



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# **International Relations: Parliamentary travel By correspondence**

## **Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 23**

### **Executive summary**

1. The Corporate Body is invited to consider forthcoming overseas parliamentary travel and, in accordance with Section 2, paragraph 62 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament in relation to receipt by Members of travel, hospitality etc., approve the details of the travel and other costs associated with the outward visit below.

### **Issues and options**

2. Presiding Officer Alison Johnstone MSP; Finlay Carson MSP (Convener of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee) and Collette Stevenson MSP (Member of the Criminal Justice Committee, and the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee) will undertake an outward visit to North America from 13 April to 22 April 2023 to attend the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Tartan Day and visit the House of Commons of the Parliament of Canada, Ottawa, and the National Assembly of Québec.
3. Every year the NYC Tartan Day Parade takes place in April, marching up Sixth Avenue amongst tens of thousands of spectators in person and online. It is the highlight of a weeklong series of Scottish themed festivities which will include over 3,000 bagpipers, Highland dancers, clan organisations and Scottish dog breeds.
4. The Presiding Officer has been invited to lead a delegation to represent the Scottish Parliament. Representatives of the Scottish Government, and other Scottish organisations and business will also be in attendance.
5. Following the events in New York, the delegation has been invited by Speaker Anthony Rota to visit the Parliament of Canada in Ottawa, and by Speaker Nathalie Roy to visit the National Assembly of Québec. In each legislature, the programme will consist of meeting Speakers, attending parliamentary business, meeting various committees to discuss issues of shared interest, and considering key procedural and

corporate issues, including management of parliamentary business, equal participation, sustainability and ways of working.

6. The Presiding Officer will lead the delegation, giving speeches on behalf of the Parliament at a number of events to mark National Tartan Day. She will also meet with both Speakers in Ottawa and the Speaker of the National Assembly of Québec to share experiences, consider issues of mutual interest and build on long-standing close relationships between the Scottish Parliament and Canadian legislatures.
7. Finlay Carson MSP and Collette Stevenson MSP will also take part in a number of visits and discussions relevant to their particular committee interests.

## **Resource implications**

8. The estimated cost for this visit is £22,000 which covers travel, accommodation, meals and appropriate incidental expenses for the Presiding Officer, two MSPs and two accompanying officials (the Presiding Officer's Principal Private Secretary and the Head of International Relations).
9. Section 2, paragraph 62 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament states that certain overseas visits are excluded from the requirement to register where the travel and other costs are wholly met by the SPCB (in this case, from the IRO budget).

## **Governance**

10. 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 (IRO) 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.
11. This is the first time the Parliament has been able to be represented and attend Tartan Day since 2019. The organisers were particularly keen that the Parliament take part in this, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary event. The visit also allows the Parliament the opportunity to learn from two legislatures that we have close relations with.
12. The Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officers play a unique role in representing the Parliament abroad as well as developing relationships with other Parliaments. Face to face meetings with other Speakers and senior parliamentarians are an essential element of this. Visiting North

America enables the Scottish Parliament to contribute to promoting Scotland internationally. It also allows the opportunity to visit two legislatures, one at a federal level and another at a sub national level. This gives the Presiding Officer the opportunity to meet with three Speakers and several Parliamentarians across both legislatures. The visit will also allow Finlay Carson MSP and Collette Stevenson MSP to hold discussions with their committee counterparts and work with the Presiding Officer in discussions on wider parliamentary issues.

13. Participation by the Members would not be possible online. In person attendance allows MSPs to participate in face-to-face bilaterals with other Parliamentarians. They will also be able to attend various networking events and meet with organisations to discuss committee issues.
14. The only viable travel option between Edinburgh and New York, New York and Ottawa and Ottawa and Québec is by air. The CO<sub>2</sub>e footprint (return) per person for flying (economy class) is 2,157kg. Hotel accommodation booked in New York, Ottawa and Québec city are all within walking distance of the Parade, House of Commons and National Assembly of Québec.

## **Publication Scheme**

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

## **Decision**

16. 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 above.
17. The IRO will then notify the Members concerned that they do not need to register this travel.

**International Relations Office**

March 2023