

## **Networking event Tallinn, Estonia. 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

### **Report form Russell George MS**

I am reporting on my visit to Tallinn from the 14th to the 16th of November, 2024. The purpose of this visit was to participate in a European Networking event, hosted at the Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament), and to foster greater awareness of Wales and the Senedd among the attendees.

Tallinn is the capital of Estonia. Situated on a bay in north Estonia, on the shore of the Gulf of Finland of the Baltic Sea, it has a population of 461,000. Tallinn is the main governmental, financial, industrial, and cultural centre of Estonia.

On the eve of the main event, I attended a networking dinner with parliamentarians and representatives from across the Nordic-Baltic nations and other European countries. As a parliamentarian from Wales, I had the honour of extending greetings and sharing information about Wales and the Senedd. This occasion provided an excellent opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with delegates and parliamentarians from Finland and Estonia, allowing us to compare the current political situations in our respective nations with those in Wales.

One of the highlights of the visit was a meeting with Lauri Hussar MP, the Speaker of the Riigikogu. During our conversation, we exchanged valuable insights into the parliamentary procedures and electoral systems of Wales and Estonia. The Speaker shared details about the Riigikogu's composition, election process, and the necessity of coalition governments due to the proportional representation system. The parliament has 101 members, and we had the opportunity to discuss the reforms in the Senedd that will take place ahead of the 2026 election.

We also discussed the relationships between national, regional, and local governments in Estonia and how they compare to those in Wales. Estonia is one of the least populous members of the European Union and NATO. It is a democratic unitary parliamentary republic, administratively subdivided into 15 areas.

The main networking event itself was an opportunity to meet with other parliamentarians. Along with a colleague attending, I presented the Estonian parliamentarians with love spoons and a commemorative coin on behalf of the St David's Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast for Wales. It was heartening to see the interest in engaging with others, and their interest in the work of the Senedd.

Another significant aspect of my visit was participating in a discussion on agriculture and forestry policy with parliamentarians from Estonia, Sweden, and Finland. I shared insights on the importance of farming to Wales and the ongoing national debate on the Welsh Government's Sustainable Farming Scheme and the UK Government's proposed changes to Inheritance Tax. We discovered many shared challenges in balancing environmental factors with food production and explored various policy responses.

Lastly, I had a productive meeting with Annely Akkermann, the Chair of the Finance Committee in the Riigikogu. We discussed current financial priorities and challenges, and compared budget scrutiny processes in Wales and Estonia. This meeting was extremely informative and provided valuable perspectives on how we can improve our parliamentary and budget processes in the Senedd.

In conclusion, it was an honour to represent Wales and this European Networking event. My participation allowed me to promote Wales and its parliamentary and governmental efforts in engaging with other parliamentarians. The meetings with the Speaker of the Riigikogu and the Chair of the Finance Committee were particularly enlightening and provided much food for thought.