

MINUTES OF THE SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING HELD IN THE BOARD ROOM, SPS HEADQUARTERS ON 28 MAY

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 Harley, Non-Executive Director and RMAC Chair
Adam Jobson, Director of Organisational Development, SPS
Simon Little, Non-Executive Director
Gerry O'Donnell, Director of Finance, SPS
Gareth Rose, Head of Communications, SPS
Gill Stillie, Non-Executive Director
Lisa Taylor, Head of Corporate Strategy and Governance, SPS
Stephen Uphill, Non-Executive Director
Billy Watson, Non-Executive Director
Ian Whitehead, Director of Operations, SPS

In Attendance: Drew Jardine, Community Justice Policy Manager (for paper AB(MAY)03/25 only)
Rachael Blackburn, OCE Administrator, SPS (Minutes)

Introduction and Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and referred to several issues that had arisen since the last meeting, including:

- SG internal audit are undertaking an advisory report on SPS governance. An early indication of feedback to the Chair suggested there will be recommendations around Advisory Board meeting structure including a review of length of the meetings going forward.
- Following a brief meeting in March with the Director General (Education and Justice), Neil Rennick he has offered to meet the Advisory Board for a fuller discussion. The Chief Executive will make arrangements for this to occur at an early point.

Action: Chief Executive

- The Chair's representation as a Non-Executive member at the newly established FAI Taskforce to implement the recommendations of a recent FAI Determination.

Apologies for Absence

2. Apologies for absence were received from Sharon Lawson and the Chair thanked Ms Blackburn for minuting the meeting in her absence.

Declarations of Interest

3. There were no new declarations of interest.

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

4. The draft minutes of the meeting held on 27 March were agreed as a true record. The Action Tracker, which had been streamlined since the last meeting, was updated during the discussion with members noting that several actions around Board governance would be discussed at the next meeting.

Action: Ms Lawson

Chief Executive's Update

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

- Population numbers have stabilised and have been sitting around 8,100 for the last few months. However, this has not provided respite as they have remained consistently high. Additionally, there is the anticipation that numbers will rise to 8,400 by summer 2025. The Chief Executive advised that the Scottish Government are considering a range of options in response to high population. Members were advised that there are concerns over staff resilience and morale, as well as tolerance of the persistent pressures.
- An update on pay offer discussions to date was provided.
- Following the FAI Determination, a Taskforce has been set up. This was a rapid action based model underpinned by independence, expertise and transparency of reporting to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs. This included a range of work including 'Talk to Me' Review, signs of life pilot and development of a 'ligature point Toolkit' which is being piloted in HMPYOI Polmont. It was noted that the Taskforce would also cover the additional recommendations arising from the FAI Determination in the case of Jack McKenzie.

6. The Chair thanked Ms Medhurst for her update.

AB(MAY)01/25: Prison Population Update

7. The prison population on 28 May was 8,126. In custody numbers have remained stable for several weeks, and on average, below 8,150.

8. The Director of Operations provided an update on further estate optimisation work underway, including a visit to HMP Grampian earlier in the month to discuss plans for the opening of the remainder of Cruden Hall.

9. Members were made aware that Early Release criteria is similar to HDC and as such, there has been a consequent drop in HDC numbers, however, these are starting to increase again.

10. Members discussed their concerns over the increasing population, noting the rise in organised crime within prisons, and whether there is any way to alleviate these risks/pressures.

11. The Chair thanked Mr Whitehead for his update.

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

12. This paper provided an update on the 2024-25 financial position as at 31 March and was discussed and noted by members. It was confirmed that the annual accounts had been submitted to our auditors and members thanked the Director of Finance and his team for their efforts.

AB(MAY)03/25: 'Deep Dive' Discussion: Development and Learning Strategy and Provision (Drew Jardine, Community Justice Policy Manager, joined the meeting for this discussion)

13. The Chair welcomed Mr Jardine to the meeting at this point. He provided an update on the new Development and Learning Strategy, 'Learning for a Better Future', the contract development and procurement of a new provider and the progress in transition and implementation.

14. Work was structured as a project and initiated via the SPS Major Projects Management Group (MPMG) on 22 December 2022 to design and implement the next generation of the learning contract. The mandate of work ensured consideration of neuro-divergence (including clear screening and support pathways), trauma-informed practice and digital enablers in delivery. The first phase focused on the development of the new learning strategy, whilst also extending the existing service provider contract to July 2025.

15. Underpinning the strategy development, SPS commissioned 2 pieces of research - Diffley User Voice and Dr Briege Nugent's Literature Review. Utilising this research and key stakeholder input and collaboration from Education Scotland, senior academics and internal SPS colleagues, 'Learning for a Better Future' was created to answer the fundamental question - "How can we provide a context for development and learning within our prisons that will enable people to have a better life beyond custody and increase the likelihood of desistance?" The new strategy and its associated guidance were completed with testing via extensive stakeholder feedback sessions. Executive Management Group (EMG) approval was gained in May 2024, with full publication on 28 January 2025.

16. Strategy implementation has and continues to be facilitated through a series of workshops with local Heads of Offender Outcomes and through presentations at Governor forums. Contract performance metrics have been agreed and are contained within the contract, and the digital platform for reporting this data remains under development towards the go live date of 1 August 2025.

17. The key focus of the next phasing of the project is in ensuring change management principles are used to support the transition to the new contractor, the successful transfer of staff and the embedding of the strategy and education delivery in establishments, whilst managing and mitigating any risks to delivery.

18. The Advisory Board thanked Mr Jardine for his attendance and presentation and noted that the project remains on track and within budget, achieving significant improvements in strategy and contract specification (Mr Jardine left the meeting at this point).

AB(MAY)04/25: RMAC Annual Report, including Annual Audit and Assurance Plan

19. Mr Harley presented this paper which summarised RMAC's work during the year and provided members' opinions on matters related to the operation of SPS' audit, risk and internal control arrangements.

20. RMAC's remit is to act as an independent scrutiny body, without executive powers, to support and advise the Accountable Officer and the Advisory Board in their responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance (including the annual accounts) and associated assurance through a process of constructive challenge.

21. Following a recommendation from Audit Scotland and a review of the Terms of Reference in March 2024, RMAC minutes are now published on SPS' website. A separate Action Log is also maintained.

22. To support the delivery of quality public services, a range of audit and assurance activities take place within SPS each year and the Annual Audit and Assurance Plan provided a summary of the planned audit and assurance activity for the 2025-26 year.

23. In September 2024, RMAC discussed and agreed 3 strategic priority areas for particular attention over the coming years. These were Assurance Mapping, Cyber Security and Information Security and Oversight of Establishment-Level Processes.

24. The Advisory Board noted both the RMAC Annual Report and the planned audit and assurance activity for 2025-26, and thanked Mr Harley for his paper.

AB(MAY)05/25: Workforce Metrics (Q4 2024-25)

25. This paper provided the Advisory Board with an update on SPS' workforce metrics.

26. Over the last year, SPS has been focused on the introduction of the new integrated payroll and HR system, iTrent, which is now the source of many SPS' people metrics data. As a result of moving over to the new system, a people metrics report for Q3 was not produced, however this report provides an analysis of key people-related themes for the financial year 2024-25.

27. Of note is the 3% increase in the size of our workforce during 2024-25 with SPS recruiting 447 prison officers and 138 non-operational staff during the year.

28. During 2024-25, our gender pay gap reduced from 6% to 4.3%.

29. Organisational Development are continuing to progress work to enhance/tailor the wellbeing supports that are available to our staff and managers.

30. The Advisory Board welcomed the significant increase in training compliance and noted how the age distribution of our workforce may impact future succession planning. The Advisory Board thanked Mr Jobson for his paper, noting the updates contained therein.

AB(MAY)06/25: Improvement Framework Report: Quarter 4 (January-March 2024)

31. This paper provided an integrated account of organisational performance and risk (including review of Annual Delivery Plan (ADP)), and a summary update as at the end of Quarter 4 (Q4) of the 2024-25 reporting year.

32. Several key activities for the organisation came to fruition this quarter, many of which have been the subject of significant development activity for some time: the signing of the contract for HMP Glasgow; publication of the strategies for both Alcohol and Drug Recovery, and Learning and Development; implementation of the iTrent HR and payroll system; and the Justice Partners Escort and Court Custody Scotland (JPECCS) contract notice publication.

These all represent significant milestones in workstreams across the organisation, many of which have had a substantial dependency on SPS' procurement function.

33. The Advisory Board noted Q4 performance and thanked Ms Taylor and her team for their work in producing the paper.

AB(MAY)07/25: Private Sector Contract Reports

34. This paper provided an update on the operational and contractual performance of the major private sector contracts managed by SPS. SPS now has 2 major private contracts for the delivery of custodial and prison escort services - the Scottish Court Custody and Prisoner Escort Services (SCCPES) and the privately operated prison at HMP Addiewell.

35. The Advisory Board noted that the SCCPES contract with GEOAmev will not be extended and the re-tender of the escort contract was approved by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs in February. Work with the new Project Team under the Justice Partners Escort and Court Custody (Scotland) (JPECCS) name continues. The Contract Management Unit (CMU) will prioritise working closely with all Multi-Agency Liaison Group (MALG) partners to assist in the delivery of the SCCPES contract by the current contract provider. All options for supporting GEOAmev are being considered to ensure the sustainability of the contractor and the service to the Justice sector until the end of the current contract in January 2027.

36. HMP Addiewell also continues to experience staff attrition and recruitment issues, which is in line with the current market conditions across the country. Overall, the staffing position is static, however, this increased turnover remains a risk with the increased proportion of inexperienced staff.

37. Members thanked Mr Whitehead for this update and noted that the CMU continue to work with all private sector contractors to monitor performance against contractual expectations.

Any Other Business

38. There was no further business discussed.

Draft Agenda for July 2025 Meeting

39. The agenda for the July meeting was agreed as drafted.

Date of Next Meeting

40. The next Advisory Board meeting will be held on 30 July from 0900-1200hrs in **the new Board Room, SPS Headquarters**.

Advisory Board Secretariat
May 2025