



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

18 December 2024

### Attendees:

Kevin Quinlan, Chief Executive (Chair)  
Graeme Prest, Director of Land Management and Regions  
Michael Hymers, Director of Corporate Services  
David Leven, Director of Commercial Development  
Graeme Hutton, Director of Net Zero  
Celyn Paton, Secretariat Assistant (Minutes)

### Others:

Julie Fitzpatrick, Head of People and Organisational Development  
Paul Sutherland, Project Manager  
Jennie Smith, Acting Deputy Head of Finance  
Gerard Stanton, Project Accountant  
Kimberly Stewart-Hobbs, Deputy Management Accounts

### Apologies:

Donna Mortimer, Chief Financial Officer

### 1. Minutes of last meeting

It was agreed that the minutes from the ELT meeting held on 05 December 2024 were a true and accurate reflection, subject to a minor amendment from Graeme Hutton.

### 2. Action Points

Ref:	Action:	Who:	Target Date:
8/08	Head of Digital Services to integrate ELT's comments into FLS' Digital Strategy and Action Plan and provide and update to the ELT.	Dave Exeter	5 December 2024
11/09	Change Manager to incorporate feedback from the ELT regarding Risk Appetite.	Rhonda Salmond	19 November 2024
17/09	Deputy Head of Finance and Head of Planning and Environment to examine unit cost performance and feedback to ELT ahead of the next BMR.	Jennie Smith / Jo Ellis	18 December 2024
5/10	Project Manager to provide assurance around future proofing ASPEN, particularly with regards to integrating coupe level data.	Paul Sutherland	5 November 2024
10/10	ELT members to include comments on the Investment Pipeline Proposal spreadsheet.	All	5 November 2024
13/10	Director of Net Zero and Director of Land Management & Regions to agree a standardised approach to generic	Graeme Prest / Graeme Hutton	26 November 2024

Ref:	Action:	Who:	Target Date:
	operational assets, such as deer larders, in terms of investment proposals.		
17/10	Directors to research ways to establish a 'bottom-up' workforce management system.	Directors	5 November 2024
18/10	Each Director to optimise and finalise their directorate's scorecard for trial by the end of December, with results to be reviewed by end of January.	Directors	31 January 2025
19/10	d) Head of Marketing and Sales to generate a one-page report on costs and potential income estimates of performance improvement plan.	Graeme Prest/Mick Bottomley	December 2024
1/11	Director of NetZero to revisit the Business Travel Review Project Plan accelerating consideration of the options for future delivery of mechanical engineering services to the organisation.	Graeme Hutton	November 2024
2/11	Chief Financial Officer to include timber sales vs forecast in year, in BMR to enable detailed business analysis and inform appropriate actions.	Donna Mortimer	5 December 2024
3/11	Chief Financial Officer and Director of Land Management and Regions to undertake a 'deep-dive' analysis of cost structure in Central.	Donna Mortimer/Graeme Prest	January 2025
5/11	Chief Financial Officer to analyse liquidity reserves to ensure adequate and appropriate levels in place.	Donna Mortimer	5 December 2024
6/11	Chief Financial Officer to incorporate the following into Version two of the Annual Financial Plan: b) Fine tune MES reallocations across regions c) Direct Production - Budget for increase in productivity to 2000 hours per annum d) Interrogate "programme & targets" comparison across regions e) Include National Insurance increase in budgets f) Pay assumption should be greater g) FTE total remains at 1069 – Directors to continue interrogate and investigate pressures behind this. h) Investment process – approved decisions need to be communicated and including in budgets	Donna Mortimer	5 December 2024
1/12	Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing to incorporate feedback from the ELT and present an action plan next quarter.	Jason Liggins	17 March 2025
2/12	Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing and Director of Commercial Development to ensure Health, Safety & Wellbeing systems and skills are integrated into contract management.	Jason Liggins David Leven	17 March 2025
3/12	a) Director of Corporate Services to schedule a specific ASPEN update meeting for all relevant Business leads across the organisation in early January 2025.	Directors	21 January 2025

Ref:	Action:	Who:	Target Date:
	<p>b) Directors to nominate key directorate team members to be included in ASPEN update meeting, alongside all regional Business Managers.</p> <p>c) Directors to ensure UAT nominated individuals can prioritise ASPEN requirements in line with associated timescales</p> <p>d) Director of Corporate Services to issue an ASPEN update all staff comms before Christmas break with proposed revised timescales</p> <p>e) Director of Corporate Services to schedule monthly ASPEN updates at future ELT meetings.</p>		<p>21 January 2025</p> <p>19 December 2024</p> <p>21 January 2025</p>
4/12	Director of Corporate Services to set out clear governance structure and associated responsibilities for ASPEN.	Michael Hymers	21 January 2025
5/12	Chief Financial Officer to incorporate ELT feedback into Investment Approach paper.	Donna Mortimer	7 January 2025
6/12	Chief Financial Officer to issue comms signposting staff to new Business Case process and templates.	Donna Mortimer	7 January 2025
7/12	<p>With regards to reduced working week:</p> <p>a) Director of Commercial Development and Head of People and Organisational Development to develop engaging, accessible and clear guidance for publication.</p> <p>b) Directors to agree requirements on core hours for agency business as usual activities and ensure clear guidance provided to managers.</p> <p>c) Director of Commercial Development and Head of People and Organisational Development to work with FTUS to develop and issue all staff comms to update the organisation on progress.</p>	Directors/Julie Fitzpatrick	21 January 2025
8/12	Director of Land Management and Regions to investigate possible solutions to reflect the impact of the reduced working week on the wildlife management service within the organisation.	Graeme Prest	21 January 2025
9/12	Head of People and Organisational Development to collate People Survey staff comments for ELT review.	Julie Fitzpatrick	21 January 2025
10/12	ELT to consider potential areas of focus and associated actions from results of the People Survey for discussion at a future ELT.	All	21 January 2025
11/12	Director of Corporate Services and Change Manager to investigate recruitment of new NEA with a focus on commercial knowledge of visitor services and renewables.	Michael Hymers/ Rhondda Salmond	17 March 2025

Action points 2/06, 12/09, 9/10, 11/10, 12/10, 6/11a and 7/11 are discharged.

## 2. ASPEN Assurance

Paul Sutherland provided an update on ASPEN and associated Go-live timescales, advising that due to an unexpected critical loss of resources in the project team, the proposed April Go-live date is looking

unlikely. The team hope that a new Go-live date of June should be achievable, however, work is ongoing to replan project timescales alongside both finance and procurement teams, before confirming new revised timescales.

Paul acknowledged current business anxiety surrounding ASPEN and stressed the importance of clear, honest communication with relevant staff to help mitigate and reassure all those involved.

The ELT discussed potential risks to the business and proposed revised timescales, recognising the need to set out a clear, succinct ASPEN governance structure and associated responsibilities to provide further reassurance and requested monthly project updates moving forwards

**AP 3/12a: Director of Corporate Services to schedule a specific ASPEN update meeting for all relevant Business leads across the organisation in early January 2025.**

**AP 3/12b: Directors to nominate key directorate team members to be included in ASPEN update meeting, alongside all regional Business Managers.**

**AP 3/12c: Directors to ensure UAT nominated individuals can prioritise ASPEN requirements in line with associated timescales.**

**AP 3/12d: Director of Corporate Services to issue an ASPEN update all staff comms before Christmas break with proposed revised timescales.**

**AP 3/12e: Director of Corporate Services to schedule monthly ASPEN updates at future ELT meetings.**

**AP 4/12: Director of Corporate Services to set out clear governance structure and associated responsibilities for ASPEN.**

### **3. Investment Approach Update, including LIDAR Business Case**

The ELT discussed the update paper provided and reflected on past and current investment priorities along with forecast reserves. They sought clarification around certain figures and terminology in the paper, and suggested a number of amendments, including articulating a live reserve position taken from the BMR ; the future investment pipeline; and revising the wording around woodland creation and disposals.

Reflecting on the revised Business Case Templates, the ELT agreed the process for Business Case Stages 1 and 2, and noted that any Stage 3 Business Cases should invoke a Director level discussion to be considered on a case by case basis.

#### **LIDAR Business Case**

The ELT approved funding for LIDAR from unrestricted funds of £1.2mil in principle, of which £300k to be used in FY 25/26. Years 2 – 4 funding is condition on:

- an agreed benefits realisation plan for FLS by the end of year 1 detailing how cost/time savings will be achieved
- Also during end of year 1, a cost/benefit analysis of alternative skills/people resource options, taking into account how other funding partners are looking to address this. Any opportunities to reduce the cost of survey technician cohort/function should also be factored in.

**AP 5/12: Chief Financial Officer to incorporate ELT feedback into Investment Approach paper.**

**AP 6/12: Chief Financial Officer to issue comms signposting staff to new Business Case process and templates.**

#### **4. ELT Forward Look**

The ELT discussed agenda items for future ELT meetings.

#### **5. Transformation Programme Reflections**

The ELT reflected on the current Transformation Programme position and identified priorities moving forwards, agreeing the need for a monthly focused ELT update to enable open, constructive discussion and information sharing, ensuring a clear collective understanding of the programme direction.

#### **6. Reduced Working Week Implementation Plan**

Julie Fitzpatrick and David Leven provided an update on the Reduced Working Week Implementation plan, recognising key areas of progress and areas for further ELT consideration. They noted the need to ensure clear guidance and consistency across the organisation, with a focus on an 'Agency – team – individual' thinking basis, in this order. The ELT stressed the importance of setting clear expectations whilst empowering managers to ensure any changes still meet core business requirements.

The ELT expressed their thanks to David, Julie, Lindsay Anderson and Sasha McKinlay for their work and efforts on this.

**AP 7/12a: Director of Commercial Development and Head of People and Organisational Development to develop engaging, accessible and clear guidance for publication.**

**AP 7/12b: Directors to agree requirements on core hours for agency business as usual activities and ensure clear guidance provided to managers.**

**AP 7/12c: Director of Commercial Development and Head of People and Organisational Development to work with FTUS to develop and issue all staff comms to update the organisation on progress.**

**AP 8/12: Director of Land Management and Regions to investigate possible solutions to reflect the impact of the reduced working week on the wildlife management service within the organisation.**

#### **7. People Survey Outcomes**

Julie Fitzpatrick presented the results from the People Survey, highlighting an overall response rate of 71%, up from 2023's response rate of 63%. She recognised a number of positive areas including, good results around work enjoyment, confidence in skills and abilities to carry out roles, good work/life balance and improvements in scores relating to pay and benefits.

Julie then went on to reflect on areas for improvement, highlighting that the bullying and harassment score continues to remain a concern, along with low scores surrounding managers, leadership and management of change.

Julie asked the ELT to consider the results and potential areas to focus on, and agree key actions to be communicated to staff when results are published. She stressed the importance of ensuring timely and effective messaging to staff.

The ELT discussed the results of the survey, suggesting areas for focus and potential corresponding actions. They agreed to consider specific directorate results in further detail and think about potential strategies/actions to take forward.

**AP 9/12: Head of People and Organisational Development to collate People Survey staff comments for ELT review.**

**AP 10/12: ELT to consider potential areas of focus and associated actions from results of the People Survey for discussion at a future ELT.**

#### **8. ELT Reflections**

The ELT provided their reflections on the meeting.

#### **9. AOB**

##### **Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) Remit**

The ELT reflected on how to get the best productivity from the SAB and recognised the importance of attracting Non-Executive Advisors (NEA) with knowledge of FLS value streams.

**AP 11/12: Director of Corporate Services and Change Manager to investigate recruitment of new NEA with a focus on commercial knowledge of visitor services and renewables.**

The date of the next ELT meeting is 7 January 2025.