

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL  
TRANSFORMING LIVES

# **SPS Commitment to Change: Our approach to delivering Fatal Accident Inquiry Recommendations**

## **December 2025**

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# 1. Foreword

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) is committed to learning from every Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI) to ensure that we support those in our care to keep them safe. While recent inquiries including those into the deaths of Katie Allan and William Lindsay (or Brown) and Jack McKenzie, have highlighted how we must do better, our response must extend beyond individual cases. It must reflect a system-wide commitment to change.

This delivery framework outlines our approach to implementing FAI recommendations. It is both a plan for action and a pledge to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. We have structured our response around key themes from suicide prevention to information sharing, workforce support to personal safety, and each is led by individuals with the expertise and drive to make a meaningful difference. Central to this work are the voices of those most affected: people in our care, their families, our staff, and our partners.

This is not a one-time effort. The changes we make now will shape our service for years to come and will provide the foundation for ongoing reflection, learning and reform. A new governance structure commenced in February 2025, led by a National Taskforce and overseen by Scottish Ministers, through the Ministerial Accountability Board, will ensure that progress is monitored, learning is embedded, and delivery remains focused.

As Chief Executive, I am fully committed to leading this work. We will move forward with humility, urgency, and a deep sense of responsibility to those who remain in our care, while fostering a culture of compassion and accountability.

**Teresa Medhurst**

Chief Executive

Scottish Prison Service

## 2. Summary

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) is committed to learning from every Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI) to protect and support those in our care. Our new National Taskforce for Prison Welfare and Safety established in February 2025, sets out a clear, coordinated approach to implementing FAI recommendations, underpinned by the principles of transparency, accountability, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

This framework is not a one-off response, but a long-term commitment to transformation. It brings together the voices of people in custody, their families, staff, and partners, ensuring that lived experience and professional insight shape our actions. By embedding user voice and partnership working at every stage, we aim to create safer, more compassionate environments for everyone who lives and works in our prisons.

Our approach is structured around key themes, including suicide prevention, innovation and technology, bullying prevention, cell and personal safety, workforce support, and information sharing. Each theme is led by subject matter experts and supported by cross-cutting priorities such as mental health, family engagement, and the prisoner pathway programme. SPS also actively contributes to themes led by partners, recognising that meaningful progress depends on working together. By sharing expertise and aligning efforts, we aim to create safer environments and better outcomes for everyone.

Robust governance ensures progress is monitored and learning is embedded. The Scottish Government's Ministerial Accountability Board and the SPS National Taskforce for Prison Welfare and Safety provide strategic oversight, while independent scrutiny is delivered by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland.

Transparency is central to our work. We will provide regular updates, publish annual reports, and improve data sharing to keep the public, families, and partners informed and engaged. Through this Framework, SPS is building the foundations for ongoing reflection and reform — delivering meaningful, person-centred change and shaping a safer future for all.

### 3. Introduction

Every death in prison custody is a tragedy for the individual who has died, for their family and loved ones, for those who cared for them, and for the wider community. While some deaths may occur in the context of terminal illness or advanced age, each loss deserves careful reflection and a compassionate response.

In Scotland, an FAI is a legal process, undertaken by a sheriff, that investigates the circumstances of certain deaths, including all deaths in prison custody (unless such deaths are taken to be adequately investigated by some other means, such as criminal proceedings). FAIs are conducted in the public interest and aim to establish the circumstances of the death and consider what steps might be taken to prevent other deaths in similar circumstances. The sheriff will make determinations as to the circumstances and may make recommendations to prevent similar incidents in the future. While not all FAIs result in recommendations, those that do provide a vital opportunity for learning and change.

Alongside the FAI process, SPS conducts our own internal review through the Death in Prison Learning, Audit and Review (DIPLAR) process. This allows us to examine each case to identify immediate learning, and take early action where needed. The FAI and DIPLAR processes form the foundation of our approach to understanding and responding to deaths in custody.

This framework sets out how SPS will deliver on FAI recommendations - not only those arising recently, but also those going forward. It reflects our commitment to continuous improvement, transparency, and collaboration with partners across the justice, health, and care systems. The recommendations we receive often highlight the need for improved information sharing, enhanced staff training, and sustaining a culture of care that better recognises and responds to vulnerability.

By embedding these lessons into our systems, practices, and culture, we aim to create safer environments for everyone who lives and works in our prisons.

#### **Purpose**

This Delivery Framework sets out how SPS will respond to, and implement, recommendations arising from FAIs into deaths in prison custody. It provides a clear, coordinated, and accountable approach to delivering change that strengthens our systems, supports our staff, and improves outcomes for those in our care.

Our commitment is rooted in four core principles: transparency, accountability, collaboration, and continuous improvement. These principles guide how we learn from

each death, how we work with partners across the justice, health, and care systems, and how we ensure that lessons lead to lasting change.

This framework is not a one-off response. It represents a long-term commitment to transformation; one that evolves as we learn, as we listen, and as we strive to do better. The actions we take now will shape the future of our service, helping to build a safer, more compassionate system for everyone who lives and works in our prisons.

## Our Principles for Change

The implementation of this Framework is underpinned by four key principles:



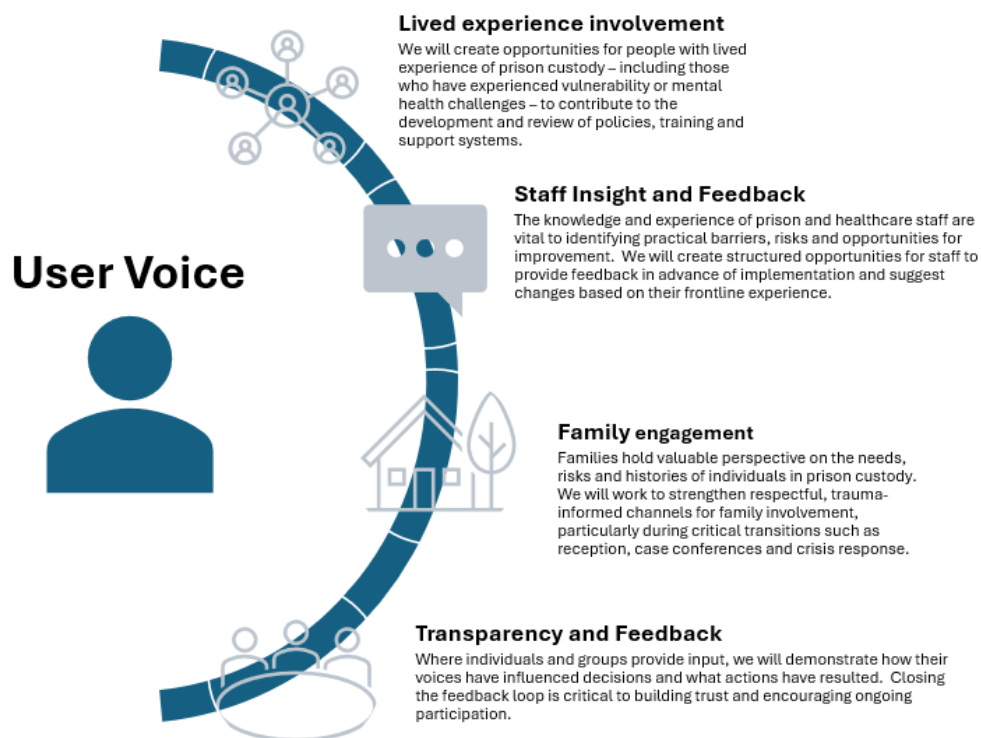
## User Voice

Listening to the voices of those most affected by the prison system is essential to delivering meaningful and lasting change. The experiences of people in custody, their families, frontline staff, healthcare professionals, and others across the justice system offer critical insight into what works, what doesn't, and where our responsibilities must be strengthened.

As we deliver on recommendations from FAIs, SPS is committed to placing genuine engagement and participation at the heart of our approach. This means not only hearing from individuals, but ensuring their perspectives actively shape how we design, implement, and evaluate the actions we take.

Embedding user voice in this way reflects our core principles: transparency in how decisions are made, accountability for the outcomes we deliver, collaboration with those who live and work in our prisons, and a commitment to continuous improvement. By listening, learning, and acting together, we can build a safer, more responsive system for all.

User voice is embedded in delivery through:



Embedding user voice is not simply about inclusion, it is about improving safety, dignity, and outcomes by ensuring those most affected by our services are active partners in shaping them. By learning from lived experience and frontline insights, we strengthen our ability to deliver meaningful, person-centred reform and build a culture of accountability and compassion across the system.

## Partnership Working

Delivering FAI recommendations effectively requires a whole-system approach. Many of the challenges identified through FAIs occur at the points where services intersect during transitions, handovers, or where responsibilities are shared. These are the moments where coordinated, joined-up working is most critical.

SPS recognise that we cannot achieve meaningful change alone. We are committed to working closely with partners across justice, health, and care systems to ensure that people in our care receive consistent, safe, and person-centred support throughout their journey.

Strong collaboration is essential to building a system that learns, adapts, and improves together. Key partners in this work include:

- **NHS Health Boards** – to ensure effective mental health care, substance use support, and physical healthcare services are available and integrated with prison-based systems.
- **Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service** – to promote early identification of vulnerabilities and support the appropriate use of alternatives to custody where possible.
- **Secure Care** – to support information sharing and effective transition from the secure estate to SPS custody.
- **Local Authorities (Social Work and Social Care)** – to coordinate care planning, particularly for young people and those with complex needs, and to ensure continuity of support from the community into custody and back again.
- **Police Scotland** – to support information sharing and effective transitions from police custody to the prison estate.
- **Third Sector Organisations** – to bring specialist knowledge, advocacy, and flexible support to individuals before, during, and after custody.
- **Trade Unions** – to ensure that staff are supported, their professional insight is valued, and any workforce changes are delivered in partnership with those on the ground.

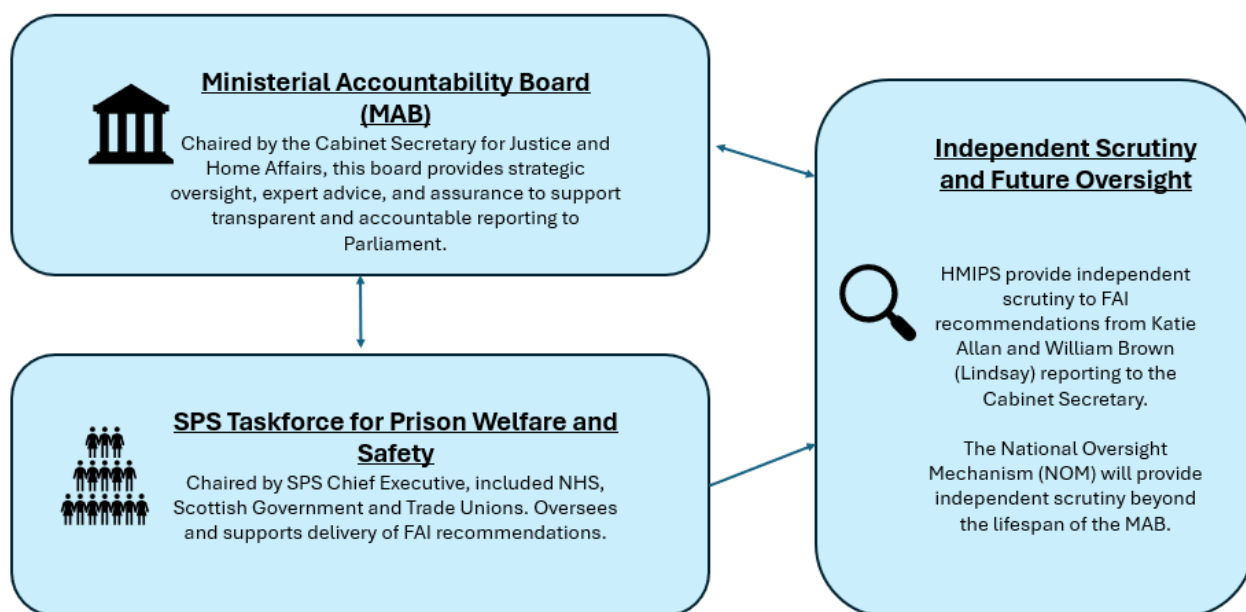
## 4. Strategic Approach

Delivering FAI recommendations requires a coordinated, strategic, and accountable approach. We are committed to embedding systemic change through robust governance, clear leadership, and focused delivery aligned with key thematic priorities.

### Governance and Oversight

At the heart of this framework is a multi-layered governance structure designed to ensure clarity of responsibility, cross-sector collaboration, and transparency:

- **Scottish Government Ministerial Accountability Board (MAB)**  
Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, this board provides strategic oversight of the recommendations and commitments arising from the Fatal Accident Inquiries into the deaths of Katie Allan and William Lindsay (also known as William Brown); and Jack McKenzie. It drives and monitors progress, holds Action Owners to account, and ensures actions are implemented at pace. The Ministerial Accountability Board (MAB) maintains a clear line of sight between operational delivery and ministerial accountability and promotes transparency through the publication of minutes and relevant papers, including progress reports.
- **SPS National Taskforce for Prison Welfare and Safety**  
Chaired by the Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service, the Taskforce brings together senior representatives from key partner agencies including the NHS, Scottish Government, and SPS Trade Union Side. It oversees the delivery of FAI recommendations and ensures coordinated, cross-agency action.
- **Independent Scrutiny and Future Oversight**  
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS) plays a critical role in scrutinising implementation through thematic inspections and routine monitoring.



## 5. Thematic Delivery

The effective delivery of FAI recommendations requires a structured, expert-led, and coordinated approach. To support this, we have adopted a thematic model that groups recommendations and lessons learned into strategic areas of focus. This approach recognises that many of the issues raised such as suicide prevention, staff training, and information sharing cut across organisational boundaries and cannot be addressed in isolation.

By organising our work thematically, we ensure that delivery is coordinated, avoids duplication, and addresses both root causes and systemic challenges. This model also enables us to embed learning into everyday practice, rather than creating parallel or short-lived processes.

Each theme is led by a designated subject matter expert responsible for:

- Developing and driving delivery plans for all relevant recommendations and learning.
- Collaborating across SPS and with external partners to embed sustainable change.
- Aligning delivery with existing policies, practices, and strategic priorities.

This thematic structure is not fixed. It reflects the current focus of our work, based on recent FAIs and internal reviews, but will be reviewed and adapted where new recommendations emerge and our understanding evolves.

## Current Strategic Themes

- **Suicide Prevention**  
Strengthening identification, support, and intervention strategies for those at risk of self-harm or suicide, with a focus on early prevention and continuity of care.
- **Innovation and Technology**  
Exploring, piloting, and implementing new tools, data systems, and digital solutions to enhance safety, communication, and service delivery.
- **Bullying Prevention and Response**  
Enhancing policies, culture, and practice to prevent bullying, promote respectful behaviours, support those affected, and build safer custodial communities.
- **Cell and Personal Safety**  
Improving the design, monitoring, and management of the physical environment to minimise risk and uphold dignity.
- **Workforce Support and Training**  
Equipping staff with the skills, knowledge, and support needed to confidently recognise and respond to vulnerability and risk.
- **Information Sharing and Record Keeping**  
Improving how key information is recorded, accessed, and shared — both within the SPS and with external partners — to support timely, accurate, and coordinated care.

## Cross-Cutting Priorities (Golden Threads)

In addition to the strategic themes, several cross-cutting priorities or “golden threads” have been identified. These include:

- **Mental Health**  
Mental health is a critical factor in understanding vulnerability and risk in custody. It influences how individuals experience imprisonment, how they respond to stress, and how they engage with support. This thread ensures that mental health is considered in every aspect of delivery from policy design to frontline practice and that support is proactive, person-centred, and trauma informed. We do this by working closely with our NHS partners who have responsibility for delivering mental health services in our establishments.

- **Family Engagement**

Families play a vital role in supporting wellbeing, rehabilitation, and continuity of care. This thread recognises the importance of involving families meaningfully, not only in moments of crisis, but throughout a person's journey in custody. It encourages approaches that are inclusive, compassionate, and that value the insights and support families can offer.

- **The Prisoner Pathway Programme**

The prisoner pathway provides a structured approach to understanding and supporting individuals throughout their time in custody from admission to release. This thread ensures that all thematic work aligns with the broader journey of the person in our care, promoting consistency, reducing fragmentation, and supporting better outcomes through rehabilitation at every stage.

These threads are essential to the success of delivery across all themes. They provide a lens through which all activity must be viewed, ensuring that improvements are holistic, person-centred, and responsive to the broader context of vulnerability.

Thematic leads are expected to actively consider these priorities in their planning and implementation, ensuring they are reflected in both design and delivery.

## **Oversight and Integration**

Thematic leads report to the National Taskforce for Prison Welfare and Safety, ensuring that progress is tracked, interdependencies are managed, and learning is shared. This structure enables SPS to drive forward reform in a way that is coordinated, expert-led, and embedded in the wider system.

## 6. Understanding the Themes

The themes outlined in this chapter reflect the current areas of strategic focus in how SPS delivers on FAI recommendations and broader learning from deaths in custody. They provide a structured way to coordinate action, draw on subject matter expertise, and embed improvements across the organisation. While these themes have been shaped by recent inquiries, they are not fixed. As new insights emerge and our understanding deepens, the thematic structure will continue to evolve to ensure our response remains relevant, responsive, and person-centred.

### **Suicide Prevention**

Suicide prevention is a central focus of our approach to delivering FAI recommendations and learning from deaths in custody. This theme recognises the need to strengthen how we identify, understand, and respond to risk not only in moments of acute crisis, but across the entire custodial journey.

A key priority within this theme is the comprehensive review and overhaul of Talk to Me, the SPS crisis response policy for individuals at risk of suicide. FAIs have highlighted several areas for improvement in how Talk to Me is applied and understood in practice. This review will ensure the policy is fit for purpose, trauma-informed, and consistently implemented.

However, suicide prevention must go beyond crisis response. This theme also focuses on building a more proactive and preventative approach; one that strengthens early intervention, enhances mental health support, and supports continuity of care during, and after, custody. It includes equipping staff with the tools, training, and time to respond compassionately and effectively.

### **Innovation and Technology**

Innovation and technology play a vital role in modernising how we deliver safe, person-centred custody. This theme explores how digital tools and data systems can support both immediate safety such as wellbeing monitoring and longer-term reform, including improved access to services, enhanced communication, and more responsive care.

We are exploring how in-cell technology, digital case management, and other smart solutions can help staff make informed decisions and empower people in custody to engage with support. Innovation is not about technology for its own sake, it's about using the right tools to meet real needs, ethically and effectively.

## **Bullying Prevention and Response**

Preventing and responding to bullying is essential to creating safe, respectful prison environments. This theme focuses on strengthening our understanding of bullying in all its forms, from overt aggression to subtle coercion and exploitation, and ensuring our response is consistent, trauma-informed, and inclusive.

We recognise that bullying affects different populations in different ways, and that young people, women, and those with vulnerabilities may face unique risks. A full review of our anti-bullying policy *Think Twice* will ensure our approach reflects this complexity and supports both prevention and early, effective intervention by staff.

## **Cell and Personal Safety**

A safe physical environment is a foundation for wellbeing and dignity in custody. This theme focuses on how we design and manage cells and personal spaces to reduce opportunities for harm, particularly for those at risk of self-harm or suicide.

We are reviewing how risk is assessed in cell environments and how personal items, especially for young people, can support emotional regulation and a sense of identity. Our aim is to strike the right balance between safety and humanity, ensuring that our environments are not only secure, but also supportive of recovery and stability.

## **Workforce Training and Support**

Staff are at the heart of safe and effective custody. This theme focuses on ensuring that everyone working in our prisons has the training, tools, and emotional support they need to recognise and respond to vulnerability, manage risk, and care for themselves and others.

Training must be practical, relevant, and embedded into daily practice, especially in areas like suicide prevention, bullying, and trauma-informed care. Just as importantly, we must support staff wellbeing, recognising the emotional demands of the role, and creating a culture where people feel safe, supported, and valued.

## **Information Sharing and Record Keeping**

Effective information sharing is critical to safe, joined-up care. This theme focuses on improving how we record, access, and use information both within SPS and across the wider justice and health care systems to ensure that decisions are informed, timely, and person-centred.

We are reviewing our internal systems and practices to ensure that key information is captured accurately and used meaningfully throughout a person's time in custody. This work complements national efforts to improve cross-system information flow and supports better risk management, continuity of care, and accountability.

While the Scottish Government is leading on many of the major improvements in this area, including work to improve cross-system information flow, SPS has a critical role to play in operationalising those changes. Within SPS, we are reviewing how we record, interpret and use information from reception through to day-to-day case management to ensure it is accurate, accessible, and used meaningfully to keep people safe.

# 7. Reporting and Transparency

Transparency is fundamental to how we deliver change. Our commitment to learning from FAIs must be matched by a commitment to openness - with people in our care, their families, our staff, and the wider public.

We understand that trust is built not only through action, but through clear, honest communication. That's why this framework includes a range of mechanisms to ensure progress is visible, accountable, and open to scrutiny.

## Ministerial Reporting

Progress will be reported regularly to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs through the Ministerial Accountability Board. Self-assessment commissions will be completed by SPS in advance of each MAB meeting, capturing key information on progress updates, risks and blockers. These commissions will be collated with those from other Action Owners and used to inform a progress report paper for the MAB which will in turn steer discussion, scrutiny, and support from the Board. In addition, SPS will provide monthly reports to the Cabinet Secretary directly to provide a clear picture of achievements, challenges, and risks, helping to maintain momentum and ensure delivery remains a national priority.

In addition to routine updates, we will provide targeted reports on key areas of work such as the development of new safety tools, policy reviews, and pilot initiatives to support informed decision-making at the highest level. We will publish these on our website wherever possible.

## Public Updates and Online Transparency

To support wider transparency, we have created a dedicated section on the SPS website which will be kept updated with:

- News and insights from thematic leads
- Links to relevant policies and guidance
- Opportunities for stakeholders to stay informed and engaged

This space is designed to be accessible and informative, helping families, partners, and the public understand how change is being delivered.

## Annual Reporting

In addition to routine updates, we will publish a comprehensive annual summary report, with the first due early in 2026. This report will:

- Assess delivery against key milestones

- Share insights and learning from across the thematic areas
- Identify areas where further improvement is required
- Highlight how we have embedded feedback from people with lived and professional experience

These mechanisms will ensure that progress is not only made, but seen, scrutinised, and sustained. They are essential to building trust, supporting accountability, and demonstrating the seriousness with which we approach this work.

### **Improving Data Transparency**

We recognise that meaningful transparency also depends on the quality of the data we share. Improving our internal data systems is a key priority, and we are actively working to strengthen how we collect, analyse, and report information. This will allow us to provide clearer, more consistent updates on progress, risks, and outcomes both internally and to the public. Better data will support better decisions and ensure that our reporting reflects the full picture of our work.

Together, these mechanisms ensure that our work is not only progressing but that it is visible, accountable, and open to challenge. They are essential to building trust and demonstrating the seriousness with which we approach this responsibility.