



Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) Executive Leadership Team (ELT) Meeting

3 March 2026

Attendees:

Kevin Quinlan, CEO (Chair)
Graeme Prest, Director of Land Management and Regions
Graeme Hutton, Director of Net Zero
Nicola McBain, Director of Corporate Services and Transformation
David Leven, Director of Commercial Development

Others:

Thomas Fouillard, Project Manager (item 4)
Rhondda Salmond, Change Manager (item 6 & 7)
Julie Fitzpatrick, Head of People & Organisational Development (item 9)
Adam Dearnley, Head of Finance (item 10)

Summary of Action Points (AP) from Meeting

Ref.:	Action:	Owner:	Target Date:
1/03	Prepare and deliver a one-hour workshop, including presentation, to clearly explain the implications, resource requirements (with examples including staff time & system costs), and change management aspects of 'Level 2' & 'Level 3' records management options, with supporting slices and signposting to inform ELT decision.	Nicola McBain / Michael Hymers / Thomas Fouillard	31 March 2026
2/03	Provide to ELT and Head of Corporate Office the headline Records Management paper and annexes, with signposting for review ahead of future targeted workshop.	Thomas Fouillard	6 March 2026
3/03	Determine and coordinator for the Enabling Services redesign programme, considering available senior project management resources in addition to clarifying the roles of SRO, sponsor, and project lead.	Nicola McBain	14 April 2026
4/03	Establish a steering group for the Enabling Services redesign – including trade union representation and key stakeholders – to provide challenge and oversight.	Nicola McBain	14 April 2026

5/03	Collaborate to refine forecasting methods, enhance financial analysis, and develop a targeted approach to unit cost improvement. Regular performance reviews and benchmarking will be established, with a plan to report back to the ELT.	Adam Dearnley / Graeme Prest	30 April 2026
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1. Review of Minutes

It was agreed that the minutes from the ELT meeting held on 10 February 2026 were a true and accurate reflection.

2. Stocktake on Action Tracker

The ELT reviewed the status of the Action Tracker, emphasising the need for Directors to ensure all outstanding actions are updated and ready for the upcoming Audit & Review Committee meeting on 25 March 2026. It was noted that some actions remain incomplete or inadequately documented, and Directors were reminded to review and update these to avoid gaps and ensure accountability.

3. ELT Forward Look

The ELT reviewed the Forward Look for upcoming meetings and discussed agenda items.

4. Records Management Options Appraisal

Nicola McBain presented the appraisal of Records Management Options to the ELT for consideration. Discussion focussed on the halted records management project, reviewing compliance risks, potential levels of response, and the need for a clear organisational mandate. Thomas Fouilland provided a technical explanation of compliance levels and possible system requirements.

Nicola outlined the history of FLS’ records management project, noting its intermittent progress since 2017 and the need for ELT direction due to compliance risks identified by both the Keeper of the Records of Scotland and internal audit. The project remains at a standstill, requiring a clear indication of risk appetite from the ELT to progress, with five key compliance areas being highlighted.

Thomas explained the four graduated levels of response, detailing that ‘level 1’ offers minimal compliance improvements, ‘level 2’ introduces demonstrable compliance through manual processes, and ‘level 3’ involves automation and a dedicated platform, such as a web-based collaboration platform with a records management bolt-on. It was clarified that the current in-use platform without modification is insufficient for compliance due to limitations in metadata protection and audit trails.

The ELT discussed the cultural and operational challenges of implementing records management systems, including the need for Director support, staff engagement, and the difficulty in addressing legacy records. The importance of change management was emphasised, with consideration given to the impact on staff and how this should guide both communication and planning.

The ELT agreed that more information is needed to distinguish between levels 2 & 3, particularly with regards to cost, resource implications, and change management. A detailed breakdown – including role-specific impacts and indicative resource requirements – was requested in a future targeted workshop for further discussion and decision.

AP 1/03: Project Manager, Head of Corporate Office and Director of Corporate Services & Transformation to prepare and deliver a one-hour workshop, including presentation, to clearly explain the implications, resource requirements (with examples including staff time & system costs), and change management aspects of 'Level 2' & 'Level 3' records management options, with supporting slices and signposting to inform ELT decision.

AP 2/03: Project Manager to provide to ELT and Head of Corporate Office the headline Records Management paper and annexes, with signposting for review ahead of future targeted workshop.

5. Enabling Services Review

Nicola presented the proposal for an Enabling Services review, seeking ELT agreement to proceed with scoping and discovery. The team discussed scope, benchmarking, change management and the need for external and Trade Union input.

Nicola elaborated by describing this review as a key part of the Corporate Services Business Plan, aiming to clarify the definition of “enabling services”, validate information, and sequence workstreams. The review will focus on efficiency, effectiveness and resilience, with initial work underway in areas such as procurement, buildings, and HR.

The ELT discussed the importance of benchmarking against both public and private sector organisations, with plans to involve peers from other public bodies for external perspective. The ELT acknowledged that, while some benchmarking metrics do not indicate over-resourcing, external input is needed to challenge assumptions and encourage radical thinking.

The review will be framed as a redesign rather than a review, with principles including openness to standardisation, reconsideration of regional versus national delivery, and sensitivity to the impact on staff. The need for a dedicated project lead, steering group, and union involvement was agreed, with the aim of ensuring coordinated and impactful change.

It was further agreed that Nicola will coordinate with other Directors, HR, and external stakeholders to finalise the discovery phase within six to eight weeks, after which the review will be integrated into the Fit for the Future portfolio. The ELT will revisit progress and provide further direction at this stage.

AP 3/03: Director of Corporate Services & Transformation to determine and coordinator for the Enabling Services redesign programme, considering available senior project management resources in addition to clarifying the roles of SRO, sponsor, and project lead.

AP 4/03: Director of Corporate Services & Transformation to establish a steering group for the Enabling Services redesign – including trade union representation and key stakeholders – to provide challenge and oversight.

6. Quarterly Risk Review

The ELT held their Quarterly Risk Review in advance of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 25 March 2026.

7. Quarterly Audit Review

The ELT held their Quarterly Audit Review in advance of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 25 March 2026.

8. Workforce Management Stocktake

Julie Fitpatrick and the ELT reviewed the workforce planning process, agreeing on the development of workforce action plans, internal recruitment protocols, and monthly monitoring with detailed discussion following on implementation, communication, and Trade Union engagement.

Julie explained that workforce action plans will be developed for each directorate by the end of April, aligned with business plans and covering a three-year period. These plans will be agile, regularly updated, and used to guide workforce changes, vacancy management, and skills development.

The ELT agreed that all recruitment should be internal in the first instance for a minimum of five days, using expressions of interest to identify candidates. Appointments at grade can be made following this process, while promotions require a full internal competition. All external recruitment requires director approval, and the 'Approval to Recruit' form will be streamlined to focus on business rationale & alignment with workforce plans.

The ELT discussed the importance of clear communication with staff and Trade Unions, balancing transparency with sensitivity to reduce or nullify unnecessary anxieties. Workforce data will be reviewed monthly by the ELT to ensure progress towards headcount reduction targets, with adjustments made as required to remain on track.

There was preparation for the upcoming town hall to communicate the workforce plan, headcount changes, and principles such as 'no compulsory redundancies'. The ELT reviewed the content to ensure clarity, appropriate detail, and alignment with organisational priorities.

9. Finance Update

Adam Dearnley provided an update on FLS' financial performance, highlighting improvements in reporting timelines, key observations on revenue & costs, and the need for enhanced unit cost analysis, with actions agreed for further benchmarking and business partnering.

It was reported that the month-end accounting process has become more efficient, now closing within two working days, with ongoing efforts to further streamline reporting and integrate non-financial data for better analysis. The financial forecast has improved by £1.8 million, with revenue slightly down but cost reduced. This was followed by discussion of seasonal patterns in revenue & costs – particularly in timber income and contract expenditure – and the need to benchmark against previous years to ensure realistic forecasting.

Initial analysis shows rising unit costs in some areas, prompting the need for deeper investigation and collaboration between finance and business leads. The ELT emphasised the importance of understanding cost drivers, benchmarking internally and externally, and focusing on areas with the greatest financial impact.

AP 5/03: Head of Finance and Director of Land Management & Regions to collaborate to refine forecasting methods, enhance financial analysis, and develop a targeted approach to unit cost improvement. Regular performance reviews and benchmarking will be established, with a plan to report back to the ELT by the end of April.

10. Monthly Balance Scorecard

The ELT reviewed and commented on the Monthly Balance Scorecard.

11. Meeting Preparation

The ELT took time to discuss and prepare in advance of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 25 March 2026.

12. ELT Reflections

The ELT provided their reflections on the meeting.

The next ELT meeting will be held on 17 March 2026.