



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

PUBLIC MEETING - SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

THURSDAY 28 AUGUST 2025 @ 1000 HRS

**BRAIDWOOD SUITE, SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE HEADQUARTERS,
WESTBURN DRIVE, CAMBUSLANG, G72 7NA / VIRTUAL (MS TEAMS)**

PRESENT:

Kirsty Darwent, Chair (KD)
Stuart Ballingall (SJB)
Angiolina Foster (AF)
Therese O'Donnell (TO'D)
Andrew Smith (AS)
Mhairi Wylie (MW)

Paul Stollard, Deputy Chair (PS)
Brian Baverstock (BB)
Neil Mapes (NM)
Malcolm Payton (MP)
Madeline Smith (MS)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Stuart Stevens (SS)	Chief Officer
Sarah O'Donnell (SO'D)	Deputy Chief Officer (Corporate Services)
Andy Watt (AW)	Deputy Chief Officer
David Farries (DF)	Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Operational Delivery
Jon Henderson (JH)	Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Prevention
Craig McGoldrick (CMcG)	Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Training, Safety and Assurance
Mark McAteer (MMcA)	Director of Strategic Planning, Performance and Communications
Fiona Ross (FR)	Director of People
Deborah Stanfield (DS)	Interim Director of Finance and Contractual Services
Richard Whetton (RW)	Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance
Gregor Welsh (GW)	BI Team Leader (Item 12 only)
Rebecca Cameron (RC)	Statistical Analyst (Item 12 only)
Heather Greig (HG)	Executive Officer Board Support
Debbie Hadow (DJH)	Board Support/Minutes

OBSERVERS:

Liz Humphreys, Scottish Ambulance Service and Public Health Scotland
Seona Hart, Fire Brigades Union
Graeme Fraser, HMFSI

1 CHAIR'S WELCOME

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting welcoming those present and those attending/observing via MS Teams.
- 1.2 Attendees were reminded to raise their hands, in accordance with the remote meeting protocol, should they wish to ask a question.

2 APOLOGIES

- 2.1 Tim Wright, Board Member

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3 CONSIDERATION OF AND DECISION ON ANY ITEMS TO BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE

3.1 The Board agreed that the *Draft Private Minutes and Private Action Log* would be taken in private due to the confidential nature of the issue (Standing Order 9G).

3.2 No further items were identified.

4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

4.1 For transparency, the following standing declarations of interests were recorded:

- Madeline Smith, Board Member of Scottish Ambulance Service
- Paul Stollard, Chair of Board of Institute of Fire Engineers

4.2 There were no other declarations or conflict of interests made.

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS:

5.1 Thursday 26 June 2025

5.1.1 The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

5.1.2 **The minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2025 were approved as a true record of the meeting.**

5.2 Matters Arising

5.2.1 There were no matters arising.

6 ACTION LOG

6.1 The Board considered the action log and noted the updates.

Action 12.3 Annual Operating Plan Progress Report Q4 (26/06/2025): The Board sought clarity on the reasons for North HubCo's withdrawal due to financial viability concerns. DS advised that North HubCo's model was based on delivery of multiple hubs, however, as funding for a larger programme was not supported by Scottish Government, North HubCo made the decision to withdraw.

6.2 **Members noted the updated Action Log and approved the removal of completed actions.**

7 DECISION LOG

7.1 The Board considered the Decision Log noting the impact assessments provided for decisions made 12 months ago.

7.2 **Members noted the updated Decision Log.**

8 CHAIR'S REPORT

8.1 KD presented the Chair's Update report which noted events that had occurred since the Board meeting held on 26 June 2025 and highlighted the following:

- Continuing in role as interim Chair of the National Joint Council (NJC) until at least September 2025. Ongoing contributions to the Ministerial Advisory Group, Task and Finish Group for the College of Fire and Rescue and Task and Finish Group for Culture.
- Recent meeting with Angela Constance, Minister for Justice, to discuss future budgets and priorities. Brief update to be provided outwith the formal Board meeting due to the confidential nature of the discussions.
- Recent positive meetings with Chief Executives from North and East Ayrshire Local Authorities. These meetings are mutually beneficial and highlighted the positive collaborative relationships.
- Attendance at several Service Delivery Review (SDR) public consultation events and responding to correspondence, particularly from elected members. Thanks were extended to the Communications Team for support.

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- Brief update on the consultation process would be provided following the conclusion of the formal Board meeting. Board members were reminded that attendance at public consultation events was as observers only. No decision would be made until the formal Board meeting on 18 December 2025.
- Recruitment of the next Chair of the Board was progressing well, with the closing date for applications having passed and shortlisting underway. Current timelines suggest that the new Chair would be appointed before the current Chair's tenure ends. Thanks were extended to the Board Support Team and Public Appointments Unit for their co-ordination of this transition.

8.2 The Board noted the report and verbal update.

9 CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

9.1 SS presented the Chief Officer's report noting events which had occurred since the Board meeting held on 26 June 2025 and highlighted the following:

- Recent meetings held with the Cabinet Secretary and Scottish Government officials regarding future funding and investment.
- Recent meetings with Ben Selby, FBU General Secretary and Iain Fitzpatrick, Unison.
- Attendance at the Career Ready event, a 5-week course for young people in partnership with Glasgow City Council and MCR Pathways. Individuals were exposed to a broad range of skills, activities and roles within the Service which helped boost confidence levels over the 5-week programme. Thanks were extended to Richard Whetton and Steven Stewart.
- Attendance at the Kilbirnie Street memorial event and future attendance at the National Arboretum for Firefighters Memorial Day.
- Continued positive meetings with Local Authority Chief Executive's to share and understand challenges and collaborative opportunities.
- Thirty-six new trainees began their career with the Service last week.
- Recruitment campaign launched and received 1600 applications within 12 hours. Due to high levels of interest, the campaign closed early.
- Future Strategic Leadership Team Development Day was scheduled and would focus on horizon planning and medium-term financial planning.

9.2 In relation to the Career Ready programme, the Board queried whether an extended period of tracking was undertaken to help assess the long-term impact for individual participants. MMcA provided a brief overview of his mentoring role within the programme including an end of year summary statement. MMcA advised that MCR Pathways collect and publish data including tracking through to positive destinations. RW highlighted the emotional impact of the programme and life skills gained through it. The Board noted that this initiative was an example of the broader definition of prevention work and warranted greater investment from the Service.

9.3 In relation to the recent recruitment campaign, FR advised that the gender split was 11% female, and feedback would be sought to strengthen the next campaign. The Board were reminded that recruitment campaigns were now restricted to smaller intakes as this would allow the Service to reflect, learn and make adjustments quicker.

9.4 With the early closure of the application window, the Board noted concerns that this may have impact on the ability for some individuals to apply and highlighted the importance of evaluating the accessibility of the process. FR advised that applicants had the opportunity to pre-register before the application window opened but acknowledged that communication and clarity on the closing date could be improved. FR further advised that work had already commenced to review the process and make improvements to the next recruitment campaign (March 2026).

9.5 Brief discussion took place on the potential to use the high demand/levels of interest to

address shortages within On-Call firefighters. FR noted that discussions were ongoing on how the Service would provide meaningful post-application feedback and how unsuccessful candidates could be encouraged to reapply, if appropriate.

9.6 **The Board noted the report and verbal update.**

10 COMMITTEE UPDATES

10.1 Strategic Planning and Change Committee (SPCC)

10.1.1 SJB reported that the Committee held a public meeting on 29 July 2025 and referred the Board to the attached draft minutes, highlighting the following:

- Workshop on People, Payroll, Training and Finance (PPFT) was held. Committee maintain concerns over the scope and delivery options of the programme. A further special private meeting had been convened on 29 September 2025 to explore and address these concerns.
- Positive update on the New Mobilising System (NMS) with the Digital Office audit being well received and progress acknowledged. Thanks were extended to the Project Leads and all those involved for their continued efforts.

10.1.2 **The Board noted the draft minutes and verbal update.**

10.2 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)

10.2.1 Draft Minutes of Meeting: 19 June 2025

BB reported that the Committee held a public meeting on 19 June 2025 and referred the Board to the attached draft minutes, highlighting the following:

- Internal Audit report on Change Management: The Committee acknowledged that improvements were still be made but expressed surprise at the extent of the gap around investment and maturity of systems/processes.
- Outgoing Internal Auditors, Azets, presented their final report providing a reasonable assurance opinion.
- Implementation of recommendations continue to be routinely reported and progressed. It was anticipated that the new Internal Auditors, BDO, would bring a refreshed perspective on future reporting and tracking of the recommendations.
- Consideration and feedback provided on scopes for future the Risk Management and Budgetary Control audits.
- Inaugural Annual Data Compliance Report was presented and provided positive assurance.
- Recognition of work undertaken to embed and implement risk appetite and assurance mapping.
- Positive update provided on actions relating to the Cyber Security Maturity audit.
- Inaugural annual Fraud Awareness report which provided a consolidated overview of fraud-related activities.
- Discussion held on how the Committee would look more holistically at how assurances are gathered.

10.2.2 Committee Annual Report to Accountable Officer

BB presented the annual report noting that this was a mandatory governance requirement. The report summarised the Committee's work and provided assurances on risk management, governance, internal controls, external audit and HMFSI oversight. The Committee concluded that it could provide reasonable assurance that these areas were being effectively managed. The Committee recognised ongoing development in terms of risk and highlighted that the adoption and application of risk and financial stewardship supported the Service Delivery Review process.

10.2.3 **The Board noted the draft minutes and verbal update.**

10.3 People Committee (PC)

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- 10.3.1 MW reported that the Committee held a public meeting on 6 June 2025 and referred the Board to the attached draft minutes which had been presented and reported on at the last meeting.
- 10.3.2 **The Board noted the draft minutes and verbal update.**
- 10.4 **Service Delivery Committee (SDC)**
- 10.4.1 PS presented the approved minutes from the public meeting on 28 May 2025, noting that a verbal report had been provided at the last meeting. PS reminded the Board that the meeting had been held at Portlethen. PS reiterated the value for all Board members to visit the training centre as this would help provide greater understanding into new decontamination protocol training, how it was being delivered, understood and impacting on behaviours by personnel.
- 10.4.2 PS reported that the Committee held a public meeting on 21 August 2025 and provided a verbal update, highlighting the following:
- Regular presentation and rigorous scrutiny of performance report.
 - Local Senior Officer Andrew Kenna, City of Glasgow, gave a verbal report which provided a valuable local insight and viewpoint.
- 10.4.3 In regard to the decontamination, SS acknowledged the work in this area, the ongoing investment in PPE, equipment, etc and the importance of culture and behavioural changes.
- 10.4.4 **The Board noted the approved minutes and verbal update.**
- 10.5 **Reform Collaboration Group (RCG)**
- 10.5.1 KD noted that no formal RCG meeting had been held since the previous update. The next meeting, scheduled for October 2025, would be attended by the Cabinet Secretary. Scottish Ambulance Service had now taken over the chairing and administration roles for this group.
- 10.5.2 MMcA advised that the Programme Board recently held a meeting and had commenced the business planning for the coming year with a workshop scheduled in September 2025.
- 10.5.3 **The Board noted the verbal update.**
- (R Cameron & G Welsh joined the meeting at 1045 hrs)*
- 11 **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE 2025-26 Q1**
- 11.1 MMcA offered his apologies for the limited performance statements provided within the report and outlined the reasons for this. MMcA introduced RC who presented the Board with the first quarter's performance for fiscal year 2025-26 for scrutiny. The following key points were highlighted:
- Final report on KPIs from the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. New KPIs which would be aligned to the new Strategy were being developed.
 - Absence and turnover rates were not included but were available via the dashboard.
 - Total number of incidents had increased primarily driven by an increase in outdoor fires.
 - Wildfire incidents were the highest level since 2013.
 - Fire fatalities and casualties remain stable.
 - Refuse and vehicle fires remain stable. An increase in accidental refuse and vehicle fires was being offset against a decrease in deliberate refuse and vehicle fires.
 - Decrease in Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV). New recording system and risk scoring system introduced earlier this year with all visits being categorised as high risk. At present, partnership referrals were not being separately captured.

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- Number of accidental dwelling fires remain stable and below average.
- Number of high severity fires had increased reaching the highest level in several years.
- Response and call handling times continue to increase.
- Assisting other agencies incidents had decreased for the 2nd consecutive quarter.
- On Call availability and FTE remain stable.
- Wholtime availability had decreased which reflected the changes in the target operating model and FTE.
- Training core skills currency and Flexi Duty Officer module completion continue to increase.
- Specialist rescue currency remains stable but outwith control limits.
- Subject Access Requests completed within timescales remained stable.
- Data breaches were below average for this quarter.
- Freedom of Information requests remained below target.
- One confirmed fraud incident during this quarter.
- Percentages of invoices paid within 30 days was reporting above target at 99%.
- Number of service desk incidents within SLA decreased due to changes in data collection methods.
- Number of verbal and physical attacks remain below or on the baseline, respectively.
- Increase in both RIDDOR and vehicle incidents.

11.2 In regard to KPI27 (Specialist Rescue Currency), the Board sought clarity on the reason for this indicator reporting over 100%. CMcG explained that, to ensure capacity/resilience at all times, the Service trained beyond the minimum numbers required.

11.3 In regard to KPI42 (Service Desk Requests within SLA), DS advised that the decrease was due to capacity levels impacted by ongoing recruitment and restructuring. DS to investigate and circulate further details, for assurance purposes, to the Board ouwith the meeting.

ACTION: DS

11.4 In regard to KPI49 (Absence Rates), FR advised that this data had been omitted in error and would be included within future reports. Data was currently available via the dashboard.

11.5 The Board commented on the deterioration of priority KPIs and sought clarity on measures being taken to address this.

11.6 In regard to KPI14 and 15 (Response and Call Handling Times), the Chair advised that a session, at the upcoming Development Days, would focus on these issues to provide the Board with a greater understanding as this was a key metric for the SDR. The Board were reminded that the Service Delivery Committee (SDC) routinely monitor and scrutinise these indicators.

11.7 In regard to KPI11 (High Severity Fires), AW noted that discussions had taken place at the recent SDC meeting. AW further noted that the decrease in the number of accidental dwellings fire had impacted on the percentage of high severity incidents. Consideration may be given to amend this indicator to report on actual numbers rather than percentages and on the definition criteria itself.

11.8 In regard to KPI8 (Partner Referral of HFSV), the Board sought clarity on the absence of this data. JH advised that this had been scrutinised at the recent SDC meeting, and reported that the new App, which was not fully live, did not currently record partnership referrals separately. This was a recording issue which would be addressed.

11.9 RW offered his assurance that the new PMF had clear alignment to the strategic

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objectives. Brief discussion took place on the planned improvements for gathering information and reduction of manual entry in favour of automated processes.

- 11.10 The Board noted concerns on the visibility and reporting of HFSV, particularly due to their importance in the prevention agenda. It was agreed that a future Strategy Day session on HFSV and the wider prevention strategy would be scheduled to refresh understanding, share future direction/intentions and to socialise expectation on future KPIs. (Captured under Agenda Item 16)
- 11.11 In regard to KPI64 and 65 (Savings Achieved and Budget Outturn), the Board commented on the potential risk of external scrutiny and misinterpretation on this data not being available. Acknowledging the explanation provided earlier, the Board requested that consideration be given to ensure clarity and accuracy going forward.
- 11.12 The Board commented on the lack of KPIs relating to innovation and for consideration to be given to include a measurable indicator within the new PMF.
- 11.13 In regard to the Detection, Indication and Monitoring (DIM) vehicles, DF provided background on the purpose, funding and strategic positioning for these assets.
- 11.14 In regard to KPI26 (Core Skills Currency), AW highlighted the continued improvement over the last 2 years and recognised the efforts for all those involved.
- 11.15 **The Board scrutinised the performance report.**

(G Welsh and R Cameron left the meeting at 1117 hrs)

(Meeting broke at 1117 hrs and reconvened at 1130 hrs)

12 RESOURCE BUDGET MONITORING MAY 2025

- 12.1 DS presented a report advising the Board of the resource budget position for the period ending 31 July 2025. DS outlined the analysis of the financial position and referred Members to Appendix A of the report, which identified the current resource position showing an overspend of £2.069 million and a forecast year-end underspend of £1.571 million. The following key points were highlighted:
- On Call staffing overspent by £1.2 million, which is driven by exceptional activity levels.
 - Potential increased costs associated with climate related activities and health and wellbeing recovery plan.
 - Wholtime Overtime costs had reduced; however a year end overspend forecast of £0.39 million remained.
 - Support staff costs forecast a year end overspend of £0.38 million, due to vacancy rates.
 - Control staffing costs forecast a year end underspend of £0.34 million due to vacancy rates.
 - Transport costs were overspent by £0.066 million due to increased wildfire incidents.
 - Third party payments were forecasting an overspend of £0.228 million primarily due to health and wellbeing programme.
 - Proposed targeted actions were included within the report.
- 12.2 The Board noted the significant forecasted overspends which directly related to wildfire incidents and queried whether there was a mechanism to seek additional funding from Scottish Government. SS advised that these increased costs were evidence of the changing risk and demand placed on the Service. This also demonstrated the limited financial clearance to respond to changing operational demands. SS further advised that he would continue to discuss and seek additional financial investment from Scottish Government. It was noted that this would be built into future budget planning process and budget allocation requests submitted to Scottish Government.

- 12.3 DS clarified that the swings graphs were presenting month to month movement and not variance between forecast and actual.
- 12.4 The Board commented on the current and potential future Wholetime staffing shortages and overtime costs. DS noted that the recent intake of new recruits would help to reduce overtime costs. However, specialist skills gaps, abstraction rates and other factors also need to be considered. The Service would continue to monitor, manage and mitigate the situation.
- 12.5 The Board sought clarity on governance oversight on in-year budget corrective actions. The Chair noted that the Board could request a deeper scrutiny of in-year financial actions, and this should be included within the next report. It had been previously agreed that, in the absence of a finance committee, the Board would undertake any additional scrutiny necessary on emerging financial pressures.
- 12.6 The Board noted their concerns on being over optimistic and reliant on activity levels returning to normal. The Board sought to understand the correlation between activity levels and costs, and subsequent risk. It was agreed that additional information on forecasting assumptions, activity trends and associated risks would be included within the next iteration of the report.
- 12.7 In regard to the sale of premises at Hamilton, SO'D advised that work was still ongoing and, due to commercial sensitivity, would provide an update outwith the meeting.
- 12.8 The Board commented on visibility of training investment and the potential for a different structure of financial reporting that aligns to the key priorities and outcomes of the organisation. SS advised that this would form part of the discussions at the next SLT Development Day. It was noted that the previous intention had been for the Strategic Planning and Change Committee to have oversight of spend in relation to strategic outcomes and this should be considered there before bringing back to the Board.
- 12.9 In regard to the additional costs incurred due to the recent visits of the American President and Vice President, JH advised that all costs have been collated and submitted to Scottish Government and were expected to be refunded.
- 12.10 **The Board scrutinised the resource budget position for the period ending 31 July 2025.**
- 13 CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**
- 13.1 SO'D presented a report advising the Board of the actual and committed expenditure against the 2025/26 capital budget position for the period ending 31 July 2025. It was currently anticipated that the budget of £47.00 million would be spent out by 31 March 2026. The following key points were highlighted:
- Actual capital expenditure to date was £3.67 million (8%) with a further £10.660 million (22.7%) committed.
 - All capital projects were reporting Green for budget on the RAG status with delivery milestones progressing well.
 - NMS and Vehicles projects were reporting an Amber RAG status due to external dependencies.
 - Proactive measures would continue to be taken to ensure that all remains on track for delivering against strategic commitments.
- 13.2 In regard to the NMS project, the Board acknowledged and welcomed the progress being made to deliver this project. JH commented on the progress being made and delivery of the project remains on track due to the constant hard work and efforts of everyone involved.

- 13.3 In regard to potential ground based solar panels at HQ, DS advised that this was currently at the feasibility study stage and could be scalable to include other locations. DS further advised that there were currently 84 locations with existing solar panels provisions.
- 13.4 **The Board scrutinised the level of actual and committed capital expenditure for the period ending 31 July 2025.**
- 14 **SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP 2024/25**
- 14.1 MMcA presented a report to the Board updating on the working in partnership 2024/25 for scrutiny. The following key points were highlighted:
- Report reflected on the Service's strength and depth of collaboration and contributions within local communities.
 - Overview of contributions made from across the Service throughout the year.
 - Inclusion of testimonies from individuals involved in partnership working and how this would continue to evolve going forward.
 - Reminder to contributors of the importance of impact and evaluation, as part of the new prevention strategy, to support testimonies to build into future reports.
 - Thanks were extended to Lou Patrick and her team and all contributors for compiling this report.
 - Advanced comments on the design of the report were noted and would be incorporated, if possible.
- 14.2 The Board queried whether the Service maintained long term engagement with Youth Volunteer Scheme (YVS) participants to monitor sustained benefits or recruitment into the Service. JH advised that since 2022, 24 past participants had since become volunteer instructors and of those, 11 had secured other roles within the Service. JH noted these positive outcomes and acknowledged that the Service could still do more in this area.
- 14.3 The Board suggested that further consideration be given to the following:
- Reference to working in partnership with Scottish Government.
 - Inclusion of reference to the Oracle project prior to any formal outcome.
 - Potential streamlining to reduce overall length of the report and remove repetition of terminology.
 - Generic climate change paragraph within Outcome 4.
 - Reference to helicopter training.
- ACTION: MMcA**
- 14.4 Brief discussion took place on the purpose of the report and whether it was intended to inspire activity, demonstrate impact or inform strategic planning. The Board commented on lack of guidance/understanding for LSO's of the process and initiatives that would support both local and national activities. JH noted that work was underway to improve clarity and strategic alignment. JH advised that an App had been developed to record and track partnership activity and that the Prevention team were now embedded within the Edinburgh Futures Institute.
- 14.5 The Board recognised and appreciated the incredible partnership work ongoing throughout the year. The Board noted their desire to continue to highlight and share this work as widely as possible. For consideration within future iterations of this report, the Board commented on the following:
- Partners contributions could be included but recognised the challenges this would involve.
 - Digital based reports could allow for easier identification of themes and/geographical activities.
 - Inclusion of a digital map to help visualise all partnership activities across Scotland.
 - Inclusion of learning gained from partnership working.

14.6 **The Board scrutinised the report.**

15 RISK THEMES

15.1 There were no new or emerging risks identified during this meeting. However, the Board flagged the increased pressure around finance and the need for additional scrutiny, not solely due to the increased pressure but the potential for optimism bias.

16 FORWARD PLAN

16.1 The Forward Plan was noted and would be kept under review and subject to change.

- Wider Prevention Strategy (including HFSV)

17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

17.1 A special Private Board meeting is scheduled to take place on Thursday 25 September 2025.

17.2 The next full public meeting of the Board is scheduled to take place on Thursday 30 October 2025.

17.3 There being no further matters to discuss in public, the meeting closed at 1238 hrs.

(The meeting broke at 1238 hrs and reconvened in private session at 1240 hrs)

PRIVATE SESSION

18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS PRIVATE MEETINGS:

18.1 **Thursday 26 June 2025**

18.1.1 Subject to agreed amendment, the minute of the meeting held on 26 June 2025 was approved as a true record of the meeting.

18.1.2 **Thursday 31 July 2025**

The minute of the special private meeting held on 31 July 2025 was approved as a true record of the meeting.

18.2 **Matters Arising**

18.2.1 There were no matters arising.

19 PRIVATE ACTION LOG

19.1 The Board considered the action log and noted the updates.

19.2 **Members noted the updated private Action Log and approved the removal of completed actions.**

There being no further matters to discuss in private, the meeting closed at 1242 hrs.