



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

21 July 2026

Attendees:

Kevin Quinlan, CEO (Chair) (KQ)
Graeme Prest, Director of Land Management and Regions (GP)
Graeme Hutton, Director of Net Zero (GH)
David Leven, Director of Commercial Development (DL)
Jo Ellis, Interim Director of Forestry (JE)
Brendan Callaghan, Interim Director of Operations (BC)
Adam Dearnley, Head of Finance (AD)
Julie Fitzpatrick, Head of People and OD (JF)

Apologies:

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

Others:

James Kyle, Head of Harvesting Support (JK)
Stephen Ramage, Head of Harvesting, Marketing and Sales (SR)
Callum Macinnes, Head of HR (CM)

Summary of Action Points (AP) from Meeting

Ref.:	Action:	Owner:	Target Date:
01/08	Undertake further discussion with relevant Regional Managers on the Direct Production fleet proposals	Brendan Callaghan / James Kyle / Stephen Ramage	16 September 2026
02/08	Return to ELT with outcome of regional discussions, proposed comms approach and final implementation position for the Direct Production fleet review	Brendan Callaghan / James Kyle / Stephen Ramage	16 September 2026
03/08	Rebase workforce planning (WFP) reports to align with the new directorate structure and provide revised reporting for next ELT review	Julie Fitzpatrick / Callum Macinnes	End of July 2026
04/08	Update and issue letters to Directors confirming headcount delegation authorities and associated accountability arrangements	Kevin Quinlan / WFP team	1 September 2026
05/08	Strengthen future workforce reporting to include succession planning, resilience and critical-post visibility	Julie Fitzpatrick / WFP team	1 October 2026

06/08	Update and issue the business planning mandate, reflecting final comments, including Business-As-Usual (BAU) content, scorecard alignment, assumptions and forward discussion points for ELT	Adam Dearnley / Michael Hymers	Early August 2026
07/08	Prepare a covering note / email summarising forward discussion points for ELT	Adam Dearnley	End of August 2026

1. New ELT Team Building & Changes in Directorate Responsibilities

The first part of the meeting was held as a Director-only session to help the newly formed ELT build relationships and begin aligning around shared priorities. A significant focus of the discussion was developing a common narrative for FLS, centred on stewardship of Scotland's public forest and land estate, delivering public value across people, nature, climate and the economy, maintaining a long-term perspective, and ensuring financial sustainability as an enabler rather than an end goal.

Directors agreed that FLS should be able to demonstrate strong public value outcomes while also improving its commercial and financial performance. There was broad consensus that financial sustainability has become a key organisational focus, but that it should be understood as supporting the long-term sustainability of both the estate and the organisation, rather than simply balancing the books.

The team also discussed the need to better articulate the value generated from public investment and explored the distinction between modernisation and transformation. Modernisation was seen as improving existing systems, reducing bureaucracy and making better use of digital tools, AI and accessible information, while transformation would involve more fundamental changes to business models, approaches to land ownership and management, operating models and partnership arrangements. The discussion concluded that ELT may need to consider its appetite for more radical transformation at a future session.

There was strong interest in using AI and digital technology to simplify guidance and procedures, improve access to information, reduce administrative burdens, strengthen business intelligence and decision-making, and increase productivity, with an emphasis on supporting staff rather than reducing headcount.

Directors also shared their individual priorities, which showed common themes around driving organisational change, improving efficiency and value, making better use of data and analytics, realising benefits from the Fit for the Future programme, building organisational capability, increasing staff engagement, strengthening capital investment planning, supporting renewable energy and visitor services opportunities, and maintaining a strong focus on delivery and accountability.

2. LUNCH BREAK

3. Review of Minutes

It was agreed that the minutes from the ELT meeting held on 7 July 2026 were a true and accurate reflection.

4. Review of Action Points

This item was rolled over to next ELT meeting.

5. ELT Forward Look

Various amendments were made to the ELT Forward Look schedule.

6. Direct Production Review Follow-Up

The majority of the formal business discussion centred on the Direct Production fleet review. The group considered performance against key indicators, including machine hours, productivity, unit cost and availability. Discussion also included a KPI summary by region and a financial comparison indicating different savings or costs by region when compared with contract alternatives.

The review demonstrated that the fleet had improved significantly since the 2024 improvement programme. Members noted improvements in utilisation, performance management, governance and cross-regional collaboration. The Direct Production Improvement Group and enhanced performance arrangements were recognised as having contributed positively.

The group recapped why FLS should retain an in-house fleet at all. The strategic case for retaining a fleet included resilience, ability to undertake complex or sensitive work, maintaining internal capability, benchmarking contractor costs, supporting skills and retaining operational understanding of forestry delivery. Members also discussed risks in the contractor market, including consolidation, reduced availability of smaller operators and the potential for increasing dependence on a smaller number of larger providers.

There was detailed discussion on whether cost should be the primary driver. Members noted that while cost effectiveness matters, the decision needed to balance cost alongside strategic issues such as resilience, capability, contractor market risk, staff impact and wider operational value. The discussion also recognised that comparisons between internal fleet costs and contractor costs are complex and not always directly like-for-like, because the work mix includes more difficult or sensitive sites.

The group considered regional positions in turn. It was agreed that further discussions are needed with Regional Managers before reverting with a recommended course of action for the 16 September ELT.

AP 01/08 - Undertake further discussion with relevant Regional Managers on the Direct Production fleet proposals.

AP 02/08 - Return to ELT with outcome of regional discussions, proposed comms approach and final implementation position for the Direct Production fleet review.

7. Workforce Planning Update

The ELT noted that, because of the transition to the new directorate structures, workforce reporting needed to be rebased. CM was asked to rebase the figures over the following two weeks and roll the revised figures into the report so that ELT could consider the updated position in the next cycle.

There was also discussion of letters to Directors confirming delegated authority and headcount accountability. It was agreed that these should be updated in line with the revised directorate structure.

The ELT discussed the need for workforce reporting to move beyond headcount compliance and provide better visibility of succession planning, resilience and critical posts. The right rhythm for this reporting was still to be considered, including whether some of the work should sit with Directorate Leadership Teams or Land Management leadership arrangements.

AP 03/08 - Rebase workforce planning (WFP) reports to align with the new directorate structure and provide revised reporting for next ELT review.

AP 04/08 - Update and issue letters to Directors confirming headcount delegation authorities and associated accountability arrangements.

AP 05/08 - Strengthen future workforce reporting to include succession planning, resilience and critical-post visibility.

8. FLS Rolling Three-Year Business Plan Follow-Up

AD introduced the business planning and financial planning mandate. Members had provided comments, and the view was that none of the comments prevented the mandate from being issued. Some issues were identified as wider discussion points for future ELT consideration rather than blockers to immediate progression.

The group discussed whether commercial or financial sustainability should be defined more explicitly in numerical terms, as well as how the planning mandate should link to the Fit for the Future portfolio, business case processes and scorecards. Pay and inflation assumptions were also discussed, with members agreeing that the best available forward estimate should be used.

A further discussion concerned whether business plans should include business-as-usual activity as well as change activity. Members agreed that business plans should not be limited to change programmes, but should also capture the totality of core work in an appropriate and proportionate way. It was noted that business-as-usual activity could be covered in a concise way rather than by listing every routine task.

The group agreed that the mandate should be updated to reflect the discussion and then issued, with a covering note or email capturing the forward issues for future ELT discussion.

AP 06/08 - Update and issue the business planning mandate, reflecting final comments, including BAU content, scorecard alignment, assumptions and forward discussion points for ELT.

AP 07/08 - Prepare a covering note / email summarising forward discussion points for ELT.

9. AOB

There were no items raised under AOB.

The next ELT meeting will be held on 17 August 2026.