



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

16th September 2025

Attendees:

Kevin Quinlan, CEO (Chair)
David Leven, Director of Commercial Development
Graeme Prest, Director of Land Management & Regions
Graeme Hutton, Director of Net Zero
Tom Greenan, Director of Corporate Services & Transformation
Matthew Henderson, Secretariat Assistant (Minutes)
Sophia Christopoulos, Portfolio Secretariat Assistant (Minutes)

Others:

Julie Fitzpatrick, Head of People & Organisational Development (item 3, 4 and 8)
Fiona Dundas, Senior HR Manager (item 3 and 4)
Joanna O'Donnell, Senior Learning and Development Manager (item 3)
Keith Paterson, Senior Technical Training Manager (item 3)
Jason Liggins, Head of Health, Safety & Wellbeing (item 3)
Colin Buchanan, Head of Finance (item 5)
Gerard Stanton, Project Accountant (item 5)
Mark Wilcock, Head of Fleet and Buildings (item 6)
Paul Calderwood, Senior Internal Communications Manager (item 8)

1. Review of Minutes

It was agreed that the minutes from the ELT meeting held on 2nd September 2025 were a true and accurate reflection.

2. Summary of Action Points from Meeting

Ref.:	Action:	Owner:	Target Date:
6/09	Present revised Learning & Development / OD Strategy to ELT.	Julie Fitzpatrick / Jason Liggins	28 October 2025
7/09	Present finalised Learning & Development / OD Strategy to colleagues in future FLS Townhall meeting.	Julie Fitzpatrick / Jason Liggins	16 December 2025
8/09	To recalibrate financial data within BMR to reflect non-paid employees.	Tom Greenan	28 October 2025
9/09	To send any comments/feedback/edits on Workforce Plan: Supplementary Guidance to HR.	Directors	30 September 2025
10/09	To arrange session to share and discuss Workforce Plan: Supplementary Guidance with CEO, SLG and TU's.	Fiona Dundas	30 September 2025

11/09	To examine restocking, woodland creation and compensatory planting regulations, and advise on feasibility, overlap and funding across these areas.	David Leven / Graeme Prest	28 October 2025
12/09	CEO to liaise with Change Manager on Scheme of Delegation, before cascading to Directors and cost centre leaders.	Kevin Quinlan / Rhondda Salmond	30 September 2025

Action Points 1/04, 2/04, 8/04, 11/04, 12/05, 14/05, 15/05, 1/07, 04/07, 19/07, 22/07, 23/07, 24/07, 28/07, 31/07, 1/08, 2/08, 3/08, 4/08, 6/08, 7/08, 9/08, 2/09, 4/09 and 5/09 were closed.

3. Learning & Development / Organisational Development Strategy

Julie Fitzpatrick and Jason Liggins outlined their objectives for engaging with ELT: to align the L&D Strategy with the Business and Corporate Plans, shape the Workforce Plan accordingly, and foster a culture of intentional leadership.

They introduced three strategic priorities: Skills Capability, Leadership & Culture for Change, Commercial & Financial Sustainability. These priorities are designed to support the One FLS – Fit for the Future programme and reflect the current organisational context. Jason highlighted key drivers including career turnover, future knowledge loss, gender balance, and the role of digital solutions in achieving financial sustainability.

3a. Skills Capability

Focus is on enhancing impact across the business, particularly in underdeveloped areas like commercial capability. Consolidating learning outcomes and identifying lessons learned will be key. External expertise may be needed in areas such as technology and renewables. ELT discussed priority skills including project management, stakeholder engagement, finance for non-financial managers, and performance management. The nine Fit for the Future projects offer a framework for identifying critical skills.

3b. Leadership & Culture for Change

The strategy will target three levels: self, others, and organisation. Emphasis will be placed on psychological safety and embedding leadership behaviours. Peer learning, mentoring, and leveraging experienced staff were highlighted as valuable approaches. Kevin Quinlan stressed the need for a clear action plan and communications strategy, potentially supported by visual materials and refined messaging.

3c. Commercial & Financial Sustainability

This priority addresses both skill gaps and mindset shifts, promoting public value and commercial thinking. Key areas include negotiation, supplier management, and customer/contractor relations. ELT agreed on the importance of finance training for non-financial managers and performance management in regional contexts.

Joanna briefly referenced the Investment Principles and the application of the 70:20:10 learning model. Kevin noted the need to clearly communicate the model's purpose and importance.

ELT broadly endorsed the strategy and priorities, though further refinement is needed. Discussions included the scope of a combined strategy and whether the current priority labels should be adjusted or

expanded. There was consensus that broad headings are useful, provided they are supported by clearly defined focus areas.

AP 6/09: Head of People and Organisational Development and Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing to return to ELT and present revised Learning & Development / OD Strategy to ELT.

AP 7/09: Head of People and Organisational Development and Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing to present finalised Learning & Development / OD Strategy to colleagues in future FLS Townhall meeting.

4. Workforce Plan: Supplementary Guidance to Support Business Planning 2026-2029

Julie Fitzpatrick provided the ELT with an update on the status of the Supplementary Guidance draft process, and explained how when looking at headcount, it is important to still account for non-paid employees, i.e. those on maternity leave or long-term sick, etc. The ELT agreed that staff not being paid should still be included in the BMR financial data for visibility and to ensure cost centre managers remain cognisant of those roles. Fiona Dundas advised that there are tight HR procedures in place regarding the backfilling of these roles.

There was a brief discussion about non-paid employees. Broadly speaking there are roughly the same amount each year, and the difference between the finance and establishment numbers is small enough that the finance numbers are still viable. Various amendments and adjustments were discussed within the guidance as well as how headcount figures are communicated to managers to ensure they are keeping in mind the 3-year overview and are incentivised to invest in the roles that are necessary for growth and financial sustainability. ELT agreed that this is a top-down meets bottom-up approach, and managers should not look at what they currently have, but at what they need.

AP 8/09: Director of Corporate Services to recalibrate financial data within BMR to reflect non-paid employees.

AP 9/09: Directors to send any comments/feedback/edits on Workforce Plan: Supplementary Guidance to Fiona Dundas.

AP 10/09: Senior HR Manager to arrange session to share and discuss Workforce Plan: Supplementary Guidance with CEO, SLG and TUs.

5. Investments, Disposals and Reserves

Colin Buchanan and Gerard Stanton gave a presentation on investments, disposals and reserves. It was noted that there has been limited movement in recent months, with an approved £30k adjustment in total costs. The investment pipeline, last approved in December 2024 by the ELT, was reviewed with attention to shifts in spend, the use of earmarked reserves, and the clarity of the Transformation Fund. Members discussed challenges in tracking spend per project due to system limitations, as well as broader forecasting and alignment with sustainable forest objectives.

The ELT discussed restocking, woodland creation, compensatory planting, and potential use of external funding, with an emphasis on ensuring clear parameters and alignment across funding streams. Disposals and reserve allocations were noted, including the need for a robust inventory and clarity on restricted versus earmarked reserves.

AP 11/09: Director of Commercial Development and Director of Land Management & Regions to examine restocking, woodland creation and compensatory planting regulations, and advise on feasibility, overlap and funding across these areas.

6. Great Glen House / Apex House Updates

Graeme Hutton and Mark Wilcock provided a high-level update on office accommodation in Edinburgh and Inverness., seeking strategic direction from the ELT based on the options presented. The discussion focused on the respective benefits and risks of each option, including factors beyond the organisation's control and areas of ongoing uncertainty.

Graeme advised that a decision is required by the end of October for Apex and a business case will be brought to a future meeting. The ELT noted that works to Smithton had been paused whilst the SG undertook its Single Scottish Estate (SSE) review in Inverness and requested further updates in due course.

AP 12/09: Mark Wilcock to present a business case for Edinburgh office accommodation with a further update on Inverness at a future meeting.

7. Scheme of Delegation

This item was not discussed in full, as the paper had been circulated in advance. The ELT confirmed they were content with the scheme as presented, subject to a minor amendment raised by Kevin Quinlan.

AP 12/09: CEO to liaise with Change Manager on Scheme of Delegation, before cascading to SES and cost centre leaders.

8. FLS Townhall Preparation

The ELT reviewed the presentation for the forthcoming Townhall, considering feedback from the previous session, key topics and timing. Relevant speakers will be contacted to provide supporting material where required.

9. ELT Forward Look

The ELT reviewed and discussed the agenda for their upcoming meeting.

10. ELT Reflections

The ELT provided their reflections on the meeting.

11. AOB

Tom Greenan proposed creating a 'suggestions box' to capture ideas for the Fit for the Future Change Portfolio. The ELT endorsed the concept, noting that similar internal schemes could provide useful reference points. Kevin emphasised the importance of maintaining a feedback loop in order to manage expectations.

Sophia Christopoulos will prepare a one-page proposal setting out the process for collecting, evaluating and managing ideas, which will be brought to the Programme Assurance Board meeting on 11th November.

The date of the next ELT meeting is 14th October 2025.