

**Meeting EIGHTEEN**  
of the  
**Directors of The Promise Scotland (SC693269)**  
on Tuesday 2 September 2025 from 13:30-16:00  
at The Promise Scotland, South Charlotte Street, Edinburgh

**Approved Minutes**

**Attendees – Directors:**

Fiona Duncan (FD)	Chair
Fraser McKinlay (FMK)	Director and Chief Executive
Jackie Brock (JB)	Director
Jane O'Donnell (JOD)	Director
Jim Savege (JS)	Director
Philip Rycroft (PR)	Director
Victoria Underwood (VU)	Director

**Apologies:**

Anna Matthews (AM)	Director
David Garbutt (DG)	Director

**In attendance – The Promise Scotland:**

Claire Burns	Head of Improvement
Claire Stuart	Head of Partnerships and Policy
Gillian Graham	Executive Assistant and Governance Coordinator (minutes)

**1. Welcome, introductions, apologies and purpose of meeting**

The Chair, Fiona Duncan (FD) welcomed the Board to the meeting noting apologies from Anna Matthews and David Garbutt. From The Promise Scotland team it was noted Gillian Graham's presence to take the minute, Morag Burnett's absence and welcomed Claire Burns and Claire Stuart.

In addition to the standing agenda items, the focus of the meeting was to discuss the Exception and Escalation process, to receive an update on the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill, and to consider future office space. As usual, the agenda was structured to allow the white space discussion to take place at the end of the meeting.

**2. Minutes and action log**

The minutes of Meeting SEVENTEEN (27<sup>th</sup> May 2025) were approved as accurate with all actions either complete or in progress.

**3. Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were received. It was noted that in relation to discussions on Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill, Jane O'Donnell (JOD)

confirmed she would be discharging her responsibilities as a Director of The Promise Scotland and not representing COSLA's position which differs from The Promise Scotland's.

#### **4. Quarter 1 reporting & management accounts**

The Chief Executive of The Promise Scotland - Fraser McKinlay (FMK) presented the Quarter 1 report covering April to June and noted it was the first report of the new [Strategic Work Programme 2025/26, Focus on Change](#). He invited discussion around the content and layout. The Board welcomed the new report which generated discussion and agreement to keep its development under review, with the following actions.

- the Audit & Risk Committee will, at their October meeting, consider how to evaluate and demonstrate the impact of the Strategic Work Programme within the quarterly reports then feedback at the subsequent Directors' meeting. The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee – Victoria Underwood will lead this.
- the external narrative about The Promise Scotland contribution towards Scotland's progress will be strengthened and a clear picture of what good looks like set out with all agreed to continue to develop the approach to communications to ensure clarity of message and a broader understanding of impact.

#### **5. Chief Executive's Report**

FMK gave an update on recent activities including:

- The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill.
  - Fiona Duncan (FD) and Fraser McKinlay are giving evidence to the Education Children and Young People Committee on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, joined by Sheriff David Mackie who was appointed by FD to Chair for the Hearing System Working Group.
- Chief Executive engagement activity.
  - FMK was advised the level of detail included was useful.
- Audit Scotland performance audit 'Improving care experience; delivering the promise' due to be published early October.
  - Work was noted on the possibility of a joint statement to be issued on day of publication.
- Team update:
  - Alison Sutherland completed her two-year contract as Head of Support and left the organisation on the 25<sup>th</sup> July.
  - Claire Burns has been promoted into a new role as Head of Improvement and, as part of a leadership and management reshaping. Claire Stuart will now lead as Head of Partnerships and Policy.
- Communications and media:
  - Alongside the Strategic Work Programme, a new communications strategy is being developed for the year by the Strategic Communications Lead who is building strong relationships to support the work.

- The Board asked for a 'so what' to be added to the draft to support an upfront understanding of the purpose of communications and that messages be assertive, encouraging and reflecting the breadth of work being done.

## **6. Exception and Escalation Process**

FMK introduced the paper, noting this process had:

- helped with clarification and delineation of responsibilities previously sitting with the Independent Strategic Advisor.
- been added to the Risk Register at Meeting FIFTEEN (December 2024) for approval and future amendment.
- been developed in recognition that The Promise Scotland has no formal powers to compel, direct or intervene but does receive information through various channels about significant concerns and this process will help formalise responses.

The Board agreed it should be further developed to:

- clearly define what constitutes an exception.
- explicitly set out the roles and responsibilities in escalation in terms of the staff team, of Directors, of the Independent Strategic Advisor and making clear how this differs from the Chair of The Promise Scotland.
- clarify what the process does and does not cover and link to relevant policies (such as Safeguarding and Whistleblowing).

FMK will incorporate feedback, circulate a revised process to the Board for agreement by correspondence with Meeting NINETEEN signing off the final version and how to promote it.

## **7. Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill**

FMK gave an update on the Children (Care, Care Experience and Service Planning) (Scotland) Bill, introduced to Parliament on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2025. The Promise Scotland's response to the Education, Children and Young People (ECYP) Committee is available on the [website](#). FMK will continue to update the Board on developments.

The Audit & Risk Committee will consider the risks and mitigating actions related to the Bill at their October meeting then report to the next Directors' meeting with VU leading this

## **8. Office Space**

Having a dedicated office space has proved invaluable in the early years of The Promise Scotland to get set up, for a new team to work from and get to know one another, and for convening meetings to progress work. The Charlotte House lease has a break clause in November 2025. The Board considered options to exercise this clause and prepare to move and / or negotiate a one or two-year extension, asking FMK to progress and update the Board on developments.

## **9. White Space**

This is an unminuted discussion.

## 10. Forward Plan and any other business

This was Jackie Brock's final meeting as she stepped down after four years on the Board. FD thanked Jackie for her significant contribution stretching back to the Independent Care Review and providing critical support to set up The Promise Scotland.

- **Meeting NINETEEN:** 25 November 2025, 1.30pm-4.00pm
  - Glidepath update
    - Financial modelling
    - Consideration of a 'reset' / re-examination of strategic scope questions
  - AGM
    - With member in attendance
  - Exception and Escalation Process
  - Audit and Risk
    - how to evaluate and report on impact of Strategic Work Programme in quarterly reports
    - consider and report on risks and mitigating actions related to the Bill
- **Meeting TWENTY:** February 2026
  - Budget approval
- **Meeting TWENTY-ONE:** May 2026
  - Strategy Session
    - With Permanent Secretary in attendance
    - Settled decision on 'reset' / strategic scope questions (ready for "in the latter half of 2026 a new work programme will be developed" from the published [Strategic Work Programme 2025/26](#) (Focus on Change)).
- **Meeting TWENTY-TWO:** September 2026

### Governance Principles Independence – Assurance – Proportionate – Transparent

N.B. All papers are copied to the Scottish Government, as per the Members' Agreement.