



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# Support to Members on re-opening local offices

11 June 2020

Reference: SPCB(2020)Paper 25

1. This paper provides information for the Corporate Body on the support we could provide to Members for the re-opening of constituency / regional offices. It would be useful to agree the principles of our approach in advance so that we can move swiftly to support Members when this is allowed under the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 (“the Regulations”).

## Background

2. Members will already be fully aware that they are under a duty to protect staff and others visiting their local offices from harm and to provide a safe working environment. Their obligations arise from a combination of employment law, health and safety legislation, occupiers’ liability and their duty of care. There are no clear dates on when local offices will be able to re-open, but we are working on the assumption this may be around late July / early August. However, Members can do some preliminary work to ensure offices will meet the regulations.
3. This paper sets out the support and guidance the SPCB could provide Members as they navigate the changes that will be required to comply with the regulations. This includes risk assessments, changes to office set ups, staffing considerations, managing public access, increased cleaning.

## Opening offices

What can Members do now to prepare for re-opening offices when it may become possible to do so?

4. Members will be required to:
  - Prepare a risk assessment of their premises, operations and their staff in order to take steps to do what is reasonably practicable to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus. The risk assessment can be carried out now, in preparation for re-opening the premise;
  - Implement the measures to minimise the risks and put in place their revised policies, protocols and procedures. In Members’ role as “controllers of premises” any alterations required to be carried out at site can be done so, in preparation for the premises re-opening;

- Consult with their staff on-line in respect of the risks they have identified and the steps/control measures they have put in place to ensure health and safety is protected and to listen to employee recommendations; and
- Continue to monitor and review what they have put in place.

How could SPCB support Members in re-opening offices?

5. We outlined our initial thinking to the Corporate Body when it last met that, while complying with the regulations is a matter for Members, we would do all that we could to support Members with this. The Corporate Body agreed that Members would find a framework and guidance helpful in that regard.
6. We can now set out some more detailed thinking about what the guidance could cover. This is set out in the Annex.
7. Members will note that it covers a wide range of issues covering an office, staff and surgeries. We would, however, be grateful to Corporate Body Members for feedback on this list as we fully recognise Members have a far better insight on the operation of an office. We also appreciate that no one office will be the same and that Members operate their offices in different ways. We have tried to capture everything we can that will help Members.
8. In addition to guidance, we also propose to operate a helpdesk where Members can email queries which we can respond to, in order to provide support to Members as they make decisions on how to re-open local offices. Based on the enquiries we get we will also prepare FAQs to communicate to Members at regular intervals. The helpdesk will be run from the IRO office and led by Fergus Cochrane.
9. We propose to engage with the MSP Staff forum to develop the FAQs. This will help ensure that the key areas of concern are captured early.

## Costs

10. We anticipate that in complying with the regulations Members will be required to source a variety of materials, goods or services.
11. As with IT Equipment and Furniture, items such as hand sanitiser, cleaning materials, masks, and Perspex screens can be provided centrally through SPCB contracts. Members can also choose to purchase these items locally.
12. The Corporate Body will recall that it recently agreed support by way of incidental expenses relating to Covid-19 to meet the costs for the homeworking allowance and the purchasing of furniture and IT Equipment for MSP staff. This is normally by way of an individual application to the Corporate Body, however, with the agreement of the Corporate Body we would propose that the cost of providing the above materials

be met from the Incidental and Ancillary Employment provision, in line with the decisions already taken. We would propose that the approval mechanism is delegated to the Allowances Office subject to a capped amount per Member and Members' confirmation of completion of a risk assessment in relation to re-opening their offices in line with the guidance.

13. It should be noted that capital works cannot be funded through the Members' Expenses Scheme and that as with other Incidental and Ancillary agreed costs this would not apply to group pools, given they do not have access to these elements of the Scheme. In this case the cost of any such materials would be met from group pool monies.

## Publication Scheme

14. This paper can be published when the guidance has been finalised under the SPCB's publication scheme.

## Next steps

15. Subject to approval, the working group will produce guidance for Members and establish a helpdesk, to support Members in their decision making.

## Decision

16. The SPCB is invited to agree:

- If the issues covered in the Annex form a sound basis for guidance to Members;
- Establishing a helpdesk;
- Regular FAQs communicated to Members;
- MSP staff forum is consulted; and
- The process for meeting any costs incurred.

**Lynsey Hamill**