

Isle of Man Branch

Report of the Chair of the Branch Executive Committee for the period January 2024 to December 2024

Introduction

1. The aims of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are to promote knowledge of the constitutional, legislative, economic, social and cultural aspects of parliamentary democracy. It does this among other things by arranging Commonwealth Parliamentary Conferences, and other conferences, seminars, meetings and study groups; and by promoting visits between Members of the Branches of the Association.

Farewells & Welcomes

2. In May 2024, former Member of the House of Keys and Member of the Legislative Council, Eddie Lowey passed away. Mr Lowey was an extremely active member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, acting as Regional representative for two three-year terms and Chair of the Isle of Man Branch from 1990 to 2001. He also attended numerous Plenary and Regional conferences, and other parliamentary visits. He will be missed by his former colleagues.



Eddie Lowey on his retirement in 2013 with now President Skelly and now Speaker Watterson

3. We welcome our first female Lord Bishop, Rt Reverend Tricia Hillas. The Lord Bishop is no stranger to parliamentary sittings, having previously been Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Restructuring the CPA

4. Throughout 2024 and 2025, the CPA internationally is restructuring itself from a UK based charity to an international organisation. Legislation has progressed through the parliament in Westminster to give this new legal status which is accompanied by a new constitution.

On-Island activities in 2024

5. To mark International Women's Day on 8th March, we invited young women from Ballakermeen High School to hold a debate in the House of Keys Chamber with the former President of Tynwald, Clare Christian OBE, serving as Speaker. Ahead of the sitting a number of students had the opportunity to join a cross-regional webinar hosted by the Parliament of Malta in Valletta, the setting for the 10th CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Regional (BIMR) Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) conference where the Isle of Man was represented by Hon. Daphne Caine MHK, Ann Corlett MHK and Sarah Maltby MHK. The conference took for its theme 'Resilient Women: Moulding Girls into Strong Women'.



6. We marked Commonwealth Day by holding the annual Commonwealth Day Dinner at Douglas Golf Club on 15th March 2024. I was delighted to welcome Deputy Kristina Moore from the States Assembly of Jersey as our guest speaker. During her visit to the Island, Deputy Moore also found time to attend a short reception with members of the Tynwald Youth Select Committee.
7. In May 2024 Tynwald received a visit from the Clerk and Deputy Clerk to the House of Assembly of the British Virgin Islands for a week-long capacity-building programme aimed at giving the clerks an insight into the day-to-day operation of the Clerk of Tynwald's Office and its procedures and processes. Bethsaida Smith and Linton Leonard observed a sitting of the House of Keys and a private meeting of the

Public Accounts Committee and met with parliamentary staff across the Office to understand roles and responsibilities.

8. In 2024, Junior Tynwald was held on Monday 15th July. Junior Tynwald provides the opportunity for young people to experience and engage with parliament and participate in debates including voting in a democratic decision-making process. Questions, submitted by the students, were asked of, and answered by, actual Ministers and Department members, which included topics as wide-ranging as the effect of the teacher strikes through to a joined-up strategy for electric vehicle charging.
9. Two motions were moved during the sitting. The first motion, moved by Libby Delaney from St Ninian's High School, 'That Junior Tynwald holds the government's plans to increase the Island's population to 100,000 in the next 15 years is more detrimental than beneficial' failed. The second motion, moved by Freya Gelling from Castle Rushen High School, 'That Junior Tynwald is of the opinion that the government should make more affordable housing available for young people' was carried.

The Outstanding Participant Award went to Alexandra Cowley from St Ninian's High School; Alexandra is also Chair of the Tynwald Youth Select Committee. I would again like to congratulate Alexandra and all the students who took part in this year's Junior Tynwald for their well-considered, relevant and topical debating.



10. On 5th July at Tynwald Day, the honoured guests included the following parliamentarians from CPA Branches:

- The Rt Hon. Alison Johnstone MSP, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament
- Dr Stephen Aiken OBE MLA, Deputy Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly
- An Leas-Cheann Comhairle Catherine Connolly TD, Deputy Chairperson of Dáil Éireann, Oireachtas

11. With the support of the CPA Isle of Man Branch, Tynwald continued to welcome visiting groups from primary schools throughout the year. In 2024 this support enabled 17 primary schools to book a school tour leading to 427 pupils visiting Legislative Buildings.

Off-Island activities in 2024

12. In January 2024 a delegation of Tynwald Members embarked on a study visit to the Houses of the Oireachtas in Dublin. The Hon. Laurence Skelly, President of Tynwald, led the delegation of eight Members: Rob Callister MHK, Ann Corlett MHK, Paul Craine MLC, Tim Glover MHK, Dawn Kinnish MLC, Rob Mercer MLC and Stu Peters MHK. The primary objective of the visit was to learn more about Committee work, gain a broader understanding of current issues of mutual concern and for newer Members to become acquainted with the work, history and functioning of the Houses of the Oireachtas, and building connections between Members.



13. Throughout 2024 the Office of the Clerk of Tynwald continued its work with the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands under a partnership arrangement funded and facilitated by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) last year. In February, Francisca Gale, Research and Scrutiny Support Manager, travelled to Honiara to kickstart a series of online workshops beginning with the topic of Managing a Committee Inquiry. During the week she led several workshops on committee practices, parliamentary research and report writing.
14. Coinciding with International Women's Day in March, a delegation of three Tynwald Members joined fellow female parliamentarians to take part in the 10th CPA BIMR CWP conference. Hon. Daphne Caine MHK, Ann Corlett MHK and Sarah Maltby MHK travelled to the conference which was hosted by the Parliament of Malta. Topics included the issues and challenges affecting women across the Commonwealth such as crimes against women, lack of women in leadership, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, and cultural and societal inequality and discrimination.
15. To mark the 75th anniversary of the Commonwealth of Nations in March, I was very pleased to be invited to take part in the Special Celebration and Summit hosted by the Speaker of the House of Commons in London. Accompanied by the Clerk of Tynwald, Jonathan King, I travelled to London for the Commonwealth Day Service of Celebration at Westminster Abbey, a Commonwealth Flag-Raising Ceremony and the laying of a wreath at the Commonwealth Memorial Gates. I also attended a CPA special meeting at the Speaker's House which provided an opportunity for the chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger MP and the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg to update members on the progress of the CPA Status Bill proposing bespoke status akin to an international organisation and to outline the latest programmes and activities for CPA branches.



16. In May, the 53rd BIMR Conference¹ was held in St Helena with three Members of Tynwald in attendance: myself, Hon. Daphne Caine MHK and John Wannenburgh MHK; we were supported by the Clerk of Tynwald, Jonathan King. The general theme of the conference was '*Addressing Challenges to Sustainable Development in Times of Global Uncertainty*'. We joined delegates from 10 parliaments and legislatures across the region in exploring topics such as: digital reforms and Artificial Intelligence; climate emergency; tourism development; and, benefits of a youth parliament. The programme also included the BIMR AGM and a Commonwealth Women's Parliamentarians (CWP) session and provided an opportunity for delegates to participate in the St Helena Day celebrations on 21st May 2024. During the conference, a presentation was made to the Speaker of the St Helena legislature marking the connection between our two Islands, back to the tenure of Colonel Mark Wilks who was Governor of St Helena and later Speaker of the House of Keys.



17. It was a great privilege to represent Tynwald at the Scottish Parliament's 25th anniversary event on 28th September 2025. It was very pleasing to receive such a warm welcome from the Presiding Officer and indeed so many Members of the Scottish Parliament. The celebrations took place in the presence of HM King, who arrived with the Queen and his escort of longbowmen and the Honours of Scotland, Scotland's Crown jewels.
18. This year it was the turn of Jersey to host the Crown Dependencies Network Event. The Crown Dependencies Parliamentary Network was established in the Isle of Man in 2019 under the auspices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It

¹ <https://www.uk-cpa.org/media/px0pi2ae/53rd-british-islands-and-mediterranean-conference-report.pdf>

brings together parliamentarians from the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey and Alderney to share experiences, discuss matters of common concern and strengthen relations between the Crown Dependencies by working together for mutually beneficial outcomes.

Paul Craine MLC and Dawn Kinnish MLC joined parliamentarians from Jersey and Guernsey for the two-day network event in October which included plenary sessions on 'constituency support' and 'public engagement'. A Q&A session was also held relating to shared experiences between the islands, including Assisted Dying legislation and housing.

19. Also in October, Hon. Clare Barber MHK and Hon. Jane Poole-Wilson MHK attended a CPA UK legislative strengthening seminar at Westminster aimed at addressing modern slavery in supply chains. The programme provided an opportunity for more than 50 parliamentarians from 17 legislatures across the Commonwealth to explore issues relating to modern slavery in supply chains and identify techniques and tactics to bring about a reduction in forced labour and other human exploitation practices through effective legislation.



20. The 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was held in Sydney, Australia in November and the theme of the Conference was *'Engage, Empower, Sustain: Charting the Course for Resilient Democracy'*. The Conference brings together over 600 Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and decision makers from across the Commonwealth for a unique conference and networking opportunity.

Tynwald was represented at the Conference by Claire Christian MHK and Rob Callister MHK, accompanied by the Deputy Clerk of Tynwald, Joann Corkish. Tynwald delegates had the opportunity to attend workshops and discuss topics of interest

including: digital innovation, modernisation, and the use of Artificial Intelligence in legislatures; immigration; national climate planning – moving from commitment to scalable action; legislating against gender based violence; and creating inclusive elections for persons with disabilities.

21. Also in November, Deputy Clerk of Tynwald, Joann Corkish, and I attended the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees (CAPAC) Meeting and the CPA BIMR Public Accounts Committee Network event, both held in Malta.

22. During the year the Branch had representation on four CPA networks:

- I was honoured to be appointed Chair of the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees and look forward to working with my fellow parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth;
- Ann Corlett MHK sat on the BIMR Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Steering Committee;
- Kerry Sharpe MLC acted as the Tynwald representative for the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network;
- Hon. Daphne Caine MHK and Hon. Tim Crookall MHK sat on the CPA BIMR Climate Emergency Working Group.

23. Former President, Steve Rodan OBE was our nominee on a proposed CPA Alumni Advisory Group, but this Group did not meet.

Virtual activities in 2024

24. Over two half-days in January, Michelle Haywood MHK and Tim Johnston MHK completed a virtual CPA BIMR Election Observation training course which introduced the theory and practice of election observation. Completing this course allows Members to participate in future CPA BIMR election observation missions.

25. As part of its work with the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands, the Office of the Clerk of Tynwald hosted a series of virtual workshops involving members of staff from across the Office to cover topics such as managing committee inquiries; research approaches; protocols and customer care; organisational structure; and information and communication technology.

26. We continue to encourage our Members and officers to use CPA UK's online training resource, *The CPA Parliamentary Academy*.² This central learning hub contains extensive learning opportunities for parliamentarians, clerks and parliamentary officials on key thematic topics.

² <https://www.cpahq.org/parliamentary-academy/>

27. It is essential that any legislature be open and transparent and for this reason the costs relating to any travel undertaken by Members are published on the Tynwald website.³

Conclusion

28. The education and training of Tynwald Members remains a key priority and thanks to our Branch membership we are afforded many opportunities by the CPA to develop and build our capacity. I am pleased that our Branch continues to support the CPA Regional and Plenary conferences and would encourage more Members to explore opportunities to represent Tynwald in other jurisdictions.
29. As a small nation that is not in itself 'sovereign', the CPA provides an opportunity for the Island to step onto the international stage, to encourage our parliamentarians to look upwards and outwards at emerging practices around the world. The benefits may be indirect, however I maintain the view that the small proportion of the 'Legislature' vote which is spent on CPA membership continues to be money well spent.
30. It remains my aim as your Chairman to optimise the value we obtain from these opportunities and I shall continue to do so in the future.

The Hon. Juan Watterson SHK
Chair of the CPA Branch Executive Committee
March 2025

³ <https://tynwald.im/members-officers/remuneration-and-allowances>