DRAFT MINUTES OF THE SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING HELD IN SPS HEADQUARTERS ON 25 MARCH

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
Heather Duncan, Interim Director of Finance, SPS
Andy Hodge, Director of Operations, SPS
Adam Jobson, Director of Organisational Development, SPS
Sharon Lawson, Executive Personal Assistant, SPS (Minutes)
Dr Anna MacKenzie, Interim Head of Corporate Strategy and Governance, SPS
Gareth Rose, Head of Communications, SPS
Lisa Taylor, Interim Director of Engagement and Change Delivery, SPS
Stephen Uphill, NED
Billy Watson, NED

In Attendance: Gillian Walker, Director of Operations

Introduction and Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting, in particular Ms Walker who would take up the temporary full-time position of Director of Operations on Mr Hodge’s forthcoming retiral.

2. During her opening remarks, the Chair touched on the current population situation, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons’ Report on HMPYOI Polmont and the 2 recent deaths in custody.

Apologies for Absence

3. Apologies for absence were received from Messrs Harley and Little.

Declarations of Interest

4. There were no new declarations of interest.

Draft Minutes of the Advisory Board Meeting held on 28 January (including Action Tracker and Matters Arising)

5. The draft minutes of the meeting held on 28 January were agreed as a true record and the Action Tracker was updated during the discussion.

Action: Ms Lawson

<u>Chief Executive's Update</u>

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

- We continue to work with SG colleagues on the work of the SG Multi-agency Taskforce on prison population and next steps in relation to recommendations of the group.

- In response to heighted operational pressures, and a record high prison population on 17 March, SPS’ Director of Operations established a daily command tactical operational governance structure from 18 March.

- The Ministerial Accountability Board, established as a result of the Determination into the deaths of 2 young people in custody, had now published its report and SPS continues to engage.

- The Chief Executive and Ms Duncan had attended the Criminal Justice Committee on 11 February to discuss SPS' budget allocation.

7. Members noted with concern the latest population update and discussed this at length, noting the contingency arrangements being put in place and the steps being taken by Ministers and Criminal Justice partners to alleviate the pressures.

8. The Chair thanked Ms Medhurst for her update.

Regular Updates on Performance and Priorities

<u>AB(MAR)01/26: Corporate Priorities and Forward Look: Spring-Summer 2026</u>

9. This paper provided the Advisory Board with a summary of upcoming priorities for the forthcoming quarter, including:

- *Emergency Early Release (EER)*: Delivery of the programme remains a key cross-portfolio priority within the Population Response Programme, supported by a multi-disciplinary project team. The tranches commenced on 11 November 2025 and have resulted in the release of 428 individuals, with further tranches continuing until the end of April.

- On 18 March, Ministers voted to change the release point for some short-term prisoners meaning those serving less than 4 years will now be released after serving 30% of their sentence, instead of at the 40% point. The change does not apply to those serving a sentence, in whole or in part, for a sexual or domestic abuse offence, who will continue to be released after serving 50% of their sentence.

- *Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI) Taskforce*: The February workshop series brought together thematic leads and operational colleagues to map inter-dependencies, identify system-wide challenges and clarify cross-cutting implementation requirements, strengthening alignment across core programme areas. The Taskforce has now transitioned into implementation planning, informed by the outputs of the workshops.

10. The Chair commended all staff who had represented the Taskforce. She acknowledged the immense amount of work undertaken which had provided useful learning and knowledge for SPS as a whole. It was suggested that a 'Deep Dive' of this topic could be undertaken towards the end of the year/New Year 2027.

Action: Ms MacKenzie/Ms Lawson

11. NED colleagues were keen to understand and be kept appraised of developments in respect of the possible delay in construction of the new data centre, and of any implications as a result.

Action: Ms Pollock

Strategic Deep Dive Discussions

<u>Reflections from the Chief Executive</u>

12. Teresa Medhurst, Chief Executive, would retire from SPS on 30 April, after over 40 years' dedicated service and 6 years as Chief Executive.

13. Ms Medhurst spoke of the many changes she had seen during her time with SPS, including how SPS now cares for those within its care, and of the achievements during her tenure, which included a number of sizable projects. She also spoke about the impact COVID had had on those who lived and worked within the Service.

14. In summing up, Ms Medhurst stated that had been overwhelmed by everyone's commitment, willingness and shift in culture over the last 6 years, and was extremely comfortable in leaving SPS in Ms Pollock's safe and capable hands [Ms Pollock would take up post as Chief Executive with effect from 1 May]. Ms Medhurst thanked the NEDs for their welcome offers of both work and personal support during her tenure and asked that Advisory Board members continue to support Ms Pollock in her new role.

15. On behalf of the Advisory Board, the Chair thanked Ms Medhurst for her thoughts and recognised her empathy and devotion to public service, together with her significant achievements, noting that decisions she had made as Chief Executive will last. She wished Ms Medhurst every success and happiness for the future. [The Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive left the meeting at this point to attend the Butler Trust Awards, hosted by the Princess Royal at Holyrood Palace.]

SPS Culture Review Update

16. This paper presented Advisory Board members with Crowe's findings following their independent review of organisational culture, and provided an overview of the steps SPS is taking to build a culture that genuinely demonstrates its values.

17. Commissioned in late 2024, the review undertook extensive engagement across all establishments, Headquarters and SPS College, drawing on conversations with staff, structured discussions with people in our care and a staff survey completed by colleagues.

18. The Executive Management Group (EMG) met on 27 January to consider and reflect on the findings. The session enabled early engagement on shaping and delivering culture improvement activity in response to the draft outputs.

19. Following discussion, the Advisory Board noted receipt of the findings and the on-going engagement work to develop a framework for cultural change. The Chair thanked Mr Jobson on behalf of the NEDs for the opportunity to review the draft findings which they would follow with interest.

Papers for Noting

<u>AB(MAR)03/26: Improvement Framework Report: Quarter 3 (October-December 2025)</u>

20. The Improvement Framework (IF) provides an integrated account of organisational performance data and risk and this paper provided a summary update as at the end of Quarter 3 (Q3) of the 2025-26 reporting year.

21. A key deliverable highlighted was the introduction of a new recruitment system is now in advanced delivery. Following contract signature in August 2025, work has progressed through configuration, internal system testing and the development of change-readiness, training and transition plans. User Acceptance Testing, third-party integrations and recruiter training are being prepared ahead of a planned Spring 2026 release.

22. The Advisory Board noted this paper and Q3 performance with thanks.

<u>AB(MAR)04/26: Workforce Metrics - Q3 2025-26 Analysis</u>

23. This paper provided the Advisory Board with the Q3 Workforce Metrics Report which focussed on sickness absence, reflecting the significant increase in sickness absence during the first half of the year compared to the same period in 2024-25.

24. Members were pleased to note that Q3 did not see the continuation of significant increases in sick absence that were reported earlier in the year, and that overall absence levels were broadly static over the quarter.

<u>AB(MAR)05/26: Financial Planning and Budget 2026-27</u>

25. This paper provided the Advisory Board with an update on the 2026-27 resource and capital budget position and was noted by members.

AB(MAR)06/26: Estates Development Programme

26. Members noted the progress of the Estates Major Infrastructure Works and Maintenance Works since the previous progress report in September 2025.

Next Agenda and Any Other Business

Agree Agenda for May 2026 Meeting

27. The draft agenda for the May meeting was considered and agreed by members. The potential deep dive topic for the next session was discussed and will be confirmed closer to the next AB meeting date.

Action: Chair/Ms Pollock

28. In closing, the Chair thanked attendees for their support during the meeting.

Date of Next Meeting

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

Advisory Board Secretariat
March 2026