



## Commissioners Board Meeting

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February 09:30am

An Lochran, Inverness

Rooms 0.01, 0.02, 0.03

### Agenda

Item no.	Item	Paper no.	Action	Lead
1	Welcome/Apologies	-	-	Michael Russell
2	Declarations of Interest	-	-	All
3	Minutes of the previous meeting	1	For Agreement	All
4	Commissioner Updates	-	For Discussion	All
5	Quarterly Reports Annex A: Delivery Progress Annex B: Finance Annex C: Risk Management Annex D: Communications Annex E: Good Practice Casework	2	For Discussion	Hamish Trench
6	26/27 Business Planning Annex: Draft Business Plan 26/27	3	For Agreement	Hamish Trench
7	Draft Advice on Tax	4	For Agreement	Kathie Pollard

<b>8</b>	Update on Commitment to Responsible Land Ownership (CORLA)	5	For Agreement	Sarah Madden
<b>9</b>	AOB	-	-	All



## Minute of the meeting of the Scottish Land Commissioners held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026 Online

- **Commissioners present:** Michael Russell (Chair), Calum MacLeod, Craig MacKenzie, Deb Roberts, Lucy Beattie, Rob Black
- **In attendance:** Hamish Trench, Nikki Nagler, Sarah Madden, Kayleigh Wilson, James MacKessack-Leitch, Scarlett Macfarlane (Scottish Land Commission), Sian Ledger (Scottish Government)
- **Apologies:** Katherine Pollard
- **Declarations of interest:** None

### 1. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> December were agreed as true and accurate.

### 2. ScotLand Futures: Draft Output for Publication

Michael welcomed Sian from SG land reform policy team to the meeting as an observer as well as all SLC staff and commissioners.

Michael asked for commissioner feedback on the ScotLand Futures document. He highlighted feedback received from sponsor team which had been circulated for the board to consider. The discussion sought first to cover overall views on the draft before moving into comments on specific sections.

Commissioners agreed that the document is strong and coherent and articulates the right direction of travel. The board agreed the three key priorities provide a good structure.

The board considered carefully the way the evidence base is presented, noting that the combination of qualitative information from the public survey and the Commission's existing body of research and analysis provides a sound basis for what is set out, but that this should be expressed more clearly.

Commissioners agreed the response level of 1200 to the public survey provides a strong qualitative insight, but that it is also important to acknowledge that responses were not fully representative across the demography of Scotland.

Commissioners asked that greater reference to the role of the new Land Reform Act is made in relevant sections, and stronger reference to the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement would be helpful.

The board discussed how best the question of residency should be addressed in the document. Commissioners support the drafting that proposes the role of residency

requirements should be considered but note the question of tax residency would not address the underlying rationale for looking at residency, which is based on local presence, access to decision making and connection to place. The board asked that this section be reviewed.

Commissioners agreed that the document should not try to provide a detailed blueprint, but it should offer the direction of travel for a coherent and integrated programme of land reform. In doing so, it can acknowledge where there is nuance and uncertainty, where further work is needed, and act as a call for others to engage in further development.

Hamish briefed the board on feedback from sponsor team, noting that the key issues raised had been discussed through Commissioners comments and discussion so far. He also provided further context to consider on human rights. The board discussed the interaction of property rights with economic, social and cultural rights, noting the current difference in legal standing, and government's intention through a new human rights bill to strengthen the standing of economic, social and cultural rights.

Commissioners offered further comments on specific sections where minor changes to provide greater clarity would be helpful. They asked that the overall message on the need for leadership and a co-ordinated programme is emphasised in the conclusion, and supported a strong message on the basic need to reform the land data system as a foundation for much of what is needed.

Subject to changes being made to reflect the key issues discussed, the board agreed to proceed to publication. It was agreed that the chair and CEO will agree a revised version which will be provided to Commissioners for any final feedback. Hamish confirmed this will be provided by the end of the month and will require a short turn around for any final comments.

<b>Action 260122.01</b>	Hamish to co-ordinate final draft, to be agreed with Michael and circulated to Commissioners by end of January
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<b>Action 260122.02</b>	Commissioners to provide any final comments or feedback on revised draft by return
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Michael asked Scarlett to provide an update on the ScotLand Futures event due to take place in Perth on Wed 25<sup>th</sup> Feb. Scarlett noted we have good participation with confirmed replies from 38 stakeholder contacts. Scarlett will share the agenda and attendee list with commissioners in advance of the event. Scarlett asked commissioners to arrive for 12pm with the event due to commence at 12:30pm.

<b>Action 260122.03</b>	Scarlett to send agenda and attendee list in advance of the ScotLand Futures event on Wed 25 <sup>th</sup> Feb
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### **3. AOB**

Michael confirmed professional development reviews are arranged with commissioners.

Michael reminded commissioners to read over the email Hamish circulated this week regarding the pre-election period guidance.

Hamish spoke about the March board meeting, seeking confirmation that Commissioners are available for a potential visit with overnight.

**Date of next meeting:**

**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February 9:30am**

**An Lochran, Inverness**



## Commissioners Meeting 5 February 2026

### Inverness Paper No. 2 Quarterly Report

<b>Purpose</b>	To review progress over Quarter 3
<b>Previous board papers</b>	Quarterly Report 1 October 2025
<b>Action required</b>	For discussion

## 1. Background

The quarterly reports provide oversight of progress against the business plan over the year. This report covers the third quarter of the 25/26 business plan (Oct-Dec).

## 2. KPI assessment

KPI MEASUREMENT	TARGET	Progress
<b>DELIVERY</b>		
% of planned outputs in annual business plans delivered	90%	On track: 85%
		Not started/work pending: 10%
		Risk of delay or changed: 5%
		See ANNEX A
<b>STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS</b>		
Feedback as reported through perceptions audits	Maintain or increase perceived impact	Perceptions audit commissioned Qtr 4
<b>STAFF SATISFACTION</b>		
% reported staff satisfaction in staff surveys	Increase	June 25: 64% extremely or relatively satisfied with the Commission as a place to work (cf 80% Oct 24); Next survey reporting due Feb 26
<b>FINANCE</b>		
End of year out-turn	Within 2% of total allocated budget	See ANNEX B

## 3. Progress Reports

The report comprises five annexes:

## **A: Delivery Progress**

Annex A sets out the RAG assessment and progress commentary against the Business Plan. Highlights in Quarter 3 include:

- Publication of ScotLand Futures ‘What we Heard’ and ‘Voices from Scotland’;
- Publication of rural land market data report;
- Publication of research on international experience in land valuation for taxation;
- Completion of 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts;
- Engagement with Tenant Farming Advisory Forum on future priorities and refreshed operating model.

## **B: Finance**

Annex B provides a summary of our current budget position which is on-track to be within a 2% underspend.

## **C: Risk Management**

Annex C provides the strategic risk register. This includes new and amended risks reflecting changes agreed at the previous ARC and board meetings.

## **D: Communications**

Annex D provides an overview of communications in Quarter 3 and a look ahead.

## **E: Good Practice Casework**

Annex E summarises good practice casework undertaken during Quarter 3.

## **4. Staffing**

Sarah Madden joined as Head of Practice and Advice on 6 October.

In December we reached agreement with the union on the staff pay award for 2025-27 and this has now been implemented.

The Commission held an externally facilitated two-day training event for all staff on 27/28 January. This focused on working effectively as a team, including using the ‘Insights’ tool which helps individuals understand themselves and others to build productive ways of working.

## **5. Tenant Farming Commissioner**

Following discussions with sponsor team and the Cabinet Secretary we have formally requested that the terms of the TFC’s appointment be amended to increase the available number of days from 8 to 12 per month. This reflects a realistic assessment of the changing demands of the role, with increasing volume and complexity of casework and additional responsibilities added by the new Land Reform Act.

## **6. Scottish budget**

The draft Scottish budget was published on 13 February and sets out £1.81M grant-in-aid to the Commission, a 7.7% increase on 2025/26 in recognition of the initial costs associated implementation of the Land Reform Act.

The budget document acknowledges the focus for Scottish Government on implementing the new Act. The tax policy section of the budget also refers to the Commission's current tax work, our interim report published last year and longer-term consideration of land and property tax reforms in the context of wealth taxation.

## **7. Scottish Election Guidance**

The official pre-election period starts on 26 March. The Scottish Government's guidance for public bodies has been circulated to all Commissioners and staff.

*Hamish Trench*

*Chief Executive*

ANNEX A

PROGRESS REPORT ON 2025/26 BUSINESS PLAN DELIVERY – Qtr3			
RAG Rating:	Delivery on track	Not started/work pending	Risk of delay or changed
Priority	2025/26 Planned Activity	Progress Commentary	RAG
<b>1. Advising on reforms to law, policy &amp; practice</b>			
<b>1.1 Land Reform Bill</b>	- Provide advice and evidence as required to inform Stages 2 and 3 of Parliamentary consideration	Parliamentary process completed and Land Reform Act in place.	
	- Develop advice to inform plans for secondary legislation and implementation	Liaison with SG on implementation timetable; Key topics for 26/27 business plan identified	
	- Plan for the financial, governance and delivery implications of anticipated new functions for the Commission	Initial board discussion and team discussions held to scope programme. Pending clarity on timetable.	
<b>1.2 A Land Reformed Scotland</b>	- Engage a wide range of voices on what a land reformed Scotland looks like	ScotLand Futures launched May; Public survey, invited contributions, public meetings completed. 'What We Heard' and 'Voices from Scotland' published Nov.	
	- Advise on the key components for a future programme of reforms	On track for publication of report setting out next steps for land reform in Feb.	
<b>1.3 Diverse Ownership and Governance</b>	- Develop policy advice drawing together recommendations to support more diverse land governance approaches	Superceded - Policy advice reflected in ScotLand Futures output, not producing separate output.	
	- Collaborate with the Crofting Commission in its work on the future of crofting	Regular liaison with Crofting Commission. Potential role of crofting included within ScotLand Futures output.	

<b>1.4 Community Land Ownership</b>	- Convene the Community Land Leadership Group to further develop community land ownership	CLLG meetings scheduled; Qtr 3 meeting focused on CWB bill and key themes for our advice work.	
	- Convene a Reference Group to support and inform Scottish Government's Review of Community Rights to Buy	CTRB Reference Group in place – considered draft consultation document in May and consultation responses in Dec;	
	- Advise on Community Rights to Buy, financing community land acquisitions and the Scottish Land Fund	SLC responded to CRTB consultation Qtr 2. Wider policy advice scheduled Qtr 4 due for publication in Qtr 1 26/27	
	- Continue collaboration with Crown Estate Scotland on the community land accelerator initiative and share learning	CES collaboration ended following CES investment committee decision, lessons learned report to be provided.	
	- Support the KLTR Ownerless Property Transfer Scheme through panel membership and advice	Supporting KLTR OPTS panel and proactive approach to ownerless VDL. DS on secondment to KLTR for 12 months	
<b>1.5 Tax Reforms</b>	- Complete Phase 1 research and initial advice on the role of tax in relation to land	Phase 1 engagement completed and interim report published Oct. Research on international practice in land values in the tax system published Sept.	
	- Complete Phase 2 providing more detailed advice on options for reforms	Phase 2 research and engagement underway, publication of advice planned for March.	
<b>1.6 Public Land Leadership</b>	- Respond to opportunities to collaborate with public land-owning bodies	Engagement with SG on role of public bodies in housing land supply and engagement in public land senior leaders group.	
	- Advise on the longer-term strategic opportunity of public land ownership	Policy advice to be considered through community ownership advice and ScotLand Futures.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide advice to inform Scottish Government's Review of Compulsory Purchase Orders</li> </ul>	Participated in SG workshop on valuation issues in CPO Review. Responded to SG consultation Qtr 3	
<b>1.7 Research and Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement a refreshed research strategy that builds collaboration and seeks to maximise value for money, including co-ordination with the Scottish Government Strategic Research Programme</li> </ul>	Research strategy agreed and published. Engagement on research collaboration with RESAS, SRUC, UHI. RESAS consultation on 2027-32 Strategic Research programme	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyse and publish the annual insights and data reports on the rural land market</li> </ul>	Rural Land Market Insights Report published June. Panel at RHS. Rural Land Market Data Report published Dec Next Insights Report underway in Qtr 4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborate with research institutions on advice to improve and integrate data on land ownership, use and value</li> </ul>	Engagement on research collaboration with RESAS, SRUC, UHI. SEFARI Fellowship underway.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support joint PhD opportunities with university partners</li> </ul>	University of Edinburgh PhD partnership ongoing.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offer the annual student award</li> </ul>	Not being progressed due to capacity/prioritisation	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participate in the Community Land Academic Network</li> </ul>	Ongoing.	
	<b>2. Supporting practical implementation of LRRS</b>		
<b>2.1 Good practice in land ownership, use and management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Champion and share good practice in implementing the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement</li> </ul>	Attended events to promote good practice.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Refresh and update the Land Rights and Responsibilities Protocols</li> </ul>	Designed draft protocols complete, due for publication end Jan	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build relationships and collaborate with industry bodies to deliver training for land agents and other professionals to promote high standards in land rights and responsibilities.</li> </ul>	Q4 Land agents events planned – 6 Feb - Highland and Northern Land Agents event 26 Feb – Stirling Land Agents event Webinar planning	

	- Provide individual advice and guidance to support the development of good practice	32 cases delivered in Q3.	
	- Consider how standards for leadership in good practice are further developed	Commitment to Responsible Land Ownership pilot phase progressing, looking ahead to pilot conclusion, evaluation and next steps	
	- Deliver casework to support good practice and promote good relations between landowners and communities	32 cases delivered in Q3.	
	- Regularly review casework to identify learning for policy and practice	Casework review meetings scheduled regularly.	
	- Collaborate with core industry bodies to collectively promote and support good practice	Partnership working on community benefits and promotion of wider good practice in place. Good Practice Advisory Group meeting took place in November.	
	- Building on the evaluation of the Good Practice Programme, consider how the programme could be expanded to extend impact	Approach agreed with Commissioners. Further development to tie in with business and financial planning.	
<b>2.2 Community benefits from land and natural capital</b>	- Convene the Community Benefit Advisory Group to provide leadership and coordination in delivering community benefits from land	Regular meetings held and scheduled	
	- Participate in the steering group for the Natural Capital and Community Benefits Partnership Group	Chairing Partnership and holding regular meetings.	
	- Support development of community benefits from nature finance in the Cairngorms National Park through project post	Three projects actively being supported as well as wider advice being delivered.	
<b>3. Tenant Farming</b>			
<b>3.1 Codes of Practice, Guidance and Casework</b>	- Publish new Codes and Guidance as required	New Codes and Guidance will be required by the Land Reform Act in 26/27 – timetable tbc	
	- Extend and promote the mediation scheme	This has been undertaken but further opportunities have been highlighted through the LRB with a consultation proposed for binding	

		arbitration which may allow the inclusion of other dispute resolution measures.	
	- Respond to casework and report on patterns in advice	Ongoing. High volume of casework demands continuing.	
<b>3.2 Relinquishment and Assignment of Agricultural Tenancies</b>	- Ensure statutory requirements to appoint a valuer are fulfilled	Ongoing	
	- Update process and guidance as appropriate	There is a requirement to update the guidance to address issues with legislative gaps. This has been drafted and needs to be considered by TFAF before progressing further.	
<b>3.3 Tenant Farming Advisory Forum</b>	- Convene regular Forum meetings to support leadership and collaboration	TFAF has been meeting regularly, with a particular focus on Part 2 of the Land Reform bill. Now seeking to shift agenda to forward focus on strengthening sector. Draft Charter discussed with members.	
<b>3.4 Land Reform Bill Part 2</b>	- Provide advice on the development and implementation of tenant farming reforms in Part 2 of the Land Reform Bill	Extensive advice provided through year, Act now in place. Further advice on implementation will be required in next financial year.	
<b>4. Communications and Engagement</b>			
<b>4.1 Public Engagement</b>	- Deliver a refreshed programme of public engagement	Scotland Futures and stakeholder engagement session due to be delivered in Q4 to bring campaign to a close and set the direction of the next strategic plan.	
	- Implement our Gaelic Language Plan	Discussion underway to deliver a Gaelic awareness session to staff in 25/26/.	
	- Renew our website to improve accessibility and functionality	Work on website underway, with website to be launched in Q4.	
<b>4.2 Communications &amp; Events</b>	- Deliver a programme of events to support our key priorities	On track, see comms report for full details.	
	- Maximise use of our existing body of research and recommendations	ScotLand Futures Land Agenda due to be published in Q4. Rural land market data report recently published.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use digital marketing to drive engagement and inform conversation amongst stakeholders</li> </ul>	Delivery of SLC bi-monthly newsletter and TFC newsletter.	
<b>4.3 Convening Stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Convene established groups and keep under review opportunities to convene others to support leadership and collaboration</li> </ul>	CLLG, CRTB Reference Group, GP Advisory Group, TFAF and Community Benefits Advisory Group in regular meeting cycles	
<b>5. Being an effective organisation</b>			
<b>5.1 Business and financial planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deliver improved financial and project reporting</li> </ul>	Implementation of new financial software to improve financial reporting. New project management process in place.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support effective audit scrutiny and assurance</li> </ul>	External audit completed, no material issues raised.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deliver information and data management obligations including development of a new Records Management Scheme</li> </ul>	In progress.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keep under review potential organisational implications of land reform bill</li> </ul>	Ongoing – considering implications for 26/27 budget.	
<b>5.2 Organisational development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deliver a training and development plan</li> </ul>	Annual plan implemented/	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keep HR policies under rolling review</li> </ul>	Ongoing.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Run bi-annual staff surveys and regular engagement through Staff Engagement Forum</li> </ul>	Staff survey run in Q4, results currently in analysis.	
<b>5.3 Climate action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deliver against a refreshed climate action plan</li> </ul>	Ongoing.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve climate action reporting to Management Team and Board</li> </ul>	Ongoing.	
<b>5.4 Risk management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undertake regular strategic and organisational risk reviews</li> </ul>	Ongoing, quarterly corporate risk reviews and strategic risk review with ARC and Board.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support effective risk scrutiny and interrogation by Audit and Risk Committee</li> </ul>	Ongoing.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure cyber security including maintaining Cyber essentials plus accreditation</li> </ul>	Completed. Accreditation now achieved.	



Scottish Land Commission  
Coimisean Fearainn na h-Alba

GIA	1,680,000.00
Expected Other Income	134,411.00
Allocated	1,812,954.16
Under / (Over) Budget	1,456.84

**Expected Other Income (already committed)**

23,100.00	SG recharge for tax research
58,512.00	Expected CNPA recharge for CBO (cost sits in salaries)
52,799.00	DS salary recharge (cost sits in salaries)

134,411.00

	Allocated Budget	Committed	Spent
1. Advising on reforms to law, policy and practice	62,183.33	60,944.00	36,046.66
2. Supporting practical implementation of Scotland's Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement	16,500.00	13,414.00	11,911.10
3. Promoting good relations between agricultural landlords and tenants through the functions of the Tenant Farming Commissioner	5,100.00	1,266.00	66.00
4. Engaging people in why land matters and how they can be involved	101,702.20	95,613.96	74,758.35
5. Underpinned by sound corporate governance and organisational development	241,425.00	252,718.79	162,509.52
Staffing	1,269,895.36	1,248,199.89	1,035,655.49
Staffing Travel & Subsistence	22,000.00	17,331.14	16,839.50
Commissioners	67,148.27	64,272.87	52,000.70
Commissioners Travel & Subsistence	12,500.00	7,997.04	7,997.04
	<u>1,798,454.16</u>	<u>1,761,757.69</u>	<u>1,397,784.36</u>

*CBO T&S sit here - to be recharged*

*Includes TFC legal*

*CBO Salary costs sit here - to be recharged*

Risk ID	Risk Description	GROSS RISK			Controls in Place	Control Effectiveness	NET RISK			Risk Movement	Risk Appetite	Action Taken/Planned	Target Risk	Target Review Date	Risk Owner	
		Untreated Impact	Untreated Likelihood	Untreated Risk Score			Current Impact	Current Likelihood	Current Risk Score							
<b>VISION: Fair inclusive and productive system of ownership management and use of land that delivers greater benefit for all the people of Scotland</b>																
<b>RISK CATEGORY: DELIVERY</b>																
1	Risk that catastrophic loss of systems resulting in the Commission not being able to operate as an organisation	5	4	20	Business continuity plan in place, cloud based IT system accessible outside of the office environment, cyber essentials plus accreditation, improved cyber security for log in to the network.	Effective	5	1	5	→	Stable	Averse	Multi factor authentication implemented for network access. Cyber security requirements embedded in retendered IT service. Potential increase in cyber threats due to current political environment. Secured continued Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation for 2025. Transfer of finance and accounting software completed April 25 with back-up in place.	5	Mar-26	Head of Communications and Corporate services
2	Risk that Land Reform Bill creates increased obligations without sufficient resource leading to adverse impacts on delivery	4	4	16	Engagement with sponsor team on implications; anticipating resource requirements, maintaining flexibility in medium term financial planning	Partial	3	3	12	→	Stable	Minimalist	Initial estimates of financial implications of new measures as drafted provided to sponsor team Oct 24. Reviewed as Bill amended. Projected costs provided for 26/27 budget planning. Initial provision in 26/27. Regular engagement with sponsor team given significant uncertainty about implementation timetable at this stage.	4	Sep-26	CEO
3	Risk that public finance constraints mean the Commission is unable to deliver planned work and/or is unable to react quickly to changes in priorities, reducing its effectiveness	4	4	16	Maintain team approach to delivery enabling staff to draw on capacity and expertise across the team as required; Quarterly progress reporting to Board	Effective	4	3	12	→	Stable	Cautious	25/26 Business Plan sets focused priorities matched with staff resource. 26/27 planning shows additional resource needs on specific business areas and risk of LR implementation being insufficiently funded. Scottish draft budget provides 7.7% increase in GIA.	6	Mar-26	CEO
<b>RISK CATEGORY: REPUTATIONAL</b>																
4 NEW	Risk that appointment of a Land & Communities Commissioner creates unexpected governance or operational implications	4	4	12	Engagement with sponsor team on appointment process; business planning to include operational preparations.	Partial	3	3	9	↑	Increasing	Cautious	Appointment anticipated 27/28. 26/27 work to plan operational approach and identify governance implications.	4	Sep-26	CEO
5 NEW	Risk that delays to, or lack of clarity in expectations of implementation of the Land Reform Bill impacts the Commission's reputation and stakeholder relationships	4	3	12	Engagement with sponsor team on planned timetable and SLC role	Partial	3	2	6	↑	Increasing	Cautious	Regular engagement with sponsor team and stakeholders to understand the dynamic, set realistic expectations and communicate SLC's role clearly.	4	Sep-26	CEO
6	Emerging issues result in reactive policy making, and relationship management.	5	4	20	Proactive horizon scanning to anticipate future issues, work closely with stakeholders and put internal processes and measures in place for handling.	Partial	3	3	9	→	Stable	Cautious	Close engagement with stakeholders and sponsor team to identify potential issues in advance and take action. Clear case handling and internal communications procedures. Land Reform Bill creates new dynamics but clarity of SLC focus agreed with board. Scotland Futures creates framing for future policy priorities.	3	Mar-26	CEO
7	AMENDED Risk that the land reform policy narrative is seen as narrow or disconnected from wider public and government ambitions	4	3	12	Develop strong narrative between role of land in economic recovery and delivering wellbeing economy, climate action, and reducing inequalities. Implement strategic communications plan, including maintaining strong digital and media presence; regular performance monitoring	Effective	2	2	4	↓	Decreasing	Open	Refreshed Programme of Work published April 25. Improved regular newsletters provide regular overview of Commission's work. Refreshed website to launch Mar 26. Scotland Futures outputs provide framing for narrative and future priorities.	2	Mar-26	Head of Communications and Corporate services
8	Risk that failure to maintain effective relationships with key stakeholders impacts on our ability to deliver and constrains opportunities for collaboration.	5	4	20	All relevant stakeholders are identified and a clear engagement strategy put in place, Commission presence at key stakeholder events, regular liaison meetings with stakeholders and periodic review of stakeholder analysis	Effective	2	2	4	→	Stable	Open	Wide stakeholder engagement across policy, good practice and tenant farming work. Structured engagement through standing advisory groups, bilateral stakeholder engagement via Commissioners and staff. Dynamics of land reform bill actively managed via open advice and engagement.	4	Mar-26	CEO
9	Risk that insufficient relationships across Scottish Government and Parliament result in reduced impact and value from the Commission's work	5	4	20	Ensure regular engagement between the Commission Chair and the Minister, and between the Tenant Farming Commissioner and Minister. Ensure regular engagement between the CEO and the SG Sponsor and Policy Teams.	Effective	2	2	4	↑	Increasing	Open	Regular sponsorship & land reform team liaison in place. Chair & CEO liaison with DG. Engagement in other formal SG structures eg EELG, Planning Advisory Group. Annual board meetings with Cab Sec. Election creates new uncertainties. Plan engagement with new Ministers post-election	4	Sep-26	CEO
<b>RISK CATEGORY: COMPLIANCE</b>																
10	Failure to have in place or adhere to statutory or non-statutory corporate governance policies or procedures.	4	4	16	Ensure internal control system in place; Work to the production timetable for completion of all documents, and disseminate widely to ensure maximum awareness.	Effective	2	1	2	→	Stable	Minimalist	Using checklist of assurance controls; 25/26 internal audit plan agreed; 24/25 year-end and annual report preparation on schedule; staff responsibilities for data, information, climate reporting and other duties identified.	1	Mar-26	CEO
11	The Commission fails to deliver to its allocated budget, resulting in reputational, administrative and governance failures.	5	4	20	Corporate and Business plan set appropriate budget allocations. Work to specified monitoring cycles, reporting requirements, and guidelines set out in the SPFM. Ensure correct adherence to authorisation procedures and delegated limits. Close monitoring of spend and profiled spend.	Effective	2	2	4	→	Stable	Averse	Improvements to budget monitoring and reporting made in 24/25. Monthly MT and board monitoring in place. Transfer to new finance software from 1st April completed to reduce manual data input and further improve consistency and format of reporting. Internal audit review of financial process undertaken 24/25. Year end return on target.	1	Mar-26	CEO
<b>RISK CATEGORY: STAFFING</b>																
12	Staff turnover or absence due to illness etc resulting in loss of capacity for critical elements of business systems and delivery.	5	4	20	Ensure good internal communication and provision of desk instructions for business critical functions. Resilience planning to ensure backup capability within staff team. Continuously seek to improve the working environment by monitoring and improving staff satisfaction and absence levels.	Partial	3	2	6	→	Stable	Cautious	Ongoing absence monitoring in place. Resilience improvements in corporate team implemented. Desk instructions for critical tasks in place. Policy to review all vacancies at board level. Recruitment for vacancies in business support and research successfully completed.	4	Mar-26	Head of Communications and Corporate services
13	AMENDED Risk that staff wellbeing is adversely impacted by changes in priorities or insufficient prioritisation.	5	4	20	Open and transparent - hold regular staff meetings, keep all staff informed of big picture direction, changes in priorities/focus. Overview through management team. Strong internal comms and leadership from managers to ensure wellbeing of staff and responsive ways of working.	Effective	2	3	6	→	Stable	Cautious	Regular staff surveys and action plan in place. Training and development plan in place. Business Plan prioritisation matched to resource capacity. Monthly all staff meetings and individual line management meetings in place. Mental health awareness training undertaken by all line managers March 25.	3	Mar-26	Head of Communications and Corporate services

# COMMUNICATIONS QUARTERLY REPORT

Q3: OCTOBER 2025 - DECEMBER 2025



This quarter saw a mixed but generally positive picture across communications and engagement activity. Strong performance in press and social media helped maintain visibility and momentum, while seasonal factors and technical issues affected website traffic. Overall activity remains well aligned with our annual targets.

Press coverage increased significantly compared with the previous quarter, more than doubling from 42 to 86 articles. There was a marked rise in national and print coverage, driven primarily by reaction to the Land Reform Bill, alongside continued coverage of the rural land market report and ScotLand Futures.

Social media performance remained strong. While Facebook engagement settled back to more typical levels following earlier campaign activity, it continued to perform well above KPI, with an average engagement rate of 9.65 this quarter. On LinkedIn, we came within one follower of our year-end target, closing the quarter on 4,751 followers against a goal of 4,752, reflecting a 20% increase and placing us firmly on track to meet the target.

Email engagement remained healthy. Two mailouts were issued this quarter, with open and click-through rates slightly lower than the previous quarter but still above target benchmarks. Subscriber growth returned to more typical levels, with 17 new sign-ups following the significant increase seen last quarter when sign-up was integrated into the ScotLand Futures survey.

Website traffic continued to decline during the quarter, likely influenced by the Christmas and New Year period, which is typically the lowest point for web activity. Traffic was also affected by a small number of hosting-related outages. Development of the new website has continued, and we remain on track to launch by the end of Q4.

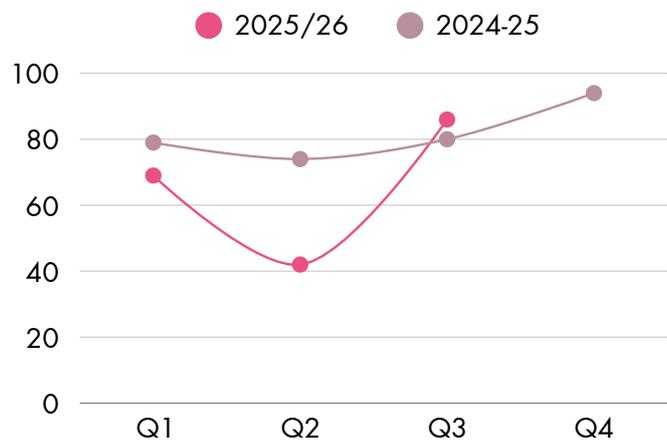
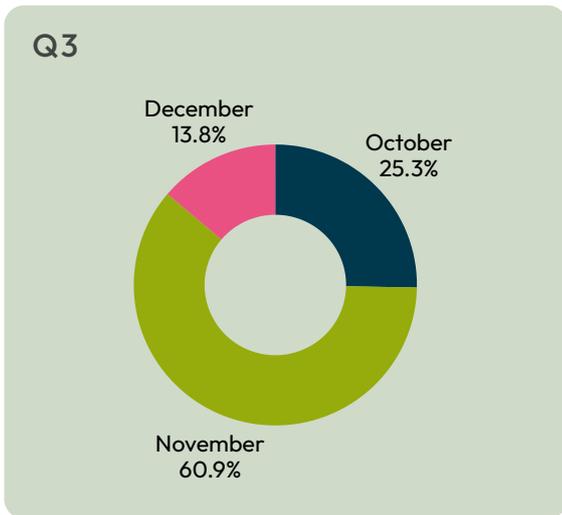
Month	Event/Activity
January	Refreshed protocols
February	Tenant Farming and Commission Newsletters
February	ScotLand Futures policy agenda
February	Interim tax findings
February	ScotLand Futures event
March	Website launch
March	Pre-election period starts

# PRESS COVERAGE

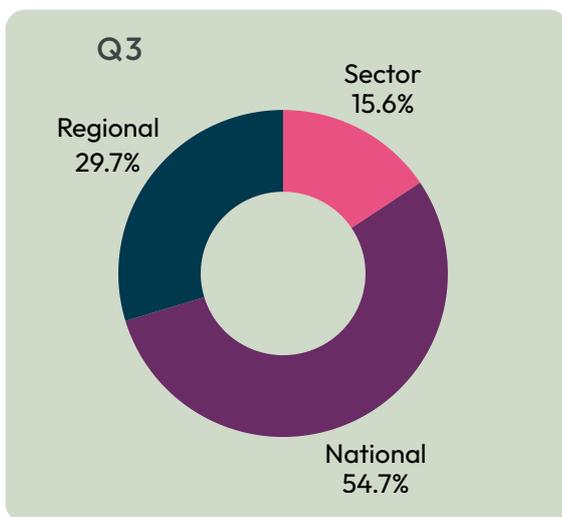
Press coverage increased significantly this quarter, rising from 42 to 86 articles, an increase of around 105%. There was also a noticeable increase in national and print coverage, strengthening the overall profile of the Commission’s work.

The majority of coverage related to the Land Reform Bill, alongside continued media interest in the rural land market report and ScotLand Futures, supporting sustained visibility across a range of priority areas.

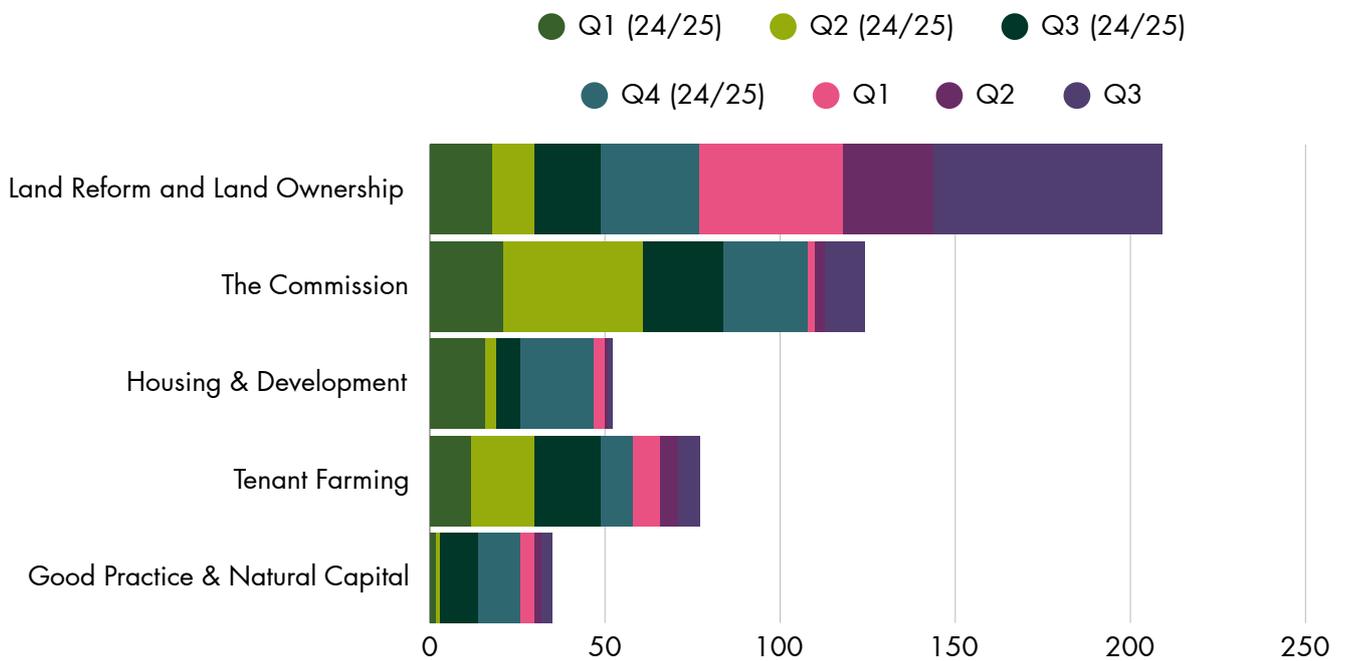
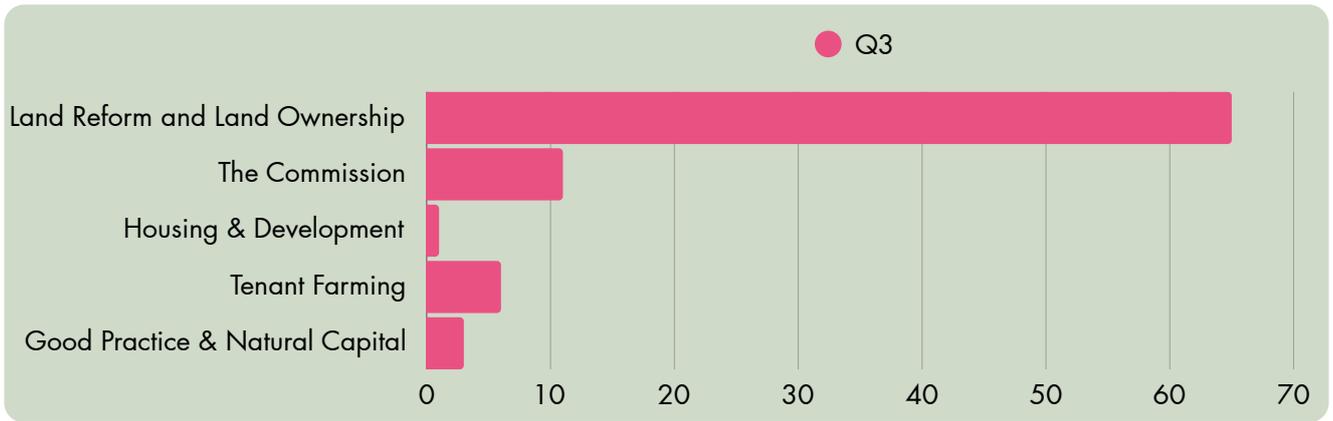
## DATES OF COVERAGE



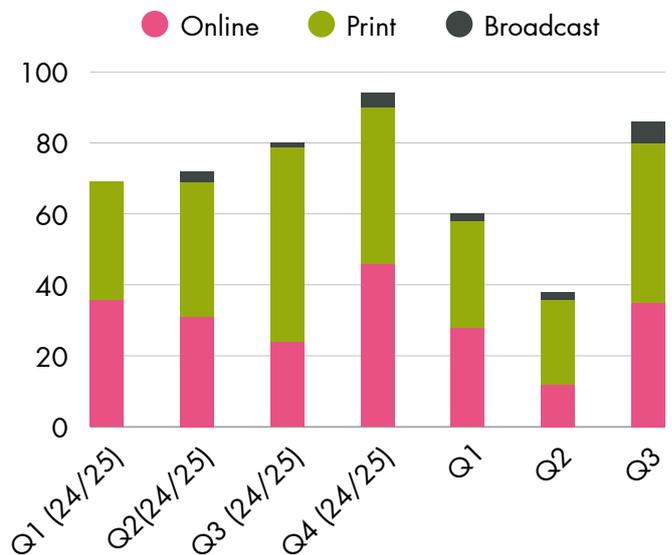
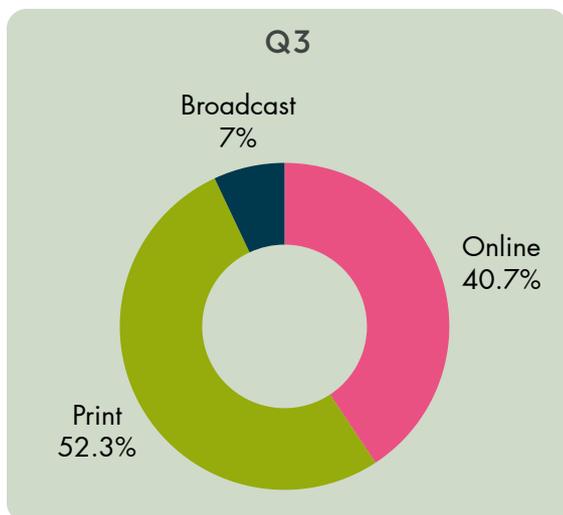
## REGION OF COVERAGE



## PRIORITY AREA COVERAGE



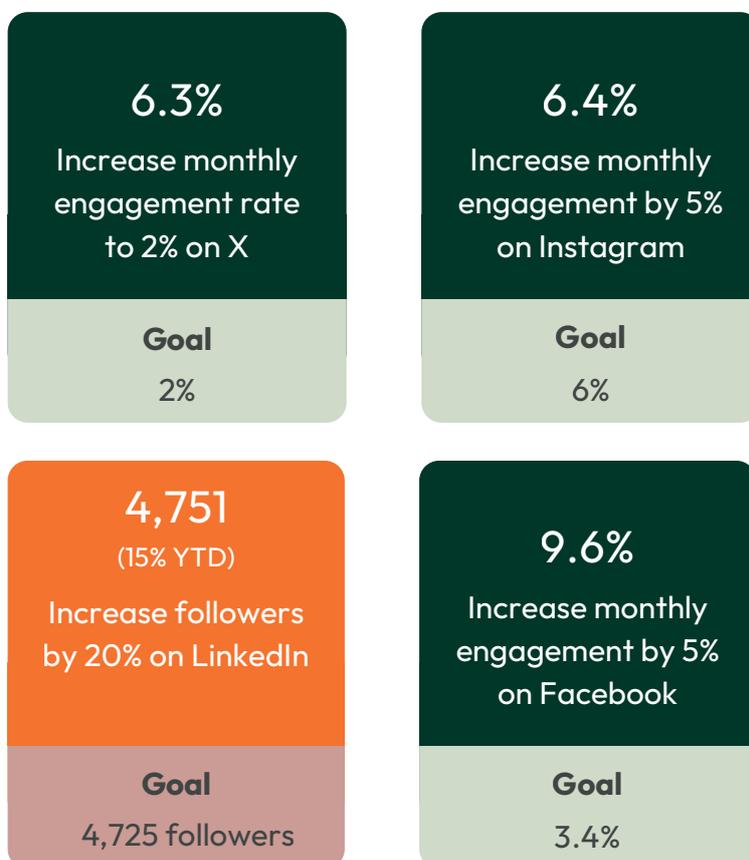
## CHANNEL OF COVERAGE



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media performance remained strong this quarter. While Facebook engagement has settled back to more typical levels, it continues to perform well above our KPI, with an average engagement rate of 9.65 across the quarter.

We also came within touching distance of our year-end LinkedIn growth target. Our goal is 4,752 followers, representing a 20% increase, and we closed the quarter on 4,751 followers, leaving us well placed to meet the target.



Platform	Avg. Engagement Rate
Instagram	4.1%
Facebook	3.2%
X	2.4%
LinkedIn	2% (Commission avg. 7%)

Source: Hootsuite

## EMAIL MARKETING

This quarter we sent two mailouts. While open and click-through rates were slightly lower than the previous quarter, both remained above our target benchmarks, indicating continued strong engagement with our email content.

We also added 17 new newsletter subscribers this quarter. This reflects a return to more typical growth levels, following the significant increase seen last quarter when sign-up was integrated into the ScotLand Futures survey.

Mailout	Open Rate	Click Through Rate
Newsletter (issue 9)	44.6%	11.7%
SLF Results	43.2%	9.5%

## WEBSITE

Website traffic continued to decline this quarter. This is likely to be partly seasonal, as the period covered Christmas and New Year, which is typically our lowest point for web traffic. The quarter was also affected by a small number of hosting-related issues that resulted in short periods of website outage.

Work on the new website has continued, and we remain on track to launch by the end of Q4.

Our top performing pages this quarter were:

- Home
- ScotLand Futures
- LRB Statement



# GOOD PRACTICE CASEWORK Q3 2025-26



In Q3 we handled 32 good practice enquiries and cases. This is a slight increase from Q2, during which 29 cases were handled. Cases handled in Q3 include 19 ongoing cases from previous quarters.

## NO OF CASES:

OCTOBER 11

NOVEMBER 12

DECEMBER 9

YEAR TO DATE 70



## ISSUES RAISED

	Q3	YTD
Transparency	12	12
Community Engagement	9	15
Diversification of Ownership & Tenure	4	13
Good Stewardship	3	23
Common Good	3	5
Vacant and Derelict Land	1	1
Charities	0	1



## CONTACT FROM:

	Q3	YTD
Individual	9	25
CoRLa	7	7
Community organisation	5	8
Community council	3	4
NCCP	3	4
Public Body	2	3
Intermediary	1	3
Academic	1	1
Developer	1	1
FIRNS	0	6
Charity	0	4
Private Landowner	0	3
Church	0	1

## CONTACT ABOUT:

	Q3	YTD
Public Body	9	17
Private Landowner	8	15
CoRLa	7	7
NCCP	3	4
Community Landowner	2	5
Various	2	3
Unknown	1	7
FIRNS	0	6
Charity	0	4
Church	0	1
Individual	0	1

## LOCATION

We received cases from:	Q3	YTD
<b>Highlands</b>	9	17
<b>Moray</b>	3	6
<b>Na h-Eileanan Siar</b>	3	3
<b>Angus</b>	3	3
<b>Fife</b>	2	6
<b>Not disclosed</b>	2	5
<b>Scotland Wide</b>	2	8
<b>Glasgow City</b>	2	3
<b>Dumfries and Galloway</b>	2	3



In Q3 we also had single cases from : Clackmannanshire, Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire, and Perth and Kinross.

Earlier in the year we had two cases each from: Midlothian, City of Edinburgh, and South Lanarkshire.

We have also had one case this year from Stirling.





## Commissioners' Meeting 5 February 2025

Inverness

Paper No. 3

26/27 Business Planning

<b>Purpose</b>	To inform development of the 2026/27 Business Plan
<b>Previous board papers</b>	N/A
<b>Action required</b>	For agreement

This paper seeks discussion on the 26/27 business plan, in order that a full plan and associated budget can be presented at the board meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> March 2026. The paper invites the board's consideration of:

- Strategic context
- Delivery priorities
- Budget planning

### 1. Strategic context

This business plan will complete delivery of our 2023-26 Strategic Plan and our current Programme of Work. By September 2026 we will need to submit a new three-year Strategic Plan to Ministers.

In 26/27 we will also need to address the direct implications for the Commission of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 and begin work to support Scottish Government's implementation of the bill.

The Scottish election in May 2026 means we will need to retain a degree of in-year flexibility so that we are able to engage with and respond to the priorities of a new government.

Our ScotLand Futures publication sets out the Commission's view on the next big steps for land reform. Our strategic and business planning needs to consider where the focus for the Commission's resource should lie within that big picture context.

### 2. Delivery priorities

Annex A provides a draft of delivery priorities. Within the strategic context outlined above we identify the following as key priorities and considerations:

## **2.1 Supporting Scottish Government's implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025**

Key priorities:

- Prepare for the appointment of the Land and Communities Commissioner, both in governance and operational approach;
- Deliver on the amended functions for Land Commissioners and the Tenant Farming Commissioner;
- Deliver work to develop a model lease for environmental purposes (directly funded by SG)
- Advise on implementation of the Community Engagement Obligation and Transfer Test. In particular we expect to undertake work with stakeholders to support implementation of the community engagement obligation and land management plans;
- Scope relevant baseline and monitoring plan for future review of Part 1.

The scheduling of this work will be influenced by Scottish Government's planned timetable for implementation of the Act and will need to retain a degree of flexibility. The model lease work has associated additional resource, but the remainder of this work will need to be undertaken within existing capacity.

## **2.2 Advising on reforms to law and policy**

Key priorities:

- Deliver on existing commitments to advise on tax and community ownership;
- Develop work to take forward the themes set out in ScotLand Futures, prioritising the themes on new land opportunities and land data;
- Delivering our annual rural land market reports;
- Ongoing implementation of our research strategy;
- A programme of policy engagement that seeks to increase the impact of our existing body of evidence and advice.

Our policy work will need to remain responsive to priorities and opportunities that may emerge post-election.

## **2.3 Supporting practical implementation on the ground of Scotland's Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement**

Key priorities:

- Good Practice Programme advice and casework – backed by our updated set of LRRS Protocols published in January;
- Programme of engagement and CPD training for land agents/professional advisers;
- Complete the pilot of the Commitment to Responsible Land Ownership;
- Identify strategic opportunities to embed Community Benefits advice;
- Supporting public sector leadership;

We will need to consider carefully the future interaction of our good practice programme with the new functions of the Land and Communities Commissioner.

## **2.4 Supporting good relations between agricultural landlords and tenants through the functions of the Tenant Farming Commissioner**

Key priorities:

- Begin a programme to develop new Codes of Practice required by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 and to refresh existing Codes;
- TFC casework – responding to requests for advice and investigating alleged breaches of Codes of Practice;
- Implement the new TFC responsibility for small landholdings with an initial focus on priorities for Codes of Practice and guidance on creating new small landholdings;
- Fulfil the statutory obligation to appoint a valuer for relinquishment and assignation cases;
- Convene TFAF and engage widely on shaping the future of the tenanted sector;
- Advise SG on implementation of Part 2 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025.

Our existing tenant farming work has increased in volume and complexity, and its scope is now increased as a result of the 2025 Act, meaning that we will need to increase our resource allocation to support the TFC functions.

## **2.5 Communications and Engagement**

Key priorities:

- Public engagement, building on ScotLand Futures and communicating our new strategic plan; delivering gaelic language plan commitments; regular communications outputs;
- Running a programme of online and in-person events to support priorities;
- Convening stakeholders through our established groups and other opportunities;
- Keeping new website up to date, monitoring use and feedback.

## **2.6 Corporate**

Key priorities:

- Develop a new Strategic Plan and Programme of Work by September 2026;
- Business and financial management and reporting;
- Governance, cyber security and risk management;
- Organisational development associated with new Land Reform Act functions.

### 3. Budget planning

#### 3.1 Income

The Commission's grant-in-aid from Scottish Government is expected to be £1.81M. This is a 7.7% increase on £1.68M in 25/26 in recognition of cost pressures and the initial implications of the new Land Reform Act for the Commission.

Within the year we expect to drawdown additional Scottish Government funds associated with specific work that government has asked the Commission to deliver. At present this includes work to deliver the model lease, and additional costs associated with the expansion of TFC functions to small landholdings and the development of new Codes of Practice.

#### 3.2 Costs

Our fixed costs are projected to be:

Cost heading	26/27	25/26
Staff costs*	£1,251,424	£1,143,780
Commissioner costs**	£82,794	£67,148
Office accommodation	£30,000	£28,800
Audit & accountancy fees	£70,600	£69,200
IT costs	£80,000	£76,000
HR costs	£28,752	£33,232
Other fixed costs	£18,362	£18,000
Total	£1,561,932	£1,436,160
% of total budget	86%	85%

\*Staff costs net of secondment/external recharges; \*\* Commissioner costs include increased TFC time

We start the year with 17.6 FTE including one post on external secondment until 31 August 2026 (no change in FTE from Apr 25).

The board has agreed that our budget planning should seek to retain at least 10% of GIA as flexible spend. Based on the expected fixed costs above, our projected flexible spend for 26/27 is 14%.

This in part reflects a saving in staff costs as a result of six months of an outward secondment (if full staff costs, flexible spend would be 12%).

Our medium-term financial strategy identifies the following levers which we will use through the year to continue to manage our financial position:

- Staff turnover – reviewing deployment of posts as vacancies arise with a presumption of taking savings.
- Efficiency savings – seeking savings through shared services and as contracts are reviewed;
- Partnership & collaboration – seeking greater value through joint working with others where appropriate.

### **3.3 Priorities for resource allocation**

#### **Tenant Farming**

We have identified a pressing need to increase resource allocation to the Tenant Farming Commissioner function. Experience over the last year indicates that the volume and complexity of casework has increased significantly (47% increase in last financial year). This level of demand is expected to continue for the foreseeable future, as awareness of the TFC functions continues to develop and as wider sector issues put pressure on landlord/tenant relationships.

In addition to casework, the Land Reform Act introduces significant new responsibilities on the TFC, extending the remit to small landholdings and requiring development of new and refreshed Codes of Practice. Implementation of other measures in the Act will also require advice and sector engagement by the TFC. Stakeholder relationships in the sector have been strained by the Land Reform Act but there is cross-sector appetite for a more proactive focus on opportunities for sector development. While this will need to be collaborative, it will also require time and leadership capacity from the TFC and Commission.

We are seeking agreement from the Cabinet Secretary to increase the number of days the TFC allocates to the role from 8 to 12 per month. At 25/26 board rates, this is an additional cost to the Commission of £12,210 pa.

We anticipate additional in-year funding from Scottish Government to support dedicated resource for small landholdings and Codes of Practice.

However, there is also a need to increase the staff capacity supporting core tenant farming work. The identified need is for a support post that will support the administration, reporting and monitoring of casework, and support for meetings and correspondence. We do not have available capacity within the team for redeployment, therefore we propose recruitment of a fixed term 0.8FTE post. Subject to detailed job evaluation, this is expected to be an additional staff cost in the region of c£35,000.

#### **Implementation of Land Reform Act**

If we assume the Land and Communities Commissioner is to be appointed in Q1 27/28, we should plan to have initial staff support in place in Q4 26/27. This is expected to require appointment of one additional post initially, focused on leading staff support to the new Commissioner. The budget should make sufficient allocation for this, to be firmed up within the year.

Other additional staff costs associated with implementation are expected to fall into future financial years.

We also propose provision for possible research and data that may be required in preparation to support the Land and Communities Commissioner role and/or the additional matters relating to land specified for Land Commissioners.

If these priorities are incorporated to our staff planning, our budget projection for 2026/27 would see flexible spend at 12%.

**The board is asked to:**

- a) Consider and agree the delivery priorities;**
- b) Consider the outline budget information provided and agree to increased resourcing of the tenant farming function, including recruitment of a support post;**

#### **4. Next steps**

Based on this discussion the management team will finalise the business plan and associated budget for approval at the March board meeting. A full draft budget will be shared with the Audit and Risk Committee for discussion at the 12 February meeting.

***Hamish Trench***

***Chief Executive***



## Commissioners Meeting 5 February 2026

Inverness

Paper No. 4

### Draft Advice on Tax

<b>Purpose</b>	To discuss draft advice to Scottish Government on tax
<b>Previous board papers</b>	6 Nov 2025: Tax Phase 2 Approach and Outputs
<b>Action required</b>	For agreement

## Background

The [Scottish Budget 2025-26](#) and tax strategy included a commitment for the Scottish Government to work with the Scottish Land Commission to explore the role of tax in supporting land reform and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from land. This included a reference to exploring the option of a carbon land tax.

The SLC's role is to support engagement and research and to provide recommendations on the strategic approach to Ministers. This paper includes a summary of this work, next steps and the draft advice (annex). The advice is underpinned by research and stakeholder engagement.

## Impact and engagement

Since the last board update in November 2026, the SLC's policy development has continued through ongoing stakeholder engagement.

Our tax work is referenced in the [Scottish budget 2026-27](#) under new taxes and future priorities, included in the draft Climate Change Plan and in January 2026, the SLC attended the Welsh Government's land valuation conference to speak on this topic.

An event with the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital is planned for February and wider stakeholder engagement is planned for March. The growing interest in this work suggests that this is likely to continue to be a priority workstream for the SLC with several issues including land data being key to further policy development.

## Research

In October 2025 the SLC published a report by [WPI Economics](#) which reviewed how other countries undertake land valuation for tax purposes. This report suggests that there is some way to go for Scotland to modernise its approach to land and property

valuation for tax purposes and bring it in line with the case study countries. The report includes practical considerations that the SLC needs to consider as part of its advice to Ministers. Conclusions from this work suggest that to fully use devolved taxation, more work needs to be done to modernise and develop a 'tax infrastructure', by which it means the necessary data, capacity and methodologies.

Scottish Government will in due course publish research on measures for calculating carbon emissions from peatland and understanding the tax base and the potential distributional impacts.

In addition to this the SLC is currently commissioning research to:

- Review the impact of most recent changes to the valuation roll by looking at the reintroduction of sporting rates.
- Using case studies, understand how long-term derelict land is treated in the tax system.
- Learn from international experience of cadastral systems for transparency, tax and valuation.

These are due to be completed end of March 2026 and will inform a document which is a proposal on how to implement our advice in practice due in May 2026.

## **Approach & next steps**

As agreed at the November 2025 board meeting, our advice to Ministers is focused on a carbon land tax and developing a strategic approach for tax to support land policy.

A key conclusion that has emerged is that the current system of tax, land data and valuation is disjointed and limited in supporting the development of new tax policies. In exploring carbon land taxation in the specific case of peatland, complex challenges have emerged that would need to be addressed to make such a tax on land a possibility in the future. It also highlights the importance of having a clear focus and scope for tax.

Our 2022 advice recommended to strengthen the role of land in the tax base and our subsequent work continues to build this case. The WPI Economics research highlights that Scotland falls behind comparative to other countries when it comes to the land and property valuation system. We see this as a foundational step that would enable Scotland to use the tax system more effectively to support environmental, land and wider outcomes.

Our 2026 advice will therefore be supplemented with a forward-thinking and practical longer-term programme to build a modern tax infrastructure to inform future land tax priorities. We aim to publish this in May 2026. This will be based on our research findings and engagement and offer Scottish Government a way forward if it chooses to accept our advice.

**The board is asked to consider and agree the draft advice**

Following agreement, the advice document will be finalised for submission to Scottish Government and for publication in March.

*Kathie Pollard*

*Head of Policy*



Commissioners Meeting 5 February 2026

Inverness

Paper No. 5

Commitment to Responsible Landownership Pilot

<b>Purpose</b>	To set out the process to complete and evaluate the CoRLa pilot
<b>Previous board papers</b>	4 December 2025: CoRLa paper
<b>Action required</b>	For agreement

## 1. Background

We received feedback from board at the December 2025 meeting on the need for further clarity to conclude the pilot phase of CoRLa, as well as plans to address interaction with implementation of the Land Reform Act and the operational role of the Land and Communities Commissioner. The board also raised concerns around reputational risk.

This paper will set out how we intend to bring the pilot phase to a close, early thinking on interaction with the Land Reform Act, and set out an adapted approach to some aspects of the pilot to address the noted risks.

## 2. Pilot conclusion and participant's expectations

### Pilot process

We propose the following process for bringing the pilot to a close.

- We are aiming for 4-5 completed commitments, however regardless of the number, the pilot will be concluded;
- Shared learning event will take place with all participants, with Commissioner participation;
- Feedback gathered and evaluation;
- Consider learning with the Commissioners, seeking recommendations on whether to proceed, close or modify the project.

Month	Milestone
January	Progress CoRLa agreement with pilot participants Meeting with pilot participant for feedback at Commissioner level
February	CoRLa agreements progressing Board feedback on items raised in this board paper
March	CoRLa agreements progressing
April	CoRLa agreements progressing Planning for shared learning event with pilot participants
May	Self-evaluations and draft continuous improvement plans completed Hold shared learning event and engage with participants and stakeholders as part of project evaluation
June	Draft paper setting out learning and recommendations for next steps
July	Share recommendations and seek decision from board on how to proceed

### Shared learning event

We recommend that a sharing good practice event take place to capture learning from the pilot, which will inform the evaluation and subsequent recommendations to board.

All pilot participants would be invited, regardless of whether they reached agreement stage, as their views and experience are key to refining the project. It is also important to acknowledge the participation and efforts of the participants.

We recommend that 1-2 Commissioners are in attendance.

### Status of completed pilot commitments

Pilot participants have been advised at the outset and throughout the pilot that this is not a formal accreditation status, but rather a voluntary commitment welcomed by SLC with the opportunity for ongoing support to increase good practice. They are also aware that this is a pilot, with no guarantee about how the initiative will proceed beyond the pilot.

We propose that the commitments made by those participating in the pilot are recognised as follows:

- Retaining decision to recognise a Commitment with a landowner at staff level, as a Commissioner involvement could risk signalling more formal accreditation status. This means not doing the proposed site visit, and not taking individual CoRLa membership decisions to board level.
- Completion of the commitment would be recognised by listing participants on our website, rather than any formal 'signing' approach. In this way, we are able

to recognise the commitments being made by those participating in the pilot without prejudice to how the initiative may or may not proceed further.

### **Potential reputational risk**

The board also identified reputation risk associated with some of the wording in the current pilot commitment. We propose to mitigate further reputational risk to the Commission by rewording Commitment 6 which currently reads:

*“Assuring that those participating in the initiative do so with integrity, applying its [the Commission’s] Casework Policy if necessary.”*

We recognise it is not possible to assure the integrity of a landowner across all their activities, but we can seek assurance from the landowner about implementation of the Continuous Improvement Plan and commit to offering support and guidance.

The wording of the Commitment will therefore be updated to reflect this.

## **3. Evaluation and Next Steps**

As outlined above, we plan to complete the pilot and evaluate before making recommendations to Board about how to proceed.

Pilot participants will be key in helping us reflect on the pilot and evaluate the options beyond this stage. The FAQ document supplies participants with several questions at the outset which will guide feedback and inform evaluation of the pilot.

A facilitated session will take place at the shared learning event which will help to stimulate discussion and collate more feedback from the pilot participants and potentially a wider set of stakeholders.

The key questions we are seeking to explore by evaluating the pilot include:

- Does the commitment approach offer value to landowners and to the Commission?
- Is the process tested fit for purpose and deliverable?
- What have we learned about the likely scope for such an approach – is it likely to be widely taken up or be attractive to a small number of landowners?
- Are there areas where CoRLa can be simplified and streamlined without weakening its objectives and integrity?
- What data needs to be held and shared?
- What other voluntary/self-assessment approaches are being taken and how could these interact with CoRLa?
- What have we learned in relation to the reputational risks identified at the start of the project?

## 4. Land Reform Act and wider context

### Ongoing role of self-evaluation

Implementation of the Land Reform Act is likely to lead more landowners to be proactive about good practice in order to comply with regulations and expectations. This will likely manifest in an increased volume of enquiries and casework, as well as some landowners seeking to exceed minimum expectations and make a more public commitment to good practice. Some landowners are already taking the initiative to self-report on their impacts on communities and the environment. **We therefore see an ongoing role for an SLC-led self-evaluation programme or tool.**

Several estates have begun to develop and publish impact reporting, measuring and reporting on their impact against environmental, economic and local sustainability outcomes. We welcome this pro-active approach as it displays leadership in good practice around transparency and the delivery of wider benefits from land. Evaluation of the pilot and future options should take into account the interaction with this developing aspect of landowner-led work.

### Interaction with role of LCC

Evaluation will also need to consider the interaction with the new L&CC functions. CoRLa, or any self-evaluation programme, should complement the Commission's regulatory obligations under the Land Reform Act, including investigatory powers.

At this stage we anticipate ongoing relevance of good practice. Landholdings within scope of the Act will inherently make an easier transition to increasing their readiness to meet the requirements of the Act if they are already embarked on voluntary approaches.

This interaction will need to be continue to be explored and tested as we plan for implementation of the Land Reform Act, and in considering options beyond the pilot.

## 5. Recommendations

The board is asked to:

1. Agree the proposed steps and timetable for concluding the CoRLa pilot, including the learning event and Commissioner participation;
2. Consider the key questions that evaluation of the pilot should seek to address;
3. Note the wider context and interaction with the Land Reform Act which will also shape consideration of options beyond the pilot.

***Sarah Madden***

***Head of Practice and Advice***