

THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT INFORMATION CENTRE

Executive summary

1. The SPCB requested a paper on SPICe services to Members and committees, taking into account the outcomes of the review of SPICe which formed part of the recent Change Management Programme.

Background

2. The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) supports the SPS Strategic Plan through the delivery of an impartial, accurate and timely research, enquiry and documentation service to:

- Members and their staff in fulfilling their parliamentary and constituency roles.
- Committees in carrying out legislative scrutiny, inquiries and other parliamentary work.
- The SPCB and staff of the SPS in support of parliamentary business.

3. SPICe core services and products include:

- Briefings to support Members in their parliamentary and constituency duties (including briefings on bills, issues of topical/current interest to the Parliament, briefings to support MSP and PO/DPO involvement in national and international events including Festival of Politics and Scottish Futures Forum).
- Support to committees (petitions briefings, briefings to support inquiries and legislation, suggested lines of questioning, analysis of responses to calls for evidence, potential committee advisors and witnesses).
- Enquiry service (responding to enquiries and requests for research support on all matters).
- Supply of Parliament and Government publications relevant to parliamentary business.
- Material for debates (key electronic resources for all debates, updated on a rolling basis).

- Provision of a print and electronic reference collection to support the work of the Parliament.
- Supporting SPS staff through the co-ordination of SPCB policy on the conduct of surveys in the Parliament and advice and assistance to colleagues with this work.
- Commissioning and managing research carried out by external experts for Committees or other parts of the Parliament.
- Updating and publishing MSP biographies, memberships, contact details and surgery information on the website.

4. Evidence from a range of surveys and reviews has consistently demonstrated both a high level of use of SPICe services and strong Member satisfaction with these services, including the latest review in 2011/12.

SPICe Review 2011/12

5. The recent review of SPICe, which formed part of the Parliament-wide Change Management Programme, has identified savings of £446k in the staff and non-staff budgets, much of which have already been realised.

6. The review has resulted in an overall reduction in staff numbers and, as a result of feedback from Members, has refocused SPICe on its main priorities of providing a high quality research and enquiry service to Members, committees and SPS staff.

7. As a result, some functions will move out of SPICe to elsewhere in the Communications and Research Group:

- Web and social media functions will be aligned with Media Relations Office to provide a better integrated communications approach to parliamentary business and public engagement.
- Information management and governance, including information strategy, records management, data protection, FOI and copyright, have also been transferred to come under the direct management of the Head of Communications and Research Group to reflect the cross cutting corporate nature of these functions.

8. SPICe has been reorganised from a six team structure comprising three research and three information teams to three integrated teams each headed by a Principal Researcher. The new structure will promote a flatter structure with the aim of a more agile, flexible approach to service delivery.

9. In order to achieve a significant reduction in our non-staff budget, we are reducing the size of the reference collection and re-focussing it to support the work of SPICe research and enquiries staff. This decision is informed by research conducted with Members and staff in the course of the review which

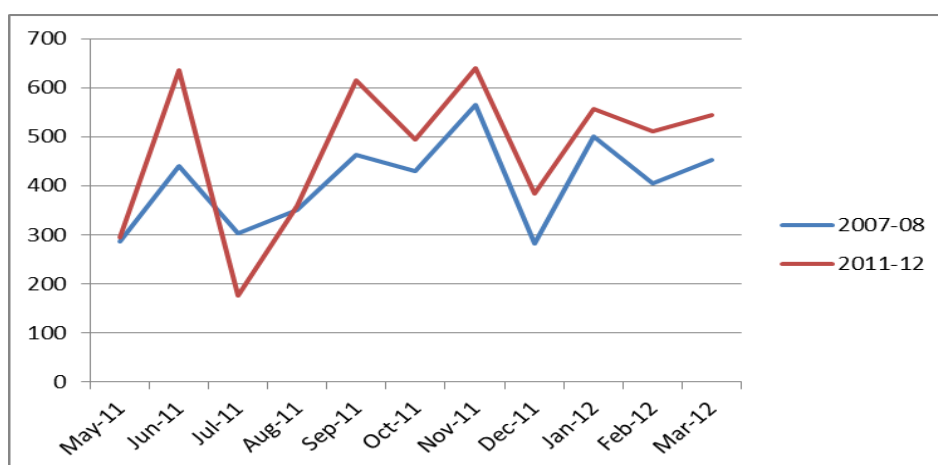
showed that, while Members and their staff use the SPICe newspaper service, they make little use of the reference collection. However, we will continue to develop our electronic collection of reference material, journals and periodicals and to improve access to these for Members and their staff.

10. While the review highlighted the need to maintain a strong research base to support Members' constituency and parliamentary business needs, it also supported a finding of a previous review of the research service that a "secondary specialism" approach should be adopted to create more flexibility in taking on new subject areas and in ensuring research cover at all times. This greater flexibility will allow SPICe to meet the challenges posed by changes such as: parliamentary reform, a greater focus on welfare issues, and the increase in the Parliament's powers consequent to the Scotland Act 2012, all against a background of continued budgetary restraint.

Challenges going forward

11. Since the beginning of Session 4, SPICe has experienced a significant upward hike in the number of enquiries received and also a change in the pattern of enquiries with increased demand for shorter turnaround and a greater proportion of enquiries coming towards the end of the week.

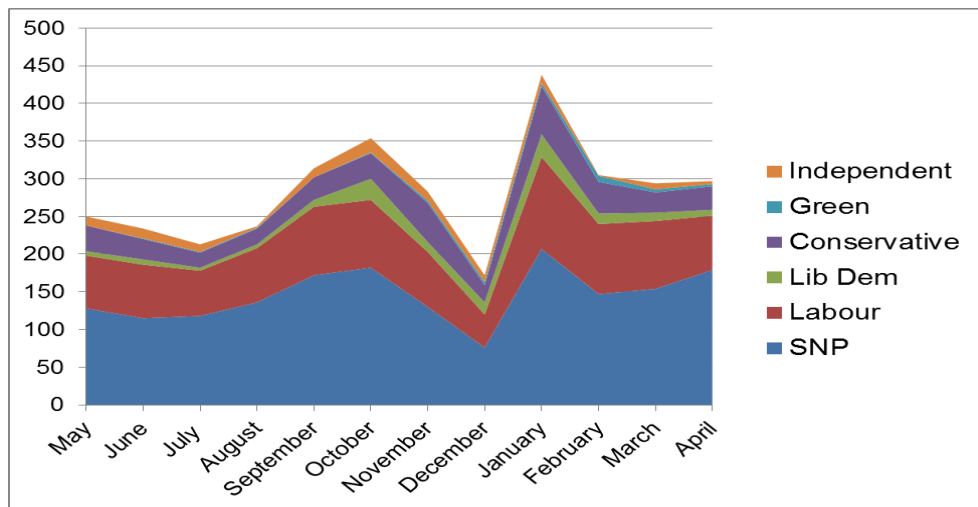
Figure 1: Desk enquiries received - Year 1 of Session 3 and Year 1 of Session 4



Source: Assyst Enquiries Database

12. While in previous sessions, we have typically had a number of very heavy users of the SPICe enquiry service, a larger number of medium users and a small number of non-users, this Session, all Members have used the enquiries service to some extent. Also, SPICe users have come from across the political spectrum with both opposition and Government parties making significant use of the service.

Figure 2: Enquiries received by party/client group (first year Session 4)



Source: Assyst Enquiries Database

13. SPICe also aims to further improve support on the budget and public finances. In this respect, the Financial Scrutiny Unit has held discussions with the Scottish Government to improve the availability of level 4 budget data. As a consequence, the Scottish Government has agreed to provide all level 4 data a maximum of 10 working days following the publication of the draft budget. This is now reflected in the Written Agreement between the Scottish Government and the Finance Committee.

SPICe going forward

14. Following the review, it was recommended that SPICe develop a customer relations management programme to ensure that staff keep in close touch with Members so that they are able to react quickly to changes in demand in what is likely to be a period of rapid change over the next few years.

Publication Scheme

15. This paper is suitable for publication in line with the SPCB's Publication Scheme.

Decision

16. SPCB is invited to note this update on SPICe services and add any comments on the nature and shape of the customer relationship programme being developed.

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