



27 January 2026

Saughton House, E1 Spur Large meeting Room & Microsoft Teams

Approved

Present:

Brendan Callaghan (BC), Interim Chief Executive - Chair
Samantha Malpass (SM), Director of Policy and Practice
Zahid Deen (ZD), Director of Transformation and Corporate Services
Jason Hubert (JH) Interim Director of Operational Delivery
Jonathan Taylor (JT) Head of Corporate Affairs and Communications
Eleanor Ryan (ER), Non-Executive Advisor
Richard Morris (RM), Non-Executive Advisor
Helen McKay (HM), Chief Forester for Scotland
Phil Taylor (PT), Non-Executive Advisor
Gary Henderson (GH), Senior Finance Manager

In Attendance: (for specific agenda items)

Gareth Phillips (GP) Head of Forestry Development
Marelle Dalziel (MD) Head of People
Rachel Martin (RM) Head of Corporate Communications
Bob Frost (BF) Head of Forests for People
Karen Wilks (KW) Corporate Planning & Governance Manager,
Minutes

Apologies:

Paul Lowe (PL), Chief Executive Officer

1. Welcome, with declarations of interest and Minutes of previous meeting

- BC welcomed members to the meeting and introduced GP and BF to the Non-Executive Advisors
- No new declarations of interest made
- Members approved the minutes from SAG September 2025 with minor edits.
- The actions from the previous meeting to be discussed within the content of this meeting and agreement they could all be closed.



2. CEO Update

- BC provided an update on PL and advised discussions are taking place in preparation of his return.
- BC spoke to the summary presentation, highlighting the budget settlement and recent successful outcome for the forestry grants. BC explained that there has been a push to improve staff communications and this has been successful and well received by staff.
- Discussion around the visibility of pre-election dimension to discussions with Ministers and SpAd. ER noted the importance of preparation for the upcoming election and post-election and the importance of impartiality.
- BC discussed the ongoing work to support the SG's Public Sector Reform policies and internal discussions of how the organisation is preparing and approaching Public Sector Reform.
- Discussion was had around some of the larger woodland creation schemes such as Jahama Highland Estates that is associated with the smelter in Fort William. A very large native woodland scheme, which has a significant deer management strategy to support natural generation.

3. Legislative Updates

- BF provided members with an overview of Land Reform Act (2025) giving a recap of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 focusing around:
 - Large land holdings management and transfer of ownership (+ community engagement obligations)
 - Land and Communities Commissioner (effects of natural capital markets)
- GP provided members of the meeting with a run-through of the Natural Environment Bill, explained the journey of the bill and what it will mean for SF once passed, focusing on:
 - Section 23 Amendment - expanding who can be prosecuted for unauthorised felling
 - Sustainable Forest Management Amendment
- BF concluded the Legislative Updates with an outline of the Community Wealth Building Bill, noting the policies that come from the Bill for a Community Wealth Building statement and Community Wealth Building action plan.



4. Future Forestry Grant Scheme

- GP gave an overview of the FFGS work, reflecting how the current legislative framework ends in 2030, and the need to move from our current framework onto a new framework. The EB and other teams have undertaken work to develop a plan, which covers the main areas of:
 - Linking to the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024
 - Receiving Cabinet Secretary approval to proceed
 - Project Lead Recruitment
 - Workstreams to be scoped and implemented.
- ER queried if the Future Forestry Grant Scheme is part of the Improvement Programme or would sit separately? ZD explained that there will be foundational elements put in place from a technology perspective, once all elements are scoped out, a decision by the senior team will be made.

5. Woodland Creation – outlook and actions

- JH gave members a summary of Woodland Creation with a focus on:
 - Advice being prepared for the Cabinet Secretary on a forecast out turn for 25/26 and expectations for the year ahead indicate challenges, however significant efforts underway to engage stakeholders to get large schemes moving. Further adjustments, like extending the claim year to May will help the sector.
 - Query from NEA if the claim year extension would become a regular activity, the negative and positives of continued extensions.
 - Dates for the Todrig Judicial Review confirmed and resources targeted towards finalising preparation and support with our legal team, we hope to have an outcome in a couple of months.
- SM provided an update on the SG Climate Change Plan how the consultation has now closed and no expectation of any significant changes to the forestry chapter. Confirmation provided that we have the funds to deliver the target, with an aim to reach 12,000 hectares next year.
- SM gave a summary of the development of a Woodland Creation Delivery Plan. Good engagement already undertaken with Conservancies and other teams, Draft proposals expected in next few months.

6. People Survey Results

- MD discussed the paper; the consensus was the People Survey showed improvements and a good result for the organisation. The SAG expressed their thanks to Marelle and the team for the efforts in addressing many of the issues. Staff had seen an improvement in many areas such as planning, skills development, leadership and management. The overarching feeling is that the



SF Live 25 was pivotal to the positive results of the Staff Survey. Key points highlighted were:

- Members discussed the Staff Survey score on Learning and Development, noting that it had improved over recent surveys even though it has some way to go. ER suggested Learning and Development deep dive at a future SAF meeting and this was supported by JT.
- A discussion was had around well-being and challenges due to posts not being filled and measures put in place to mitigate future gaps in well-being provision and having good avenues of communication.
- ER discussed the challenges of career progression opportunities within SF with the organisation being relatively small.
- MD explained there is a focus on leadership training, learning and development which is hoped will address engagement and career development.
- ER highlighted section B46 in the survey "*I think it is safe to challenge the way things are done in my organisation*" noting that the figures may be an early warning indicator. Members explored possible reasons for the results.

7. Forestry Stakeholder Communication & Engagement

- RM took the members of the meeting through the power point presentation covering issues and what is being done. The group very much welcomed the discussion on how the organisation can make improvements to its stakeholder engagement. It was recognised that engagement is more than just a communications issue and cuts across all teams.
- There was agreement on the principal issues and challenges identified, but that work was needed on stakeholder mapping, prioritisation of issues and strategy to pull the work and resources together. RM agreed the areas needed to be addressed, and it required support from a range of teams.
- Work would be initiated on stakeholder mapping and SWOT exercises to help shape future strategy and priorities. RM supported this approach and offered to assist in its development.

8. AOB

Future look of SAG meetings

- JT noted that future SAG meetings could be structured differently, with a thematic or function area focus to the meetings, and to allow for a broader view of function areas and/or deeper dives on specific issues; the group were all in agreement. Also to look for opportunities for visits to other offices and forestry sites for meetings. The NEAs were in agreement this would be a good way of having a visual on topics and to have early sight on any potential dates.



Action/s:

- KW to make minor changes to minutes of SAG 30 September 2025 and publish.
- JT to make changes to future SAG meetings, and note any potential site visits and location for future SAG meetings.

Date of Next Meeting

10 March 2026 E1 spur, large meeting room

Meeting Name Action List

Actions points run sequentially from the start of the Calander year.

Ref	Meeting	Action	Lead / Staff Member	Target Date	Status
01/26	Jan 2026	KW to make minor changes to minutes of SAG 30 September 2025 and publish.	KW	Jan 2026	
02/26	Jan 2026	JT to make changes to future SAG meetings, and note any potential site visits and location for future SAG meetings	JT	March 2026	