



SWAG Secretariat
Tuesday 20 January 2026
13:30 – 14:40
MS Teams

Attendees List

Confirmation of members in attendance at the time of writing:

Name	Organisation
Mary Morgan (Chair)	National Services Scotland
Jacqui Jones	NHS Lanarkshire
Steven Lindsay	Unite
Gordon McKay	Unison
Norman Provan	Royal College of Nursing
Fiona Hogg	Scottish Government
Jane Hamilton	Scottish Government
Christina Stokes	Scottish Government

Additional attendees:

Name	Organisation
Ronan O'Dowd (Secretariat)	Scottish Government
Zachary Deponio	Scottish Government
Catriona Hetherington	Scottish Government
Jenny Watson	Scottish Government
Sofie French	NSS
Susie Dodd	NSS
Erin Murphy	Scottish Government
Corey Reilly	Scottish Government
Laurie Whyte	Scottish Government

Apologies have been received from:

Name	Organisation
Elaine Watson	NHS Tayside



Agenda item 1: Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

- The Chair welcomed SWAG Secretariat members and confirmed the meeting was quorate.
- Members were advised that the meeting schedule will differ this year. Two secretariat meetings will take place ahead of each SWAG Committee to ensure Secretariat members are fully sighted on upcoming Committee business. Members were content with this scheduling.
- It was noted that Elaine Watson has stood down as Secretary of the HRD Committee and is no longer a member of SWAG. SG have been notified that the HRD Committee are in the process of nominating a replacement.
- Minutes from the meeting on 23rd September 2025 were agreed and members agreed to the recording of the meeting for note-taking purposes.

Agenda Item 2: Transmissions Based Precautions

- SF and SD were invited to present on ongoing work concerning Transmission Based Precautions. As co-clinical leads of the National Policy Guidance and Evidence Programme, which sits within ARHAI, SD explained that their primary role is to populate the National Infection Prevention and Control Manual for all NHS Scotland staff.
- SD noted that a background paper has been submitted for review by members, and provided a brief overview of context. There had been some contention around mask use throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and in the period following it. Historically, respiratory transmission was categorised as either droplet or airborne, and mask type was selected accordingly. While it made the process for selection clear and straightforward, it was apparent that could be overly simplistic, with additional factors influencing transmission.
- In 2023, the team began reviewing how transmission is described and developed new descriptors. The World Health Organisation later published updated descriptors which aligned closely with their work, which SD described as a positive outcome. It was highlighted that no country, including the WHO, has produced guidance describing which transmission based precautions

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should be applied in relation to these updated descriptors and this has been a challenge.

- The most significant impact from the proposed update to TBPs will relate to PPE and specifically mask selection using a risk assessment approach. SD highlighted that they are developing a flowchart to support staff in doing this. They emphasised the need for a cultural shift in the way staff think about mask use, noting that mask compliance in line with current guidance isn't always good.
- The team are intending to soft launch guidance in springtime to infection control leads and HAI Executive leads, followed by a wider roll out of published guidance NHS staff in the summertime. CNOD is supporting this implementation fully, and a Director Letter (DL) will accompany the release.
- Extensive engagement has taken place with a wide range of experts nationally and internationally, including the WHO, DC, HSE and ACDP. The draft guidance will be shared with HSE once finalised. Other countries, including Public Health Canada, are interested in adopting it.
- The rollout will be supported by education and associated campaign work. Given the contentiousness of the subject, the team is seeking views on the best approach to engaging with staff. Specifically, how to involve staff whose expertise does not lie in transmission science, and what key questions to ask to gather meaningful feedback.

Discussion

- The Staffside co-chair reflected on staff experiences during the pandemic, noting that measures introduced at the time did not work effectively. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) produced guidance during the pandemic due to concerns about PPE use and the lack of recognition of airborne transmission. A study undertaken by the RCN was not incorporated into decision making at the time, and staff were advised to continue following existing guidance.
- It was emphasised that, although policies suggested certain controls were possible, in practice these could not always be implemented. PPE, as the broadest infection control measure, was also difficult for staff to access in some cases. It was stressed that the issue was not staff non-compliance but an inability to access appropriate PPE within the prevailing culture of guideline



application. It was also noted that the group to date has not had trade union involvement which would be the best way to represent the interests of staff and ensure alternative views can be heard.

- The Chair acknowledged the difficult period for staff but highlighted the need to think about how we move forward. The Chair queried the mechanism that is looking at face-fitting and ensuring it is up to date and where funding would come from. The Chair also noted the ongoing work within ACNO to consider these issues.
- Members noted that, in terms of engagement, there is scope for accredited health and safety representatives from within trade unions and engaging with national staffside would be appropriate to support frontline staff and address concerns regarding PPE and implementation.
- SD thanked members for comments and acknowledged the need for a wider culture change, noting that although they develop national guidance, there is an element about behaviours in practice and implementation. They are hoping to do significant work with CNOD in that space. SD noted they are keen to get a staff side representative to come to the working group now that the team are at the guidance development stage and asked for advice on the appropriate contact route.
- The Chair advised that the recommendation of SWAG Secretariat is for SD to contact NP to ensure appropriate engagement with staff.

Actions	
A20012026 (1)	Secretariat to provide Norman Provan’s contact details to Susie Dodd.

Agenda Item 3: NHS Socialisation of Guiding Principles for Supporting Employees with Lived Experience of Problematic Substance Abuse

- EM outlined ongoing work on the implementation of drugs workforce, which includes developing employability tool kits for people with lived experience of substance abuse. There is also work underway to create leaflets to highlight the purpose of the toolkits.
- The guiding principles were published in June last year by the First Minister at Harbour in Ayrshire, and colleagues previously presented them to SWAG

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Secretariat, where they were endorsed in principle, pending further NHS socialisation across relevant groups.

- Erin delivered a presentation explaining the purpose of the guiding principles and the work they have done since their previous presentation at the SWAG Secretariat meeting. A key point emphasised was that the principles are not mandatory, rather they are intended as supportive tools for those who would benefit from them. There is no intention to place pressure on employers or resource available to monitor uptake.
- Socialisation to date has included engagement informed by the Workforce Expert Delivery Group (WEDG), which includes representatives from across NHS Scotland, HIS, and NES, with a focus on ensuring it is led by clinical voices.
- Harbour have embedded the principles into recruitment processes and general organisational policies. There has been sustained approach throughout the year, involving hosting various engagement sessions with NHS groups. They have provided information on the principles within the drugs and alcohol partnership and Royal College of General Practitioners newsletters.
- EM noted upcoming activity which includes attending the Future of Residential Rehab Working Group next month, continuing to provide information through newsletters and hosting a stall at the upcoming CORRA foundation 'National Drugs Mission Celebration Event' and the National Lifelines Scotland Conference in March to share the guiding principles alongside other workforce resources.
- EM invited Secretariat members to suggest additional groups, mailing lists or newsletters that may be helpful for further circulation of the principles.
- It was noted that the guiding principles received endorsement from COSLA last year. The team intends to present to the SWAG Committee in March to seek formal endorsement and would welcome any comments or input from Secretariat members in advance of this.

Discussion

- Members highlighted that the guiding principles have been endorsed by Secretary HRDs who have been engaged along with other groups. It was noted

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that the work is strongly supported, and they confirmed they were content to endorse taking it forward.

- One member welcomed the work but raised concerns about employer endorsement. They reiterated that there is currently no mechanism to monitor adherence once employers endorse the guiding principles, and questioned what endorsement would mean in practice. They emphasised the need for employers to create a safe environment for staff to disclose addiction issues. It was asked what SWAG is expecting from employers if the principles are endorsed, and whether accompanying guidance will outline good practice.
- It was suggested that, if the principles are endorsed by SWAG, there may be value in issuing communication from SWAG to the service recommending employer endorsement and noted that the principles align well with the Staff Governance Standard and could be included in the Staff Governance Monitoring returns. Endorsement through Board Chief Executives and HRDs could provide a route to encouraging consistent adoption.
- Members agreed that the guiding principles should go to the SWAG Committee in March, noting this would broaden awareness and support communications and engagement.

Actions	
A20012026(2)	The guiding principles to be taken to SWAG Committee in March, with the recommendation that the Committee endorse them.

Agenda Item 4: Standards of Business Conduct

- LW advised that a proposal to introduce the Standards of Business Conduct (SBoC) had been considered by the SWAG Committee approximately one year ago. At that time, the Committee was supportive in principle, but requested that the policy be further developed with examples for staff and training materials.
- Although progress had not been as rapid as hoped, it has been taken to the Board Secretaries Group, and their feedback has been incorporated. It has also been shared with finance colleagues and the HRD team in NHS Forth Valley, who reviewed and contributed examples.
- LW reported that NES have been assisting in the development of e-learning materials, which are expected to be completed within the next couple of weeks. In December, the updated materials were taken to the Deputy HR Directors group, and final feedback is awaited.

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- LW confirmed that it will be ready for presentation in the next few weeks, and with that timeline in mind, is seeking for the item to return to the SWAG Committee for formal consideration.

Discussion

- One member confirmed support for the Standards of Business Conduct in principle but raised several considerations regarding implementation. They emphasised the need for a clear mechanism to ensure Boards understand which staff groups must be made aware of the standards. It was suggested that individuals who are directly affected should have the Standards explicitly highlighted during induction.
- Clarification was sought on how the standards would interact with existing investigation and disciplinary processes. The staffside co-chair stressed the need for clarity that any consideration of the Standards would operate within current terms and conditions ‘Once for Scotland’ workforce policies.
- The Chair agreed, noting that Counter Fraud Services may investigate issues as part of an overarching process, but this would not override or replace existing organisational policies. The Standards of Business Conduct would sit within the current policy infrastructure, not supersede it. The Chair highlighted that endorsement by SWAG would support consistent application across Boards and suggested that inclusion within Staff Governance Monitoring Returns could help ensure visibility without creating a heavy monitoring burden.

Decision	
D20012026(1)	Standards of Business Conduct to be taken to SWAG Committee in March.

Agenda Item 5: SWAG 2026 Workplan

- The Chair introduced the draft SWAG 2026 workplan which covers the next couple of quarters. SWAG Secretariat members were asked to approve the proposed workplan recognising more flexibility as priorities evolve.

Decision	
D20012026(2)	SWAG Secretariat members accept and approve the proposed 2026 workplan.



Agenda Item 6: AOB

- The Chair noted significant ongoing changes across the health system, including development in the sub-national space and NHS Delivery. The Chair highlighted potential impact on staff experience and asked members to consider what role SWAG should play going forward, suggesting a presentation on the anticipated changes.
- Members agreed with this suggestion but noted the ongoing work in Partnership space. It was suggested that SWAG should reflect on its future role, while recognising that some clarity may only come following wider ongoing work.
- The Chair enquired about timelines, but it was confirmed there is uncertainty around dates. It is likely this work will fall within the pre-election period.
- It was noted that it would be helpful for SWAG to build this work into its forward planning, while being mindful of the pre-election period and identifying the most appropriate timing for the discussion. It was emphasised the need for SWAG to reflect on its future role, particularly in relation to the strategic forum, and to consider how upcoming structural changes may impact workforce policy and the Staff Governance Standard. Members should also consider potential priorities for the year ahead within the changing environment.

Actions	
A20012026(3)	Secretariat to organise a meeting for SWAG Secretariat co-chairs to discuss a proposal.

Next Meeting: SWAG Secretariat Tuesday 17 February 2026, 13:30 – 14:30