



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# Members' Interviews on Parliamentary Services - 2 October 2023

Reference: LT (2023) Paper 21

## Executive summary

1. One of LT's key responsibilities is to assess overall satisfaction with the delivery of our services by Members. Members' interviews have been a key part of this assurance as part of our performance reporting.
2. Prior to the pandemic, LT interviewed a small selection of Members on a quarterly basis for inclusion in the quarterly performance report. Interviews were paused during the pandemic. On resumption a large survey where the majority of Members were contacted was conducted in February 2022. In June 2022, after considering the success of that survey LT agreed a new approach for regular surveys on a bi-annual basis rather than quarterly, aiming to interview 35 Members each exercise, new interview questions and, involving Office Heads and Team Leaders on a rotational basis. Two surveys have been carried out on that basis in Q3 2022-23 and Q1 2023-24.
3. Following the initial discussion at LT on 28 August 2023, as agreed LT is invited to discuss and consider the following options for undertaking future Members' interviews:
  - Move to once a year
  - Stay with twice a year
  - Return to quarterly LT interviews
  - Move to biennial
  - Online surveys only

# Issues and options

## Purpose of Members' interviews

4. The purpose of the Members' Interviews is to take stock on delivery of current parliamentary services (as defined in the [delivery plan](#)) in relation to:
  - Scrutiny & debate
  - Public involvement
  - Members support & resources
5. The aim is to identify & understand any common or recurring themes, drawing out what is working well; any barriers or concerns; suggestions to enable us to make any adjustments or improvements.
6. LT receive a presentation and feedback on the survey findings. Thereafter, the SPCB receives a paper and presentation providing high level summary of feedback together with our response (action already taken, being progressed or to be taken) to areas raised for SPCB discussion.
7. As well as providing valuable feedback, the interviews also give an opportunity for senior managers to gain insight into a wider range of services and the organisational experience that brings.

## Resource Commitment

8. The Office of the Deputy Chief Executive (ODCE) manage the overall process on behalf of LT. This includes guidance and co-ordination of the interview process, interview allocation, returns analysis and production of the necessary reports and presentations. Communications and guidance are issued to Office Heads/Team Leaders, LT, the SPCB and Members. The other key resource factor is the time taken by Office Heads/Team Leaders and LT in securing the interview, the interview itself as well as writing up the feedback and submitting. There can also be additional work in feeding back specific issues to the relevant business area. Experiences on the length of time involved for interviewers is mixed, depending on the ease of securing an interview and the nature of the feedback. The interviews themselves take between 15 to 45 minutes, with an average of 30 minutes.
9. Although Office Heads/Team Leaders are invited to take part on the interviews on a rotational basis, some decline due to work commitments. Where possible, ODCE reallocates to others who may have struggled to secure an interview or who have indicated a willingness to carry out another interview in addition to their allocation.

## Response

10. Pre-pandemic a review of the Members interview was undertaken due to the difficulty in LT securing sufficient interviews with the allocated Members. Typically, returns in the final year would be based on an average of 6 Members per quarter.
11. The three surveys since 2021 have been aligned with the Member related operational areas in the Delivery Plan, looking at a broader range of services and the feedback from both LT and the SPCB has been positive.
12. The response rates for the three exercises are shown in the table below:

Date	Response rate (to Members contacted)	Number of interviews
February 2022	50%	40
Q3 2022-23	52%	22
Q1 2023-24	38%	14

13. Note, each exercise is based on the number of available interviewees – an initial Member is allocated, with another allocated if the first is unable to participate (FM and Cabinet Secretaries are excluded). The February 2022 exercise targeted 59 Members, Q3 2022-23 and Q1 2023-24 – 35 Members each exercise.
14. The reducing response rate and difficulty of senior managers in securing interviews has led us to consider whether a change in approach should be made to maintain the validity of data and ensure that the significant effort put into the surveys realises value for the time spent.

## Options

15. The table below shows the different options identified, together with identified advantages/disadvantages.

Option	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Return to quarterly LT Interviews	<p>Reduced organisational effort by not requiring OH/TL input</p> <p>Effort in ODCE more evenly spread across the year</p>	<p>Increased quarterly effort from LT</p> <p>We moved away from this in the past as LT were finding it increasingly difficult to secure appointments with Members and quarterly</p>

Option	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
		Increased engagement with SPCB on responses on more regular basis	figures were very low (average 6 interviews per quarter in last year)
2	Stay with twice a year with interviews conducted in Sept/Oct and Feb/Mar	<p>Twice yearly exercise enables regular contact with Members.</p> <p>We have had good feedback from some OH/TL on the process.</p> <p>The current questions format seems to work well and elicits valuable feedback.</p>	<p>Increasingly difficult to engage with a meaningful number of Members based on response rate data.</p> <p>Resource intensive no matter how many interviews carried out.</p> <p>LT identified at last meeting that there were no significant issues that were not already being addressed in some way.</p>
3	Move to annual interviews – options to target all Members (excluding FM and Cabinet Secretaries). Next Interviews would be conducted in Feb/Mar using same methodology as currently used.	<p>On basis of post covid survey would expect increased response rate due to more of a novelty factor. SPCB has expressed support to support survey via their own Group meetings</p> <p>Retains involvement of Office Head/Team/Leaders but reduces burden of twice-yearly exercises.</p> <p>More representative views of all Members</p> <p>Reduces load on ODCE resources, LT and SPCB time.</p>	Longer time between surveys and less frequent interaction for Office Heads/Team Leaders.
4	Move to biennial interviews of all Members	<p>Reduced resource requirement in terms of ODCE, OH/TLs and LT.</p> <p>Reduced correspondence for Members on survey activity.</p>	<p>LT/SPCB feedback would be at higher risk of ongoing issues not being identified.</p> <p>Much less frequent contact for Office Heads in the exercise.</p>

Option	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
5	Move to online only surveys	<p>No requirement for face-to-face involvement from senior staff – saving in time commitments.</p> <p>Potentially reduced effort in compiling results if use less text-based responses.</p> <p>Ability to quickly issue questions based on current topics.</p>	<p>This has previously been discounted by LT as the face-to-face nature of interviews was seen as essential.</p> <p>Risk that Members and their staff will ignore online only questionnaires and the added value conversations with Members do not take place.</p> <p>Reduces chance of spontaneous comments triggered by discussion.</p>

## Recommendation

16. Based on the above ODCE believe a move to an annual exercise represents the point where we would expect a better response rate and an improved use of resources across the SPS and for Members, without the time between surveys becoming so large to be seen to be unresponsive. Online surveys have a place and should continue to be used for subject specific engagements from business areas/project teams as required. Operational issues would continue to be raised within normal working processes and systems, however any recurring themes raised through customer engagement teams that raise wider issues for services can be raised at LT at any time by Group Heads.
17. **LT is invited to discuss this proposed approach.**

## Governance

18. Conducting Members' Interviews helps inform an assessment of how current parliamentary services are being delivered and ensure Members are effectively supported in their parliamentarian and representative roles. Through seeking Members views and feedback on their experiences of current service delivery, this allows us to temperature check our services, and identify and understand any common or recurring themes and/or widespread concerns or issues to enable us to make any adjustments or improvements.
19. A data protection and equalities impact assessment has been carried out for the surveys as currently carried out.

## **Resource implications**

20. Delivery of Members' interviews will be carried out within existing resources.

## **Publication Scheme**

21. The paper can be published in line with the SPCB's Publication Scheme.

## **Next steps**

22. If LT is content with the overall approach to conducting Members' Interviews on an annual basis the next set of interviews will take place in February/March 2024.
23. A communication will be issued to Office Heads/Team Leaders notifying them of any agreed changes to the schedule.
24. The SPCB would be advised of the change to the schedule.

## **Decision**

25. LT is invited to discuss and agree an approach to seeking Members' views and feedback on our operational delivery.

**Office of the Deputy Chief Executive**

October 2023