



Glasgow Economic Leadership Board

Meeting 46

Thursday 6 November 2025, 14.15 – 15.45

Conference Room 9, Technology & Innovation Centre (TIC)
99 George Street, G1 1RD

Present

Professor Sir Jim McDonald, Principal, University of Strathclyde / GEL co-Chair
Cllr. Susan Aitken, Leader, Glasgow City Council / GEL co-Chair (*joined online*)
David Bunton, CEO, Reprocell Europe / *GEL Life Sciences lead*
Chris Courtney, CEO National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS) / *GEL Advanced Manufacturing lead*
Selma Hunter, CEO, Hunter Consultancy
Kam Jandu, CEO, AGS Airports Ltd.
Janice Kirkpatrick, Director, Graven / *GEL Creative Economy lead*
Professor Scott MacGregor, Vice Principal, University of Strathclyde / *GEL HFE lead*
Jane Martin, MD, Innovation & Investment, Scottish Enterprise
Professor Stephen McArthur, Principal, University of Strathclyde
Jim McColl, Chairman & CEO, Clyde Blowers Capital
Dominic McKay, CEO, Scottish Events Campus (SEC) / *GEL tourism lead*
Susanne Millar, CEO, Glasgow City Council
Mark Napier, MD, JP Morgan Chase
Cllr. Owen O'Donnell, Vice Chair, GCR Cabinet, Leader, East Renfrewshire Council
Stuart Patrick, CEO, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce / *GEL International lead*
Vida Rudkin, COO Global Operations / MD Glasgow, Morgan Stanley / *GEL F&BS lead*
Professor Andy Schofield, Principal, University of Glasgow

Guests

Douglas Alexander MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
Kate Forbes MSP, Deputy First Minister (*joined online*)
Adrian Gillespie, CEO, Scottish Enterprise

Apologies

Guy Jefferson, COO, Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) / *green economy lead*
John Howie, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Babcock International / *GEL Innovation lead*

Attending

Kevin Kane, Executive Director, GEL
Alison McRae, Senior Director, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce
Kevin Rush, Head of Regional Economic Growth, Glasgow City Region
Paul Zealey, Regional Skills Lead, Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

1 Welcome, introductions and apologies

- 1.1 GEL Co-Chair, **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** welcomed all to the meeting and noted that **Cllr. Susan Aitken** joined the meeting online from Schiphol Airport *en route* to attend COP 30 in Brazil on behalf of Glasgow and the city region.
- 1.2 In particular, **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** welcomed the GEL Board's distinguished guests - the **Rt. Hon Douglas Alexander MP, Secretary of State for Scotland** and the **Rt. Hon. Kate Forbes MSP, Deputy First Minister**. **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** invited Board members to briefly introduce themselves.
- 1.3 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** also welcomed existing and new GEL Board members including: **Professor Scott MacGregor**, Vice Principal of the University of Strathclyde and longstanding lead for the GEL Higher & Further Education (HFE) work stream; the new Principal of the University of Strathclyde, **Professor Stephen McArthur**; the new Principal of the University of Glasgow, **Professor Andy Schofield**; to **Chris Courtney, CEO of the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS)** based in Renfrew, adjacent to Glasgow Airport. Finally, to **Vida Rudkin**, COO Global Operations and MD Glasgow at Morgan Stanley and the new GEL lead for Finance & Business Services (F&BS) taking on the role from **Mark Napier** (JP Morgan Chase) for whom this is his final meeting. On behalf of the GEL Board, **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** thanked **Mark Napier** for his contribution over the past years and to his leadership of the GEL F&BS work stream.
- 1.4 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted that **Adrian Gillespie**, CEO of Scottish Enterprise, joined the GEL Board as a guest at today's meeting.
- 1.5 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted that the GEL co-Chairs had invited the **Secretary of State for Scotland** and the **DFM** to meet with the GEL Board to discuss the Glasgow City Region (GCR) Cabinet's Devolution Proposal to the UK and Scottish governments. The Devolution Proposal had been tabled and approved at the June GEL Board and circulated with the papers for today's meeting and that this would be the focus of today's meeting.
- 1.6 **Kevin Kane** noted apologies.

2 Minute of 6 June 2025 and Matters Arising

Minute of 6 June 2025

- 2.1 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** invited the Board to approve the Minute of the Board meeting of 6 June 2025. It was noted that **Jane Martin** had attended the meeting of 6 June 2025 and subject to that change, the Minute was approved.

Matters Arising – Local Innovation Partnership Fund (LIPF)

- 2.2 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** noted her delight that GEL and GCR had successfully lobbied to be part of the UK-wide LIPF, alongside metropolitan peers such as Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. The initial allocation of £30M had been subsequently increased to £50M by HMG and LIPF would add to GCR's portfolio of innovation programmes including: Innovation Accelerator, Investment Zone, 5G Region and Innovation Districts' support via the Shared Propensity Fund (SPF). In each case, GCR had leveraged significant co-investment and that would be the case for LIPF, plus a wider focus on stimulating inclusive innovation across the city region.

2.3 *Matters Arising - GEL Board invitation to Prof. Sir Ian Chapman (CEO, UKRI)*

Cllr. Susan Aitken confirmed that a GEL Board invitation had been sent to **Prof. Sir Ian Chapman** with a date in 2026 still to be set.

3 Scottish Government priorities for growth, investment and regional devolution in Scotland's city regions

3.1 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** invited the **Deputy First Minister, Kate Forbes MSP**, to speak to the Scottish Government's priorities for growth, investment and regional devolution in Scotland's city regions, and Glasgow City Region in particular.

3.2 The Deputy First Minister, **Kate Forbes MSP** thanked the co-Chairs for their invitation and the opportunity to speak to the GEL Board and apologised for her appearing online which was the result of late Parliamentary business.

3.3 **Kate Forbes MSP** noted that the most effective joint working was when Scottish, UK and local government(s) worked together behind a common aim. She said she was "totally persuaded" that a city region approach is the "way to go" and the most effective approach given the density of businesses, the need to develop clusters and to attract investment. Over the past ten years joint working under City Deals has worked well, allowing local leadership to tailor interventions to local needs, recognising that challenges and opportunities are as different in Aberdeen as they are in Edinburgh and in the Glasgow city region.

3.4 **Kate Forbes MSP** said she recognised the scale of the GCR economy as a powerhouse with 34% of all Scottish jobs, with a GVA of £60BN and a skilled workforce and said that "the more Glasgow succeeds, the more the nation succeeds". She commended GCR on the scale and impact of its projects and its investment in its Regional Intelligence Hub that underpins its evidence-based decision making and informed city regional collaboration.

3.5 The **Deputy First Minister** said she was persuaded of the value of a "region-first" approach and that the Programme for Government had committed the Scottish Government to work with GCR (and many others) to explore change. She recognised that different city regions are at different stages and she was not waiting for a national approach, she wanted action now to enable more effective and efficient city regional approaches. She had "set the groundwork" to do this and wished to see progress in the period from now until the end of March 2026. She wanted to empower city regions and to see some quick wins achieved.

3.6 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** thanked the **Deputy First Minister, Kate Forbes MSP**, for her contribution.

4. The UK Government's priorities for growth, investment and regional devolution in UK city regions

4.1 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** invited the **Secretary of State for Scotland, Douglas Alexander MP**, to speak to the UK Government's priorities for growth, investment and regional devolution in the UK's city regions, and Glasgow City Region in particular

4.2 **Douglas Alexander MP** thanked the GEL Board for its invitation and the **Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes MSP** for her contribution and her wider contribution to Scottish public life, which he said would be missed when she stands down at the next Scottish Parliamentary elections in May 2026.

- 4.3 **Douglas Alexander MP** noted that “Glasgow is in my blood” with deep family connections to Glasgow spanning several generations on both sides of his family. From an engineer-educated father, latterly a Minister in the Church of Scotland, to a grandfather who was a GP in St George’s Cross before the establishment of the National Health Service. Glasgow is a city he knows well.
- 4.4 **Douglas Alexander MP** noted that although there was undoubted progress in Glasgow and the city region in his view it could be doing better. In his view “city regions are the driver of modern prosperity” and it is vital that they work well to secure the investment that is needed to grow and develop. As Trade Minister he was all too aware of their role in the government’s Industrial Strategy, in a world of open markets and an active state. He was proud of the £10BN worth of naval orders on the Clyde that would secure employment for a new generation of workers, something that was a distant dream back in 1998 when he stood at Govan cross seeking signatures for a petition to (successfully) keep the Kvaerner Yard open. These orders are a sign of what we can as are the investment in the City Deal and latterly the Innovation Accelerator, Investment Zone, LIPF etc.
- 4.5 Notwithstanding undoubted progress, **Douglas Alexander MP** was concerned that Glasgow was falling behind other UK city regions such as Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, Leeds and even Hull. He noted that Manchester (at 44) and the West Midlands (at 130) secured a higher number of inward investment projects than Glasgow (at 27) and that planning approval times for major projects are 16 weeks in Manchester and 37 in Glasgow. These disparities concerned him and he asked whether “we were failing to grasp the opportunities of devolution”. **Douglas Alexander MP** said when he campaigned for devolution back in the 1997 his hope had been for a transfer of power from Whitehall to Holyrood and from Holyrood to local areas. This has not happened and he said it can be seen in areas like transport where Manchester – with clear political direction from an elected Mayor – has been able to build something that Glasgow has not. **Douglas Alexander MP** said there was much to be learned by Glasgow looking south at partnership working in English metropolitan areas.
- 4.6 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** thanked the **Secretary of State for Scotland, Douglas Alexander MP** for his contribution.

5 GEL role in Glasgow City Region (GCR) governance and delivery

- 5.1 **Prof Sir Jim McDonald** briefly outlined the role of GEL since its establishment in 2011 as a key recommendation of the Glasgow Economic Commission. GEL is a ‘triple helix’ body of ‘C-suite’ level leaders from across business, the public sector and academia. GEL is the principal strategic adviser on economic development to the GCR Cabinet and is the “voice of the business community” in GCR governance. GEL has a number of private sector-led key sector work streams (e.g. Life Sciences, Energy, Finance & Business Services, Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, Tourism & Events, Creative Industries, Higher & Further Education) plus newer thematic work streams groups in Innovation and International.
- 5.2 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted that GEL is well-integrated into GCR governance. **Cllr. Susan Aitken** chairs the GCR Cabinet and co-Chairs GEL and her Cabinet Vice Chair, **Cllr. Owen O’Donnell**, is a GEL Board Member, while **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** attends the GCR Cabinet. This close inter-relationship benefits GEL and GCR and helps sustain and strengthen regional alignment across the private, public and academic sectors.

- 5.3 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted that the GEL Board has discussed the GCR Devolution Proposal and is very supportive of powers to further develop greater effectiveness and efficiency in delivery and impact and increased financial flexibilities to enable GCR to focus on its mission of inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth across the whole of the city region.

6 Glasgow City Region: from City Deal delivery to city regional governance

- 6.1 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** invited **Kevin Rush** to speak to GCR's impact, capabilities and the Cabinet's Devolution Proposal which had been circulated with the Board papers.
- 6.2 **Kevin Rush** spoke to a presentation that was circulated to members after the meeting. **Kevin Rush** noted that over the past ten years GCR has expanded to have a delivery portfolio of £2BN, from the initial £1.13BN City Deal in 2015 to programmes including Shared Prosperity Fund (2022), Innovation Accelerator (2023), Investment Zone (2023), 5G Innovation Region (2023), Clyde Mission (2023), Local Innovation Partnership Fund (2025) and National Wealth Fund Partnership (2025).
- 6.3 **Kevin Rush** noted that GCR had invested in its analytical capacity to underpin GCR evidence-based decision making with the establishment of the Regional Intelligence Hub whose analytical excellence was confirmed by HMT and BST in its analysis in support of GCR's Innovation Accelerator bid. GCR has also developed an approved Regional Economic Strategy (2021) and Innovation Action Plan to guide decision making. In addition, GCR regularly engages with its UK metropolitan peers both on allocated programmes (IA, IZ etc.) and also via a formal regional partnership with the National Wealth Fund – alongside its metro peers of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.
- 6.4 **Kevin Rush** set out GCR's Devolution Proposal which is built on (i) financial parity with Greater Manchester and the West Midlands etc. (£400M pa), (ii) areas where GCR has a proven track record of delivery, complementing that of the member local authorities such as in economic development and regeneration, transport and local infrastructure, adult skills and employment support, housing and strategic planning, environment and climate changes and health, wellbeing and public sector reform and (iii) where activity could be commenced immediately boosting growth and job opportunities.
- 6.5 **Kevin Rush** noted that the proposal could be phased with the creation of GCR Transport and powers over delivery, transport land assembly and finance not being implemented until 2028. **Kevin Rush** reprised the proposal as being based on GCR as one of the UK principal metropolitan city regions, the danger that under the English Devolution White Paper (2024) that GCR was in danger of being "left behind" vis-à-vis its peers, GCR's proven track record of governance and impact as evidenced by Gateway Reviews and programme extensions. **Kevin Rush** emphasised this was about Glasgow city region as a place and not about individual local council areas. **Kevin Rush** emphasised that it should not be about going at the pace of the slowest and the real danger of GCR being left behind by its metro peers in England.
- 6.6 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** thanked **Kevin Rush** for his contribution and invited **Cllr. Owen O'Donnell**, Vice Chair of the GCR Cabinet and Leader of Renfrewshire Council, add any comments he wished to make.

- 6.7 **Cllr. Owen O'Donnell** noted that all local authority Leaders were “completely aligned” behind the GCR Devolution Proposal and had been for some time. In the ten years since the start of the City Deal, the Cabinet had matured. The Cabinet is ambitious for the city region and is seeking greater opportunities to positively impact into the future. “Success breeds success” and City Deal was now virtually over and the Cabinet is ready for the next phase. It is not looking for extra resources, but to replace the “patchwork” of programmes and accountabilities to that now offered to English city regions.
- 6.8 **Cllr. Owen O'Donnell** noted that all eight local authority Leaders were committed to inclusive growth given the scale of deprivation that still scars the city region. Finally, **Cllr. Owen O'Donnell** thanked the **Deputy First Minister** and the **Secretary of State for Scotland** for attending the GEL Board to discuss GCR's Devolution Proposal and hoped there would be concrete steps agreed to take it forward.
- 6.9 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** thanked **Kevin Rush** and **Cllr. Owen O'Donnell** for their contributions.

7. GCR Devolution Deal: next steps

- 7.1 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** invited GEL Board Members **to give their views**.
- 7.2 **Stuart Patrick** said he was very supportive of the Proposal and endorsed it. He noted that an explicit statement of the UK and Scottish government's intent to work towards an integrated settlement/single devolution deal for GCR would be a “great message” to the private sector. Stuart Patrick noted he was particularly keen to “overcome” the inflexibilities of the current system and noted especially the value of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) which is currently the most flexible mechanism at GCR's disposal. Finally, he welcomed resources to invest in city regional capacity to allow GCR to connect into both government's national priorities.
- 7.7 **Janice Kirkpatrick** made a plea for greater focus on the creative economy, a UK and Glasgow success story – with an example of the RSNO's work with Disney and Netflix on the recording of film scores in the city. **Prof. Andy Schofield** noted the opportunities that have been created in the West Midlands to unlock the “next level of investment” at £1.7BN. Something similar for Glasgow city region would open up real opportunities.
- 7.8 **Adrian Gillespie** noted that much had been achieved to date by partnership working, for example the International Financial Services District, Clyde Gateway/Mission, GCR's three Innovation Districts and indeed this very building, the Technology & Innovation centre (TIC) – all “work really well”. **Adrian Gillespie** noted that per capita, Scotland attracts more inward investment than any UK region outwith London and the South East. **Jane Martin** noted that clarity at the city regional level makes it easier for bodies like Scottish Enterprise to complement activity at the national level and to “fill in the dots”.
- 7.9 **Kam Jandu** noted that direct international connectivity is vital for any city region economy – for trade, inward investment and visitors. Air Passenger Duty needs to be revisited for non-London airports to better enable them to compete for vital international connections. **Mark Napier** noted that JP Morgan, Barclays and Morgan Stanley focus on the “pace of delivery” and each gives significant delegated authority to local leadership so as to make faster decisions. What is true for corporates and businesses would be true for the public sector. **Selma Hunter** noted Glasgow's renowned, regionally-based engineering skills. These needed to be nurtured and further internationalised as they are world class but face stiff competition globally. **David Bunton** noted that the most recent BioEurope conference had a city region focus, something that GCR should build upon as we have a competitive LS sector.

- 7.10 **Jim McColl** said that the Scottish National Investment Bank was not sufficiently empowered to compete with the German, Greek and Finnish national investment banks when it comes to providing loan and export guarantee to companies. Such banks outcompete the support provided to businesses in the UK and Scotland – and are funded 90% by bond markets with State’s 10% funded off-balance sheet. As such they are not subject to State Aid rules and provide a competitive advantage to foreign companies vis-à-vis UK/Scottish companies. We should create a UK prototype here in Scotland with the British Business Bank with the support of UKG. It will require HMT approval and perhaps an Act of Parliament but it would allow us to start competing.
- 7.11 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted the sheer scale of GCR’s innovation assets which include 6 UK Catapults, 5 Scottish-based Innovation Centres, 3 Innovation Districts (City, Riverside and Advanced Manufacturing), the UK’s only Fraunhofer Centre (in photonics). These all map directly on the to the UK’s Industrial Strategy and the Scottish Government’s innovation priorities and clusters. **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** said we needed to up our level of ambition, increase our focus on delivery and have the tools and flexibilities to allow us to act.
- 7.12 The **Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes MSP** said she supported an outcomes-based approach and the most successful countries were those that had clear, cross-party and stakeholder-based vision and consensus. She said she wanted the next stages to be on a shared ownership basis. **Kate Forbes MSP** noted that Scotland had different democratic structures than in England (i.e. Mayors) but she did wish to see city regions have the ability to execute and move quickly. She reiterated the need for data and evidence-based decision making and commended recent work in the north of Scotland by SDS on regional workforce planning. **Kate Forbes MSP** said she agreed that more creative financing approaches were needed and that this is an active conversation with HMT currently, and a perfect example of joint government working.
- 7.13 The **Secretary of State for Scotland, Douglas Alexander MP** noted the extent of the English Devolution White Paper. He agreed with **Cllr. Owen O’Donnell’s** observation that local buy-in was important and that city region strategies needed to reflect local authority and local areas priorities too. With respect to GCR’s Devolution Proposal, **Douglas Alexander MP** noted powers sought - in economic development, skills, transport, housing, strategic planning – all “rest with Holyrood”. He agreed with **Jim McColl** that there was a “wall of money” out there that we needed to attract and his business experience out of politics visiting 85 countries in a decade gave him an appreciation of what investors are looking for. Glasgow cannot rest on its laurels vis-à-vis Greater Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and even Hull. He agreed that connectivity is vital but compared Glasgow and Edinburgh’s to that of Dublin over the same period. He was keen to follow up on SNIB and discussion with HMT and noted that recently he heard **Larry Summers** say that the 20th century was driven by physics but the 21st will be by biology, hence the importance of Life Sciences.
- 7.14 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** thanked GEL Board Members for their contributions and to the **Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes MSP** and the **Secretary of State for Scotland, Douglas Alexander MP** for directly engaging with the GEL Board on this matter of vital importance to not only all businesses and citizens across Glasgow city region but to the performance and development of both Scotland and the UK.

8. **GCR Devolution Deal: next steps**

8.1 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted that how the GCR Cabinet's Devolution Proposal is taken forward over the coming months up to and after the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary election was of great interest to the GEL Board and it was ready to play its part in a constructive dialogue putting the voice of the business community at the heart of any discussions.

9. **AOB/ DONM**

9.1 There being no other business, **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** closed the meeting.

Kevin Kane
Executive Director
Glasgow Economic Leadership

December 2025