Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service

MINUTES

SCOTTISH COURTS AND TRIBUNALS SERVICE BOARD
MEETING: Monday 8 June 2026, High Court, Glasgow

Present: Lord Pentland, Lord President (Chair)
Lord Beckett, Lord Justice Clerk
Sheriff Principal Anwar, KC
Dr David Caddick MBE
Sheriff Frank Gill
Malcolm Graham
Ruth Innes, KC
Sheriff Olga Pasportnikov
Anne Scott
Lynsey Walker

Attended: Noel Rehfisch, Deputy Chief Executive, SCTS
Karen Lawrie, SCTS Secretariat (Minutes)

Apologies: Maggie Craig
Dr Sophie Flemig
Lady Wise

1. Minutes of the SCTS Board Meeting on 23 March 2026

1.1 The Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

2. Declarations of Interest and Matters Arising

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

2.2 Ahead of the formal meeting the Board visited the High Court at Glasgow. An overview of the work of the Court was provided by Yvonne Taylor (Principal Clerk of Session and Justiciary). Board members viewed a live online preliminary hearing from a dedicated facility within the court that allowed any interested person to view such business. A demonstration of the technology used in the courtroom to facilitate remote appearance and evidence presentation was also provided.

2.3 The Board acknowledged the pressures currently faced by a continually growing caseload entering the High Court. Indictment levels had been growing year on year, with a record 1,500 indictments registered in 2025 and the highest ever monthly level of registrations recorded in April. These pressures were increasing the waiting period between preliminary hearing and trial.

2.4 Work to expand capacity and make best use of technology was discussed. An additional preliminary hearings court would be launched in the coming months and four additional trial courts would be established in the course of this financial year. Whilst welcome, this would not be sufficient to address the continuing growth. Further work was planned, in collaboration with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and defence agents, to explore how to make most effective use of processes to resolve cases at the earliest appropriate stage. Liaison would also continue with Scottish Government to make clear the degree of pressure faced.

2.5 The Board were advised of recent changes to the Executive Team structure, that formed part of the fit for the future programme. The programme would ensure the SCTS was well placed to manage change and development against a tight financial backdrop over the coming years.

2.6 Board members supported the proposed changes – which would ensure that new developments were prioritised in line with the Corporate Plan 2026-29 priorities. The creation of an Executive Team role focusing on people and culture was welcomed. This would be crucial as the organisation enters a period where it would be required to adapt and develop more quickly to maintain high quality services and respond to the wider public service reform agenda.

3. Finance Report

3.1 The Board considered a report on financial performance for the full 2025-26 financial year. The provisional outturn for the year reported a £2.7m (1.5%) underspend against Total Net Expenditure of £181.8m. The final budget for the year had been slightly higher than anticipated due to a rates rebate and stronger than expected growth in fees. Capital expenditure was within 0.5% of budget for the year. The production of the detailed Annual Report and Accounts for the financial year was ongoing. The report would be considered by the Audit and Risk Committee in July before being presented to the Board at its next meeting.

3.2 The Board acknowledged the end-year financial position. They commended the work carried out to manage budgets and produce accurate reports and accounts over the course of the financial year, given the ongoing challenges associated with the Oracle Fusion Accounting system.

4. Civil Fees Update

4.1 Following the Board meeting in February discussions had taken place with interested Board members to consider steps that could be taken to ensure that the civil court fee regime encouraged the submission of high quality applications. Discussions also considered the extent to which any measures could be introduced to reduce the submission of inaccurate, spurious or excessively lengthy documents. These were time consuming for both staff and the judiciary to review – often containing irrelevant or inaccurate information (sometimes generated through the use of artificial intelligence).

4.2 The importance of taking work forward in this area was recognised. It was agreed that representations would be made to the Scottish Government with a view to amending the fees order regime, in order to encourage a “right first time” approach and to consider the potential for a resubmission fee where applications did not meet a certain standard. It would be important to balance access to justice alongside the best use of scarce resources.

4.3 It was also noted that a number of the applications in question came from party litigants who may benefit from being informed as to good practice and the standards that should be observed ahead of any document being submitted. Dialogue would take place with the Scottish Civil Justice Council to consider what steps might be taken in instances where applications were persistent or excessively long.

4.4 The Board were supportive of the steps being considered to address the quality of the applications submitted.

5. Quarterly Performance Review and SCTS Board Scorecard

5.1 The Board carried out its quarterly performance review of the organisation, considering progress made on delivery of the outcomes contained in the 2026-27 Business Plan and the Board Scorecard for Q4 of 2025-26.

5.2 Work had commenced against all outcomes detailed in the business plan with the majority of outcomes reporting as green. It was noted that a revised format for the scorecard was in development and would be presented to a future meeting.

6. Annual Review of Standing Orders

6.1 The Board conducted its annual review of the SCTS Standing Orders and the scheme of delegation, which detailed the responsibilities delegated from the Board to its Committees and the wider organisation. Minor updates were proposed, to reflect current procedures and to reflect the effect of inflation on financial delegations.

6.2 The revised SCTS Standing Orders were approved for publication in July, superseding the current version.

7. SCTS Committees

Audit and Risk Committee

7.1 The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee outlined the discussions at their last meeting. The Committee had received its regular update on the Oracle Fusion Cloud Accounting system. Whilst working relationships with the Scottish Government had improved, manual workarounds were still in place in some areas.

7.2 The Committee had reviewed the scope of the External Audit plan and timetable for the submission of the SCTS Annual Report and Accounts. Internal Audit had provided a “reasonable” assurance rating for the year. It was noted that the Financial Assurance audit had received “substantial” assurance.

People Committee

7.3 The Board were updated on the discussions of the People Committee at their last meeting. Members had been updated on the proposed changes to the Executive Team Structure as part of the Fit for the Future Programme, which were wholeheartedly supported. They also received an overview of the strategic framework for future work in the Education and Learning Unit and the Human Resources Unit, which aligned to the SCTS Corporate Plan 2026-29.

Estates Committee

7.4 An update was provided from the Chair of the Estates Committee on the discussions at their last meeting. Members received an update on the monitoring of the Facilities Management Contract, which was being closely monitored by the Property Services Team. It was noted that the KPIs were being met. An update on the monitoring and management of Radon Gas was also provided.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 It was noted that the process to appoint a new non-executive member of the Board and a new member of the Audit and Risk Committee, with cyber security experience, would commence shortly.

8.2 The inaugural SCTS Service Excellence Awards would take place on 10 June. The recognition event was designed to celebrate the successes of SCTS people who go the extra mile; have made a meaningful difference to the organisation and the people we serve; and consistently demonstrated the SCTS values of Respect, Service and Excellence when carrying out their roles. Members of the Board would be attending to present the awards.

9 Papers for Scrutiny/Exception Reporting Only

9.1 The following papers had been circulated for scrutiny:

- the SCTS Decision Tracker.

10. Date of the Next Meeting

10.1 The next meeting would be on Monday 10 August 2026 in Edinburgh.

11. Post Meeting Discussion

11.1 Following the Board meeting Ken Miller (Director Communications) gave a presentation to the Board, setting out the work of the Communications team and its priorities for 2026-29. The need for the organisation to take a more proactive and strategic approach to communications was recognised – to improve public understanding of the work of SCTS and to support the Open Justice agenda, which highlighted the importance of SCTS and the judiciary in Scottish society.

11.2 The Board commended a number of recent developments – including a greater use of video to communicate key messages and the increase in livestreaming of high-profile business. Members discussed the future work required to ensure that SCTS understood how people wished to receive information and to ensure the right systems and platforms were in place to provide it. The need to maintain effective relationships with both the media and partners across the justice system was acknowledged.

11.3 Members thanked Ken for his informative presentation and for the work of his team.

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June 2026