Minutes of the Board Meeting

Monday 20 April 2026

09:15am to 14:30

Board Room 4th Floor Thistle House

Present:

Mr Lindsay Montgomery CBE, Chairing Member (CM)

Mr Jonathan Barne, KC

Mrs Liz Burnley, CBE

Mr Paul Cackette, CBE

Mrs Wilma Canning – Via Teams

President May Dunsmuir – Via Teams
The Hon. Lady Shona Haldane, KC

Ms Denise Loney

Ms Emma Marriott

Dr Fiona McLean

Mr Peter Murray

The Hon. Lord Robert Weir, KC

Sheriff Principal Kate Dowdalls, KC

Sheriff Jane Farquharson, KC

Mr Gareth Morgan, QPM

Attendees:

Mrs Laura McGeary, Chief Executive (CE)

Mr Billy Love, Head of Operations (HoO)

Apologies:

Mr Paul Gray

1. Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

1.1 The CM welcomed attendees to the meeting.
1.2 No declarations of interest were raised.

2. Business from Previous Meeting

2.1 Minutes of 11 March 2026 were approved.
2.2 The CE provided an update on actions, including a Freedom of Information request relating to gender recognition policy. Legal advice from Brodies confirmed JABS' position regarding recommendations and Equality Impact Assessments. Materials are available on Huddle.
2.3 JABS will review its monitoring and equality questions to ensure compliance with relevant legislation.

2.4 Action Tracker

The CE presented the updated Action Tracker. Older actions have been removed and progress noted across remaining items, including interview recording, strategy outputs and the travel time policy.

3. Chairing Member Update

The CM reported on a busy period, noting strong collaboration between panels and the BMU. Work is ongoing to review panel availability for 2026 to ensure resilience.
The March Strategy Day was positively received, with issues identified for further consideration including Board meeting frequency, support for legal case study development, the role of LAAs and resourcing for development activity.
The CM will hold 1:1 meetings with Board members, including development discussions. Further Board training will be considered, including assessment, panel chair training and unconscious bias.
Scottish Government will undertake recruitment to replace members leaving later this year.
The Diversity Reference Group met on 16 April and discussed clarifying its remit and encouraging a more collaborative approach.

The CM thanked Sheriff Principal Dowdalls for her significant contribution as she reaches the end of her term.

4. Chief Executive Update

The CE provided her update and confirmed the BMU is operating at full capacity. Two B1 roles have been filled, with recruitment planned for A3 and part-time finance roles, although these are currently filled on an interim basis.
Work is underway to allocate panel members to 2026/2027 competitions.

5. Governance

5.1 Risk Register: Key risks include tribunal vacancy filling and limited resources for development work. Budget risk may be reduced but will continue to be monitored.
5.2 Policy Review: A full register of policies and structured review schedule will be developed. Cyber security assurance arrangements will be clarified and shared with the Board.

6. Corporate Policy

6.1 Corporate Plan (2026–2029): The draft plan was broadly supported, subject to minor amendments and clarification of references to Scottish Ministers.
6.2 Business Plan (2026–2027): The Board agreed that resources are sufficient. Further work is required to better measure outcomes and the effectiveness of appointments, including judicial feedback.

7. Competition Update

Recent competitions (Sheriff Principal, Parole Board, Chamber President) have concluded. Learning from wash-up sessions will be shared.
Upcoming milestones include Senator recommendations (25 May 2026) and Sheriff recommendations (22 June 2026).
The HEC competition launches on 21 April. Forward planning continues, though some delays arise from discussions with Scottish Government and Judicial Office.

8. Finance

An underspend of approximately £50,000 was recorded for 2025–26. The 2026–27 budget is flat but sufficient based on current plans.

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS BOARD FOR SCOTLAND

9. Programme for Change

Deirdre Fulton updated the Board on progress. Improvements include enhanced outreach, refined application processes, more holistic candidate assessment, and strengthened quality assurance.
Feedback mechanisms and bespoke candidate feedback have improved applicant quality.
Challenges include resource constraints and the burden of developing competition materials. Options include creating a pool of judicial contributors.
Further work includes assessing pre-application testing and reviewing eligibility guidance. A final report with implementation priorities, timelines and resource implications will follow.

10. Any Other Business and Date of Next Meeting

No other business was raised. The next meeting is scheduled for 22 June 2026.

Action Points

1. CE to circulate Strategy Day note to Board
2. Develop policy register and review schedule
3. Provide cyber security assurance update to Board
4. Finalise Corporate Plan and Business Plan following amendments
5. Develop mechanism for sharing learning from wash-up sessions.
6. Circulate Programme for Change report and implementation plan