

Advice Sheet 12: For Stewards and Safety Reps

How to Respond to Proposed Changes to Working Patterns during COVID-19 Pandemic

National guidance, specifically the National Social Partnership Forum (SPF) statement on industrial relations during the pandemic issued on 1 April 2020, requires consultation on any changes to still be carried out via local SPF/JNCC channels, albeit tighter timeframes and more streamlined processes might be necessary. It stresses "...the importance of our partnership principles of 'no surprises', transparency, finding common ground and mutual respect."

Specifically, it states that as regards temporary changes to working practices: "Within any changed approach, managers should still consult their people and their trade union reps in line with the new ways of working before making significant decisions arising from COVID-19 that affect staff and their ways of working. Such discussions are especially critical around issues such as redeployment, changing the scope of practice, and health and safety and well-being. Contractual variations should be made in the normal way through agreement. Changes unconnected with COVID-19 should be postponed unless unavoidable."

Full SPF Statement: <https://www.socialpartnershipforum.org/media/166314/SPF-Covid-19-statement-final-and-formatted.pdf>

CSP advice is therefore that:

- There should always be collective consultation whether in context of organisational change policy or under streamlined arrangements
- This should be through staff side/union reps initially then also through full staff meetings
- Changes should be temporary with a clear end and/or regular review dates e.g. every 8 weeks, and/or setting out the circumstances in which the change should end
- There should be scope for individuals to raise special circumstances that might prevent them from working longer/different hours. Any such individual objections should not be unreasonably dismissed
- No-one should be worse off financially nor work any longer hours involuntarily over a - say - 12 week comparison period
- There should be an agreed and clear process to resolve any such pay/hours disputes
- It should be agreed that a return to status quo will apply at the end of the process, with full consultation if any of the temporary changes are proposed to be made permanent
- AFC terms and conditions must be adhered to, including weekend payments. There should be an explicit focus on the health and wellbeing of staff, allowing requests for AL etc.
- There should be written confirmation of all the above.