

MINUTES OF THE SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING HELD IN THE BEN CLEUCH MEETING ROOM, SPS COLLEGE, POLMONT ON 29 JANUARY 2025

Present: Ann McKechin, Non-Executive Director and Advisory Board Chair
Teresa Medhurst, Chief Executive, SPS
Linda Pollock, Deputy Chief Executive, SPS
Sarah Angus, Director of Policy, SPS
Lynne Clow, Non-Executive Director
Ian Whitehead, Director of Operations, SPS
Adam Jobson, Director of Organisational Development, SPS
Sharon Lawson, Executive Personal Assistant, SPS (Minutes) (attended virtually)
Simon Little, Non-Executive Director
Gerry O'Donnell, Director of Finance, SPS
Gareth Rose, Head of Communications, SPS
Lisa Taylor, Head of Corporate Strategy and Governance, SPS
Stephen Uphill, Non-Executive Director
Billy Watson, Non-Executive Director

In Attendance: Angela Holmes, Head of Psychology (for paper AB(JAN)05/25 only)
Prof Graham Towl (for paper AB(JAN)05/25 only)

Introduction and Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting, in particular, Mr Little who had recently been appointed as Non-Executive Director.
2. The Chair referred to several issues that had arisen since the last meeting, including the continued rise in prison numbers and the publication of the FAI Determination into the deaths of Katie Allan and William Brown (Lindsay), and noted that the Emergency Release Bill had now been passed with STP40 due to commence in February. She also congratulated the Governor and staff at HMP Dumfries on the recent HM Chief Inspector of Prisons' Inspection Report.

Apologies for Absence

3. Apologies for absence were received from Ms Stillie who was undertaking a DIPLAR and Mr Harley who was unable to attend due to another commitment for the early part of the meeting and technological issues for the latter part.

Declarations of Interest

4. There were no new declarations of interest.

Draft Minutes of the Advisory Board Meeting Held on 27 November, Action Points and Matters Arising

5. The draft minutes of the meeting held on 27 November were agreed as a true record. The Action Tracker was updated during the discussion, with several items being closed.

Action: Ms Lawson

Chief Executive's Update

6. The Chief Executive's update touched on the following points:

- The FAI Determination into the deaths of Katie Allan and William Brown (Lindsay), advising that Directors were meeting to discuss the recommendations contained therein. Members noted with concern the number of deaths in SPS custody in 2024, particularly the significant increase in those by natural causes. Ms McKechin and Mr Watson agreed to speak with Ms Angus outwith the meeting about the support and advice the NEDs could offer in this respect.
Action: Ms McKechin/Mr Watson/Ms Angus
- SPS is now engaged with the UK COVID Inquiry in relation to Module 8.
- Work was underway on the final submission for the current chapter of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) statement which includes SPS.
- Population numbers remain a concern and both the Chief and Deputy Chief Executives had attended a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs earlier that week to discuss the current position. A fuller update on population was provided by Mr Whitehead during his update.
- Budget pressures continue. The Chief Executive advised that the flash reporting which had been initiated by Finance colleagues had been invaluable in understanding the financial position monthly.
- The final business case for HMP Glasgow had recently been signed off and Ms Medhurst gave thanks to Ms Angus and Messrs McKean, Stoney and Weetman for their endeavours in securing this position.

7. The Chair thanked Ms Medhurst for her update, agreeing that it was indeed excellent news about HMP Glasgow. There then followed a fuller discussion about deaths in custody.

Prison Population

8. The prison population on 29 January was 8,263, with 149 on HDC. All establishments had now completed the first monthly review of their Assessed Capacity Tolerance.

9. STP40 will see between 260-390 individuals released over 3 tranches, with the first tranche scheduled for 18-20 February and fortnightly thereafter. It is anticipated that STP40 will see an overall on-going reduction in the population of around 5%. However, it was noted that the planned increase this year in solemn cases would have an impact on capacity.

10. Members thanked Mr Whitehead for his helpful update and again expressed their concern for establishment colleagues.

AB(JAN)01/25: SPS Advisory Board Development Plan 2025-26

11. Ms McKechin spoke to her draft plan and the suggested amendments and asked NED colleagues for their comments. Those NEDs present advised that they were content to accept the proposed changes and the plan was approved.

Action: Ms McKechin/Ms Lawson

AB(JAN)02/25: Financial Update/Budget Monitoring

12. This paper provided an update on the 2023-24 financial position as at 30 November and was discussed and noted by members.

AB(JAN)06/25: Financial Planning and Budget 2025-26

13. This paper provided members with an update on the 2025-26 resource and capital budget position.

14. The Scottish Government (SG) 2025-26 Budget Bill was published on 19 December 2024. In preparation for this, SPS submitted a high level budget response paper to SG highlighting the increase to budgets that would be required in 2025-26.

15. Financial planning packs were returned in November from Directorates and establishments, and Finance colleagues are collating and analysing the submissions as a basis on which to form estimated outturns for 2025-26 budget meetings with Directorates. These meetings will take place over the coming months to allow a further critical review of budget requirements and provide a robust financial forecast. Budget letters are scheduled to issue by end March.

16. The Advisory Board noted the current position, with NEDs requesting that a short paper on SPS' major projects (ie HMP Glasgow) be provided to them in advance of future meetings. Ms Pollock undertook to speak to Mr Copland in this respect.

Action: Ms Pollock

17. The NEDs had previously suggested inviting the Director General (Education and Justice) to a future Advisory Board meeting to discuss financial planning and agreed that there was still benefit in doing so. Ms Pollock agreed to take this forward. There then followed a discussion about efficiencies within SPS.

Action: Ms Pollock

18. Ms Pollock was asked to circulate the Annual Delivery Plan (ADP), together with a short discussion paper, to NEDs in advance of a meeting with the Director General.

Action: Ms Pollock

AB(JAN)03/25: Reduction in the Working Week

19. This paper provided the Advisory Board with an update on the Reduction in the Working Week project.

20. In January 2024, SPS agreed with the Trade Unions, as part of annual pay negotiations, to reduce the standard contractual working week from 37 to 35 hours without a reduction in pay. The intended benefits of the change include improved work life balance, working practices, employee wellbeing, and attraction and retention, together with alignment within the Scottish Administration.

21. The reduction in the working week was successfully implemented on 1 December 2024, with many establishments achieving a reduction in the working day by altering start and finish times for staff, with minimum impact on the existing prison regime. The change in working hours reflected SPS' commitment to enhancing work-life balance for the wider staffing group.

22. The Advisory Board noted this update, congratulating Mr Jobson and his teams for their work in achieving a successful outcome. It was noted that a feedback exercise was being conducted and NEDs recommended that this should incorporate information from prisoners directly.

AB(JAN)04/25: Prisoner Survey 2024

23. This paper provided Advisory Board members with a brief on the findings emerging from the 2024 Prison Survey (PS24).

24. The Prison Survey was introduced in 1991 and focuses on the core elements of prison life. It is undertaken in each of the 17 Scottish prisons and is offered to all of those held in custody in Scotland. The frequency of the Survey has varied - initially undertaken every 3 years in the 1990s, then annually from 2001-2009 and then biannually from 2011. Due to the pandemic, the last Survey was undertaken in 2019; this 2024 edition provides a timely update at a time of unprecedented pressure. Members were advised that this is likely to be the last paper-based Prison Survey as a targeted, incremental and thematic approach moving forwards is envisaged with the implementation of in-cell digital services across the estate.

25. Detailed findings were presented within the paper and discussed by members during the meeting.

26. The PS24 Bulletin will be published in February and a range of communication and dissemination has already taken place. Ms Taylor offered to provide a focused webinar for NEDs which they accepted.

Action: Ms Taylor

RMAC Chair's Verbal Report

27. In his absence, Mr Harley provided a written update advising that RMAC met on 27 November and covered the following key issues:

- Planning has commenced for the 2024-25 annual audit.
- A new risk had been added to the Risk Register relating to "HR and Payroll" triggered by the uncovering of some data issues during new system testing.
- Internal Audit will be acting in an advisory capacity regarding ex-gratia improvements.
- The Fraud Response Group Annual Report was discussed and members noted the low levels of fraud and discussed where additional dedicated resource could be utilised.

28. Members thanked Mr Harley in his absence for this update.

Any Other Business

29. Members discussed topics to be included for discussion in the October Planning Day.

Action: Ms Pollock/Ms Taylor

Draft Agenda for January 2025 Meeting

30. The agenda for the March meeting was agreed as drafted.

Date of Next Meeting

31. The next Advisory Board meeting will be held jointly with Governors-in-Charge and will be held on **Thursday 27 March from 0900-1200hrs in the Ben Cleuch Meeting Room, SPS College, Polmont.**

32. The Chair summed up the discussion by thanking members for their contributions and for the discussion that had taken place.

AB(JAN)05/25: Presentation and Discussion: Independent Review of SPS Psychological Services

33. Prof Graham Towl and Angela Holmes, Head of Psychology, were welcomed to the meeting at this point to discuss the Review of Psychological Services which Prof Towl had undertaken on SPS' behalf in 2024 following on-going problems with recruitment and retention within psychological services.

34. The main themes raised within Prof Towl's report relate to structure and utilising Psychologists to their full potential in the deployment of the resource. In consultation with SPS Heads of Psychology (now Consultant Psychologists), many of the points and recommendations were accepted - notably in relation to opportunities for diverse work, retention and in consideration of the structure of the service.

35. Considering learning from the report, alongside a wider understanding of psychological services in other jurisdictions, has been important in framing next steps, and the approach in sister Services has highlighted some key differences to SPS' current service delivery approach.

36. Following consideration of the report by the Executive Management Group (EMG), key points have been identified for action by Policy Directorate and are being taken forward.

37. The Chair thanked both Prof Towl and Ms Holmes for their presentation and the thoughtful discussion which this had provoked on the future of service delivery.

38. Following discussion, the Chair summed up the conversation by welcoming Prof Towl's report, which was incredibly constructive and set out in a sequenced way, in assisting SPS in the on-going development of Psychological Services. Members thanked him for his insight and overall assistance, and for giving up his time to attend the discussion. Ms Angus was asked to return to the Advisory Board in November with an update on progress.

Action: Ms Angus

**Advisory Board Secretariat
January 2025**