Forestry and Land Scotland
Coilltearachd agus Fearann Alba

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

23 June 2026

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

Others:
Callum McInnes, Head of HR
Adam Dearnley, Head of Finance
Jason Liggins, Head of H,S&W

Summary of Action Points (AP) from Meeting

Ref.:	Action:	Owner:	Target Date:
11/06	Provide a map of bare land to support the asset management discussion and future consideration of compensated land.	Graeme Prest	7 July 2026
12/06	Revise the workforce report heading and add reporting lenses for funding type, value streams, workforce categories, and externally funded activity in the next reporting cycle.	Julie Fitzpatrick	21 July 2026
13/06	Work with Adam and Jo and others to develop a clearer approach to the explanation and integrated management of disposals, reserves and investments, including how reserves are organised and business cases are presented, including whether a more formal investment board or equivalent governance arrangement is needed to help with decision making and oversight.	David Leven	21 July 2026
14/06	Review treatment in reserves and whether the various monies reserved for woodland creation can be used more broadly for restoration, deer control, natural regeneration, and related environmental work.	David Leven & Graeme Prest	21 July 2026
15/06	Create an modest earmarked capital line or equivalent reserve treatment for strategic	Adam Dearnley	21 July 2026

	acquisitions, instead of inclusion in the 3-year business plan.		
16/06	Arrange a discussion with Jo O'Donnell to support facilitation for the 21 July ELT team-building session.	Jason Liggins	21 July 2026
17/06	Coordinate with Paul on targeted communications to the teams affected by the directorate changes and consider a later wider message once implementation is under way.	Jason Liggins	7 July 2026

1. Review of Minutes

It was agreed that the minutes from the ELT meeting held on 9 June 2026 were a true and accurate reflection, subject to a minor correction.

It was agreed current format provides enough substance to show how decisions had been reached and to remain useful when members later revisited the discussion.

2. Review of Action Points

The ELT then moved to the action log. An earlier action on infrastructure funding was challenged and concluded to be unnecessary as already covered by business planning. An action covering a proposal for asset management of bare land, was recognised as still needing movement but dependent on related staffing and mapping inputs. A new date to be agreed but action on map of bare land to be considered now. A VAT-related action was judged too detailed to need continued ELT monitoring because the issue now sat within wider fleet and business travel compliance work and would be reported through the programme board instead.

AP 11/06: Provide a map of bare land to support the asset management discussion and future consideration of compensated land.

3. Workforce Planning and Headcount Controls

The workforce planning report was described as a management tool for ELT intended to support formal control totals and help Directors manage both headcount and establishment. Members agreed that the underlying workforce trajectory should now be treated as settled, with an establishment of 1084 and a wider expectation reduction over of c. 2%, 5% and up to 10% by March 2029. Future monthly reporting was expected to shift from baseline explanation towards trends and exceptions.

The group tested whether the report gave Directors enough information to manage their areas. NM noted that corporate services could still manage to its overall reduction target, although the fit for the future profile might create an awkward short-term spike before numbers reduced again. A wider point was raised about value-stream accountability, particularly where one director might be responsible for delivery but another retained line management control over staff. The response was that operational line management remained with the relevant Director, but that workforce planning needed to support cross-director conversations and eventually provide additional lenses, including value streams, workforce categories, and externally funded activity.

Control discipline was a major part of the discussion. The report was framed as the basis for CEO letters setting Director-level control totals, and members were reminded that any exceptional over-recruitment would need a very strong justification. d. It was agreed that Directors needed visibility of all recruitment activity so that central approval did not have to be reintroduced for every case.

The final part of the discussion covered report content and communication. Members asked for the report heading to be tightened and for future iterations to distinguish more clearly between core Scottish Government-funded activity, project-funded activity, and externally funded activity. There also needs to be reporting of workforce composition by value stream and separately by category/ profession. There was also agreement that fuller follow-up reporting should be added by the next reporting cycle in four weeks, with updated numbers included in the June report. On communication, the baseline workforce information and trajectory were expected to continue being shared with FTUS, while broader staff sharing should remain at a suitably aggregated level, such as by directorate or value stream.

The ELT agreed that the current workforce trajectory was the settled basis for delivery.

The meeting revisited the organisation's approach to management postings and agreed they would be signed off by Directors (delegated to Regional Managers within Operations if appropriate) and countersigned by Head or Deputy of HR.

The ELT agreed thatmManagement postings were retained as an exception mechanism for urgent temporary situations rather than being replaced by mandatory advertising in all cases. Use of management postings was made subject to Director and HR approval, with the Director of Operations able to delegate that decision to a regional manager where appropriate.

AP 12/06: Revise the workforce report heading and add reporting lenses for funding type, value streams, workforce categories, and externally funded activity in the next reporting cycle.

4. Forward Look and ELT Scheduling

The forward look section worked through the coming ELT cycle meeting by meeting, with attention to leave cover, agenda realism, and the best use of available time.

Agendas for 7 and 21 July were agreed. The morning of 21 July will be a focused team building sessions for new Directors.

Standard item on renewables income considered too narrow, preference is for a broader deep dive on renewables more generally, including community energy.

5. Capital Investments, Reserves and Disposals

AD introduced a summary of FLS's financial position across three linked areas: reserves, investments and disposals. He reported various capital spending commitments and proposals with a total indicative value of £15.3 million.

Planned capital disposal income over the next three years was shown at £20.7 million, meaning a notional £5.4 million of flexibility over the investment pipeline, although AD noted that disposals carried timing risk. AD also highlighted an approximate £10 million improvement in reserves, due to better than expected operating results and additional restricted natural capital funding.

Discussion turned to the disposals programme and underlying strategy which needs to be clear and aligned with with an asset management and long-term value creation approach.

The reserve discussion focused on whether a clear enough plan was in place for the use of existing balances. Members distinguished between genuinely restricted funds and balances that have been earmarked by FLS (and thus could unearmarked if necessary)>. There was discussion on woodland creation reserves, including whether these were being interpreted too narrowly.

The investment pipeline comprises routine 'operational capital investment' and 'business-development capital investment' activity. Restocking and buildings are considered as operational and technology is considered as business development. It was noted that strategic land acquisitions currently had a notional £500k per year allocation in the business plan, but that this ought to be included in the investment pipeline.

It was agreed that further consideration should be given to the definition of a more integrated approach to reserve management, disposals and investments, including how reserves and business cases are presented and revisiting whether a more formal investment board or equivalent governance arrangement should sit alongside ELT.

AP 13/06: Work with Adam and Jo and others to develop a clearer approach to the explanation and integrated management of disposals, reserves and investments, including how reserves are organised and business cases are presented, including whether a more formal investment board or equivalent governance arrangement is needed to help with decision making and oversight.

AP 14/06: Review treatment in reserves and whether the various monies reserved for woodland creation can be used more broadly for restoration, deer control, natural regeneration, and related environmental work.

AP 15/06: Create an modest earmarked capital line or equivalent reserve treatment for strategic acquisitions, instead of inclusion in the 3-year business plan.

6. Directorate Transition and Team Development

JL joined to update ELT on implementation of the new directorate structure and the practical steps needed over the summer. He indicated that an initial move for digital into Corporate, could happen relatively quickly once the outstanding HR issues were worked through. The larger structural shift was now targeted for 3 August, allowing a clean handover from GP into the new Forestry and Operations arrangements, with a second phase in the second or third week of August to move MES into Operations, the climate change team into Forestry, and the buildings team into DL's area. Timing was partly constrained by payroll system lock periods.

The mood among affected teams was described as broadly positive, with a stronger appetite for clarity and pace than for prolonging uncertainty.

Attention then shifted to how the new leadership model would be supported. The 21 July session was positioned as an internal first pass at team-building and operating model design, including how director-led teams would work separately and together. KQ also signalled an intention to bring in external OD support around mid-August, potentially across two sessions, to help the new ELT build cohesion. Jason asked whether support from Jo O'Donnell would be useful for the July session, and that offer was welcomed. On communications, the view was that broad messaging had already landed reasonably well, and the next priority should be targeted communication to affected teams, followed later by a clearer message that the changes were now implemented rather than still under discussion.

The ELT agreed the core Forestry and Operations directorate changes were targeted for implementation on 3 August, with later associated team moves expected in the second or third week of August. should be escalated or viewed through a wider organisational lens. RS reinforced that the register should be treated as a tool to inform discussion, not an end in itself.

AP 16/06: Arrange a discussion with Jo O'Donnell to support facilitation for the 21 July ELT team-building session.

AP 17/06: Coordinate with Paul on targeted communications to the teams affected by the directorate changes and consider a later wider message once implementation is under way.

7. AOB

There were no items raised under AOB.

The next ELT meeting will be held on 7 July 2026.