Introduction

1. Members of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Scotland Branch visited their CPA Northern Ireland Branch counterparts on Monday 27 September to continue the dialogue started in 2008 about how both branches might collaborate to share knowledge, information and experience of best parliamentary practice, processes and procedures.

2. Jamie Stone MSP led the delegation. Other members were Ted Brokblebank MSP and Sandra White MSP. The Secretary of CPA Scotland Branch accompanied the delegation.

3. This report outlines how each objective was met, the ideas that have subsequently been generated and follow-up actions the delegation is keen to pursue, to build on the substantial benefits the visit provided.

4. A copy of the visit programme is attached at Annex A.

5. Given Scotland’s drive to reduce carbon emissions, the CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee agreed that the delegation should undertake a more environmentally friendly method of travel. Three members of the delegation travelled from Edinburgh in 1 vehicle and met the fourth Member at the railway station in Troon before proceeding to Cairnryan to take a ferry to Larne. The return journey involved taking the ferry at Larne and returning to Troon, and again, the delegation travelled back together in the same vehicle. The programme is attached at Annex A.

6. Members of the delegation recommended that the Clerk/Chief Executive should be aware of the delegation’s experience with a view to informing future travel policy for Members and staff travelling to Northern Ireland who were considering environmentally friendly travel options.
Aims and objectives

The aims of the visit were as follows:

- Discuss how both Branches might collaborate to share knowledge, information and experience of best parliamentary practice, processes and procedures.

- Provide an opportunity to share information and experience on lessons learned working with the National Assembly of Malawi to assist the Northern Ireland Assembly to develop and sustain a relationship with a developing democracy.

- Provide an opportunity for Members of CPA Scotland to study the procedures and practices of CPA Northern Ireland to inform a legacy paper for the new Executive Committee following the 2011 Scottish Parliament election. Particularly in relation to the selection procedure for visits and attendance at parliamentary conference and events.

- To explore the possibility of collaborating with the CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee to place the CPA Scotland Branch intern from Malawi with the Northern Ireland Assembly for up to 1 week.

- To share information with Northern Ireland Assembly officials about the Scottish Parliament’s current and future international engagement strategies, particularly in relation to the Commonwealth and to learn about the Northern Ireland Assembly’s approach in this area.

Objective 1:

Discuss how both branches might collaborate to share knowledge, information and experience of best parliamentary practice, processes and procedures.

7. The delegation observed that the Entrance Hall was very busy with groups visiting to tour the building which was similar to tours which take place in the Scottish Parliament. During the tour of the Assembly building, the delegation noticed that preparations for an event in the Chamber was underway. The event entitled *To Kill a Mockingbird* involves pupils watching the film which is then followed by a debate by pupils in the Chamber about the issues raised in the film. Members of the delegation thought that this type of activity might be of interest to the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Communities Partnership Office and recommended that officials should be aware of this type of activity which would likely have a broad appeal to educational institutions and other community groups.

8. As with the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly consider engagement with the public to be a strategic priority for the institution. Members of the delegation noted that many of the engagement programmes and activities
were similar to those used by the Scottish Parliament. Throughout conversations, ideas, innovations and activities on a broad range of engagement activities and programmes were discussed.

9. However, the delegation felt that the Northern Ireland Assembly were implementing some refreshing innovative programmes which could possibly be adapted for use within the Scottish Parliament.

10. Members of the delegation were interested to learn that the Northern Ireland Assembly was working with Queen’s University, Belfast to develop a political leadership programme for Assembly Members. The programme has already started focussed on identifying leadership skills and developing those skills through a series of seminars. Experienced Assembly Members acted as mentors to colleagues who were participating in the programme. At the end of the course participants receive accreditation for the work undertaken. We understand that the accreditation can be used towards obtaining other qualifications.

11. Members of the delegation were impressed with this initiative and expressed the view that some Members, particularly new Members, might find this type of programme beneficial. The delegation suggested that this initiative should be highlighted at the appropriate level within the Scottish Parliament to ascertain if this initiative might be adapted for the Scottish Parliament at some point in the future.

12. The Northern Ireland Assembly in partnership with Queen’s University have developed a 5 day legislative module for university students studying in Northern Ireland. A module which is relevant to some undergraduate courses enables students to spend 4 days at the Northern Ireland Assembly and 1 day at Queen’s University. The module allows participants to receive an in depth, quality, learning opportunity. The programme is planned and structured so that all participants receive the same experiences and this helps for streamlined and efficient administration of the programme. The delegation thought that this type of activity might not be possible to arrange in the Scottish Parliament due to the greater number of university students studying in Scotland. However the delegation suggested that this initiative might be worth bringing to the attention of relevant officials in the Scottish Parliament.

13. Members of the delegation were particularly impressed with the programme which enabled university students with an interest in legislative studies to undertake an internship at the Northern Ireland Assembly. This programme provides an opportunity for students to work in the Committee Office within the Northern Ireland Assembly for 1 year. The students mainly undertake research work in relation to Bills. During the course of the year students are able to observe firsthand the overall workings of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Queens University select the students and this year, 150 applications were
received for 7 places. The Northern Ireland Assembly funds a bursary scheme for successful students who each receive £15,000 per annum.

14. Members of the delegation expressed the view that this initiative should also be brought to the attention of relevant Scottish Parliament officials for possible consideration.

15. The Northern Ireland Assembly also hold a Women's Day where women can come to the Northern Ireland Assembly for a 1 day placement and are assigned to an Assembly Member. Costs for this activity are charged to the Assembly Member’s cost centre.

16. The Northern Ireland Assembly run a regular work experience programme for secondary school pupils. A standard programme covering a 5 day period has been developed to allow 2 pupils per week to visit the Northern Ireland Assembly for work experience. Participants must complete a daily work log recording their own learning outcomes which helps to evaluate the programme on an on-going basis. The programme is very fair insofar as pupils are selected to participate on a first-come first-served basis.

17. The delegation was also very impressed with the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Trust. The Business Trust exists to forge links with, and promote the exchange of knowledge and information between, local businesses and parliamentarians both in Northern Ireland and in Europe. Membership is open to businesses from all sectors and sizes, the Trust organises activities including breakfast briefings, educational visits, fellowships, seminars and an annual European visit.

18. The aims of the Trust are to: (i) provide Assembly Members with a better insight into how the local business sector operates; (ii) help Assembly Members to make informed judgements on policy and legislation relating to the local economy; (iii) improve the business community’s understanding of how the Assembly and devolution work and (iv) how policy and legislation is initiated and developed.

19. Officials offered to provide further information on these topics if there was an interest in further exploring any of the topics discussed. The delegation agreed that information about these initiatives should be passed on to Scottish Parliament officials for information, and where appropriate, consideration.

20. As with the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly are continually looking for unique and innovative ways in which to engage with different communities within the country.
Objective 2:

Provide an opportunity to share information and experience on lessons learned working with the National Assembly of Malawi to assist the Northern Ireland Assembly to develop and sustain a relationship with a developing democracy.

21. Dr Gareth McGrath, Director of Engagement and Sheila McClelland Head of Education & Outreach met the delegation and explained that the Northern Ireland Assembly were engaging with the National Assembly of Kosovo through NI-CO. NI-CO is a not for profit, public body dedicated to the pursuit of building efficient, accountable and sustainable public sector institutions capable of managing donor aid effectively and implementing positive change. NI-CO develops capacity building programmes which Members and officials of the Northern Ireland Assembly participate in, and deliver.

22. The approach in Scotland differs insofar as the relationship between Scotland and Malawi has a historical link spanning 150 years. The delegation emphasised that much of the success of our engagement is attributed to the people of Scotland who have sustained a relationship with Malawi at different levels since the mid 19th century.

23. Information was exchanged about how to sustain parliamentary relationships and it was acknowledged that where there are people-to-people links and/or committed dedicated individuals, driving the relationship forward and sustaining relationships is easier to achieve. The delegation discussed the the Pilot Parliamentary Pairing Initiative (PPPI) between Scotland and Malawi focussing on the challenges caused through communication issues. Communication is not an issue with the Kosovo Parliament.

24. The delegation acknowledged that the relationship with the Commonwealth was perhaps stronger in Scotland due to the mass migration by Scots to the former colonies during the 18th, 19th and early part of the 20th centuries. It was also recognised that new European democracies were more advanced in their development than in some of Commonwealth countries in part because of better developed infrastructure.

25. As with Scotland and Malawi, the Northern Ireland Assembly responded to the needs for technical assistance and capacity building as identified by the Kosovans.

26. The delegation agreed that the Project Initiation Document for the First Scotland-Malawi Technical Assistance Project and the Evaluation Report should be shared with Northern Ireland Assembly officials.
27. A discussion took place around the added value the Scotland Malawi relationship brought to the Scottish Parliament. The delegation expressed the view that although the technical assistance work was designed to provide technical support and assistance to the National Assembly of Malawi, the benefits have not all been one way. Both politicians and officials at the Scottish Parliament have benefited from exposure to, and joint-working with, politicians and officials working in a different political and economic environment. Engagement with Malawi has provided a direct international perspective for Members and staff of the Scottish Parliament and has allowed them to share knowledge and experience gained since the establishment of the Parliament. Multi-party democracy in Malawi pre-dates devolution in the United Kingdom by a few years and both parliamentary institutions are still young and learning as they mature. The technical assistance work had provided a mechanism for direct contact between two organisations at an early time in their existence and has contributed positively to the learning processes of both.

Objective 3:

Provide an opportunity for Members of CPA Scotland to study the procedures and practices of CPA Northern Ireland to inform a legacy paper for the new Executive Committee following the 2011 Scottish Parliament election, particularly in relation to the selection procedure for visits and attendance at parliamentary conference and events.

28. The delegation received a briefing from officials on the selection process for Members of the CPA Northern Ireland Branch attending overseas events/visits.

29. The Selection Committee was appointed after development of a protocol which identifies a policy for attendance at CPA conferences outside Northern Ireland. This is to ensure that capacity building is maximised and that attendance is in line with expertise on Committees and other criteria. Its existence as a separate body emphasises that outward visits are only one element of the work of the Branch Executive Committee. This frees the Branch Executive Committee to focus on the development of other Branch activities. The Selection Committee is appointed and chaired by the Branch President.

30. The remit of the Selection Committee is to consider and agree which CPA activities the Branch should send representatives to, and how many representatives. The Selection Committee also considers applications from Members for advertised places and agrees which Members should attend and report back to the Assembly.

31. Similar to CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee the Selection Committee take into account the relevance of the topic in relation to usefulness to the Members/institution, travel costs, the quality of the programme and level of interest amongst Members. At the point of decision, the Selection Committee
also takes account of other factors as appropriate, such as party balance, previous commitment/interest in CPA events, previous attendance at CPA events and gender balance. The same criteria are also applied during the CPA Scotland Branch selection process.

32. CPA Northern Ireland have an agreed written protocol prescribing how the selection works unlike Scotland Branch who operate within a broader framework agreed by Branch Members at the Branch General Meeting in 2002. In Northern Ireland, the Branch President is automatically offered to attend the CPA Annual Plenary Conference as a delegate and also as one of the delegates attending the Annual British Islands and Mediterranean Region Conferences. If the President declines, then applications are sought to fill that place. All Members are invited to apply for additional places.

33. The delegation felt that a separate Selection Committee worked well for Northern Ireland Branch and noted that the criteria for selection was almost identical to that used by CPA Scotland Branch although in Scotland, by convention, the Branch President was not expected to participate in CPA events. Scotland Branch tended to perceive CPA programmes more suited to meet the needs of backbench Members. On occasion, invitations to seminars had stipulated that Speakers and Presiding Officers should not attend. Another main difference between both processes is that the Scotland Branch preferred a Member of the Branch Executive Committee to lead outward delegations wherever possible.

34. Overall, the delegation took the view that the existing selection procedure for attendance at CPA conferences, seminars and events had worked well. The delegation expressed the view that if a dispute situation arose, then the Branch President would ultimately have the authority to rule on the matter. Members of the Branch would also be able to make representations which could be considered by the Branch Executive Committee and also at the Annual General Meeting.

35. The delegation concluded that the existing arrangements for selecting Members to attend CPA conferences should be maintained. However, The delegation was also of the view that if other ideas or practices came to light to improve the openness and transparency of the current system, these would be carefully considered. The delegation further agreed that more effort should be made to ensure all Members are aware of existing arrangements for selecting representatives to attend CPA conferences and seminars. The Branch Secretary was asked to take this action forward.

**Objective 4:**

To explore the possibility of collaborating with the CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee to place the CPA Scotland Branch intern from Malawi with the Northern Ireland Assembly for up to 1 week.
36. William Hay MLA, Presiding Officer of the Northern Ireland Assembly and President of CPA Northern Ireland Branch agreed that a week long programme could be arranged for the Malawian intern.

37. The delegation expressed sincere gratitude to the Branch President and acknowledged his readiness to endorse this request. Given the importance of the Pilot Internship Programme to CPA Scotland Branch, a placement with the Northern Ireland Assembly would provide the Malawian intern with a wider perspective of how devolution works within the UK.

38. It is hoped that at some point in the future CPA Scotland Branch might reciprocate.

Objective 5:

To share information with Northern Ireland Assembly officials about the Scottish Parliament’s current and future international engagement strategies, particularly in relation to the Commonwealth and to learn about the Northern Ireland Assembly’s approach in this area.

39. The Presiding Officer was complementary about the direction CPA Scotland Branch was taking, particularly the strategic approach to Branch activities.

40. The Northern Ireland Assembly have identified an area in Africa which may be an ideal partner to work with in the future. During one of the meetings, the delegation mentioned that a delegation of Members from Uganda had requested a 5 day visit to the Scottish Parliament in December 2010. The delegation explained that the Scottish Parliament tended to limit inward visits to 1 or 2 day programmes unless there were extenuating circumstances. Northern Ireland Branch offered to accommodate an inward visit to the Northern Ireland Assembly if this fitted with the Ugandan delegation’s itinerary. The Secretary of CPA Scotland Branch was asked to ensure that this information was passed to Ugandan officials to take forward if appropriate.

41. A discussion about the format of the CPA Annual Plenary Conference took place. Topics included the length of the business programme and cultural tours. The discussion also touched upon benefits to Members and officials gained by attending CPA conferences, seminars and study groups. Members also discussed the possible impact that the current global economic situation might have on future participation at CPA events and on the content of conference programmes. The delegation noted that the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament were thinking along similar lines.
42. The delegation was pleased to hear that officials from Northern Ireland would assist UK Branch during the CPA Annual Conference which would be held in London in 2011.

Conclusion

43. The CPA Northern Ireland Branch Executive Committee extended a very warm welcome to the delegation. The Presiding Officer also extended an open invitation to Scotland Branch to visit at any time. The delegation was content that all objectives had been met. The delegation was particularly pleased at the volume of information gathered in relation to engagement, which surpassed expectations.

44. The delegation expresses grateful thanks to William Hay MLA, for giving his time and for extending generous hospitality to the delegation. The delegation also records their thanks to their fellow parliamentarians who were very generous with their time and very open in sharing their knowledge and experiences. During the visit the delegation met with the Rev Robert Coulter MLA, Mr Simon Hamilton MLA, Mr David McClarty MLA, Mr Stephen Moutray MLA, Mr Declan O'Loan MLA and Ms Dawn Purvis MLA. Finally the delegation would like to thank Dr Gareth McGrath, Sheila McClelland, Louise Simpson, Nicola Rafferty and Pamela Carson for arranging an interesting and informative programme and who were also very generous sharing knowledge and their time with the delegation.

45. Post visit actions and recommendations are attached at Annex B.
Visit to the Northern Ireland Assembly from Sunday 26 to Monday 27 September by Members of the CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee

Draft Programme

Sunday 26 September

10.45 Meet at Scottish Parliament
14.00 Check in for ferry crossing from Cairnryan to Larne
15.00 Ferry departs Cairnryan
16.00 Ferry arrives in Larne
17.30 Arrive at hotel foyer

Monday 27 September

10.00 Arrival at West Door Parliament Buildings
10.10 Tour of Parliament Buildings
10.45 Engagement Strategy Presentation
   **Dr Gareth McGrath, Director of Engagement and Louise Simpson, Head of Outreach Services**
11.30 Discussions on Selection Process and Twining
   **Ms Sheila McClelland, Head of Education & Outreach**
12.30 Viewing of the Plenary
13.00 Meeting of Executive Branches
14.00 Depart Parliament Buildings for ferry
16.30 Check in for crossing from Larne to Troon
17.30 Ferry departs Larne
19.30 Ferry arrives in Troon
22.00 Delegation arrives back in Edinburgh
Post Visit Action and Recommendations

a. Members of the delegation recommended that the Clerk/Chief Executive should be aware of the delegation’s experience with a view to informing future travel policy for Members and staff travelling to Northern Ireland who were considering environmentally friendly travel options (paragraphs 5 and 6 refer).

b. The delegation recommended that information about the following initiatives as described in paragraphs 7, 10, 11 and 12-18 inclusive, should be passed on to Scottish Parliament officials for information, and if appropriate, consideration:

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* event (paragraph 7 refers).
- Political leadership programme for Assembly Members (paragraphs 10 and 11 refers).
- The 5 day module on legislative studies for students, developed by Queen’s University, Belfast and the Northern Ireland Assembly (paragraph 12 refers).
- The bursary assisted programme for internships at the Northern Ireland Assembly (paragraph 13 refers).
- Women’s Day initiative (paragraph 15 refers).
- Work experience programme for secondary school pupils (paragraph 16 refers).
- The Northern Ireland Assembly Business Trust (paragraphs 17 and 18 refers).

c. The delegation agreed that the Project Information Document for the Technical Assistance Project and the Evaluation Report should be shared with Northern Ireland Assembly officials (paragraph 26 refers).

d. The delegation concluded that the existing arrangements for selecting Members to attend CPA conferences, seminars and events should be maintained. Furthermore, the delegation was also of the view that if other ideas or practices came to light to improve the openness and transparency of the current system, these should be carefully considered. The delegation further agreed that arrangements should be put in place to ensure that all Members are aware of existing arrangements for selecting representatives to attend CPA conferences and seminars (paragraphs 28-35 refers).

e. The Secretary of CPA Scotland Branch was asked to ensure that the offer from the CPA Northern Ireland Branch to facilitate a visit by the Ugandan delegation was passed to Ugandan officials to take forward (paragraph 40 refers).

f. The Branch Secretary was asked to monitor developments on the aforementioned suggestions and recommendations and to update the Executive Committee prior to dissolution in 2011.