



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Minute of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) meeting held on Thursday 18 February 2021 at 09.00, via Teams

Present:

- Ken Macintosh MSP (Chair)
- Jackson Carlaw MSP
- Liam McArthur MSP
- David Stewart MSP
- Sandra White MSP
- Andy Wightman MSP

In attendance:

- David McGill
- Michelle Hegarty
- Callum Thomson
- Judith Morrison
- Cristine Livingstone
- Tracey White
- Lynsey Hamill
- Lorna Foreman
- Mairi Pearson
- Lesley Pirie
- Sara Glass
- Janice Crerar
- Becky Thomson
- Helen Birrell
- Fergus Cochrane
- Roz Thomson
- Eric MacLeod
- Joanne McNaughton
- Huw Williams
- Lisa Creamer
- Judith Proudfoot, Secretary

Previous minutes

1. The SPCB agreed the minute of the meeting held on 4 February 2021.

Matters arising

2. There were no matters arising.

Covid-19: update

3. There were no matters requiring SPCB consideration following the latest FM statement.

Chief Executive's Report

4. The SPCB observed that the Report evidenced the considerable amount of work being undertaken across the organisation and the pressures being experienced. While it was not unusual for the period at the end of a session to be busy, working to conclude outstanding business and planning for the post-election period, this one had the particular added pressures associated with managing the impacts of covid-19 and Brexit.
5. Some of the areas covered included: the continuing pressures of business; support services being provided to MSPs and their staff by HR; the increased use of social media platforms for communicating with the public; revision to the SPCB's Conditions of Contract documents following the end of the EU exit transition period; and update to guidance on use of the corporate identity by MSPs. The Report also included the Quarter 3 finance and performance reports.
6. The SPCB noted the Report.

Election planning – SPCB(2021)Paper 07

7. The SPCB discussed planning arrangements for the 'First Days' following the 2021 Scottish parliamentary elections in May. This was primarily focused on the registration and induction of new MSPs and the initial parliamentary business governed by statute, such as the oath-taking and election of the Presiding Officers.
8. The SPCB welcomed the paper which reflected the significant work already put into the planning and acknowledged the complexities introduced by covid, the compression of the period of dissolution into just one day and the uncertainties around the level of restrictions that may be in place come May.
9. The SPCB agreed that elements of the registration process should be done remotely but that certain aspects of the induction process and First Days Programme required to be done in person. These must have regard to the current public health regulations and guidance, and correspondingly modifications and mitigations should be put in place to ensure that these activities were delivered safely. It was noted that current restrictions, including physical distancing, were likely to still be in place at the time of the First Days Programme which may therefore require it to be extended over a longer period than usual. Officials were asked to look at prioritising those activities which would enable the Parliament to be up and running and in a position to undertake its role in scrutinising the Scottish Government as soon as possible in a safe way.

10. Further risk assessments, as required under current public health restrictions, would be undertaken by officials as part of the finalisation of the Programme which would be presented to the SPCB at a future meeting.

11. The SPCB noted the update.

MSP staff redundancy payments – SPCB(2021)Paper 14

12. The decision by Parliament to move dissolution from 25 March to 5 May had a potential impact on the ability of MSPs to follow the normal end of session redundancy arrangements for their staff. The SPCB agreed that, for the limited circumstances set out in the paper, MSPs could access the provisions in the Members' Expenses Scheme to pay redundancy payments to their staff during their notice periods.

Members' Expenses Scheme: Resolution – SPCB(2021)Paper 08

13. The SPCB agreed a resolution to amend the Scheme to reflect the recommended changes arising out of the earlier review of the Scheme in 2019 and the more recent review of the staff cost provision in 2020. The resolution was due to be tabled sometime between 22 Feb and 5 March.

Members' Expenses Scheme: use of resources complaint – SPCB(2021)Paper 09

14. The SPCB considered the details of a complaint received in respect of some content on a Member's parliamentary funded website and Facebook posts which were deemed to be party political. Investigations by officials had concluded that the content did not meet the guidelines. Set up costs for the website were met from parliamentary funds however no parliamentary funds were involved in relation to the Facebook posts.

15. The SPCB agreed that a breach of the rules had occurred and the Member should be invited to acknowledge the breach and either refund all moneys received in relation to the website or immediately remove all party political content from the site.

Officeholders: contingency applications – SPCB(2021)Paper 10

16. The SPCB agreed 2 requests for contingency funding, one from the Standards Commission in relation to legal costs and one from the Scottish Information Commissioner relating to legal costs and also set-up costs for home working for staff as a result of covid.

Officeholders: 2020-21 pay awards – SPCB(2021)Paper 11

17. The SPCB noted the uplift of officeholders' salaries for the 2020-21 financial year in line with the award made to the Senior Civil Service. The pay award is effective from 1 April 2020.

Security: local office works – SPCB(2021)Paper 12

18. The SPCB was not inclined to agree a request for funding for future works to a local office at this time in the session.

International Relations Office: activity report – SPCB(2021)Paper 13

19. All inward and outward international visits have been suspended since March 2020 due to covid-19. The International Relations Office has, however, continued to arrange virtual discussions and engagement activities for the Presiding Officers and other MSPs with other legislatures and organisations with which the Parliament has prioritised strengthening relations.

20. The SPCB noted the report.

AOB

Correspondence

21. The Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints (SGHHC) wrote to the Corporate Body on 17 February 2021 seeking an urgent decision by the SPCB, as publisher of parliamentary material, on whether to publish a submission by the former First Minister Alex Salmond.

22. The SPCB was briefed on the matter and agreed that it would reconvene that afternoon to discuss and reach a decision. Andy Wightman confirmed his intention to recuse himself from the decision meeting as he was a member of the Committee.

Date of next meeting

23. The next meeting of the SPCB was scheduled for 4 March 2021.

SPCB secretariat
February 2021