



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

International Relations: Parliamentary travel

18 May 2023

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 35

Executive summary

1. The paper seeks the following approvals:
 - Prior approval of the costs associated with overseas visits – including travel, accommodation and other related expenses – by the Parliament’s nominees to the Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group in accordance with Section 2, paragraph 62 of the Code of Conduct for MSPs; and
 - Prior approval of the costs associated with overseas visits – including travel, accommodation and other related expenses – by the Parliament’s members of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in accordance with Section 2, paragraph 64 of the Code of Conduct for MSPs
2. Members have only recently been nominated for these bodies for this Session and therefore will only be attending meetings as of October 2023.

Issues and options

Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group (CoR)

3. MSPs are appointed to the CoR through nomination by the Parliament. Scotland makes 4 nominations: 2 Full Members, and 2 Alternates. In practice these are evenly divided between local government and the Scottish Parliament.
4. The members for the CoR for the remainder of the current parliamentary session to 2026 were agreed by the Parliamentary Bureau on 9 May 2023.

5. Prior approval is now sought for the two members, Alasdair Allan MSP and Neil Bibby MSP for their travel in respect of their participation in the CoR. As the membership could change over the course of the session, the approval is sought for those appointed to the role by Parliament. Individual papers covering the detailed travel costs and environmental impact considerations will be brought to the SPCB before each meeting. This approval is sought under Section 2, paragraph 62 of the Code so that the Members concerned are not required to register the overseas visit as they will be representing the Parliament on this body.

Council of Europe - Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CECLRA)

6. MSPs are proposed as nominees for the UK Delegation to CECLRA by the Scottish Parliament. Scotland makes 4 nominations: 2 Full Members, and 2 Alternates. In practice these are evenly divided between local government and the Scottish Parliament. Those nominations are then passed for the approval of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary of State whose role is to consider the delegation as a whole, and finally to the Congress Secretariat who facilitate formal ratification by the Congress Bureau.

7. Prior approval is sought for the overseas travel and other associated costs for the Parliament's full and alternate members, Ben MacPherson MSP and Maurice Golden MSP respectively, for the remainder of the current parliamentary session. Membership was agreed by the Parliamentary Bureau on 9 May 2023. While the travel and expenses will be covered by the Council of Europe, prior approval of the travel is sought in accordance with Section 2, paragraph 64 of the Code of Conduct in order that these Members are not required to register the costs of the overseas visit under the Code as they will be representing the Parliament on this body.

8. It is proposed that these approvals run until the date of the dissolution of the Parliament at the end of the current session.

Frequency of meetings

9. The Members concerned are fulfilling a role that they have been nominated to by the Bureau, and the frequency of the meetings is determined by the organisations to which they have been nominated and will vary from year to year.

10. As a minimum, the Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group meets in plenary twice a year. There may also be other meetings or conferences to which the Members are invited.

11. The Scottish Parliament member of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities sits in the Chamber of Regions of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and is a member of one of the three standing committees. All full members attend the plenary sessions. Both full and

alternate members can participate in the Congress's work as rapporteurs, election and local democracy monitors. The Congress also organises specialised conferences and colloquies which a member may be invited to.

Governance

12. Advance approval by the SPCB will mean that no registration will be required for overseas visits to the Committee of the Regions – UK Contact Group or Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in the Register of Interests for the relevant Members.

Resource implications

13. One official from IRO will support the members and will collaborate with SPICe and the clerks to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee to provide an appropriate briefing on specific Parliament and Scottish interests.

14. The costs to the SPCB for both Members and one official to attend the Committee of the Regions – UK Contact Group is estimated to be £4,500 p.a.

15. All the costs for the members for the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities are met by the Congress. One official will accompany the member(s) to each plenary, resulting in a cost of £2,000 p.a. for the SPCB.

16. All costs will be met from the existing budget.

Publication Scheme

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

Next steps

18. The relevant Members will be informed of the SPCB's decision.

Decision

19. The SPCB is invited to give advance prior approval for the travel and other costs for overseas visits undertaken by Members in respect of their nomination to and membership of the Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group and the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities as set out in this paper until the dissolution of Parliament at the end of the current session.

International Relations Office
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