

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee  
Thursday 30 October 2025  
27<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

## Historic Environment Scotland

1. The Committee will be taking evidence from Historic Environment Scotland.
2. We will be hearing from—
  - Sir Mark Jones, Chair, Historic Environment Scotland
  - Andrew Davies, Board Member, Historic Environment Scotland
3. SPICe have produced a briefing to inform the evidence session, which is available to view at **Annexe A**.

Clerks to the Committee  
October 2025

**Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee**  
**Thursday 30 October 2025**

## **Historic Environment Scotland**

### **Introduction**

The Committee will take evidence from Historic Environment Scotland (“HES”). This follows a turbulent year. A new Chair of HES was recently appointed and in the last two months there have been regular reports in the media on the actions of senior officials at HES and the internal culture.

The Committee heard from HES during its pre-budget scrutiny in September. The In 2023, the Committee also undertook a short inquiry into the strategy for Scotland’s historic environment sector.

This paper provides a very brief summary of some of those reported issues. The paper also highlights the role of the board and HES’ roles and strategic objectives. Around the time of the appointment of Sir Mark Jones as Chair of HES, SPICe asked the Scottish Government to provide a timeline of events, from the perspective of the Scottish Government, up to that point. This is included in an annexe to this paper.

### **Governance and Culture**

There have been a range of media reports that have highlighted concerns over governance issues and the internal culture at HES. At the time of writing, HES has not published a formal response or statement on any of these issues on the [News section of its website](#).

Some of these issues were explored by the Committee during its pre-budget scrutiny this year. Alison Turnbull’s, Director of External Relations and Partnerships, appearance on [11 September](#). She said that in the absence of the Chief Executive, “the executive leadership team ... has ensured continuity of leadership and operational stability” and worked closely with the HES Board and sponsorship team at the Scottish Government. In relation to the culture of the organisation, she said—

“We have evidence from the independent staff surveys that we run every two years. The most recent staff survey shows quite high marks: 7.6 for overall employee experience and 7.4 for pride.”

HES wrote to the Committee following the session on 11 September and in relation to pay structures, the letter stated:

“The new framework was based on job evaluation outcomes and independent salary benchmarking, adjusting salaries where gaps existed and maintaining

them where already comparable. 80% of the investment targeted the three lowest pay bands, with 9% allocated to senior roles.

“The revised framework, endorsed by our three recognised trade unions, is fair and transparent. Following negotiations, all three trade unions recommended the framework for member acceptance.”

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture [told the Committee on 25 September](#) that “Historic Environment Scotland is in a period of transition ... there are on-going issues in Historic Environment Scotland, particularly management-related issues.” He [also said](#)—

“I agree that there is a wide range of issues of concern relating to the senior management of Historic Environment Scotland. They cause me extreme concern, and I expect to learn what the consequences of those cases are. Some relate to matters that are subject to on-going internal human resource processes, and I await the conclusion of them. I also believe that those issues will be fully attended to by the incoming chair of Historic Environment Scotland, Sir Mark Jones. I have total confidence in his ability and willingness to deal with the issue. We all share an interest in the focus of Historic Environment Scotland’s efforts being on the tremendous job that it does throughout Scotland.”

[The Cabinet Secretary also answered questions on these matters in the Chamber on 17 September](#). He said that he was “seized of the importance of the matter” but did not comment on specific internal governance issues.

## **HES’ role and responsibility**

The [Historic Environment Scotland Act 2014](#) established HES. This provides that HES has the “general function of investigating, caring for and promoting Scotland’s historic environment”. HES was created through a merger of Historic Scotland with and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

On behalf of Scottish Ministers, HES looks after properties in care. HES’ role in relation to these properties includes ensuring their conservation, articulating and safeguarding their cultural significance, providing public access for current and future generations, and managing the associated commercial operations.

In the current financial year, the net resource budget for HES is £59.2m. In addition, the budget for 2025-26 provides for £10.0m of capital funding for HES. The resource budget was £2m lower than in the previous year. The Scottish Government has agreed to allow HES more flexibility in carrying balances of earned income into future financial years in return for lower resource grant in aid.

On 11 September, the Committee explored a potential in year shortfall at HES. [Alison Turnbull said that HES](#) was managing this and was “prioritised projects and [and] looking at efficiency savings”. In the follow up letter, HES said:

“For 2025/26, we set an ambitious net commercial income target of £74.9m, against which we are currently forecasting £71.9m; while this does represent

an in-year shortfall against the target, it compares against a full year 2024/25 outturn of £65.8m and as such still represents a strong performance.”

## Strategy

In April 2023, HES published a new strategy for the historic environment. [Our Past, Our Future](#) identifies three priorities as the focus for delivery over the five years to 2028. This strategy identified three priorities as the focus for delivery over the five-year period. Under each priority sit three outcomes. The priorities and outcomes are—

- [Delivering the transition to net zero](#)
  - Outcome 1: Reduced emissions from the historic environment
  - Outcome 2: The historic environment is more climate resilient
  - Outcome 3: Improved pathways for historic environment skills
- [Empowering resilient and inclusive communities and places](#)
  - Outcome 4: Organisations that care for the historic environment have the right skills and are more resilient
  - Outcome 5: Communities have more opportunities to participate in decision-making about the historic environment
  - Outcome 6: The historic environment is more diverse and inclusive
- [Building a wellbeing economy.](#)
  - Outcome 7: The historic environment makes a responsible contribution to Scotland’s economy
  - Outcome 8: The historic environment provides Fair Work
  - Outcome 9: Increased engagement with the historic environment with a focus on activities that enhance wellbeing

The outcomes of the strategy will be [measured against a Delivery Framework](#). In relation to progress on the strategy, HES’ website says:

“The first year of delivery concluded with the publication of a Baseline and update on monitoring and reporting. Year Two of delivery has focused on finalising the delivery and evaluation framework for the strategy, alongside targeting support for developing needs areas. The year culminated at Scotland’s Historic Environment Forum (SHEF) 2025 in June where leaders and policymakers explored actions aligned with national priorities. ... In Year Three of strategy delivery, we will be continuing to focus on establishing leadership, enhancing collaboration and identifying stakeholders and resources to support our strategic pillars.”

On [29 September 2025](#), HES published its [second annual report](#) on the strategy which provided a summary of the work intended to deliver on the outcomes of the strategy between June 2024 and June 2025.

The Committee undertook a short inquiry into HES and its, then new, strategy in the autumn of 2023. Following this work, the Committee [wrote to the Scottish Government and in that letter](#), the Committee observed:

“It is clear from the evidence received that there will be challenges in the delivery of the strategy, and the Committee in particular notes the concerns of witnesses regarding the shortage of a skilled workforce to maintain, repair and retrofit historic assets; and on the impact this may have on Scotland’s historic environment and on communities.”

Speaking to the Committee [on 11 September](#), Alison Turnbull from HES said—

“Our commitment to deliver our corporate plan and sector strategy is unchanged. We have reviewed our deliverables for Q1 and we are on track. However, it has been a difficult time and I am very proud of the staff team.”  
(Col 13)

## Closures and risk

A theme of the Committee’s scrutiny of HES has been around the closures or partial closures of sites following safety concerns and high-level masonry checks.

The previous chief executive, [Alex Paterson, told the Committee in September 2022](#) he had followed legal advice to restrict access after a pilot of a more hands-on approach to high-level masonry inspections had identified issues. He said that the decision to restrict access to sites was taken following legal advice in relation to risk of injury. Mr. Paterson said that the issues with masonry were due to “a lack of investment over decades and ... the exposure of some of the sites to climate change.”

HES provided an update on this work in a letter to the Committee in September,

“The High Level Masonry (HLM) programme was launched in April 2022 to inspect over 200 sites with masonry above 1.5 metres and was a proactive response to climate-driven deterioration and safety risks. To address site closures related to HLM issues, we initially prioritised 70 key sites for inspection and have now completed assessments at over 140 sites, including 68 of the 70 priority sites. Of the sites in our care, 95% have either partial or full access, with 64 out of the 70 priority HLM sites now reopened. Around half of the remaining 5% of sites that are closed are due to HLM related issues, with the rest shut for other reasons, including conservation work. The HLM inspection programme is progressing well and we expect it to complete by Easter 2026.”

[HES’ website](#) lists sites “where access has been restored, either fully or partially, since undergoing inspections and repairs where necessary.” At the time of writing, HES listed 63 sites, of these 29 are marked as “Full Access”.

## Role of the board

HES is a non-departmental body. The HES [Board](#) are appointed by Scottish Ministers. Chair and Board member appointments are regulated by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland. The HES Chief Executive reports to the Board and is the designated Accountable Officer to the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government has [published guidance, On Board, for all those appointed under statute to be members of the boards of public bodies in Scotland](#).

Among other things, the guidance notes that:

- The four main functions of the Board of a public body are: to ensure that the body delivers its functions in accordance with Ministers' policies and priorities; to provide strategic leadership; to ensure financial stewardship; and to hold the Chief Executive and senior management team to account.
- The Chair has additional responsibilities to Board members, particularly leadership, directing a diverse team and harnessing the benefits of this, and the conduct of Board business.
- The Board focuses on strategy, performance and behaviour – the Chief Executive advises the Board on all matters and is solely responsible for operational issues. Board members have no authority to instruct the Chief Executive or any member of staff on operational matters.

HES is listed in [Schedule 3 of the Ethical Standards Act](#) and board members of HES are subject to the nine key principles outlined in the [Model Code of Conduct](#). Reflecting the Model Code of Conduct, the On Board guidance stated—

“Board members must not undermine any individual employee or identifiable group of employees, or raise concerns about their performance, conduct or capability in public. This does not mean that board members are prevented from scrutinising the performance of a team or service; it just means that they are required to refrain from making any public criticism, which is personalised in nature, about an individual employee or identifiable group of employees. If a board member wishes to raise concerns in public about the performance, conduct or capability of the organisation (or parts of it), they must do so objectively and respectfully and should focus on the issues, rather than on any employees who may have been directly involved in the matter.”

**Ned Sharratt, Researcher (Education and Culture), SPICe**

**Date: 21/10/2025**

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

## Annexe: Timeline from the Scottish Government

The following timeline was provided to SPICe by the Scottish Government on 25 September 2025. SPICe requested a timeline on the issues with the governance of HES and how the Government responded. This will not include any issues which are legally privileged.

Date	Event
29 April 2025	Katerina Brown CEO HES writes to SG to report Data Breaches
2 May 2025	HES CEO submits a "Fit note" to advise she will be absent from the business.
3 May 2025	Email received from HES regarding a potential cyber incident regarding emails being sent (242)
8 May 2025	SG Sponsorship Team write to inform HES Chair that they will be attending all future Board meetings
19 May 2025	Email from HES advising IT breaches not significant enough to be reported to the ICO
May 2025	HES Chair informed he would not be getting a second term as a recruitment exercise for Board Chairs for a number of NDPB's was underway.
21 May 2025	HES receive Fol request from the Guardian regarding Governance and HR issues. SG Responded
22 May 2025	Members of Sponsorship Team attend HES Board meeting
28 May 2025	Katerina Brown writes to Principal Accountable Officer advising she will have been out of the business for over 4 weeks from 30 May 2025
11 June 2025	New Director Kenneth Hogg met HES Chair.
12 June 2025	Daily Record asks SG for comment on investigation into Chair and other Governance issues. SG Responded
2 June 2025	Sponsorship Team receive from Whistleblowing report alleging financial/procurement improprieties involving HES Director.
1 July 2025	Whistleblowing email HES Corruption Volume 1 circulated to HES Board and Ministers
3 July 2025	SG sponsor team attended closed board meeting as observers
15 July 2025	CEO confirms to Director she intends to return to work 28 July 2025
21 July 2025	Sponsorship Team attend the HES Closed Board meeting
21 July 2025	Whistleblowing email HES Corruption Volume 2 circulated to HES Board and Ministers.
24 July 2025	DG meets HES Chair and Board Member
24 July 2025	Sponsorship Team ask HES to provide details of al HES events and guest lists for events at the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo. Full details still to be received.
29 July 2025	Whistleblowing email HES Corruption Volume 3 circulated to HES Board and Ministers
28 August 2025	Sponsorship Team attended HES Closed Board Meeting

29 August 2025	Hugh Hall, Chair, HES informs Director that he will be resigning as Chair with effect 5 September 2025
2 September 2025	Daily Record enquiry on Governance at HES. SG Responded
2 September 2025	Whistleblowing email HES Corruption Volume 4 circulated to HES Board, Audit Scotland and Ministers
4 September 2025	Sponsorship Team attend HES Closed Board meeting
11 September 2025	HES appear at CEACC Pre Budget Scrutiny meeting.
11 September 2025	Sponsorship Team attend the HES Closed Board Meeting
11 & 12 September	Issues ongoing following HES CEACC appearance re: Edinburgh Castle event and Pay Policy.
11 September 2025	Regarding allegations at CEACC that a HES director faced a "serious allegation of misconduct" over a meal in Edinburgh Castle, the Daily Mail and Scottish Sun sought SG response.. SG Responded HES issue responses to a number of media enquiries on Edinburgh Castle and Pay and Grading
18 September 2025	HES Corruption Vol 5 circulated to HES Board, Audit Scotland and Ministers
18 September 2025	Telegraph approach SG regarding Edinburgh Castle Dining allegation. SG Responded
18 September 2025	Sponsorship Team attend the HES Closed Board meeting.
22 September 2025	Sir Mark Jones takes up post as HES Chair.
22 September 2025	Telegraph approaches SG regarding letter from Stephen Kerr MSP to Audit Scotland in which he calls for an external inquiry into the exercise of powers by directors and senior managers within HES. SG Responded
23 September 2025	Daily Express approach SG regarding HES FoI policies. SG Responded
24 September 2025	The National approach SG regarding allegations of racism against a HES Director: SG Responded