

## MINUTES OF THE SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING HELD IN SPS HEADQUARTERS ON 28 JANUARY 2026

**Present:** Ann McKechin, Non-Executive Director (NED) and Advisory Board Chair  
Teresa Medhurst, Chief Executive, SPS  
Sarah Angus, Director of Policy, SPS  
Lynne Clow, NED  
Heather Duncan, Interim Director of Finance, SPS  
Ian Harley, NED and RMAC Chair  
Adam Jobson, Director of Organisational Development, SPS  
Sharon Lawson, Executive Personal Assistant, SPS (Minutes)  
Simon Little, NED  
Dr Anna MacKenzie, Interim Head of Corporate Strategy and Governance, SPS  
Lisa Taylor, Interim Director of Engagement and Change Delivery, SPS  
Stephen Uphill, NED  
Billy Watson, NED  
Ian Whitehead, Director of Operations, SPS

**In Attendance:** Jim McMenemy, Head of Prison Services/Contracts (for Strategic Deep Dive discussion only)  
Mhairi McCowan, Deputy Director, Civil Contingencies Division, Scottish Government (SG) (for Strategic Deep Dive discussion only)  
Emma Faulds, Civil Contingencies Division, SG (for Strategic Deep Dive discussion only)  
Rodger Watt, Civil Contingencies Division, SG (for Strategic Deep Dive discussion only)

### Introduction and Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting, in particular, Dr MacKenzie (previously Head of SPS College) who had taken up post as Interim Head of Corporate Strategy and Governance whilst Ms Taylor was covering the position of Interim Director of Engagement and Change Delivery; and Ms Duncan, as Interim Director of Finance.

2. Ms McKechin apologised to members for the previously advised late change to the agenda to accommodate a presentation by the SG Civil Contingencies Unit. She updated the Advisory Board on the timetable for the recruitment of the new Chief Executive and further advised that she had been recently asked to join a Scottish Government Chairs Forum to consider options for Public Service Reform.

### Apologies for Absence

3. Apologies for absence were received from Ms Pollock and Mr Rose.

### Declarations of Interest

4. Mr Uphill advised that he had recently been appointed as Interim Chief Operating Officer at Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and was congratulated by colleagues.

### Draft Minutes of the Advisory Board Meeting held on 26 November (including Action Tracker and Matters Arising)

5. The draft minutes of the meeting held on 26 November were agreed as a true record. The Action Tracker was updated during the discussion, with a number of actions being closed.

**Action: Ms Lawson**

## Chief Executive's Update

6. The Chief Executive's update included the following points:
  - A further letter had issued to the Director General (Learning and Justice) setting out Ms Medhurst's concerns in respect of the current population level and that numbers had not taken their usual seasonal dip during the festive period with court activity remaining high. As a consequence, a range of engagement has taken place with SG and Ministers on possible contingency options which are under active consideration. In addition, resilience arrangements (which are covered later in the minutes) have also been established, resulting in a large number of requests on SPS colleagues; it is likely that these asks will mean colleagues stepping back from business critical work in order to respond.
  - SPS is establishing a Population Taskforce, led by Ms Taylor, covering 4 main workstreams within SPS.
  - The 'For Women Scotland' legal proceedings will be live broadcast next week.
  - Ms Duncan was working through the recent budget allocation for 2026-27 to understand the implications on the organisation.
  - The intention of 2 senior colleagues to retire in June - one from Operations Directorate and the other from the Estates team. Plans for successor arrangements will be put in place shortly.
7. The Chair thanked Ms Medhurst for her helpful update.

## **Regular Updates on Performance and Priorities**

### AB(JAN)01/26: Corporate Priorities and Forward Look

8. This paper provided the Advisory Board with 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.
9. At the NEDs' request, Mr Jobson provided an update on the benefits to applicants of the new Eploy system, a new digital recruitment platform, scheduled for Spring 2026.
10. The AB discussed and noted the Directorate updates and thanked Director colleagues for providing a helpful resume of the current key issues within their respective areas.

## **Strategic Deep Dive Discussions**

### Current Status of Justice Partners Escorting and Court Custody Scotland (JPECCS) Contract

11. Prior to welcoming Mr McMenemy, the Chief Executive advised that the new Justice Partners Escorting and Court Custody Scotland (JPECCS) contract had been awarded to Mitie Care and Custody Limited and signed in HQ on 27 January. Representatives from Mitie and other justice partners were very complimentary about the procurement process and partnership engagement and feedback, and Ms Medhurst acknowledged and thanked Ms Beal, Mr Door and their respective teams for their exemplary work in reaching this successful conclusion.
12. The Advisory Board then welcomed Mr McMenemy to the meeting. He advised that the new contract would run from January 2027-March 2035, at the conclusion of the current contract with GEOAmev.
13. Court custody and prisoner escorting are integral to the effective and efficient operation of the whole justice system in Scotland. The current provider employs over 800 staff, of which over 650 are employed as Prisoner Custody Officers. The service provider facilitates over 7,500 monthly prisoner

movements across Scotland, including the Highlands and Islands, as well as some cross-border transportation to and from England and Wales.

14. The strategic objectives of the contract are:

- Delivering a Safe, Secure and Dignified Prison Escort Service
- Transforming Justice Transport and Escorting
- Driving Digital Transformation and Innovation
- Building and Maintaining a Skilled, Resilient and Adaptative Workforce
- Embedding Sustainability and Environmental Responsibility
- Strengthening Collaborative Alliances and Continuous Improvement

15. The Chair thanked Mr McMenemy for his time and presentation and following discussion, including around arrangements for the transition period, Mr McMenemy left the meeting.

#### SG Civil Contingencies Unit

16. The Advisory Board welcomed Ms McCowan, Ms Faulds and Mr Watt from the SG Civil Contingencies Unit to the meeting at this point. Following introductions, Ms McCowan advised that to address the current high risk to safety and stability from increasing numbers of people being sent to custody, SG had initiated a review by the Unit into prison population to consider the actions taken to date and any other actions that could be considered.

17. The Unit are undertaking an initial evaluation sprint which will report their initial findings into the Independent Taskforce which has been established to undertake an initial 3 week scoping review to assess current risks and work underway by Justice colleagues. Their remit is to produce practical recommendations, with the aim of delivering a clear set of system-level options for reducing overcrowding, improving resilience and preventing further escalation. Thereafter, Scottish Ministers may decide on recommendations to be taken forward over a 12 week "sprint".

18. The Chair stated that as it was important to have the right people making the right decisions, it was a priority that SPS be included in this work to ensure it can optimise this process when the organisation is under extreme stress. Ms McCowan advised that she was content for SPS to attend all meetings and would ensure SPS colleagues received the necessary invitations. She also agreed to provide members with a note of all decisions taken by the Taskforce.

19. Appreciating that the Taskforce was still in its initial stages, the Chief Executive asked how confident the Taskforce were that the outcome would be achieved within the tight timescales. Ms McCowan agreed that the timescales were indeed challenging, but was confident that a full report and recommendations would be complete by the deadline.

20. There was a wide ranging discussion which set out the pressures and risks experienced by SPS as a result of overcrowding for the past 3 years.

21. In closing, Ms McCowan acknowledged the willingness and commitment of all officers the Taskforce had spoken to who she noted were working tirelessly to absolute capacity. The Chief Executive re-iterated that she and SPS were keen to work together with the Taskforce and offered to meet with Ms McCowan outwith the meeting.

22. The Chair thanked Ms McCowan and colleagues for attending the meeting and for their comprehensive presentation and discussion thereafter. [Ms McCowan and colleagues left the meeting at this point.]

AB(JAN)02/26: Deep Dive Discussion Proposals for 2026-27

23. This paper suggested proposals for deep dive topics and external speakers gathered from the AB Chair and SPS Directors for Advisory Board (AB) agenda setting in 2026-27. Due to a late change to the agenda, the paper was not discussed at the meeting, but instead, AB colleagues were asked to submit any comments to Ms Lawson for collation. [Following the meeting, Mr Little contacted Ms Lawson with a suggestion.]

**Action: All**

**Papers for Noting**

24. There were no papers for noting at this meeting.

**Next Agenda and Any Other Business**

Agree Agenda for March 2026 Meeting

25. The draft agenda for the March meeting was considered and agreed by members.

**Action: Ms Lawson**

26. In closing, the Chair thanked everyone for their support during the meeting. She advised NED colleagues that she would contact them shortly to arrange dates for their annual 1-2-1 conversations.

**Action: Ms McKechin**

**Date of Next Meeting**

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

**Advisory Board Secretariat**

January 2026