildare would require Members missing an extra day of parliamentary business (Wednesday). An additional evening away would also negatively impact Members' work/life balance. It is expected, therefore, that most Members will choose to travel by air or a combination of air and train/ferry.

Publication Scheme

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

Decision

18. 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.

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

International Relations Office

September 2023