



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Interim Covid Recovery Policy For SPS

28 February 2022

Reference: LG (2022) Paper 20

Executive summary

1. Leadership Group had a strategic discussion on 7 February to inform its policy position on an interim covid recovery policy for the Scottish Parliamentary Staffing group. Following the publication of the Scottish Government's new strategic framework for the management of covid 19, this paper captures the rationale and Leadership Group's proposed policy position for final agreement and next steps.

Issues and options

2. At present we are in covid recovery mode, consistent with the Scottish Government's new Strategic Framework for managing covid 19. We are bringing back services onsite in a phased manner. Legally required public health protection measures will cease on 21st March. We will consider new guidance to ensure we are still taking an appropriate balance of measures to operate safely whilst returning Parliamentary operations towards normality. We expect normal physical capacities can be achieved at Holyrood from w/c 21 March onwards.
3. The Scottish Government have asked employers to consider hybrid working and Leadership Group is already committed, under our NWOW goal, to achieve more flexibility for Members and our staffing group post covid restrictions. This is flexibility in how we work, as well as when and where. Because we have an inclusive definition of NWOW it should have relevance to everyone, including those whose role requires being at Holyrood for some or all of the working week.
4. When we phased back services last summer/autumn, we opened Holyrood to all staff for more optimal service delivery, team collaboration, line management, training etc. This is the current approach being adopted again whilst physical distancing and other restrictions are in place.
5. However, in the context of the strategic changes to covid management, Leadership Group has agreed that we now need to collectively shape an interim policy position which can be consistently applied across the organisation. This will be an important step in our stewardship: out of legal restrictions, which have imposed a certain way of working, through this important phase of covid recovery, towards a more stable, effective future way of working [NWOW].

6. We have considered the following rationale in framing our interim policy position:

- The Scottish Government have a new strategic approach to management of the virus; this takes account of high vaccination rates and improvements in treatment as well as recognising other harms resulting from public health measures. Overall management of the virus is shifting towards the longer term and a more sustainable way of living and working for the foreseeable future. Our interim policy is set in this broader context.
- Leadership Group has a clear commitment to adopting more flexibility in how, where and when we work in the medium term. We have defined the principles and goals and acknowledged that this will require change management, investment and capability development. We are clear that the current temporary imposed way of working is not the blueprint for New Ways of Working. The interim policy can support us by creating the conditions and opportunities to collaborate and experiment to achieve successful change.
- Our staff survey results show an impact on our staff, teams and culture of being required to work the way we have over for the last 2 years. For some staff there have been significant periods since they were last onsite regularly with their teams, wider SPS and Members. We recognise some of the challenges - service delivery is less than optimal, collaboration is impacted, less cohesion, fatigue with transitory arrangements and general uncertainty for the future.
- This Parliament has not benefitted from more normal running for over 2 years. Members will therefore have differing experiences and expectations of service delivery in the period ahead. Given it is SPS role to support Parliament and Members, it would be beneficial to have a more normal period of operations so that we can assess how Members and their staff are adapting how they work, and we can ensure that we make changes to our services and how we work in a way that continues to meet Members' and business needs.
- For everyone – Members and staff – there is a sliding scale of needs and expectations with having established a different routine and changed way of working over this crisis. For some staff and Members there will be other personal issues, arising from the public health crisis, they are now dealing with. We should therefore ensure clear and timely communication of our approach and that within the overall policy position, we are providing additional support for the small number of staff who may have more challenging personal circumstances.

Policy development

7. **Current position:** In addition to current essential staff, we have resumed face to face helpdesk services, and more staff are now onsite to support the return of public access to the chamber gallery, increasing events and tours, education visits. From w/c 21 February we are also supporting staff to come onsite for those wider reasons which we've recognised as being valuable before – team cohesion, collaboration, training, meetings and workshops etc. This will still be

within physical distancing capacities, but offers a gradual, phased opening up for staff purposes, including familiarisation with Holyrood.

8. From w/c 21 March legal restrictions will ease and move into guidance which means that normal capacity is available at Holyrood. From this date we are planning a return to normal chamber and committee room capacities and opening to the public [hybrid parliamentary business and remote voting will still be available]. From Easter recess [April] there will be a greater focus on promoting visits to the Parliament and an increase in our wider engagement activities.
9. **Interim Covid Recovery Policy:** This is an opportunity to reset how we work across all offices. The policy is important because it is likely to be in place for the medium term, whilst we finalise the timescales and approach to NWOW. This is an interim policy bridging where we are coming from and where we want to go ie towards a more flexible, tailored approach under NWOW.
10. The policy attached at Annex A offers business areas flexibility within a framework which resets expectations for the whole staffing group. It sets us up for effective resumption of Parliamentary support services and creates the right environment to progress work under NWOW. We hope it can also start to address some of the organisational and cultural issues raised via the staff survey by providing more opportunities for in person formal and informal engagement.
11. We have discussed giving staff good notice and establishing a fair, consistent and supportive approach. We are offering a generous amount of notice to staff; the existing managers' guidance document has been updated to take account of all the latest Scottish Government guidance; and managers will be supported by our colleagues in People & Culture office as necessary.

Publication Scheme

12. This paper can be published once the Policy is approved.

Decision

13. Leadership Group is invited to:
 - (a) approve the interim covid recovery policy at Annex A;
 - (b) note the updated managers' guidance
 - (c) the engagement and communications plan to be presented at the meeting

**Michelle Hegarty,
Deputy Chief Executive**

Annex A

Scottish Parliamentary Staff: Interim Covid Recovery Policy

Background

At present we are in Covid Recovery, gradually phasing back services onsite at Holyrood, consistent with overall public health requirements. We have been operating in a way which is imposed, because of the pandemic and we recognise, through our staff survey and feedback from Members, that this is less than optimal.

Current legal restrictions, which have had a significant impact on our operations, will cease on 21 March. We will consider new Scottish Government guidance, to ensure we can operate safely and sustain business. We are planning that we will be able to return to a more fully functioning Parliament at Holyrood from this date onwards.

In the medium to longer term, we have a strategic ambition to choose a more flexible way of working for everyone – Members, Members' staff and SPS staff. We are calling this New Ways of Working. For SPS we aim to have flexible policies which enable our staff to be as productive as possible and enhance how we deliver our services. It will take time over session 6 to make changes and achieve our ambitions.

Purpose for Interim Covid Recovery Policy

Overall management of the virus is shifting towards the longer term and a more sustainable way of living and working. Within this broader context Leadership Group wants to reset how we all will work, after more than 2 years of imposed workplace restrictions and uncertainty. This is an important step in our stewardship from restrictions in how we work, through our covid recovery towards a more stable, sustainable and effective future way of working.

This policy aims to:

- Create certainty for SPS staff after a lengthy period of uncertainty and change.
- Ensure fairness, consistency of application, and flexibility – we are all being asked to reset, with flexibility at local office level to shape this according to business needs, team, and individual circumstances.
- Deliver optimal services onsite at Holyrood and remotely, recognising that formal and informal interactions between staff, and with Members, are an important part of excellent service delivery in our Parliament
- Respond to staff survey feedback which shows the negative impact of imposed workplace restrictions on our staff, teams and culture. Especially the

lack of face to face interaction and collaboration so many staff feel is valuable to how they work, their overall wellbeing and productivity.

- Create the right environment to progress work under New Ways of Working by bringing staff together again, and with Members and their staff, so that we can understand, experiment and shape more permanent changes to how we deliver our services. Many Members, and some of our staff, have never experienced a fully functioning Parliament at Holyrood; how we have had to work is not the blueprint for the future.

Leadership Group has agreed an Interim Covid Recovery Policy which will be applied to all parliamentary offices consistently by Group Heads. All staff have a role to play in bringing the Parliament back to its full role and in shaping how we change.

From 2 May 2022 every SPS staff member is expected to be onsite at Holyrood for at least part of their working week. This does not affect any agreed cohorts which are in place to support business resiliency at the current time.

Office Heads have flexibility within this policy framework to determine and agree the number of days onsite based on:

- Optimal business delivery for Members, Parliament, and other offices.
- Effective line management.
- Team collaboration and cohesion.
- Staff support and wellbeing.
- Personal development and training needs.
- Cross team delivery and collaboration including projects and other joint initiatives.
- Overall business resiliency.

Current access arrangements to Holyrood, effective from February recess continue to be supported for all staff. This will be updated in accordance with new Scottish Government guidance.

Office Heads/Team Leaders have an important role in discussing and agreeing specific arrangements for their function, with regular review points to ensure business needs and team needs are being met and adjustments made accordingly. All office heads/team leaders should ensure their team arrangements support effective cross team/business area delivery and other activities such as projects and working groups that may require onsite collaboration.

Group Heads will authorise office plans to ensure that services to Parliament and Members are consistent with overall operational requirements, as defined and agreed with SPCB, and business resiliency.

We expect the majority of staff to mainly come back onsite between Monday and Friday, although for some teams this is likely to include weekend working as we resume public access and wider services.

There are a number of other operational changes which will require staff to attend Holyrood in future to deal with specific issues more effectively e.g. IT equipment issues, pass studio, etc. and these will be issued via updated operational guidance.

We recognise that for everyone– Members and staff – there is a sliding scale of needs and expectations with having established a different routine and changed way of working over this crisis. For some there will be other personal issues, arising from the public health crisis, which need more tailored support within our local management approach. Please see the updated Guidance which sets out more advice.

The Scottish Government's new strategic framework makes it clear that the management of the pandemic may change, and this could mean changes in how we work. We also need to spend time investing in New Ways of Working before we make permanent changes to how we work.

These arrangements will come into effect from Monday, 2 May 2022 and will be in place until at least 24 September 2022, but this is just an indicative date that we will continue to keep under review. 24 September is the expiry date for statutory coronavirus (Covid-19) requirements.

Guidance for Managers and Staff is available to support the implementation of these arrangements.