



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

9th December 2025

Attendees:

Kevin Quinlan, CEO (Chair)

Graeme Prest, Director of Land Management and Regions

Graeme Hutton, Director of Net Zero

Nicola Mcbain, Interim Director of Corporate Services and Transformation

David Leven, Director of Commercial Development

Sophia Christopoulos, Portfolio Secretariat Assistant (Minutes)

Others:

Rhondda Salmond, Change Manager (item 3 and 6)

Julie Fitzpatrick, Head of People and Organisational Development (item 4 and 5)

Eddie Saunders, Health and Safety Manager (item 4)

Joanna O'Donnell, Senior Learning and Development Manager (item 5)

Keith Paterson, Senior Technical Training Manager (item 5)

Gavin Falconer, Head of Renewables (item 7)

Chris Abrams, Estate Commercial Manager (item 7)

1. Review of Minutes

It was agreed that the minutes from the ELT meeting held on 18th November 2025 were a true and accurate reflection.

2. Summary of Action Points from Meeting

Ref.:	Action:	Owner:	Target Date:
1/12	To include the following at the next Quarterly HSW Update: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Liaise with Head of Visitor Services and Safety Advisor to consider whether further mitigations are required at high-incident mountain biking sites and to gather data on the severity of incidents.Include visibility of progress against Promoted Trail Assurance assessment actions.Explore ways of raising the profile of hazard and unsafe condition reporting.	Jason Liggins	10 February 2026
2/12	To confirm how live charges are made safe following a quarry misfire.	Eddie Saunders	19 December 2025
3/12	To explore correlation between reduction in vehicle accidents and the introduction of telematics.	Jason Liggins	12 May 2026

4/12	To provide options appraisal for new Health and Safety assurance software/system.	Jason Liggins	April 2026
5/12	To explore usage rates of walking poles and consider whether further encouragement is required to improve uptake.	Graeme Prest	February 2026
6/12	To strengthen the 'second line of defence' through a more structured and systematic programme of health and safety compliance checks.	Eddie Saunders / Graeme Prest	April 2026
7/12	To include breakdown of AIRS archive reporting in the Annual Accident Statistics Report.	Eddie Saunders	12 May 2026
8/12	To revise the L&D/OD Action Plan to reflect ELT feedback, including clearer prioritisation, sequencing and a more granular one-year action plan aligned to a three-year strategy.	Joanna O'Donnell / Keith Paterson	February 2026
9/12	To commission and collate Director input on key areas of focus for the Internal Audit Work Programme for FY 26/27.	Directors / Rhondda Salmond	20 January 2026

Action points (AP) 7/02, 18/07, 6/09, 8/09, 16/09, 9/10, 13/10, 4/12, 7/12, 8/12 and 9/12 were closed.

Nicola McBain advised that new deadlines will be confirmed in due course for APs 13/07 and 10/10 now that the new Head of Finance, Adam Dearnley, is in post.

The deadline for AP 30/07 was changed to 30 January 2026 as Nicola McBain has only recently joined FLS as interim Director of Corporate Services & Transformation.

The Directors provided an update on their current progress toward AP 1/09, with each at varying stages of completion. Rhondda Salmond added that there is a new tab on actions in the Risk Register and to ensure these are delivered within agreed timeframes.

3. ELT Forward Look

The ELT reviewed and discussed the agenda for their upcoming meetings. Nicola confirmed that an agenda will be circulated ahead of the Support Service Review on 15 December 2025. The ELT also reviewed the overall timeline for Business Planning, including the session on 20 January 2026.

4. Quarterly Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW) Update

Eddie Saunders provided the quarterly update on HSW, covering incident trends, reporting behaviours and assurance arrangements. Employee injury accidents were noted to be broadly similar year on year, with slips, trips and falls continuing to account for around a third of incidents. Members of the public incidents, particularly linked to mountain biking, have increased, while vehicle accidents have reduced, with early indications suggesting a possible correlation with the introduction of telematics. Eddie advised that this would need to be monitored over a longer period to draw firmer conclusions.

Near miss reporting has increased, while reported hazards and unsafe conditions have reduced. The ELT discussed the importance of maintaining strong reporting levels for both, noting regional variation and that low overall numbers can skew trends. A need to raise the profile of hazard/unsafe condition reporting was identified.

Work-related ill health has reduced, driven largely by a significant fall in tick-borne disease cases. The underlying drivers of the fall in tick-borne disease cases will be explored at the end of the financial year when more data on tick populations is available. RIDDOR reportable incidents have also reduced and it was noted that there had not been any hand-arm vibration cases. A specific issue was raised around a quarry misfire, with Kevin Quinlan requesting further assurance on how live charges or misfires are made safe.

The ELT discussed assurance and reporting through the AIRS system and the balanced scorecard. Graeme Hutton queried the mixed assurance picture, noting that reporting behaviours and the seriousness of incidents are not always clearly distinguished. While overall reports have reduced, the proportion archived has also fallen, raising questions about triage, investigation and closure. Eddie confirmed he would provide further analysis of archiving compliance.

Mountain biking incidents were discussed, with a focus on hotspots such as Glentress and the wider Tweed Valley area. Eddie noted that new trail development may be a contributing factor, but emphasised the importance of ongoing monitoring and maintenance to ensure public safety and manage FLS's liability. Trail assurance safety is also now reflected in the balanced scorecard. Kevin advised that clearer and more impactful communications with the public on risk would be beneficial, while Eddie noted that improved data on accident severity would enable more effective interventions.

As the AIRS contract is ending in September 2026, Eddie outlined the work planned to explore procurement of a new health and safety assurance system. He highlighted that standardisation across regions is key, as the current fragmented approach limits consistent management information and assurance. The ELT recognised this as a significant change programme, likely to require formal change management. Julie Fitzpatrick agreed to share an options appraisal following the conclusion of the business planning process.

Eddie summarised progress on SAWS and outlined changes to the corporate risk register, including stronger links to Audit & Risk Committee reporting, improved assurance through a second line of defence, agreed directorate priorities and a continued emphasis on behavioural safety and reporting culture. The ELT agreed there should be a shift towards stronger and more systematic assurance, including spot checks and compliance activity alongside existing informal and audit approaches. Graeme Prest highlighted the need to further strengthen this through a more structured programme that supports both assurance and coaching across regions. In addition, Graeme Prest agreed to explore the current usage rates of walking polls to support improvements in safety and assurance.

AP 1/12: Head of Organisational Development to include the following at the next Quarterly HSW Update:

- **Liaise with Head of Visitor Services and Safety Advisor to consider whether further mitigations are required at high-incident mountain biking sites and to gather data on the severity of incidents.**
- **Include visibility of progress against Promoted Trail Assurance assessment actions.**
- **Explore ways of raising the profile of hazard and unsafe condition reporting.**

AP 2/12: Health and Safety Manager to confirm how live charges are made safe following a quarry misfire.

AP 3/12: Head of Organisational Development to explore correlation between reduction in vehicle accidents and the introduction of telematics.

AP 4/12: Head of Organisational Development to provide options appraisal for new Health and Safety assurance software/system.

AP 5/12: Director of Land Management and Regions to explore usage rates of walking poles and consider whether further encouragement is required to improve uptake.

AP 6/12: Health and Safety Manager and Director of Land Management and Regions to strengthen the 'second line of defence' through a more structured and systematic programme of health and safety compliance checks.

AP 7/12: Health and Safety Manager to include breakdown of AIRS archive reporting in the Annual Accident Statistics Report.

5. Learning and Development (L&D)/ Organisational Development (OD) Action Plan

Julie Fitzpatrick introduced the L&D/OD Action Plan, setting it in the context of workforce planning, the Fit for the Future (FFF) programme and the wider organisational strategy. She noted that further detail on the plan is contingent on the outcomes of the business planning process. Joanna O'Donnell and Keith Paterson presented the three strategic priorities: technical skills, leading an entrepreneurial culture, and commercial and financial skills.

The ELT requested clearer sequencing within the paper, suggesting that a more detailed year-one action plan be developed, aligned to a broader three-year strategy. The importance of positioning learning and development as a core contributor to organisational development, rather than a standalone activity, was emphasised. The ELT also discussed the required mindset and cultural shift, the language and terminology used, and the role of technology in supporting delivery.

AP 8/12: Senior Learning and Development Manager and Senior Technical Training Manager to revise the L&D/OD Action Plan to reflect ELT feedback, including clearer prioritisation, sequencing and a more granular one-year action plan aligned to a three-year strategy.

6. Internal Audit Work Programme FY 26/27

Rhondda Salmond outlined the approach to developing the Internal Audit Work Programme for FY 26/27, noting that a draft programme will be developed in discussion with Internal Audit, agreed by the CEO and endorsed through ARC, with ELT oversight. Kevin Quinlan noted an upcoming meeting with Internal Audit in January to consider draft recommendations and suggested areas of audit or advisory work, ahead of finalising the programme for ARC approval in March.

The ELT discussed potential areas of focus, including business planning, procurement, capital investment and Aspen post-implementation assurance, emphasising the need for clarity of scope and alignment with key organisational risks. It was agreed that Directors would provide short statements on priorities to support the development of clear terms of reference for the agreed areas of work.

AP 9/12: Change Manager to commission and collate Director input on key areas of focus for the Internal Audit Work Programme for FY 26/27.

7. Renewables Audit – Draft Management Response

David Leven introduced the Renewables advisory audit and draft management response, noting that renewables income now represents a significant and growing part of FLS operations. The auditors were commissioned to review key aspects of management, including lease agreements, revenue recognition, monitoring and forecasting. The ELT noted that the findings largely reflected known issues and were helpful in formally documenting risks and required improvements.

Chris Abrams highlighted the recommendations relating to governance, forecasting uncertainty and revenue recognition, acknowledging the inherent volatility and external factors affecting renewables income. It was noted that increasing scale will place greater pressure on accruals and accounting processes, and that additional finance capacity and clearer roles and responsibilities will be required over time. Links were noted to wider FFF work, including service design and systems development, which will support implementation of the recommendations. The ELT approved the draft management response.

8. ELT Reflections

The ELT provided their reflections on the meeting.

9. AOB

There were no AOBs raised.

The next ELT meeting will be held on 13 January 2026.