

What Matters to You? Scottish Parliament Consultation on priorities for the Scottish Parliament's committees between 2021 and 2026

Submission: Priorities for the Covid-19 Recovery Committee

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1. The Scottish Parliament has recently appointed the Covid-19 Recovery Committee to consider and report on matters relating to COVID-19 falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for COVID recovery and other Scottish Ministers where relevant. The committee has a wide remit. On the one hand, it has to perform scrutiny of the Covid-19 emergency response, while on the other it must think about medium and long-term issues arising from the serious social and economic consequences of the pandemic.
2. While there is a temptation to focus on the Covid-19 recovery, not least on account of the significant progress made in tackling the immediate health crisis, the scientific evidence suggests that the pandemic is far from over. For this reason, the committee may want to strike a fair balance between its short-term, and medium to long-term responsibilities.
3. The short-term responsibilities include the scrutiny of Covid related primary and secondary legislation, as well as the overall government's strategic framework to respond to Covid. This includes, significantly, any changes to lockdown policy restrictions. In addition, the committee will have a relevant role in scrutinising the two monthly reports published by the government on the operation of powers under the two Scottish Coronavirus Acts and the UK Coronavirus Act 2020. It is worth noting that there is a backlog in terms of scrutinising these reports, as the committee's predecessor did not have an opportunity to look at the [sixth](#) and [seventh](#) reports, published on the 14 April and 9 of June, respectively. Finally, the past experience of two renewals of the expiry dates of the two Scottish Coronavirus Acts suggest that the Covid-19 Recovery Committee will make a critical contribution to the scrutiny of the extension of these emergency measures for further six months in March 2022, under provisions contained in the forthcoming Coronavirus (Extension and Expiry) (Scotland) Bill. The committee may want to launch an inquiry into Scottish coronavirus emergency legislation to gather views from the public and other relevant stakeholders, and hold oral evidence sessions to question the Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery. The committee may also want to look

closely at the statement of reasons that the government will publish, should it seek an extension of the expiry date for further six months.

4. We call the committee's attention to the relevant material gathered by its predecessor (the Covid-19 Committee) in its February 2021 inquiry entitled "Covid-19 legislation: next steps". This inquiry gathered an impressive 846 responses from experts, NGOs and the public, on various issues arising from the Scottish Government's emergency powers to respond to Covid-19. The responses to this consultation are still available at [yourviews website](#), and represent a valuable resource to inform the committee's short-term work.

5. Secondly, in terms of the medium- and long-term responsibilities, the committee may want to scrutinise closely the government's recovery plan. This plan is likely to address a wide range of issues concerning the social, political and economic consequences of the pandemic. While the economic recovery plan may be an important aspect of this plan, the committee may want to pay special attention to the impact that the pandemic has had on pre-existing inequalities in our society. These inequalities have been thrown into sharp relief, and sadly deepened, by the pandemic.

6. When thinking in the medium to longer-term issues, the committee will benefit from taking stock of the work of other committees during the fifth session of parliament. In particular, when addressing the human rights' dimension of the pandemic, the committee may want to look closely at the [Equalities and Human Rights Committee's report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on equalities and human rights](#). This report recommends public bodies to improve their impact assessment practices when carrying out their duties to mitigate the harm already experienced by protected groups, people with disadvantaged backgrounds, or marginalised groups. Significantly, the report identified a series of priority areas which may inform the Covid-19 Recovery Committee's medium- to long-term scrutiny work. Among them are, ensuring inclusive communication built into all national and local government frameworks, embedding the needs of LGBT+ people into the mental health recovery plan and the monitoring of prison conditions and their compliance with human rights standards.