

Parliamentary Bureau – Committee overseas travel

1. The Bureau is invited to consider two requests to approve overseas travel set out below.

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Introduction

2. As required under Rule 12.10 of Standing Orders, Bureau approval is sought for the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee (CEEAC) Committee to travel to Brussels on 3-5 November. It is intended that seven members of the Committee, if available, two clerks and one SPICe researcher will undertake the visit, which would run from Sunday to Tuesday.
3. Approval will be sought separately from the Conveners Group, which will consider the request at its next meeting.

Justification/benefit

4. The Committee has been undertaking an inquiry intended to feed into the Review of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). The focus of that inquiry has been—
 - How trade in goods and services between the EU and UK is currently working and if there are areas where it can be improved.
 - Whether there is an interest in developing the trading relationship further e.g., through an agreement on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS)¹ measures or on the opportunities for UK nationals to provide services in the EU.
 - Whether EU-UK relations in the future could build on elements of the Windsor Framework to encourage flexible and simple conditions for trade.
5. The purpose of the visit will be to promote the Committee's published report with a European audience; and to do so through a programme of meetings with the European institutions, notably the European Commission and the European Parliament.
6. It is expected that this audience will include MEPs (following the European Parliament elections), European Commission officials, as well as potentially one or more new Commissioners, representatives of Member States, third countries, and others.
7. The review of the TCA will take place in 2026, and the timing of the Committee's inquiry and publication of its report is intended to maximise the opportunity for its findings to inform that review in a meaningful way. The report will be shared with the Scottish Government, the UK Government, and the EU institutions.

¹ SPS measures ensure that food traded is safe to eat and animals and plants are free from pests and disease.

8. A key priority for the Committee this session has been developing inter-parliamentary relations and the visit is also intended to allow all Members of the Committee to build relations with the European Parliament including in relation to its role in scrutinising the TCA. The need to build informal relations at an EU level was something raised by a number of witnesses during the Committee's 2022 inquiry on the Scottish Government's international work.
9. For the reasons stated above – promoting the Committee's report with relevant EU bodies, building relationships with those bodies (in particular the European Parliament), and taking a cross-party approach – it would be of benefit if all Members of the Committee were to attend the visit.

Travel and costs

10. In order to maximise the time available for Members to engage in a full programme of meetings during the visit it will be necessary for Members to travel on the Sunday. This means that they will have almost two full days in Brussels in which to meet with as broad a range of people as possible.
11. From an earlier visit to Brussels this session, members were provided with additional information regarding travel options for the Brussels trip. The clerks had calculated the estimated CO₂e emissions attributed per passenger using this UK Government document: [Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2021](#), for emissions per kilometre travelled as follows –
 - Air travel: estimated emissions per passenger is approximately 242kgCO₂e.
 - Train: estimated emissions per passenger is approximately 48.51kgCO₂e
12. For that previous visit, having been provided with that information and given the option to fly or to travel by train, five Members of the Committee opted for the former and two chose the latter. Members have not as yet been canvassed for their preferred travel option for this proposed visit. However, if two did again decide on train travel, based on previous costings, it can be estimated that this would add £200-£300 to the overall cost.
13. The overall predicted costs for the trip based on flights are—

Costs	£
Return flights from Edinburgh to Brussels (10 people)	2,545
Overnight Allowance for 2 nights x 10 people	3,500
TOTAL	£6,045

Decision

14. The Committee seeks the Bureau's approval for travel to Brussels and for the associated expenditure as detailed in Annexe A.

Committee team
June 2024

Annexe A

Visit to Brussels**Travel**

10 economy class air fares from Edinburgh to Brussels	£ 2545
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Subtotal	2545
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Expenses

2 x overnight allowance for 10 people	3500
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Total		6045
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Costs incurred in current financial year

Total	<u>6045</u>
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Cost Codes

Committee Travel	Cost
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SP414030	2545
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Committee Expenses

SP414035	3500
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Finance and Public Administration Committee

Introduction

1. As required under Rule 12.10 of Standing Orders, Bureau approval is sought for the Finance and Public Administration (FPA) Committee to travel to Tallinn on 23-26 September 2024. It is intended that up to six members of the Committee would attend the visit, along with two clerks, and that the visit would involve two full days of meetings.
2. Approval is being sought separately from the Conveners Group, which will consider the request at its meeting on 26 June. The Bureau's approval is therefore contingent on the Conveners Group granting the request the following day. Approval from both bodies before summer recess would allow arrangements to be made during the summer period.

Justification/benefit

3. The FPA Committee has committed to a three-year programme of scrutiny of the Scottish Government's public service reform programme (PSR). In the first year (2023), it carried out a dedicated inquiry which examined the Scottish Government's objectives for reform and progress made to date. In years 2 and 3, the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny will include specific strands of work on reform, allowing it to continue to monitor progress and then evaluate outcomes achieved by the end of the parliamentary session. The FPA Committee's remit specifically includes PSR and public administration, as well as finance. All three aspects of the Committee's remit are engaged with this inquiry and this year's work on reform will directly inform its pre-budget 2025-26 scrutiny into Managing Scotland's Finances: A Strategic Approach.
4. The Committee's focus on PSR stems from the Scottish Government's view that PSR is crucial element of ensuring fiscal sustainability, particularly in the context of significant pressure on Scotland's public finances. Indeed, the Scottish Government's 2022 Resource Spending Review identified the need for "an enhanced focus on delivering efficiency savings across the public sector" over the life of the Parliament, including through: digitalisation, maximising revenue through public sector innovation, reform of the public sector estate and public body landscape, and improving public procurement. The Scottish Government has committed to providing six-monthly updates to support the Committee's ongoing scrutiny of its PSR programme.
5. As noted above, a key element of the Scottish Government's PSR programme is digitalisation, with the aim of achieving more effective and efficient public services. In its Report on the Scottish Budget 2024-25 published earlier this year, the FPA Committee concluded that much greater progress is needed with digitalisation given its potential to achieve efficiencies in the current financial climate, as well as improving public services and productivity.
6. The OECD has described Estonia as a "frontrunner in digital governance and innovation", which is one of the factors that allowed it "to cushion better than

others the sanitary and economic shock from the pandemic”². In 1998, the Estonian Parliament adopted the development of Estonian e-Government, initiating a digital transformation to increase efficiency of its processes and delivery of public services. Now, 98% of Estonia’s public services are online and it is estimated that this approach has saved the Estonian administration 804 working years compared to previous calendar years. Estonia’s approach to AI began in 2018 with a three-year strategy, which has evolved into an action plan with specific key performance indicators and budgetary estimates for 2024-26.

7. A fact-finding visit to Estonia would inform the Committee’s ongoing scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s reform programme and enable it to make informed and practical recommendations to the Scottish Government which would maximise digitalisation opportunities, including AI, to achieve more efficient and effective public services in Scotland. A visit in September 2024 would allow quicker progress to be made, with recommendations being included in the Committee’s pre-budget report in October/November 2024, and an opportunity for the Scottish Government to take these on board when developing its Scottish Budget 2025.²⁶, when it has said difficult decisions may be required.
8. A detailed programme of meetings would be arranged over two days to enable Committee Members to hear first hand from a range of people and groups about how digital transformation has been achieved, the challenges and opportunities based on the lived experience of those delivering and experience it at a national level. This type of dedicated programme and outcomes that will arise would not be able to be achieved without an in person visit involving the majority of Committee members. This would be the Committee’s first overseas visit this parliamentary session.
9. Officials from the Estonian Parliament (*Riigikogu*) and the British Embassy in Tallinn are able to support the visit and would seek to design the visit programme around the FPA Committee’s key areas of interest, including arranging meetings with the following people and organisations—
 - Members of the Riigikogu’s Finance Committee,
 - Members of the Riigikogu’s Economy Committee, which scrutinises the Government’s digitalisation programme,
 - The Ministry of Finance, which is responsible for state governance reform,
 - The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, which has responsibility for digitalisation,
 - Officials from the e-Estonia programme, which provides briefings on the country’s digitalisation transformation, including areas of best practice,
 - The National Audit Office, which has reported on the digitalisation programme,
 - The Estonian Association of IT and Telecommunications, a voluntary organisation which represents the sector and promotes innovation in a digital society, based on a vision of “a smart Estonia”, aiming to improve cooperation between the private and public sector, and

² The OECD’s Economic Survey of Estonia (2022)

- Academia and/or other organisations representing public service users of digital systems in Estonia.

Travel and costs

10. Two full days of meetings would take place on 24 and 25 September 2024. Outward and return travel would need to take place on 23 and 26 September respectively as these are the days of the week when flights to and from Edinburgh (via Helsinki) are scheduled.
11. The Committee's predecessor received vouchers for British Airways amounting to £300, which clerks would seek to use to put towards flights if possible. Clerks would seek to ensure value for money and look for opportunity to minimise costs wherever possible. Opportunities to travel by more environmental modes of transport, such as by travelling from Helsinki to Tallinn by ferry, would also be explored.
12. The anticipated costs for the visits are set out below.

Costs	£
Return flights from Edinburgh to Tallinn (up to 8 people)	2,960
Accommodation, breakfast, lunch and dinner for 3 nights (up to 8 people)	6,000
10% contingency	896
TOTAL	9,856

Decision

13. The Committee seeks the Bureau's approval for travel to Tallinn in relation to its ongoing public service reform scrutiny and for the associated expenditure as detailed in Annexe B. As noted above, this request is contingent on Conveners Group approval for the visit which will be considered the following day, on 26 June 2024.

Committee team
June 2024

Annexe B

Fact finding visit to Tallinn**Travel**

Outward flights from Edinburgh to Tallinn via Helsinki	£160 x 8 people = £1,280
Return flights from Tallinn to Edinburgh via Helsinki	£160 x 8 people = £1,280
Taxis/mileage for travel to and from airport	£400
Subtotal	£2,960

Expenses

Hotel accommodation, breakfast, lunch and dinner for 8 people for 3 nights (overnight allowance £250 x 8 x 3)	£6,000
Subtotal	£6,000
Contingency approx 10%	£896
Total	£9,856

Costs incurred in current financial year

Total	<u>9,856*</u>
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Cost Codes

Committee Travel	Cost
SP414030	2,960

Committee Expenses	
SP414035	6,896

*This will be the FPA Committee's first overseas visit in this parliamentary session.