Forestry and Land Scotland
Coilltearachd agus Fearann Alba

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

26 May 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

Others:
Ian Considine, Head of Procurement
David Craig, Head of Programme Management
David Exeter, Head of Digital Services
Michael Hymers, Head of Corporate Office
Julie Fitzpatrick, Head of People & Organisational Development
Joanna O'Donnell, Senior Learning & Development Manager
Catriona Williamson, Business Change Manager
Shona Stewart, Portfolio Secretariat Assistant

Summary of Action Points (AP) from Meeting

Ref.:	Action:	Owner:	Target Date:
08/05	Consult trade unions on replacing the outdated change protocols with the new framework.	Julie Fitzpatrick	31 July 2026
09/05	Investigate Scottish Government's refreshed values launch in August to determine alignment opportunities for FLS values.	Nicola McBain	August 2026
10/05	Land Management to review 26/27 KPIs, and Commercial Directorate to consider Procurement and Visitor Services indicators.	Graeme Prest & David Leven	End of June 2026

1. Review of Minutes
It was agreed that the minutes from the ELT meeting held on 12 May 2026 were a true and accurate reflection.

2. Review of Action Points
The ELT reviewed the status of the Action Tracker, noting that several workforce planning items, including the revised baselines, were due to complete in May. Nicola McBain (NM) advised that an update on recruitment-related decisions taken at previous ELTs would be forthcoming shortly, allowing for a number of actions to be closed.

Further action tracker discussion covered change management, BMR timing, and risk submissions. NM requested a firm BMR and balanced scorecard timetable with clear dates and responsibilities. Financial sustainability had received a deep dive at the Audit & Risk Committee (ARC); NM requested that Workforce Planning risks are submitted to the ELT for approval whilst work progresses and asked colleagues to consider the level of other risks.

3. ELT Forward Look

The ELT reviewed the planned agenda for the upcoming meeting on 9 June. This included town hall preparation, stakeholder management & community engagement, risk management, the Finance Period 12 report, and a proposal on electricity infrastructure. Discussion on town hall content suggested potential coverage of enabling services, performance over the past year, among other topics.
The group also discussed the leadership prioritisation session scheduled for 23 June.

Additional forward-planning discussions touched on agriculture updates and Aspen-related reporting.

4. Change Management Framework

NM introduced the proposed Change Management Framework as a practical response to the scale of change expected to occur within FLS over the next three years and highlighted the need to review existing People and Change protocols. The aim should be to create a more usable framework and toolkit that would help staff manage change consistently and confidently.

David Craig (DC) and Catriona Williamson (CW) explained that the framework was intentionally structured around three recognised phases: preparing, managing, and sustaining change. It would provide common language, broad phases, and a proportionate set of tools that could scale up or down depending on the size and nature of any changes.

A central element was the proposed change effort analysis, designed as a simple early assessment tool. It was advised that this would assist teams in considering why change is required, which colleagues & stakeholders would be affected, the type of changes involved, where 'ripple effects' may appear, and whether specialist support from other departments should be realised at earlier stages of projects. The discussion placed particular value on the tool as a shared conversation starter, giving people a common language for engaging subject matter experts without forcing them to master detailed policy themselves.

The planned change plan and sustainment tools were also outlined. The intention was to keep these short and form-based, using templated prompts rather than long narrative papers. The sustainment phase was presented as particularly important as FLS has often focused on implementation without confirming whether benefits had materialised, whether colleagues had reverted to previous ways of working, or what lessons had been learned.

Discussion focused heavily on proportionality, practical usability, and how resistance should be understood. Graeme Hutton (GH) cautioned that the framework must not be presented as a rigid process which staff feel obligated to follow mechanically, and argued that practitioners would need clearer support on handling resistance constructively.

Consideration was also given to trade unions. NM confirmed the Change Management Framework would replace negotiated change protocols and that this would need to undergo trade union consultation.

The ELT remained supportive of the framework and the direction of travel. The steer is to continue development, sharpen emphasis on people rather than process, test materials with change leaders and Senior Responsible Owners, make proportionality messaging more explicit, and bring stronger content on resistance, support, and practical guidance prior to wider rollout.

AP 08/05: Consult trade unions on replacing the outdated change protocols with the new framework.

5. Organisational Values Approach

NM introduced a paper on whether and how to introduce organisation-wide values for FLS. She explained that a similar discussion had been come to the ELT in September 2025, however had continued to reappear in several forums and most recently through a Staff Council meeting. NM acknowledged that the context had shifted with new Corporate and Business plans now in place, prompting questions about which values should underpin these plans and whether the timing to revisit FLS' approach was right.

The ELT recognised that values could help strengthen horizontal relationships across the organisation, complementing existing work on leadership, communication, and change.

Opportunities and constraints were considered. NM reported that the Scottish Government expected to launch a refreshed Corporate Plan, mission and values in Autumn this year. There was also a discussion of previously developed FLS values work from 2019 which had been paused, in addition to examples from other bodies where values had become deeply embedded.

The ELT broadly favoured using the Scottish Government values as a starting point, however members felt that there would need to be more FLS-centric, particularly around the organisation's more commercial and delivery-focused contexts.

There was discussion on timing and organisational capacity. The team agreed that values could be powerful if properly embedded, however warned that this would require sustained effort across systems, communications, behaviours, and management practices rather than a light-touch branding exercise. Suggestions for implementation included waiting for the Scottish Government refresh, benchmarking good practice from other organisations, and potentially using an opportunities-board style approach to involve interested staff as a development opportunity.

The ELT agreed to move forward with the Organisational Values workstream with the timetable to be informed by the Scottish Government's own workstream. An Opportunity Board is to be established to steer, and engagement should be undertaken within existing forums.

AP 09/05: Director of Corporate Services & Transformation to investigate Scottish Government's refreshed values launch in August to determine alignment opportunities for FLS values.

6. Lunch

7. Balanced Scorecard and Performance Reporting

Michael Hymers (MH) introduced the balanced scorecard paper in two parts: a retrospective look at 2025/26 performance and proposals for the 2026/27 scorecard and reporting process. In 26/27, only fourteen of twenty-three KPIs had been met. (61%) He noted that underperformance was relatively evenly distributed rather than concentrated in one area.

Directors reflected on specific results in their own areas. The group then turned to process and reporting discipline. NM asked directors to update their respective annual reports and accounts sections promptly so that narratives can be input into annual reporting, Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) reporting, and the planned town hall. NM & MH both stressed that collecting period data had involved considerable extrication and that the process required firmer timetabling, designated scorecard contacts within each directorate, and stronger local ownership of the underlying figures.

The "approved investment pipeline" KPI was removed from the 2026/27 balanced scorecard, and the publication of the year-end balanced scorecard was deferred until after the SAB on 8th June.

On the 2026/27 scorecard, MH clarified the difference between two finance-related changes; the approved investment pipeline measure was proposed for full removal because it was not considered helpful to the ELT. Operating surplus, by contract, would remain available internally. NM also proposed adding an annual measure on staff having a positive view of organisational change, using the annual people survey and a target of 40%, to which the ELT agreed.

The discussion closed with several design points for further refinement. KQ asked for the order and presentation of KPIs to be reconsidered, and for further thought on whether procurement and visitor services needed more useful indicators.

AP 10/05: Land Management to review 2026/27 KPIs and Commercial Directorate to consider procurement and Visitor Services indicators.

8. ELT Reflections

The ELT gave their reflections on the meeting.

9. AOB

There were no items raised under AOB.

The next ELT meeting will be held on 8 June 2026.