

MINUTES OF THE SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING HELD IN THE BOARD ROOM, SPS HEADQUARTERS ON 26 NOVEMBER

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
Sharon Lawson, Executive Personal Assistant, SPS (Minutes)
Simon Little, NED
Gareth Rose, Head of Communications, SPS
Lisa Taylor, Director of Engagement and Change Delivery, SPS
Stephen Uphill, NED
Billy Watson, NED

Introduction and Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and noted:
 - Advisory Board members' thanks to the Governor and staff at HMP Castle Huntly for hosting the Advisory Board Planning Day in October.
 - The highlighted changes to the agenda and the new format for Advisory Board meetings going forward.
 - The Chair's recent meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs.

Apologies for Absence

2. Apologies for absence were received from Ms McDonald who has recently resigned from SPS.

Declarations of Interest

3. There were no new declarations of interest.

Draft Minutes of both the Advisory Board Planning Day held on 29 October and Previous Meeting held on 24 September (including Action Tracker and Matters Arising)

4. The draft minutes of the meeting held on 24 September and planning day held on 29 October were both agreed as true records. The Action Tracker was updated during the discussion.

Action: Ms Lawson

5. An outstanding action related to cyber security and discussion followed as to whether there was a need for this to remain given RMAC had recently undertaken a 'Deep Dive' on the

subject and planned to re-visit this at the proper time. It was agreed that the NED members who did not also sit on RMAC would raise this issue further with Mr Ironside in respect of their development.

Action: NEDs

Chief Executive's Update

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

- Population management - work continues on the increasing levels, with officials being particularly concerned about the projected seasonal rise in January. A number of meetings had been held with Ministers and Scottish Government (SG) colleagues and agreement had been reached on some of main items which will be taken forward.
- Both Ms Medhurst and Ms Pollock had met with James McEwen, the new Director General and Chief Executive of HM Prison and Probation Service, and Michelle Jarman-Howe, Interim Director General of Operations, and hoped to visit them in February to discuss the population challenges in further detail.
- Both Ms Medhurst and Ms Pollock had met with the Law Officers and SG Legal colleagues about deaths in custody and the FAI Taskforce work. It had been a very productive meeting and an invitation had been extended to them to visit to an establishment.
- The Chief Executive had attended the recent Criminal Justice Committee with Ms Pollock and Ms McDonald to speak about budgets.

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

Regular Updates on Performance and Priorities

AB(NOV)02/25: Corporate Priorities and Forward Look: Autumn 2025-Winter 2026

8. This paper was a new standing item on the Advisory Board agenda and provided a summary of upcoming priorities, activities and milestones from across the organisation to allow identification of items for further discussion and advice at future meetings. This first paper contained details of key cross-organisational major priorities, though updates were also presented by Directorates. Members were invited to pose any questions they had on the identified activities and provide comment on the paper's content and format.

9. NEDs thanked Directors, Mr Beardmore and their teams for all their work in producing this new paper which they agreed was helpful to have structured by area, was well presented and a good response to the discussion held at the Planning Day.

10. In relation to future discussions, the Chair asked that for the January and March meetings, the topics for future deep dive discussions be agreed by the Executive Team. She agreed to collate a list of items from the NEDs for future discussion at later meetings, and Ms Pollock and Ms Taylor agreed to collate ideas from Directors.

Action: Chair/Ms Pollock/Ms Taylor

Strategic Deep Dive Discussion

AB(NOV)01/25: 'Justice Vision Priorities'

11. The Advisory Board welcomed Cat Dalrymple, Director of Justice, and Emma Dilger, Head of Prisons Unit, Community Justice Division, Scottish Government, to the meeting at this point to speak about the Scottish Government's priorities in relation to the 'Justice Vision' which is in place until 2026. Ms Dalrymple also spoke about the 2 major Justice-focused Bills SG colleagues are currently working on.

12. Ms Dalrymple thanked SPS colleagues for everything they do and recognised the particular number of challenges they currently face. She had visited a number of establishments over the summer months and had witnessed for herself the commitment, professionalism and dedication of operational colleagues.

13. Ms Dalrymple spoke about the number of individuals coming through the courts for sexual offences and serious organised crime-related activities, and acknowledged that whilst they are welcome developments in terms of public safety, the impact this has on SPS and other partners is recognised.

14. Discussion focused on the long-term strategic approach, particularly in regard to population pressures and complexity and Ms Dalrymple stated that colleagues need to have the strongest possible evidence to ensure that the correct decisions are made and actioned. The prison estate of the future would still require secure establishments for sex offenders, young people and social care, but there may be alternate ways of accommodating them.

15. The Chair thanked Ms Dalrymple for her time and presentation, which had stimulated discussion amongst members. The Advisory Board looked forward to hearing more as policies developed. [Ms Dalrymple and Ms Dilger left the meeting at this point.]

Regular Updates

FAI Taskforce Update

16. This subject had been covered in earlier discussion, but Ms McKechin advised that work had focused on the TTM review, Professor Towl's review, bedding, items in use and ligature point estates review. She spoke about the comprehensive analysis of work involved across the range of FAI Taskforce tasks and highlighted the degree of complexity involved. This work was all now in a position to be timetabled to the Ministerial Advisory Board (MAB) and the Cabinet Secretary for decision. Members thanked the Chair for this update.

RMAC Verbal Update

17. Mr Harley updated colleagues on the discussion held at the earlier RMAC meeting. As the RMAC meetings were now scheduled to take place immediately prior to the Advisory Board meetings, it was agreed that there was no longer a need for these updates to be provided to the Advisory Board. Instead, Mr Harley agreed to circulate the minutes of RMAC meetings to members for their information as part of the Advisory Board papers. Members thanked Mr Harley for his update.

Action: Mr Harley

Papers for Noting

18. The following papers had been circulated for noting:

- AB(NOV)03/25: Improvement Framework (Q2 2025-26)
- AB(NOV)04/25: Workforce Metrics (Q2 2025-26)

19. Members noted with concern the steep increase in sickness absence levels highlighted in the Workforce Metrics paper but noted from Mr Jobson that the objectives of the Regime and Roster Operational Review include prioritising delivery of a safe, consistent and sustainable prison regime and enhancing the experience for our people.

20. Congratulations were sent to the College team for their achievement in winning the Educators of the Year award at the UK-wide Inspire Justice Awards.

21. The Chair and Chief Executive agreed to consider NED representation on the Major Projects Management Group (MPMG) during their next scheduled call.

Action: Chair/Chief Executive

Next Agenda and Any Other Business

Agree Agenda for January 2026 Meeting, and 'Deep Dive' Discussions for 2026 more generally

22. As previously agreed, the Chair asked that for the January and March meetings, the topics for future deep dive discussions be agreed. She agreed to collate a list of items from the NEDs for future discussion, and Ms Pollock and Ms Taylor agreed to collate ideas from Directors.

Action: Chair/Ms Pollock/Ms Taylor/Directors

23. Following the Advisory Board Planning Day on 29 October, Families and Children, and Visitors' Centres had been requested as future discussion topics, and at the Chair's request, an invitation would be extended to a Governor-in-Charge to attend that discussion.

Any Other Business

24. The Chair thanked NED members for providing her with their skills matrices which she would send to Ms Lawson for the Directors' information.

Action: Chair/Ms Lawson

Date of Next Meeting

25. The next Advisory Board meeting will be held on 28 January 2026 from 1300-1600 hrs in Room G.09, SPS Headquarters.

Advisory Board Secretariat
December 2025