

## **DRAFT NOTE OF THE SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE ADVISORY BOARD TELECON HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 MARCH 2020 IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

**On the line:** Brigadier Hugh Monro, Non-Executive Director and Advisory Board Chair  
Colin McConnell, Chief Executive, SPS  
Teresa Medhurst, Deputy Chief Executive, SPS  
Prof Kay Hampton, Non-Executive Director  
Gill Stillie, Non-Executive Director  
Rob Molan, Non-Executive Director  
Gavin Scott, Risk Monitoring and Audit Committee (RMAC) Chair  
Ali Purdie, Interim Director of Operations, SPS  
Sue Brookes, Interim Director of Strategy and Stakeholder Engagement, SPS  
Caroline Johnston, Interim Director of Corporate Services, SPS  
Stephen Coyle, Head of Health and Justice, SPS  
Martin McGoldrick, Head of Corporate Risk and Change, SPS

### **Introduction and Welcome**

1. Brigadier Monro opened the meeting and thanked the Executive team for undertaking the call in these difficult times – noting that the challenges the organisation is facing must be daunting.
2. Brigadier Monro then noted the imminent departure of Colin McConnell as Chief Executive, thanking him for his dedication and hard work over the 8 years that he has led the service. He particularly noted the skill with which Mr McConnell has led the service on its transformational journey, and wished him well for his new role with Scottish Government.
3. Brigadier Monro then went on to comment on Teresa Medhurst taking over as Interim Chief Executive, noting that SPS couldn't have a better person to be taking on the mantle from Mr McConnell in these challenging times.
4. Additionally, Brigadier Monro welcomed Mr Purdie and Mrs Brookes to their first Advisory Board meeting and wished them well in their new roles.
5. Brigadier Monro also noted that there was a need for continued good governance throughout this crisis and that there would need to be a flow of information and regular updates to the Advisory Board.

## Covid -19 Update

6. Mrs Medhurst then provided the Advisory Board with a comprehensive update on the SPS response to Covid-19. Of particular note:

- **SPS response level** – in the past week or so, the pandemic response has quickly moved from phase 1 (prevention and planning), through phase 2 (preparation and implementation) to phase 3 (pandemic period). This required a change in governance.
- **Governance of Response** – during phase 1 of the SPS response, much of the work was being coordinated and managed by a small team led by Stephen Coyle (Head of Health and Justice), Sharanne Findlay (Divisional Head of Operational Support) and Lesley MCDowall (Head of Health Strategy). Mrs Medhurst commended them for their sterling work. In phase 3, the National Steering Group will be chaired by Ali Purdie (interim Director of Operations) and will include TUS partners, external Health colleagues and SPS workstream leads for Partners; Communications; Prison Policy; Resilience; Resource; HR; Clinical. The National Steering Group will report into an Oversight group chaired by Mrs Medhurst which comprises the Directors; the Chair of the TUS and strategic Health colleagues. This will all be supported by suitably scaled programme management structures.
- **Possible cases** – as of the date of this meeting, there are 100 people in SPS care who are self-isolating. In addition, there are 861 staff who are off work as a result of sick absence; special leave (due to presenting factors); isolating with family; childcare issues; fall under the high risk categories.
- **Business critical roles** – to combat some of the above, SPS is focussing on business critical roles only and is looking to redeploy some members of staff (both operational and non-operational) into roles which primarily support the covid-19 response. Some work has been undertaken to date to redeploy laptops from individuals in non-critical roles, to allow more critical functions to carry on. As a result, it is recognised that there may be staff at home unable to do work who would relish the chance to transition to an alternative role to do more impactful work and support their colleagues. Scoping work is being undertaken on this.
- **Suspension of visits** – As the Advisory Board know, SPS took the difficult decision to suspend visits in establishments. There have been some very minor issues from people in our care, but for the most part these measures have been met positively. SPS are also restricting work in establishments to laundry and catering and are putting these teams onto shift work. This means that should there be an outbreak on a shift, contingency cover can be arranged whilst the original team go into isolation.
- **Family Support** – given the restrictions on visits noted above, SPS are creating a Families helpline (which goes live on 26<sup>th</sup> March). The contact number and information will be placed on the SPS website and social media. It will provide support, signposting and guidance for families, but will not be able to discuss personal issues relating to individuals in custody or their specific circumstances.
- **Digital services** – in addition, the Digital services team are exploring options in regard to access to video calls and also the possibility of mobile phones in cells.
- **Transition to core day** – SPS are also moving to a core day across the estates. This will be similar to the level of service which can be provided at weekends. Regimes will be limited, but access will be provided to external exercise. As this has to be done in smaller numbers, to achieve social distancing guidelines, it requires to be fulfilled throughout the day, hence the restriction on wider regimes.

- **Drop in court activity** – as a result of the reduction in court activity, there has been a significant drop in population figures. It is anticipated that there could be 7,800 in custody by 27<sup>th</sup> March and it is possible this could reduce further to 7,200 by the end of April.
- **Workforce** – significant work has been undertaken in regard to workforce. The inclusion of prison staff as key workers has helped considerably with schools now being closed. In addition, HR are exploring how partially retired staff could take on more hours without incurring a financial penalty on their pension. Similarly, HR are also looking at arrangements for retired workers who may be able to be brought back in to provide contingency cover. It was noted, during questions that some local authorities are taking slightly different approaches to the issue of key workers and access to schools, however it is believed that this may be a timing issue and HR are encouraging affected workers to contact them.
- **Releasing pressure** – in response to questions around releasing vulnerable individuals (as per England and Wales), it was confirmed that the Scottish Government are looking into the possibility of early release for people near the end of their sentence and possibly greater use of HDC to create capacity. Additionally, SPS are in dialogue with health colleagues in regard to how “shielding” for vulnerable people can be applied to the prison setting.
- **Incidents** – an update was given on the recent situation in Addiewell where a number of people took over a wing. Whilst this was resolved with minimal injuries, it has further supported the need for Scottish Government to consider previously less palatable options (i.e. early release or mobile phones in cells)

#### **Additional points**

7. Brigadier Monro asked Mr McConnell for his thoughts as departing Chief Executive. Mr McConnell noted that a tremendous amount of effort had been undertaken in a very short period of time to manage the emerging crisis. He noted that SPS work well in this space and are very experienced at crisis management, however he noted that the Executive team, like everyone else, would tire and that they needed to consider contingency arrangements to ensure that they were able to perform at their best.
8. Mr McConnell also agreed with Brigadier Monro’s earlier points on corporate responsibilities and also cautioned that governance would continue to be critical, and that arrangements would need to be made to ensure that effective governance could continue to be applied in these challenging times.
9. Mr McConnell also wanted to put on record his thanks to Kate Hudson for the work she undertook in her spell as Interim Director of Strategy and Stakeholder engagement. Mr McConnell wanted to note his appreciation of Ms Hudson’s intellectual capability and contribution on a number of endeavours. Brigadier Monro endorsed this, further noting that Ms Hudson has provided an extremely important contribution to SPS and that it mustn’t to be overlooked.

#### **Next steps**

10. Brigadier Monro asked that the Advisory Board be kept abreast of developments in the Covid-19 response and asked that fortnightly update calls be scheduled between Mrs Medhurst and the Advisory Board members.

**Action: Mr McGoldrick/ Ms Lawson**

#### **Advisory Board Secretariat**

March 2020