



West of Scotland
Branch

Public Services Group Report

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by **Kenny Brown**

The Public Services in Scotland have been delivering for the population through the pandemic and the various employers have had to balance the risk to the public if the service is not delivered, against the risk to staff delivering that on a daily basis. The development of PPE, the use of risk assessments and asking if Covid 19 is in the household before attending any premises, or adopting a range of enhanced PPE testing and inoculations to provide protection. The Police Service for example have dedicated Custody facilities where any arrested people with suspected Covid 19 cases are taken. The NHS are screening people before any procedure and rescheduling these until the patient is negative. Others adopted working in "bubbles" to avoid mixing people from different crews or teams to minimise transmission. The HSE have visited premises monitoring the control measures in place and providing guidance or taking other action.

The Scottish Coronavirus Regulations required employers to consider working from home and this was done with a range of DSE and other assessments in place, along with the cooperation of staff to work in partnership as we were in the midst of a pandemic. The measures to support workers at home, monitor their mental health and maintain productivity as well as maintaining a work life balance are now relatively sophisticated.

The changes in the approach to learn to live with Coronavirus and move towards a new normality with hybrid working, will bring an interruption to what has become a relatively smooth process. What were previously routine aspects of work, such as transport/travel, parking, office etiquette, and the physical interaction with colleagues are genuine concerns. The interaction with customers which for some would have been virtual, will need careful handling. Some staff will have integrated carer responsibilities with their home working during the pandemic, may have to manage these afresh. The ability to join meetings across Scotland by Zoom or MS Teams has been an inclusive measure so can this continue, or will physical meetings become the norm excluding or inconveniencing those who are geographically remote?

Every business in Scotland will be facing these challenges and while these measures were mandated by law, then compliance is required however that mandate is ending so employers will make these decisions in consultation with the workforce. Trade Unions will be mindful that any changes to the pre pandemic terms and conditions should be managed sensitively and balance the need to provide the service with the needs of those individuals delivering that service.

There is no doubt a backlog of issues deemed secondary to other priorities will have built up across all parts of the public sector and this potential tidal wave of delayed work, probably across all businesses in Scotland, may need to wait until the new working practices are normalised and staff build both confidence and capacity.

Our public services have delivered for the public during the pandemic, and it may be months before the new normality emerges and those beneficial measures which have been developed, can be retained and some of the less constructive practices replaced.

Expectations may need to be managed that any announcement of the removal of legislation equates to an overnight return to pre pandemic levels of service delivery, which will not be the case.