

**Chief Executive's Report to the SPCB
September 2021**

Introduction

This Report looks at activities across the organisation from early June. It also incorporates the Quarter 1 Finance report.

Items highlighted include:

- Current pressures on Chamber Desk and the Non-Government Bills Unit
- Committee's held business planning days to start work on their approach to scrutiny for Session 6
- The reopening of onsite visitor reception and orientation services on business days
- Preparations for the Opening Ceremony, COP26 and the Festival of Politics 2021

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OVERVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES

Prescribed Persons

The issue of MSPs becoming prescribed persons was taken forward by the SPCB last session. Being a prescribed person means that MSPs will be designated in law as people to whom whistle-blowers can disclose information and receive legal protection. If whistleblowing is done in the correct way, a worker is legally protected from any adverse treatment by their employer as a result. The process for becoming a prescribed person is for the UK Government Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to lay an Order at Westminster. This Order is updated once a year, but because the Department has been dealing with of Co-vid related matters the timetable has been considerably delayed.

I can now let you know that BEIS has formally commenced its consultation for the next iteration of the Order which we expect to be made early next year. We have replied to the consultation to confirm that we wish MSPs to be added to the list of prescribed persons. We have also asked that given this process is with constituents in mind, that inclusion in the Order for MSPs covers both devolved and reserved issues, as is already the case for MPs. We consider it would not be fair on constituents to try and make that distinction. I will keep the SPCB updated on progress with the Order as a number of Members have expressed an interest in this matter given MSPs are not currently prescribed persons.

In the meantime, I recognise that the framework for whistleblowing is complex and I have therefore asked colleagues to prepare guidance which we can issue to Members when the Order has been made.

Legislation and Parliamentary Business

Chamber Desk

Demand for Chamber Desk services has increased at the start of the Session compared to the start of Session 5. For example, in Session 5 the 2000th written question was lodged on 29 August 2016. In Session 6 that mark was reached on 29 July 2021, a full month earlier. While there appears to be some evidence of this gap reducing a little, the number of written questions being lodged continues to run ahead of that experienced at the start of Session 5.

One particular aspect of business that differs significantly from previous years is the rate of submission of Urgent Questions (UQs). In the three parliamentary years prior to the current year, the number of UQs lodged was an average of 21.33 per year. The number of UQs submitted in the current parliamentary year so far is 61. Given that selected UQs are answered on the day on which they are lodged, the Chamber Desk prioritises checking these questions against Standing Orders and Guidance, confirming any edits with the Members lodging the question and then preparing selection advice for the Presiding Officer. This means some resources must be diverted away from processing questions and motions at a time of the day when the focus of

resources would previously have been on processing written questions, oral questions and motions.

Resources are being deployed flexibly in recognition of this changing demand for Chamber Desk services. However, the role does require specialist expertise and training of additional staff resulting in a temporary situation where the Chamber Desk is not currently able to meet its aim of providing a same working day service to Members.

Non-Government Bills Unit (NGBU)

Demand for NGBU services is also high. The NGBU team is working on draft proposals for a number of substantial bills which are likely to generate a substantial volume of responses to their consultations. The team has also experienced high levels of demand for initial meetings with Members who have proposals for new bills or who wish to pursue bills which did not progress right through the legislative process in session 5. Three members bills which were proposed last session, but were timed out, are currently being pursued this session. If statements of reasons for not conducting fresh consultations on these proposals are accepted by the relevant committee, the proposals could potentially progress to bill introduction more quickly.

Scrutiny Group

Committee Office

All committees held business planning days to start work on their approach to scrutiny for Session 6, agree working practices and develop early work programmes. Business planning days took place at Holyrood, but several committees have said that they are keen to start doing visits outside of Edinburgh, as Covid restrictions allow over the next few months. The Business Planning Days allowed Members to meet the officials who provide support across arrange of specialisms, including clerking, research (SPICe), participation (PACT) and communications (PCO).

It is worth noting that from the outset of Session 6, there appears to be a strong appetite for committees to work together on issues of mutual interest and where issues are cross-cutting in nature. For example, the COVID-19 and Health etc Committees in relation to issues such as vaccination programmes and compensation for people who are self-isolating. The early indications are that there will be a strong demand for a cross-cutting approach to be taken to scrutiny of SG performance when it comes to Net Zero, with multiple committees engaged. On a similar theme of committees working together, the Constitution etc Committee issued guidance to the subject committees on how the UK internal market impacts on scrutiny and requested that this is discussed at the Conveners Group (CG).

CG is meeting for the first time at the end of September; Liam McArthur MSP is the convener for Session 6.

In terms of committee impact, it should be noted that the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee agreed on 8 September to close petition PE1517 from the Scottish Mesh Survivors - "Hear Our Voice" campaign. This

petition was considered extensively by the PPC during both Session 4 and Session 5. During that time, the PPC considered more than 100 written submissions, held 10 oral evidence sessions, a debate in the Chamber and produced a report on the petition.

Significantly, the Scottish Government introduced the Transvaginal Mesh Removal (Cost Reimbursement) (Scotland) Bill on 23 June 2021. The Bill will allow the Scottish Government to set up a scheme which could reimburse people who have paid private healthcare costs to have their transvaginal mesh implant removed. It could also cover travel costs and hotel accommodation paid for in relation to the surgery.

This positive outcome marks the end of a lengthy consideration of the petition over several sessions. It highlights the impact the petitions system – and parliamentary committees more generally – can have in contributing to meaningful policy and legislative change as a result of direct public engagement. This is in direct support of the Parliament’s strategic plan, and its emphasis on how we can enhance the nature of the parliamentary scrutiny to improve accountability and public policy.

SPICe

From September, more SPICe staff have returned to the office. This means that Members can now phone us on 85300 with any enquiries or come into room CG.01 Tuesday to Thursday if they want to speak to someone in person.

SPICe has continued to work over summer to provide detailed briefing for Members to support scrutiny in the new Session. SPICe has published a wide range of “subject profiles” – accessible on the Digital Publications Hub: <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings>, including on the environment, legal aid, local government finance, among many others. In addition, the team published a detailed blog article on the Programme for Government on Wednesday 8 September to inform the debate on that afternoon.

SPICe has also been leading and supporting parliamentary activity around COP26. This includes working with the Events and Exhibitions team to deliver the Globe Legislators’ Summit, and bidding into UN, UK Government, Scottish Government and Nordic Council processes to create spaces for parliamentarians to engage in and alongside COP26. The Parliament’s work involves partnering with the Children’s Parliament, Scottish Youth Parliament, Royal Scottish Geographical Society, UK Committee on Climate Change, and Scotland’s Futures Forum.

Finally, SPICe has been gathering contact and social media details from Members to add to the website. We have also been working with web colleagues to develop new Members’ biographies. These will be added to the website in the next few weeks.

Participation and Communities Team (PACT)

During summer recess Digital Engagement Tools Team (DETT) used the Your Priorities digital tool to run a 'What Matters to You?' public consultation to highlight the establishment and role of the new committees and connect people to them. Over 2,700 people participated from every local authority area in Scotland, with 668 ideas generated and over 80,000 ratings (up votes and down votes) on the issues that participants want committees to consider in Session 6. Summaries of the issues relevant to their remit have been shared with each committee to help inform work programmes. DETT will evaluate the learning from this exercise so we can continue to develop the use of digital engagement in support of committee scrutiny.

Parliamentary Services

People and Culture Office

The People and Culture Office has continued to support new and returning Members with recruiting and developing their staff over the summer recess. To date over 80 roles have been advertised on the Parliament's careers site since the election with the People and Culture Office assisting MSPs at various stages of the recruitment process from initial drafting of the job description and advert up to and including assisting with interviews.

The People and Culture Office has commenced seeking feedback from MSPs on their experience of the recruitment process. Initial feedback suggests that the vast majority of MSPs that responded were satisfied with the ease of the recruitment process, the quality of support received from the People and Culture Office and with the overall outcome of the recruitment process. A range of helpful comments have also been provided which will enable the People and Culture Office to further improve the support it provides to MSPs with recruiting to roles in their offices. Further information will be provided to the SPCB in future reports.

As well as its support to new MSPs, the People and Culture Office continues to support returning MSPs with mapping over their existing staff to the new job families and salary ranges, including support with drafting job descriptions, and with planning a safe return to office working. Additional support, including briefings on the new job families and family ranges, has also been provided.

The MSPs' staff learning and development programme has continued to evolve and develop to meet MSPs' needs. Welcome and induction sessions have been offered to all new staff over the summer recess to give them the opportunity to learn about how the Parliament works. In addition to this, training courses have been made available in:

- Speechwriting skills,
- Media and social media skills,
- Security and safety on social media, and
- Managing virtual teams,
- Snippet learning sessions to introduce staff to the role and functions of a range of parliamentary offices such as Pay and Pensions, SPICe and Allowances,
- Wellbeing and returning to the office.

Engagement and Communications

During summer recess (21 July - 26 August) an outdoor educational display about the work of the Parliament went on display for the first time. Located near the public entrance, they used infographics, colourful designs and photography to provide information to visitors. Staff carried out surveys with a small number of visitors. Feedback on the accessibility of the information and designs was extremely positive.

Visitor Services

Onsite visitor reception and orientation services on business days reopened onsite from Tuesday 24 August for Members' meetings and Committee witnesses. The Parliament Shop Select & Collect service for the Parliament Shop also reopened at this time.

Forward look

The Visitor Services, Parliamentary Communications Office and Broadcasting teams have developed a new short film, looking at the history of Canongate and Queensberry House and the history of the old Parliament of Scotland in the context of the new. This will be introduced for the weekend of Edinburgh Doors Open Day on Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 September. A new online Parliament Shop will open online at the same time.

Kirking and Opening Ceremony

The Kirking of the Parliament will take place on Friday 1 October at St Giles' Cathedral followed by a reception hosted by the Presiding Officer in Parliament Hall. Both events will be in the presence of His Royal Highness The Duke of Rothesay.

Her Majesty The Queen will address the Scottish Parliament on Saturday 2 October as part of the Opening of the Sixth Session of the Scottish Parliament. The ceremony will be held in the Debating Chamber with TRH The Duke and Duchess of Rothesay also in attendance. The Ceremony will include performances from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, The *National Centre of Excellence* in Traditional Music, the National Youth Choir of Scotland, Musicians in Exile, BBC Young Traditional Musician of the Year 2021 Michael Biggins and Kathleen Jamie, Scots Makar.

Over the summer the Parliament launched their Local Heroes initiative as part of the Opening Ceremony. The Parliament Communications Office provided Members with a communications toolkit to promote their search for local heroes across the country, on social media platforms and to local media. Press coverage was generated across Scotland in both local, regional and national newspaper, highlighting that the Parliament was looking to celebrate the achievements of those who had made an extraordinary contribution locally or nationally as part of the day. A number of Members also featured in a short video package promoted on our corporate social channels trying to raise awareness of our campaign.

More recently the Parliament announced that Her Majesty The Queen and TRH The Duke and Duchess of Rothesay would be part of the occasion. Generating positive mentions of the day and the expected contribution from Local Heroes, this news featured in national and regional media, supported by social media content from the Presiding Officer's account. Through our media and social content almost 500,000 people had an opportunity to see this information across a number of platforms.

Work is now progressing on a detailed plan to promote the event more widely in the run up to the day with interesting and engaging content for those watching at home as well as those attending in person.

Festival of Politics 2021

The Festival of Politics 2021 will take place online over five days between Wednesday 20 and Sunday 24 October. Festival sessions will be largely chaired by Members and are designed to reflect the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as the Festival will explore the synergy between the SDGs, including climate action; sustainable cities; poverty and inequalities. The Festival will also debate issues ranging from Black History Month to mental health and the nation's recovery from COVID-19.

COP26 GLOBE Legislators' Summit

On Friday 5 and Saturday 6 November, the Scottish Parliament is hosting the COP26 GLOBE Legislators' Summit for international parliamentarians. This high-profile Summit will explore the role of parliaments in the climate emergency, and issues including how to accelerate climate action, and delivery of a green, fair and resilient recovery from COVID-19. It will also consider how parliamentarians can secure public support for transformative climate action. In advance of the Summit, GLOBE International in partnership with the Children's Parliament are leading a project that will engage children and young people from across Scotland in a nation-wide climate surgery with Members on Friday 29 October. This new initiative will ensure their voices are heard as part of the debate on the climate emergency.

International engagement

The International Relations Office:

- Supported a meeting between Scotland's Futures Forum Directors and the Education Committee of the New Zealand Parliament
- Supported the Presiding Officer in a virtual discussion with the President of the Bavarian Parliament (the Presiding Officer's first meeting with her counterpart from another parliament)
- Supported the Presiding Officer in a virtual discussion with the President of the State Parliament of Lower Saxony
- Supported the Presiding Officer at a meeting in Holyrood with the Ambassador of Georgia (the first 'in person' inward meeting since the start of the pandemic)

- Supported the Deputy Presiding Officer (LM) at a meeting with the Ambassador of Spain in Holyrood (the Deputy Presiding Officer's first diplomatic courtesy call)
- Arranged the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Scotland Branch AGM, chaired by the Presiding Officer (as Branch President).

Facilities Management

Sustainability

As part of a wider offering around increasing understanding of the climate and directly related ecological crisis, the Parliament now has access on our own learning portal to a **Climate Solutions Accelerator** course. Developed through a collaboration of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, the Institute of Directors, and the Universities of Stirling and Edinburgh, working with digital content creators Jump Digital, the training features climate scientists, finance experts such as Mark Carney, and global leaders such as Kofi Annan. The training is designed in chunks, so people can come out and return if need be. The learning portal is the same as you access other online training on (e.g. GDPR), you just need to [access the portal](#), click on '*Climate Solutions*' then '*Enter*' and if it doesn't launch, click '*launch manually*'.

Quarter 1 2021-22 Monthly Finance Report – SPCB

Executive Summary:

- Quarter 1 outturn is £1,734k, (6.2%) under the phased current annual budget. This is over the target underspend percentage for the first 6 months of the year of within 5% or less. SPS accounts for £807k with projects accounting for a significant element of this where there has been underspend against phased budget in Security and Digital projects and members costs for £701k of the underspend particularly in staffing, engagement and travel associated costs and £226k for Officeholders.
- The costs to date of the members resettlement following the election are £2,335k so an adjustment has been made to the Current Annual Budget from election contingency to cover payments of members resettlement costs made in the May payroll.
- Due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SPS Current Annual Budget has been revised from that submitted to the Finance & Constitution Committee in December 2020 to reflect the on-going impact of Covid-19 on our budgets in 2021-22. This has resulted in a net transfer of £140.4k from contingency to revise various Office budgets.
- Finance rolled out a new finance reporting tool, Hubble, during the first quarter of 2021-22 to support SPS forecasting. This tool will also support budget preparation for 2022-23 commenced in July 2021.

Summary position:

SPCB Expenditure Summary Outturn – Q1:

	Year to Date					Current Annual Budget	Original Annual Budget	Net Changes
	Actual	Budget	Variance	Variance				
	£'000	£'000	£'000	%				
Parliamentary Service Costs	11,933	12,740	807	6.3	53,615	53,398	217	
Members Costs	10,732	11,433	701	6.1	40,282	37,947	2,335	
Commissioners & Ombudsman Costs	3,444	3,670	226	6.1	14,838	14,838	0	
Sub Total	26,109	27,843	1,734	6.2	108,735	106,183	2,552	
Reserves – SPCB contingency					1,848	4,400	(2,552)	
Total SPCB Expenditure	26,109	27,843	1,734	6.2	110,583	110,583	0	



SPS Expenditure Summary Outturn – Q1:

	Year to Date					Current Annual Budget	Original Annual Budget	Net Changes
	Actual	Budget	Variance	Variance				
	£'000	£'000	£'000	%				
Staff	7,622	7,736	115	1.5	31,593	31,573	20	
Staff Related Costs	67	64	(2)	(3.7)	548	715	(167)	
Property Costs	1,902	1,971	69	3.5	8,035	7,840	195	
Running Costs	1,808	1,834	27	1.5	7,003	6,833	170	
Projects	535	1,134	599	52.8	6,437	6,437	0	
SPS Expenditure	11,933	12,740	807	6.3	53,615	53,398	217	

SPS Current annual budget increased by £217k net from the Original annual budget by the end of Quarter 1.

Revising the budget (based on 2021-22 being a normal Election year) before the year commenced from that submitted to the Finance & Constitution Committee was agreed at the March 2021 Strategic Resources Board (SRB).

Key decisions made by SRB from March-21 to June-21 include:

- Adjustments to budgets affected by COVID increasing costs or pausing planned business activities (see table above)
- Contingency transfer to meet unforeseen running costs required for an emergency change of webcasting service provider by £67k.
- Approval of £10k for Lobbying register system enhancement costs.

- Reduction in advertising budget of £30k because planned Corporate Events in Q1, Q2 & Q3 have been cancelled or delayed and scaled back due to COVID.

Staff numbers are set out below:

SPS Staff Full time equivalents:	Original Budget FTE	Current budget FTE	Actual FTE
Total	526.3	556.9	508.5

The number of staff posts have increased reflecting the extension of temporary posts in Committee, Legal Services and Spice to support Brexit related Parliamentary Business and Committee Engagement. The future of these posts and the overall resourcing of the scrutiny of Parliamentary Business are being considered within the ongoing Strategic Resourcing Reviews.

Staffing underspends to date reflect the level of ongoing vacancies which persisted during COVID and where public engagement activities paused and the need to recruit was deferred.

The SPS project underspend to date of £599k is mainly due to delays in commencing Service Yard construction work. Discussion is ongoing with the contractor over potential additional costs.

Members:

Members are showing an overall underspend of £701k (6.1%) of budget. Members pay accounts for £25k of this with £676k occurring in Members Expenses. Members pay expenditure includes £2,335k of resettlement grant paid to former Members in the May payroll. A further sum will be paid for Ministerial and Officeholder severance in quarter 2 estimated at £177k.

Officeholders:

Expenditure of £3,444k is £226k below budget for Officeholders with most of this accounted for by £190k variance from the year to date phased budget for the SPSO. Funding now includes quarterly funding payments to the Electoral Commission and some start up costs for the new Biometrics Commissioner. An anticipated budget transfer from the Scottish Government is anticipated as part of the Budget Revision cycle to fund this Commissioner later in the year. The SPCB has already approved in principle funds in the Officeholders contingency for 2021-22.