

Russell George MS – Health Research visit, Helsinki, March 2024

Purpose of visit

The visit was an opportunity to provide and learn more about the Finnish healthcare system and the issues that Finland face, how they are combatting these issues and if there is anything that Wales can learn from any success stories. I also went to Finland to learn more about their healthcare initiatives, healthcare technology and learn more about how their Health and Social Care committee works and is structured. I also met with politicians from other countries to discuss shared partnerships and the importance of their relationships with Wales.

Political Networking Event

I met with political leaders from other Scandinavian countries, including a Swedish GP, and discussed issues facing Swedish healthcare, recruitment and retention.

Finnish Health Committee

I met with MP Laiho who is the Chair of the Finnish Parliaments Health and Social Care committee. I also met with other members of the committee. We discussed a wide range of topics including how their committee works and the current work they are undertaking. The Finnish Health and Social Care committee meet most days when the parliament is sitting. They are currently working on scrutinising the new Health Care model where a major change in the public healthcare system came into force in 2023. Now, Finland have 22 newly formed "wellbeing services county councils". These councils are planned to organise the healthcare and welfare related services in their respective areas. I also discussed the Senedd's Health and Social Committee's work and our forward work programme.

This visit also included a wider tour of the Finnish parliament. There was an opportunity to watch their plenary session in action and meet with other Finnish MPs.

ICAN (Finnish Research Flagship dedicated to solving the cancer challenge through cutting-edge discovery and innovation.)

I visited Biomedicum Helsinki and met with the iCAN team. I also met with Mirjami Tran Minh, the Senior Planning Officer of the Finnish Cancer Center FICAN. We discussed Finland's cancer research flagship program and I was given a presentation on the latest of the cancer strategy work that is currently being done in Finland. ICAN is a Finnish Research programme that is dedicated to solving the cancer challenge through cutting-edge discovery and innovation. I had the chance to see new AI and robot technology in action and was given a demonstration from the medical research team.

Parliamentary event – British and Irish Parliamentary Association

I met with Irish parliamentarians as well as other parliamentarians from across Britain and Northern Ireland to discuss bilateral relations and to share best practice over issues our countries face. I met with BIPA – European Affairs committee to discuss future security cooperation between the UK and Ireland in the context of an ever changing geopolitical landscape and the future direction of EU security policy, including implementation of the European Agenda on Security, and the implications of these developments for

future security cooperation between the UK and Ireland.

Medical Advisers to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health: Taina Mäntyranta (Chief Medical Adviser) + Hanna Tonlen (Programme Director, Adjunct Professor). We met at the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in Helsinki.

I met with Taina Mäntyranta, who works for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. I also met with Hanna Tonlen who is also a civil servant within the ministry. We discussed the current challenges facing Finnish healthcare, health of the nation which included obesity and staff shortages. I received a presentation on the Good Work Programme which was launched by the Finnish government in 2023 to ensure the sufficiency and availability of personnel in healthcare, social welfare and rescue services. I was told that the most effective measures for improvement are linked to improving the functioning of the healthcare and social welfare service system by staggering the services and by responding appropriately to the personnel needs related to the services. At the same time, prevention, digital services, service coordination and possibilities for self-management of health are being targeted for strengthening.

Meeting with Merja Laine, a professor of Medicine at the University of Helsinki and a registered GP.

I met with Merja Laine who is a GP and lecturer on primary care at the University of Helsinki. We discussed the general overview of Finland's approach and model for managing cardiovascular diseases. I also learnt about how medical students prepare to transition into the health service from University. We also discussed Wales's approach to treatment options, waiting times and discharge systems and how these compare with Finland. We shared notes on our respective health systems and I asked about what solutions are being put into place for primary care in Finland with a view to adopting good clinical practice in Wales, UK.