

PARLIAMENTARY OUTREACH

Executive summary

1. This paper outlines proposals to refresh outreach work in order to capitalise on several different workstreams coming together outwith the Parliament. The aim would be to maximise efficient use of resources and generate maximum outcome, whilst better supporting the SPCB's Strategic Plan and continuing to address barriers to engagement. The SPCB is invited to agree the principles of this approach for officials to work up a programme in more detail.

Issues and Options

2. The SPCB has supported a number of innovative initiatives for reaching out to local groups across Scotland. Each has been reviewed and developed over time in order to keep the approach fresh and relevant to the SPCB's strategic objectives, to Members' needs and to the target audiences.

3. In line with this, it is proposed to introduce a new approach from April 2012 which:

- builds on previous strengths
- addresses some operational and strategic weaknesses
- maximises the opportunities offered by the new Committees and Outreach staff grouping.

The intention is to bring together a number of existing strands of activity into a more cohesive programme that can support increased and more effective interaction with Members and with business.

4. In the last few years, the SPCB's approach to parliamentary outreach has centered on:

- support to Committees' external meetings
- an annual "Communities Conference" event, entitled "Understanding and Influencing Your Parliament"
- the Presiding Officer's summer work programme
- an annual tour of the "Moving Stories" exhibition, supported by receptions and educational sessions
- the Community Partnerships Project (CPP).

5. Under the new approach, it is proposed to refine and integrate the first four activities. It is proposed to discontinue the Community Partnerships Project after the current phase (CPP3) concludes in March 2012.

6. Whilst the Community Partnerships Project has been successful as an innovative method of engaging with specific target audiences, its reach has been limited overall (ten groups have engaged over the three phases of the project since late 2008). It is an intensive programme to resource for this limited return. There is scope to take the elements of CPP that have worked best and develop them within the new approach, for example through the delivery of tailored workshops for local lifelong learning/vocational training groups.

7. The strategic aim of the new approach will be to contribute to increasing the visibility of Parliament and understanding of its procedures in order to encourage more, and wider, interaction with Members and business.

8. The outcome would be that people feel equipped to engage with the Parliament at the time of their choosing/need, and on the topic that matters to them. This requires a certain amount of risk, innovation and creativity in approach to achieve as the results are likely to be long term and may be less easy to capture and evaluate.

9. The aim would be achieved through a programme focusing on communicating the work of the Parliament, gathering feedback and raising awareness of the political process. The output should be an increased number and range of people engaging:

9.1. This will include targeting under-represented groups and those who have not engaged with the Parliament before. Addressing socio-economic barriers and geographical barriers will be a critical success factor.

9.2. The programme can be flexible to reach specific audiences as required, for example to reach small and medium size businesses.

9.3. There is potential to capitalise on other engagement work also, for example to bring in elements of the SPCB's programmes for schools and young people's groups.

10. A number of tactical activities will be used:

10.1. An increased number of Communities Conference events, including at least one delivered outwith Holyrood each year. This enables a strategic focus on raising awareness of the role of Members and ways to engage with business in general.

10.2. A new programme of "Parliament Days". These would be outreach events involving one, or more, Committee(s) meeting in local venues. This gives a strategic focus for the programme of raising awareness of Committees, and on facilitating quality engagement opportunities to support their work.

10.3. A programme of support events and activities for the Parliament Days such as:

- MSP visits to local schools and an event for young people (such as a Question Time with MSPs, local public figures and the media)
- Presiding Officer/Committee/MSP programme of local visits
- Presiding Officer hosted reception (with local authority involvement)
- the Parliament exhibition in a local venue
- sessions for teachers at the exhibition venue
- peer education sessions for 16 to 24 years olds at the exhibition venue
- lifelong learning/vocational training workshops – on general information or themed, for example to how to petition or how to work with committees.

11. This activity could run in the region in the build up to the Parliament Day and could be used to target any appropriate follow up (offering measurable outcomes).

12. It would be possible to run the elements of the programme in different combinations to accommodate the fact that Committees may not hold many external meetings. For example, we could organise a local Presiding Officer or MSP work programme backed up with information sessions and a civic reception but without a remote Committee meeting.

13. There is considerable scope for partnership working externally within the approach. As well as local authorities and other agencies, such as the Third Sector Interfaces, there is potential to involve a wide range of local groups and organisations. Members could be supported to suggest groups that would benefit from involvement with the programme, using their local knowledge to best effect.

14. The refreshed approach offers the opportunity to work with specific partners in different locations and on individual events. This could include organisations, such as the Electoral Commission, as well as universities and colleges. This could be used to make the programme as efficient as possible in use of SPCB resources.

15. In order to maximise reach and outcomes, local media opportunities would be exploited; social media and promotional work would be focused to support this and the programme. This can be used to drive content for events and activities, as well as to encourage uptake.

16. The key internal partners to successful development and delivery of the programme would include Committee Office, Education and Community Partnerships, Events and Exhibitions, Equalities, Presiding Officer's Office, Media Relations Office and SPICe.

Resource Implications

17. The new programme can be delivered with existing staff and budgetary resources.

Governance issues

18. As with all outreach activity, environmental considerations will be taken into account when choosing venues and methods of travel in order to minimise impact. The Working Group will include Equalities officials and will complete an Equalities Impact Assessment as this is a new programme of activity. Other governance issues are built into the existing activities that will form the core of the new approach; the Working Group will consider if any practices need to be reviewed.

Publication Scheme

19. This paper can be published after the conference to mark the end of the current Community Partnerships Project (to be held on March 27th 2012).

Next steps

20. A Working Group of the key internal partners will be set up to take forward the new approach. Updates will be given to the portfolio member as appropriate.

Decision

21. The SPCB is invited to agree that the Community Partnerships Project will be discontinued from the end of March 2012 and that a new approach to Parliamentary Outreach will be developed from April 2012 onwards.

Committees and Outreach Group
February 2012