

MINUTES OF THE SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING HELD IN THE BOARD ROOM, SPS HEADQUARTERS ON 24 SEPTEMBER

Present: Ann McKechin, Non-Executive Director (NED) and Advisory Board Chair
Teresa Medhurst, Chief Executive, SPS
Linda Pollock, Deputy Chief Executive, SPS
Sarah Angus, Director of Policy, SPS
Lynne Clow, NED
Ian Harley, NED and RMAC Chair
Andy Hodge, Director of Operations, SPS
Adam Jobson, Director of Organisational Development, SPS
Simon Little, NED
Amy McDonald, Director of Finance, SPS
Gareth Rose, Head of Communications, SPS
Lisa Taylor, Director of Engagement and Change Delivery, SPS
Stephen Uphill, NED
Amy Scott, SPS (Minutes)

Introduction and Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and noted that:
 - The Chief Executive had announced her plans for retirement in early 2026. Ms McKechin commented on Ms Medhurst's excellent service and expressed gratitude for the support she had received during her time on the Advisory Board.
 - Ms Medhurst had formally written to the Cabinet Secretary to note SPS' concerns over the population crisis and SPS' ability to maintain a safe and stable Service. The Chair noted she had previously written a similar letter to the Scottish Government last year to express her concerns.
 - The Talk to Me review process is underway and the Chair noted that this would be discussed at the October Planning Day.

Apologies for Absence

2. Apologies for absence were received from Ms Lawson and Mr Watson.

Declarations of Interest

3. There were no new declarations of interest.

Draft Minutes of the Advisory Board Meeting Held on 30 July, Action Points and Matters Arising

4. The draft minutes of the meeting held on 30 July were agreed as a true record. The Action Tracker was updated during the discussion.

Action: Ms Lawson

5. Ms Taylor confirmed that the Annual Delivery Plan would now be sent to the NEDs for information.

6. The NEDs had previously asked for a training session on Cyber Security and Mr Ironside's response in relation to hosting an online course in October was awaited. However, whilst the Chief Executive supported this request, she expressed concerns about the current pressures on staff and had spoken with both Ms McKechin and Mr Harley earlier in the day with a view to delaying this request meantime.

Action: Ms McKechin

Chief Executive's Update

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

- SPS is facing an extremely busy period with several complex issues causing additional strain on the organisation.
- Ms Medhurst briefly discussed the population pressures establishments are facing, noting that this issue would be discussed at length during the meeting.
- The FAI Taskforce for Deaths in Custody is on-going, with the ligature toolkit and signs of life system pilot being brought into establishments. Ms Pollock and Ms Roughan are attending the Scottish Government Ministerial Accountability Board to present the progress of the Taskforce to date and will provide an update at the next Advisory Board meeting.

Action: Ms Pollock

8. The Chair thanked Ms Medhurst for her informative and helpful update.

AB(SEP)01/25: Population Management Highlight Report

9. The prison population on 24 September was 8,392, with 114 people on HDC. Members again noted that custody numbers continue to rise steadily and were advised that both Ministerial and Justice colleagues continue to engage on the situation.

10. Mr Hodge discussed the population challenges that SPS currently faces with increasing long-term population numbers and rises in Rule 95 being applied to individuals and Serious Organised Crime members being sentenced and housed close to each other which is causing serious staff concern. Resourcing is also a concerning factor for the stability of running safe and full regimes with programmes being cancelled which is causing extra strain on residential staff.

11. Members discussed the on-going work to understand how best these issues can be managed and noted changes within the establishment criteria and the work to de-escalate issues in halls where organised crime members are involved.

12. Members engaged in a discussion over the rising population figures and SPS' alternative options and contingency planning. Ms Medhurst advised of current discussions that are taking place with SG colleagues and noted the actions that are being taken toward. Mr Hodge discussed contingency planning options for establishments.

13. Ms McKechin presented a proposed draft letter, which included recommendations and members' full endorsement of Ms Medhurst's and HMIPS' previous letters, for submission to the Cabinet Secretary, which members were content to approve.

Action: Ms McKechin

14. The Chair thanked Mr Hodge for his update.

AB(SEP)03/25: Improvement Framework (Q1 2025-26)

15. This paper provided an integrated account of organisational performance and risk as at the end of Quarter 1 of the 2025-26 reporting year. As with previous Q1 reports, this condensed report contained less data and information than other quarters, primarily due to capacity and availability of relevant staff over the summer period. Ms Taylor provided a brief overview of the key dates and developments over the Q1 period, noting increasing work on the risk of cyber security and review of the annual learning plan.

16. Members noted and thanked Ms Taylor and her team for this informative report.

AB(SEP)06/25: Healthcare Update

17. Ms Angus provided a brief overview of the work on-going within Healthcare noting that there is continuous improvement on healthcare for individuals in custody. She provided brief updates on the strategy work for Mental Health, Alcohol and Drug Recovery, and Talk to Me.

18. Ms Angus advised that work is continuing on the MoRS Review to determine who is best placed to take this work forward and work with the independent research and evaluation process. The research evaluation work will take approx 3 months once the independent contractor has been appointed. Members discussed and Ms McKechin requested this subject be brought to a future meeting for a deep dive discussion. It was agreed that Ms McKechin would have a separate meeting with Ms Angus and Ms Pollock to determine when would be an appropriate time to schedule this.

Action: Ms McKechin, Ms Pollock, Ms Angus

AB(SEP)05/25: Advisory Board Terms of Reference (ToR)

19. Ms McKechin discussed the paper briefly and noted the changes that had been made to the ToR. She advised that reports would now be noted at meetings unless they have been selected for a deep dive discussion as agreed in the ToR. It was agreed that this would be added to the agenda annually for review. The proposed changes to the ToR were agreed.

20. Ms McKechin gave special thanks to Ms Taylor and the team for their work in producing the updated ToR.

AB(SEP)04/25: Workforce Metrics (Q1 2025-26)

21. The Q1 2025-26 SPS workforce metrics report provided data and analysis across many people themes. Mr Jobson explained that this report was shorter than the Q4 2024-25 report as it focused on emerging trends and changes and therefore data which does not change significantly between each quarter was not included.

22. SPS' workforce continues to increase and SPS now employs more prison officers than ever before. Despite these increases, prisons remain under huge pressure and feedback from Governors is that their deployment models are unrealistic. The changes to regimes could provide an opportunity for Governors to provide a more realistic regime, staffing numbers and deployment model which could potentially offer better value for money.

23. Moving to the integrated iTrent system has brought to light several data challenges that are affecting SPS' ability to produce and rely upon single source people data. Whilst this has been a long-standing issue, it is recognised that SPS' people data, and the effective

management of that data, is crucial in establishing a single source of truth, and working in an evidence-based way to inform our decision making. For that reason, Organisational Development Directorate are now taking forward work to scope and implement a more strategic data management and oversight approach that will work in partnership with key stakeholders to enable sustained, incremental improvement of data knowledge, maturity and practice.

24. Members noted the updates contained within this paper and thanked Mr Jobson and his team for its production.

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

25. This paper provided an update on the 2025-26 financial position covering the period 1 April-31 July and was noted by members.

RMAC Verbal Update

26. Mr Harley provided members with a verbal update on RMAC:

- He advised that RMAC members had discussed Internal audit actions and recommendations.
- A workshop involving Mr Ironside and the Digital team is still to be arranged.
- Induction plans for new RMAC members may include a light touch survey for feedback for both new and current members.

27. The Chair thanked Mr Harley for his update.

Any Other Business

28. The agenda for the October Planning Day meeting was agreed noting a tour of the establishment thereafter for the NEDs.

Draft Agenda for November 2025 Meeting

29. The agenda for the November meeting will be agreed at a later date.

Action: Ms Lawson

Date of Next Meeting

30. The Advisory Board Planning Day will be held on 29 October from 0930-1300 hrs in the Tayview Board Room, HMP Castle Huntly.

31. The next Advisory Board meeting will be held on 26 November from 0900-1200 hrs in Room G.09, SPS Headquarters.

Advisory Board Secretariat September 2025