



Glasgow Economic Leadership Board

Meeting 48

Monday 20 April 2026, 08.30-10.00

Committee Room 3, Glasgow City Chambers
82 George Square, Glasgow G2 1DU

Present

Professor Sir Jim McDonald, Principal,
University of Strathclyde / GEL co-Chair

Cllr. Susan Aitken, Leader, Glasgow City
Council / GEL co-Chair

David Bunton, CEO, Reprocell Europe / *GEL
Life Sciences lead*

Chris Courtney, CEO National Manufacturing
Institute Scotland (NMIS) / *GEL Advanced
Manufacturing lead*

John Howie, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer,
Babcock International / *GEL Innovation lead*

Selma Hunter, CEO, Hunter Consultancy

Kam Jandu, CEO, AGS Airports Ltd

Guy Jefferson, COO, Scottish Power Energy
Networks (SPEN) / *green economy lead*

Janice Kirkpatrick, Director, Graven / *GEL
Creative Economy lead*

Professor Scott MacGregor, Vice Principal,
University of Strathclyde / *GEL HFE lead*

Jim McColl, Chairman & CEO, Clyde Blowers
Capital

Dominic McKay, CEO, Scottish Events Campus
/ *GEL tourism lead*

Jane Martin, MD, Innovation & Investment,
Scottish Enterprise

Susanne Millar, CEO, Glasgow City Council

Stuart Patrick, CEO, Glasgow Chamber of
Commerce / GEL International lead

Vida Rudkin, COO Global Operations / MD
Glasgow, Morgan Stanely / *GEL F&BS lead*

Professor Andy Schofield, Principal, University
of Glasgow

Apologies

Sir Simon Lister, MD Naval
Ships, BAE

Professor Stephen

McArthur, Principal,
University of Strathclyde

Cllr. Owen O'Donnell, Vice
Chair, GCR Cabinet, Leader,
East Renfrewshire Council

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)

Guests

Aileen Crawford, GCC

Elaine Morrison, SE

Andrew Robertson, GCR

1

Welcome, introductions and apologies

1.1

Professor Sir Jim McDonald welcomed all to the meeting.

- 1.2 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** welcomed Board guests **Elaine Morrison** (SE) and **Andrew Robertson** (GCR) who would speak to the Defence sector item and **Aileen Crawford** (GCC) who would speak to the Tourism item.
- 1.3 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** thanked Glasgow City Council for the use of the City Chambers for this meeting of the GEL Board.
- 1.4 **Kevin Kane** noted the apologies and that **Kevin Rush** would be late to the meeting.
- 1.5 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** handed the Chair to **Cllr. Susan Aitken**.

2 Minute of 22 February 2026 and Matters Arising

Minute of 22 February 2026

- 2.1 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** invited the Board to approve the Minute of the Board meeting of 2 February 2026. The Minute was approved.

3 Matters Arising

GEL Board invitations (Prof. Sir Ian Chapman, John McGhee, Rt Hon Alan Milburn)

- 3.1 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** noted that **Professor Sir Ian Chapman** (UKRI) had replied to say he was unable to attend either of the proffered June or October GEL Board dates but was keen to engage. **Cllr. Susan Aitken** noted that **Professor Andy Schofield** had contacted the co-Chairs to note that **Professor Sir Ian Chapman** was to be in Glasgow on 18 June 2026. **ACTION: Kevin Kane to liaise with Professor Andy Schofield's office to seek to develop a representative GEL session with Professor Sir Ian Chapman.**
- 3.2 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** also noted that **John McGhee**, the new Executive Director of Education for Glasgow has the June and October GEL Board dates in his diary with the aim for him to possibly attend alongside another invited GEL Board guest, the **Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn**, who is currently leading a Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) enquiry into economic inactivity. The mutual availability was not to be a constraint in having Mr McGhee attend GEL.
- 3.3 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** handed the Chair to **Professor Sir Jim McDonald**.

4. Analysis: the Defence Sector in Scotland and Glasgow City Region

- 4.1 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted that today's Defence & Security item was the first of two Board meetings where the sector and its opportunities for Glasgow city region would be discussed. Today, the focus would be on an analysis of the sector at both the Scotland (**Elaine Morrison**) and GCR-level (**Andrew Robertson**). This would then be followed by a full Board discussion of issues raised to help inform **John Howie** and **Sir Simon Lister** as they develop a fuller analysis of the economic opportunities for GCR to grow and develop the sector.

- 4.2 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted that GEL - and via it GCR - has developed a template for developing new sectors, particularly in the area of innovation where the track record of governance and delivery has seen GCR implement the Innovation Accelerator, Investment Zone and now the new Local Innovation Partnerships Fund.
- 4.3 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** invited **Elaine Morrison** and **Andrew Robertson** to brief the Board.
- 4.4 **Elaine Morrison** spoke to a presentation circulated to Members after the Board meeting. **Elaine Morrison** noted that the 'Defence & Security' sector is "broad, diverse, and increasingly innovation-driven." It covers a number of sectors – from aviation and aerospace, land systems (armoured vehicles, robotics etc.) to naval and maritime and cyber, digital and electronic warfare and includes logistics support and space. All come under the broad headings of Advanced Manufacturing and/or Dual use technologies including quantum, AI, photonics and semiconductors.
- 4.5 **Elaine Morrison** noted that the Defence & Security sector in Scotland is large and supports 14,000 direct FTE jobs and a further 21,000 jobs in the supply chain, has a combined turnover of £7.3BN and GVA of £3.3BN. There are regional concentrations with GCR heavily represented in naval shipbuilding and aerospace, and key companies who are MOD 'prime contractors' include BAE Systems, Thales, Rolls Royce, Babcock and Leonardo.
- 4.6 **Elaine Morrison** noted that the UK Strategic Defence Review (2025) and the Defence & Security Industrial Strategy marked a fundamental shift in national security *and* industrial policy with the Defence & Security now viewed as a driver of economic growth, technological innovation, and a whole-of-society transformation. Scotland is well-positioned to take advantage with strong Tier 2 and 3 suppliers and, with 95% of the supply chain made up of SME's, opportunities exist for Scotland's business base. To take full advantage, organisations will have to work in partnership and take advantage Regional Defence Growth Deals and existing Advanced Manufacturing sector growth plans.
- 4.7 **Andrew Robertson** spoke to the position within GCR. He noted that post-pandemic GVA growth of the Defence & Security sector had been higher than for Manufacturing or Services as a whole and the highest of any UK Core City region. A key GCR strength is in naval shipbuilding & repair (incl. submarines) and over the past decade it has consistently grown its share of total MOD expenditure spending from 11% to 20%.
- 4.8 **Andrew Robertson** noted that GCR's Investment Zone is focused round Advanced Manufacturing and Precision Engineering, with three sub-sectors – Space, Maritime and Semiconductors – clear dual use technologies with Defence & Security applications. Intelligence Hub research highlights a robust defence supply chain ecosystem in GCR with strong linkages across sectors which make it ideal for investment and innovation.
- 4.9 **Andrew Robertson** noted that GCR has a strong talent pool. GCR has the 3rd highest number of enrolments in defence-related subjects of any UK Core City region outwith London in 2022-23 with high concentrations in aerospace engineering, mechanical engineering and physics.
- 4.10 **Elaine Morrison** and **Andrew Robertson** raised a number of questions for GEL Board Members to consider: is there additional evidence required? How should GCR position itself to attract investment? How can GEL/GCR optimally secure opportunities for the city region, while also promoting the opportunities of Scotland as a whole?

- 4.11 **John Howie** noted that as co-Chair of the National Armament Group it is very clear that the nature of warfare is changing radically and that the MOD is moving away from very large £1BN+ items (missiles etc.) to smaller, more innovative items that utilise new technologies, often from companies outwith the traditionally defined defence sector including games, AI, quantum and other sectors. Though the UK government has committed to significantly increase defence expenditure into the future, there continues to be Treasury concern with the MOD's existing financial "black hole" and as such the Defence Investment Plan has not yet been published – and with the MOD pushing for a 10-year funding settlement to allow it to plan.
- 4.12 **John Howie** noted that a number of defence innovation funds (e.g. Defence Challenge Fund) are seeking to develop innovative new products - for example, new, autonomous vehicles that use STAR link technology. What we are witnessing, said **John Howie** is a significant technology shift for the MOD with a much greater focus on innovative technologies and "not on £BN assets".
- 4.13 **Selma Hunter** said that Glasgow has a great university sector but "to build the stuff" she wondered whether we have manufacturing skills to do so. **Selma Hunter** also noted that defence is impacting on non-defence sectors such Life Sciences which has the ability to supply products for both preventive and offensive purposes and asked how GCR can best harness cross-sectoral opportunities?
- 4.14 **Professor Andy Schofield** noted that the MOD has established a Defence Universities Alliance (DUA) to create a "whole of society" approach to defence research, innovation, and skills development with an EOI as of end-March 2026. There has been considerable interest from across UK universities and there will only be c. 20 DUA institutions across the UK. **Professor Andy Schofield** asked how in GCR we could together better play into this opportunity. He also noted the key role of **Dominic Wilson**, DG Transformation at MOD.
- 4.15 **Janice Kirkpatrick** noted that the design capabilities of Glasgow School of Art are important if we are to grasp the opportunities presented by developing new and innovative products, especially in SMEs. She also noted that GSA had played a strong role in the defence sector in WWII.
- 4.16 **Jane Martin** asked how do we anticipate and use collaboration to maximise the opportunity and **Dom McKay** noted the role of SEC in securing defence-related conferences to help SMEs get closer to the opportunity. **Chris Courtney** noted that NMIS works closely with the defence sector via its key role in the UK's High Value Manufacturing Catapult.
- 4.17 **Jim McColl** noted that innovation was not only in new defence products but in new financing options and he noted the example of a new, 73m multi-purpose landing vessel produced in Australia – Sea Transport Group's Stern Landing Vessel (SLV) - that has attracted interest from the US Marine Corps which has leased three vessels rather than via the traditional purchase route. **John Howie** agreed that innovative financing and "crowding in" the private sector is now an important MOD priority.
- 4.18 **Stuart Patrick** noted that we have a current GCR cluster mapping but he wondered what the new cluster mapping would look like? **John Howie** noted that within Babcock a team was currently assessing future defence technology themes. **Alison McRae** said we should use all our networks, including the Congress of Business, to help develop pathways for the tech sector.
- 4.19 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted his sense of "GEL déjà vu". GCR has a track record of delivery of the IA and IZ programmes and that this learning could be used to

offer to help MOD attract and manage SME participation in defence innovation programmes.

- 4.20 **Elaine Morrison** noted the current impasse over the funding for the proposed West and East DTECs (Defence Technical Excellence Colleges) in Scotland where UKG funding of £10M is contingent on match-funding from Scottish Government, something which is yet to be confirmed. **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** noted that the GEL Board would act as the de facto leadership body for the project and the wider defence sector in GCR.
- 4.21 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** wondered whether GCR was in a less traditional defence sector “space” than the West of England and with a strong new technology and innovation ecosystem and how could we best optimise this. **Cllr. Susan Aitken** proposed that **John McGhee** the new Executive Director of Education in Glasgow be invited to attend to the next GEL Board to hear of the scale of the defence sector skills opportunity for the city’s young people.
- 4.22 **John Howie** noted the prospect of GCR piloting a pathfinder project with MOD that operationalises a regional model to defence innovation development. **John Howie** noted the desire at the UK level to expand defence. The real prize is to become a MOD “preferred construction partner”. MOD has a real desire to build partnerships and GCR has an ecosystem of world class companies. **John Howie** noted his view of the “real opportunities” at the regional level for GCR to deliver a pathfinder innovation programme with the MOD to help it engage a wider range of companies, technology capabilities and new innovative products to meet its defence and security aims.
- 4.23 **Janice Kirkpatrick** noted that people needed to know about our capabilities in Glasgow and the city region (as per the Glasgow Business Narrative) – and said that we are not getting the message out. **David Bunton** noted that at international Life Sciences conferences defence and security opportunities are highlighted but not at UK events.
- 4.24 **Susanne Millar** noted the discussion reinforced the place-based approach of the GCR Cabinet and like LIPF it should be framed under innovation - with the active participation of the universities and colleges.
- 4.25 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** thanked GEL Board Members for their active participation in this important Board discussion. The following action were agreed:
ACTIONS:

(i) That GEL establish a Defence Task Group under John Howie and Sir Simon Lister to map out the opportunity for GCR in the defence sector to be brought to the next GEL Board in June 2026.
(ii) That Professors Andy Schofield and Stephen McArthur map GCR university participation in defence and related research as funded through UKRI etc.
- 4.26 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** thanked **Elaine Morrison**, **Andrew Robertson** and **John Howie** for bringing the analysis of the Scottish and GCR defence sector to the GEL Board and noted that the focus of the next Board would be on the opportunities for GCR in the Defence and Security sector.
- 4.27 **Professor Sir Jim McDonald** handed the Chair to **Cllr. Susan Aitken**.

5 Glasgow Tourism Strategy and Action Plan: highlights and impact

- 5.1 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** invited **Dom McKay**, the GEL Board lead for Tourism & Events, to introduce the item.
- 5.2 **Dom McKay** noted that Tourism & Events is a vital sector for Glasgow supporting jobs and skills across hospitality, culture and events and is a sector that supports some of Glasgow key economic assets such as the SEC and Glasgow Airport. It is a sector where the industry is strongly represented in developing and delivering the Glasgow Tourism Strategy 2030. The industry-led *Glasgow Tourism Advisory Forum (GTAF)* - which **Dom McKay** chairs - provides strategic oversight for Strategy 2030 as well as monitoring the progress of the Glasgow Tourism Action Plan(s) - 2024-26 and now 2026-28. In addition, the *Glasgow Tourism & Events Network (GTEN)* connects with GTAF by sharing data and insights to inform activity and to support collaboration and early information sharing across the sector. The Strategy is also supported by a number of other groups including the Glasgow Events Sector Industry Group, Glasgow Events & Transport Group and the Glasgow Culture Forum.
- 5.3 **Dom McKay** invited **Aileen Crawford** the Council's Head of Tourism & Events to brief the Board on the structure, priorities and impact of Strategy 2030.
- 5.4 **Aileen Crawford** spoke to a presentation that was circulated to Board Members after the meeting. **Aileen Crawford** noted that the Strategy had 48 strategic actions supported by 153 key performance indicators (KPIs) with 22 active Action Plan partners who contribute to delivery. **Aileen Crawford** noted that the Strategy aligns with wider city strategies, including the International Strategy, City Development Plan and the Culture Strategy and Events Strategy. She noted there was now a stronger emphasis on the importance of events and heritage to Glasgow's visitor economy.
- 5.5 **Aileen Crawford** noted that the Strategy was in part shaped by resident survey feedback on the sector. In short, citizens are very supportive of tourism and want to see more visitors to Glasgow especially overseas visitors.
- 5.6 **Aileen Crawford** noted some of the Strategy's highlights including: that Glasgow's visitor economy is worth £2.39BN of direct visitor spend, up 1.9% on the previous year. In 2024-25 Glasgow hosted 420+ conferences, with 140,000 delegates worth £152m. Glasgow Airport has secured a new North America and 5 new European city routes plus in 2026 it has added a further 8 new European city routes and multiple other leisure routes. There has been an increase in 3rd party green accreditation across city businesses covering 68% of hotel rooms (up from 41%). Finally, Glasgow has retained its Top 10 position on the Global Sustainability Destination (GDS) Index, where Glasgow ranks 5th globally (up from 12th) and is 1st in UK (out of 21 destinations).
- 5.7 **Dom McKay** said that if there is one "ask" of GEL Board Members it is that they are advocates for Glasgow's visitor economy. As part of that the SEC is keen to modernise and refresh the SEC campus which he said was "bursting at the seams" on the back of an "incredible growth phase" that has seen the SEC host over 154 live performances. **Dom McKay** noted that live events are good not only for the SEC but for the wider Glasgow economy and help promote Glasgow to the wider world. **Dom McKay** was keen to see SEC develop new and innovative activities that would help attract private sector capital and help develop the 60% of the site that is currently undeveloped. Dom McKay said that he was keen to share SEC's growth plans with the GEL Board once they were finalised.
- 5.8 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** invited questions and observations from GEL Board Members.
- 5.9 **Stuart Patrick** asked about the intended use of the Visitor levy?

- 5.10 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** noted that the Council has been subject to considerable lobbying on the use of levy income. Unlike the case in Edinburgh, Glasgow's tourism sector is supported by citizens and is not "extractive". The Council's plans, in consultation with the industry and as stipulated by legislation will be to invest in areas that add value to the industry and enhance the Glasgow visitor product.
- 5.11 With regard to marketing Glasgow, **John Howie** wondered whether Glasgow has done enough to communicate the economic value of the innovation activity taking place across the city, in terms of jobs and skills? **Susanne Millar** noted that the move of Destination Glasgow from Glasgow Life to the City Council was "intentional" to better link the DMO to the city's economic development priorities. **Susanne Millar** noted that GEL was an important advocate and that the Council cannot deliver it on its own, it needs advocacy from the business sector. **Kam Jandu** noted it was important that GEL agree on the branding of Glasgow and that it is something that everyone could get behind.
- 5.12 **Janice Kirkpatrick** said it was great to hear good news from the tourism sector. She asked that we think more about why people visit Glasgow? Culture and heritage are key drivers and her view was that the GEL Board could be a powerful advocate, helping turn challenges such as funding into opportunities to attract new cultural investors and investment into the city, beyond public sector sources. **Aileen Crawford** noted that external marketing for the city (that we don't see) has a very strong narrative on the Glasgow's heritage and cultural attractions.
- 5.13 **Kam Jandu** said progress had been good with the airport and working with the Council, Glasgow Airport has successfully attracted new routes. He urged GEL Members to "use or lose" the airport and the emphasised the importance of improved surface accessibility to the airport. Though Clyde Metro is the longer-term prize, he noted that the Airport is start a bus shuttle service to Paisley Gilmour Street station. **Cllr. Susan Aitken** noted that Clyde Metro has a city region-wide significance to to the future of the GCR economy and noted the Cabinet's approval to recent governance changes that brings Clyde Metro into the GCR PMO.
- 5.14 **Stuart Patrick** asked whether it would be useful to invite Transport Scotland to a future GEL Board to discuss the implementation of Clyde Metro; **Jane Martin** suggested an invite to the new Transport Secretary. **Cllr. Susan Aitken** noted that transport was one of the areas that GCR is seeking greater powers and that **ACTION: the co-Chairs to consider invitations to Transport Scotland / Transport Secretary.**

6 AOB/ DONM

- 6.1 **Cllr. Susan Aitken** asked if there was Any Other Business.
- 6.2 There being no other business, **Cllr. Susan Aitken** closed the meeting and thanked Members for their contributions.

Kevin Kane
Executive Director
Glasgow Economic Leadership

May 2026