



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

17 August 2026

Attendees:

Kevin Quinlan, CEO (Chair) (KQ)

Nicola McBain, Director of Corporate Services and Transformation (NMcB)

Graeme Hutton, Director of Net Zero (GH)

David Leven, Director of Commercial Development (DL)

Jo Ellis, Interim Director of Forestry (JE)

Others:

Eddie Saunders, Health & Safety Manager (ES)

Penny Coles, Head of Estate Development (PC)

Rebecca Carr, Community Asset Transfer Scheme Manager (RC)

Gwen Wilkie, Senior Landscape Architect (GW))

Summary of Action Points (AP) from Meeting

Ref.:	Action:	Owner:	Target Date:
08/08	Prepare for Director General Net Zero visit. Preparation of arrangements and Briefing Pack.	Nicola McBain / Michael Hymers	28 August 2026
09/08	Schedule half-day ELT session to review progress on Rolling Three-Year Business Plan.	Michael Hymers	01 September 2026
10/08	Prepare a paper / Business case for fixed-term funded posts, including the additional posts required, the costs involved, and the public benefit that would be delivered.	David Leven / Nicola McBain	13 October 2026
11/08	Refine the community engagement programme prior to sharing with the Operational management group as the owners / delivery partner.	David Leven / Rebecca Carr	31 September 2026
12/08	Arrange a discussion on tick-resistant clothing at the next National Health, Safety & Wellbeing Committee.	Jason Liggins	16 September 2026
13/08	Review RIDDOR incidents relating to tick bites and FLS staff to assess the use of tick-resistant clothing.	Jason Liggins	16 September 2026
14/08	Provide an update on speeding in FLS vehicles to the ELT meeting scheduled of the 16 September.	Jason Liggins / Tommy Groat	16 September 2026

1. Opening business

The Chair opened by returning the group to the previously agreed leadership principles:

- keeping discussion at the right altitude
- maintaining personal focus
- creating space for challenge; and
- ensuring that ELT actively drives organisational change.

2. Minutes and Action tracker and carry-forward updates

The previous minutes were reviewed briefly. Minor updates were flagged. No wider challenge to the minutes was recorded.

The group reviewed the action tracker with a view to clearing aged items and improving the quality of updates.

3. Forward look and ELT scheduling

The forward look was discussed.

Attention turned to the 01 September meeting, when the Director General Net Zero (Andy Kerr) would attend. The group discussed how best to structure that session so that it gave him a useful view of the organisation. The preferred shape was an informal meet & greet walkabout and some form of staff contact at Apex, and then attendance at Executive Leadership Team. Agenda to be re-shaped on items of greatest impact.

Apex design changes were also folded into the same horizon planning discussion. MW had previously set out the thinking for the building, but subsequent landlord constraints meant the original alterations could not proceed and revised drawings were now being developed. The group agreed that a consensus view would still be needed on the revised approach, including the balance between collaboration space and quieter working space. A six-month trial for visitor arrangements has been agreed, but the stronger point was that members wanted visibility of the revised designs and a practical route to collective agreement rather than a purely email-based exchange.

The first draft of the business plan was expected from directors by 13 September and should then come to ELT, likely at the 29 September meeting.

One of the clearer meeting conclusions concerned the DP review, this was re-scheduled till later in October.

AP 08/08 Prepare for Director General Net Zero visit. Preparation of arrangements and Briefing Pack.

AP 09/08 Schedule half-day ELT session to review progress on Rolling Three-Year Business Plan.

Alongside the forward look, ELT spent time on the relationship between headcount controls, externally funded posts, and the public value case for expanding work in areas such as renewables and natural capital. DL/JE described work carried out in Central to map the renewables pipeline into an FTE requirement. This raised the question of whether externally funded posts could be added on top of current headcount constraints where they are fully covered costs and delivered additional public benefit. This has been done for Network Infrastructure, but members wanted to frame the wider case carefully before raising it further. The Chair suggested that the argument should not be reduced to a simple request for more posts. Instead, the case should show that the organisation's core headcount remained on a downward trajectory while fixed term, fully funded programme posts could unlock additional outcomes for Scotland. The same reasoning was seen as potentially relevant for natural capital as well as income-generating renewables work.

The discussion moved to reporting disciplines. Members wanted ELT papers issued earlier, preferably on Wednesday. Balanced scorecard production was highlighted as particularly problematic, with frustration that data owners, finance, and business leads were commissioning and re-commissioning information in circles rather than following a clean mapped sequence. Similar pressure points were noted for risk and audit reporting, where Corporate Affairs were often working up to the deadline because source inputs had

not arrived on time. There was also an emerging question about whether all elements of the broader balance scorecard genuinely needed to be reviewed monthly, given that some measures were seasonal or quarterly by nature.

AP 10/08 Prepare a paper / Business case for fixed-term funded posts, including the additional posts required, the costs involved, and the public benefit that would be delivered.

4. Community engagement approach

PC introduced the paper as a follow-on from an earlier stakeholder engagement discussion, making the case that community engagement needed to be treated as a related but distinct issue because it sat within a different legislative and practical context. The starting point was not that the organisation lacked good practice. On the contrary, several strands were described as already strong: the community asset transfer and related empowerment work had been in place since 2017 and was regarded externally as good practice, long-term plan consultation was routine and well regarded, and a range of community-facing work was already happening through visitor services, community energy and local regional engagement.

The challenge was that this activity was fragmented rather than coherently joined up. Community engagement was characterised as being everybody's job and therefore, at times, effectively nobody's job. Different regions used different tools, relationships and methods, often reactively and with limited coordination across functions. That meant the organisation might not be using staff time as efficiently as possible, and the experience for communities could vary considerably depending on the place, the issue, and which part of the organisation they happened to encounter.

The forthcoming legislative context was then examined. Community wealth building was described as a significant step change because it would push public bodies further into questions of local economic impact, local labour markets, land and property, inclusive ownership and finance. Members could already see overlap with existing areas of work, including community asset transfer, nature finance, visitor services and wider estate development. Although the detailed duties were not yet settled, there was agreement that the organisation needed to understand the implications early and collectively rather than wait passively for the final requirements.

Land reform prompted a more detailed exchange. GW explained that, while much attention had focused on the proposed land management plan provisions, the core concern was the risk of duplication. Forestry already operated within a dense regulatory framework through long-term plans, UKFS requirements and other forms of assurance, and the new regime appeared likely to request evidence that was already being generated elsewhere. Whilst FLS must adhere to the legislation, members were wary of ending up with one set of long-term forest plans and another overlapping layer of place-based land management plans covering much the same ground, especially when the land reform tools appeared to have been designed more for large private estates with limited transparency than for a public body already working under visible statutory controls.

Several members argued that the organisation should be able to demonstrate that it already works in line with the principles of transparency and community engagement, while still resisting unnecessary double regulation. The emerging consensus favoured the opportunity to show what the organisation already does, sharpen the package and presentation of that work, and seek an exemption from any duplicative land management plan.

A possible practical response was discussed in two parts. First, members supported the idea of creating a clearer package around long-term plans so that they sat alongside other existing place-based material such as habitat management plans, renewables. Secondly, they explored whether the wider community engagement effort should be organised around four existing pillars: community energy, community empowerment including CATs and agreements, visitor sites, and long-term plans.

PC outlined a draft action plan; the room supported the overall direction but challenged the scale of ambition. The proposal covered a working group, and whilst members felt that the shape was broadly right, the programme risked becoming disproportionate to the problem. The stronger steer was to right-size the work, focus on joining up what already existed, and make sure regional and land management leaders saw the exercise as solving a real operational problem.

The conversation ended with a clearer strategic emphasis. ELT wanted a more joined-up and consistent approach across the country, stronger leadership sponsorship, and better coordination across the existing pillars of work. It also wanted the legislative response to be practical: pursue an exemption from duplicative land reform planning requirements, improve the way existing activity is presented and connected, and take the refined work back through the land management leadership route with a more proportionate plan.

AP 11/08 Refine the community engagement programme prior to sharing with the Operational management group as the owners / delivery partner.

5. Quarterly Health, Safety and Wellbeing Update

ES presented the quarterly update. During Q1 2026/27, overall incident reporting decreased by 21% compared with the same period last year, including a 25% reduction in employee injuries. Slips, trips and falls remained the most common cause of injury, while manual handling incidents reduced. Reportable employee injuries (RIDDORs) remained unchanged, with no contractor or member of the public RIDDORs reported. While reductions were also seen in other incident categories, increases were recorded in work-related ill-health, member of the public injuries, contractor injuries and vehicle accidents.

Of particular concern was the increase in work-related ill-health cases linked to tick exposure, with four RIDDOR-reportable Lyme disease-related incidents in Q1 and a further six cases already reported in Q2. Near miss and hazard reporting also reduced, resulting in proactive reporting levels remaining below the corporate target and reinforcing a previously identified need to strengthen reporting culture. Incident severity classification rates improved significantly to 75%, although this remains below the 80% target and further improvement is required to ensure incidents are appropriately assessed before closure. Further trend analysis of incidents will be carried out in mid-year and end of year ELT reports.

The SAWS programme continued, including work to improve consistency around mechanical harvesting safety zones ahead of revised FISA guidance 603. The new assurance programme commenced with a learning and assurance visit at Newton Nursery, which identified health and safety issues requiring action and highlighted opportunities to refine the assurance approach. Work also progressed on selecting a new electronic health and safety management system, while wellbeing and skills development initiatives continued, including promotion of the Forestry Wellbeing Toolkit and targeted support for Forest Craftsperson Technical Leads through risk assessment development, site visits and management training. Discussion included the importance of tick-resistant clothing and how FLS should make it as easy as possible for staff to access this. Clarification was given on when member of the public injuries are reportable under RIDDOR (work-related and taken directly to hospital for treatment). It was also queried why most mountain bike accidents were at Glentress, which in part was attributed to more proactive reporting from third parties on site. Whilst fire incidents reduced in Q1 it is anticipated these will have increased in Q2.

AP 12/08 Arrange a discussion on tick-resistant clothing at the next National Health, Safety & Wellbeing Committee.

AP 13/08 Review RIDDOR incidents relating to tick bites and FLS staff to assess the use of tick-resistant clothing.

AP 14/08 Provide an update on speeding in FLS vehicles to the ELT meeting scheduled of the 16 September.

6. AOB

There were no items raised under AOB.

The next ELT meeting will be held on 01 September 2026.