Scottish Forestry
Coilltearachd na h-Alba

Executive Board Minutes

Executive Board Meeting held on Tuesday 14 August 2025

Saughton House, E1 Scottish Forestry Large Meeting Room and Microsoft Teams

Approved

Present:

- Zahid Deen, Director of Transformation and Corporate Services (ZD) - Chair
- Jonathan Taylor Head of Corporate Affairs and Communications (JT)
- Adam Dearnley, Director of Finance (AD)
- Jason Hubert, Head of Forest Sector Development (JH)
- Lyndsay Bisset, Grant Schemes Manager (LB)
- Helen McKay, Chief Forester for Scotland (HM)

In Attendance:

- Julie McClymont, Executive Office Assistant (JM) – Minutes

Apologies:

- Paul Lowe, Chief Executive (PL)
- Brendan Callaghan, Director of Operational Delivery (BC)

1. Welcome and declarations of interest (as relevant)

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1.2 No new declarations of interest were made.

2. Minutes and actions of previous meeting

2.1 The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

2.2 Actions arising from previous meetings:

The Executive Board noted the updates provided and they were taken as read.

- 25/27 – JT noted that a proposal on net zero responsibilities would be shared by correspondence from Bastian.
- 25/43 - ZD/JT noted to reinstate to open as this was still in progress and in hand.

3. Standing item: Woodland Creation update - ALL

3.1 LB provided an update on woodland creation, noting that the current year was in a transitional phase. The sector had largely delivered on previous commitments, and attention was now turning to new applications. Forecasts projected between 8,300 and 9,400 hectares to be approved under the Forestry Grant Scheme, with an additional 650 hectares from Forestry and Land Scotland , potentially reaching 10,000 hectares.

Key points included:

- A significant drop in smaller scale WC applications.
- The importance of pre-application data for improving pipeline accuracy.
- The potential need to extend the claims window again.
- The risk of under-delivery against Programme for Government (PFG) targets.

3.2 JT raised the need to manage expectations with ministers and suggested clearer reporting on commitments versus actual delivery. LB confirmed that while commitments might reach 11,000 hectares, actual delivery could fall short due to external factors.

3.3 The EB discussed the need for a more structured narrative around woodland creation, including a visual summary of influencing factors. It was agreed that the new woodland creation policy role could support this work.

3.4 JH updated the Board on the climate change plan, noting efforts to reduce the target from 28,000 to 18,000 hectares, with sector capacity and external factors (e.g., nursery droughts) limiting progress. Even with funding, other barriers remain.

- ➢ **Re-affirmed Action** BC/LB to produce a visual summary of key factors affecting woodland creation and their status *(already captured in last meeting action 25/30)*

- ➢ **Action** BC/Practice & Policy team to consider how the new woodland creation policy role will support narrative development.

- ➢ **Action** JT to consider how to highlight risks for both large and small woodland creation schemes in the Strategic Risk Register.

4. Standing Item: Finance Update

4.1 AD presented the finance update, noting a £1.1 million underspend in the first four months of the year, largely due to timing issues (e.g., delayed pay rises, project phasing). AD advised that no surplus is expected, and underspend should catch up later in the year. He also confirmed that the cost centre owners had been asked to review forecasts.

4.2 ZD suggested that some improvement programme decisions might need to be expedited in PL's absence to avoid underspending. AD agreed to support this where appropriate.

4.3 LB raised the need for formal confirmation to Douglas Petrie regarding Scottish Forestry's role in grant payments. AD and LB agreed to draft a response, with Brendan to sign off as Accountable Officer.

- ➢ **Action** - AD to support sign-off of improvement programme and other budget-related decisions in PL's absence.
- ➢ **Action -** LB to draft a summary and response for formalizing Scottish Forestry's role in grant payments, coordinating with AD and BC

5. Business Continuity Planning

5.1 JT introduced the business continuity update on behalf of Louise Maclean (LM). The plan had been developed following an audit and was now in a phase of ongoing review and testing.

Key developments included:

- Testing exercises to identify gaps.
- Plans to support localised continuity planning in conservancies and G&Rs.
- Recognition of the need for clearer roles and responsibilities.

5.2 LD/JH/HM raised points about:

- Need for greater focus on customers /service delivery in the policy.
- need for improved clarity in the role definitions.
- Leadership continuity during unexpected absences, suggesting a protocol for delegation.
- ➢ **Action** – JT to review and update the policy to reflect customer service and clearer responsibilities.
- ➢ **Action** - A follow-up discussion to be held with LD and LM to unpack delivery-related concerns.

- **Action** - JT to explore best practices for leadership continuity and involve HR in the discussion**.**

6. Executive Board Planning & Forward Look

6.1 ZD led a discussion on strategic planning. JT outlined the need for a forward-looking approach to business planning, particularly in light of public sector reform, budget pressures, and workforce challenges.

6.2 The EB discussed:

- The need of a more structured, multi-year business planning.
- The importance of the EB leadership in shaping organisational direction and long-term business planning – and to support this, the value of facilitated sessions to explore scenarios and dependencies.
- The potential role of external assistance in futures work and the link to organisational design review.

6.3 It was agreed that Jonathan would develop a proposal for a strategic planning session, including timing, facilitation, and integration with governance structures. The EB also discussed how it could draw in the Strategic Advisory Group to support this area.

- **Action -** JT to develop a proposal for a strategic planning session, including timing and facilitation
- **Action** - JT to clarify ownership and format of the business plan**.**
- **Action** - JT to consider how to better utilise the Strategic Advisory Group.

7. Stakeholder Management

JT noted the initial internal audit findings on the organisation's approach to stakeholder engagement, which highlights the importance and inconsistencies in some stakeholder engagement practices.

- **Action -** EB to use audit findings to inform a strategic review of stakeholder engagement.
- **Action –** JT/ZD to clarify Scottish Forestry's role (regulator vs facilitator) in external communications.

8. AOB

Operational Standards

LB highlighted reputational risks from declining operational standards and called for leadership in addressing these.

- **Action** - LB to consider how to escalate the issue for formal discussion (e.g., at EB or SOG).

Pay Award and Union Communications

LB flagged rising union frustration over the lack of a pay award.

Adam confirmed that joint communications were being prepared**.**

- **Action** - AD to finalise and issue joint communications regarding pay award concerns.

Corporate Sustainability

JT noted that BA will be circulating a proposal to EB members regarding roles and responsibilities for net zero work.

All Staff Event

JT noted that feedback from the session has been positive a short evaluation report on the all-staff event will be circulated. A formal proposal will be presented to the EB, with the expectation that another event will be held in the future.

Home Equipment Policy

AD announced a working group will be set up to develop a home equipment policy.

Meeting closed.

Next meeting

Tues 16 October 2025 10:00

Saughton House E1 Spur Large meeting room & Microsoft Teams.

Executive Board Actions from the Meeting.

Ref	Meeting	Action	Lead / Staff Member	Target Date	Status
25/44	Aug 2025	Woodland Creation – BC/P&P team to consider how the new woodland creation policy role will support narrative development	BC/P&P Team	Sept 2025	New
25/45	Aug 2025	Woodland Creation - JT to highlight risks for both large and small woodland creation schemes in the Strategic Risk Register	JT	Sept 2025	New
25/46	Aug 2025	Finance - AD to support sign-off of improvement programme and other budget-related decisions in PL's absence.	AD	ongoing	New
25/47	Aug 2025	Finance - LB to draft a summary and response for formalizing Scottish Forestry's role in grant payments, coordinating with AD/ BC	LB	Sept 2025	New
25/48	Aug 2025	Business Continuity Planning - JT to review and update the policy to reflect customer service and clearer responsibilities	JT	Sept 2025	New
25/49	Aug 2025	Business Continuity Planning – A follow-up discussion to be held with LD and LM to unpack delivery-related concerns	JT	Sept 2025	New
25/50	Aug 2025	Leadership Continuity - JT to explore best practices for leadership continuity and involve HR in the discussion	JT	Sept 2025	New
25/51	Aug 2025	Executive Board Planning - JT to develop a proposal for a strategic planning session, including timing and facilitation (half day).	JT	Sept 2025	New
25/52	Aug 2025	Executive Board Planning - JT to clarify ownership and format of the business plan.	JT	Sept 2025	New
25/53	Aug 2025	Executive Board Planning - JT to consider how to better utilise the Strategic Advisory Group.	JT	Sept 2025	New
25/54	Aug 2025	Stakeholder Management - EB to use audit findings to inform a strategic review of stakeholder engagement.	EB	Sept 2025	New
25/55	Aug 2025	Stakeholder Management - JT to clarify Scottish Forestry's role (regulator vs facilitator) in external communications	JT	Sept 2025	New

25/56	Aug 2025	Operational Standards - LB to consider how to escalate the issue for formal discussion (e.g., at EB or SOG).	LB	Sept 2025	New
25/57	Aug 2025	Pay Award and Unions - AD to finalise and issue joint communications regarding pay award concerns.	AD	Sept 2025	New