

**CROFTING COMMISSION MEETING
ST KILDA, GREAT GLEN HOUSE
20 MARCH 2024 AT 0900 hrs**

AGENDA

- | | | |
|---|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1 APOLOGIES | <i>Oral</i> | <i>Standing Item</i> |
| 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST | <i>Oral</i> | <i>Standing Item</i> |
| 3 DRAFT MINUTES FROM 6 FEBRUARY 2024* | <i>Minutes</i> | <i>For approval</i> |
| 4 REVIEW OF ACTION POINTS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING
(of 6 February 2024) | <i>Paper</i> | <i>For info</i> |
| 5 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES | <i>Oral</i> | <i>Standing Item</i> |
| 6 BUSINESS PLAN 2024-2025 | <i>Paper</i> | <i>For approval</i> |
| 7 BUDGET 2024-2025 | <i>Paper</i> | <i>For approval</i> |
| 8 REGULATORY CASEWORK UPDATE | <i>Paper</i> | <i>For info</i> |
| 9 EXTERNAL COMMS STRATEGY | <i>Paper</i> | <i>For discussion</i> |
| 10 ANNUAL REVIEW OF WORKFORCE PLAN | <i>Paper</i> | <i>For discussion</i> |
| 11 ANNUAL REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS | <i>Paper</i> | <i>For decision</i> |
| 12 SCOTTISH LAND AND ESTATES | <i>Oral</i> | <i>For info</i> |
| 13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING
8 May 2024 – St Kilda | | |
| 14 ANY URGENT BUSINESS | | |
| <u>AFTERNOON (CLOSED) SESSION</u> | | |
| 15 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC | | |

**Not in public copy*

APOLOGIES – ORAL

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – ORAL

CROFTING COMMISSION MEETING

20 March 2024

Report by the Chief Executive

Review of Action Points from 6 February and 23 January 2024

ACTION POINTS FROM 6 FEBRUARY 2024					
ITEM	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	DEADLINE	DATE COMPLETED	COMMENTS
1	Make sure we engage with CCARs on 'The Future of Crofting'	HM	Ongoing		Linked to AP 8
2	Outward communication to be planned to coincide with approval of the Business Plan in March	CEO/KC	March Board		
3	Produce a timespan report to clarify how long cases judged to be invalid have been with the Commission.	AR	End of February	12/02/24	Refers to applications received since April 2023 and 236 figure quoted in email to Commissioners.
4	Review approved change to Scheme of Delegation in relation to decrofting in 6 months' time.	JK	August Board		Put on Planner for August Board (done)
5	Board members to receive training on changes to Tier 3 decision-making process	DF	May Board		Put on Planner for afternoon session (done)
6	Carry out review of new Tier 3 procedure.	CEO/JK	In 12 months		Put on Planner (done)
7	Try to find out who is co-ordinating applications for National Park status and where and when local meetings are taking place in crofting areas, to ensure Commission has a presence.	CEO	asap		CEO emailed sponsor division for information on 7/2/24 and now has this in hand with relevant person.
8	Propose timeline for possible steering group on Future of Crofting and establish group with members of staff plus two Commissioners, if Head of Development feels this would be helpful at this point.	CEO/HM	Update at March Board		Linked to AP 1. CEO to cover in update to Board.

ACTION POINTS FROM 23 JANUARY 2024

ITEM	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	DEADLINE	DATE COMPLETED	COMMENTS
1	Investigate if action 6.6 from the National Development Plan for Crofting has been completed	LH	May Board		On Planner
2 & 3	Establish how many Grazings Committees are In and Out of Office within the map areas and notify all those affected.	LH	May Board (2) Notify by summer 2024 (3)		On Planner
4	Engage with Scottish Government and other organisations on peatland restoration matters and report back to Board	DF/HM	May Board		On Planner
5	A dialogue is started with SF/WCC with a view to making amendments to the WCC so that it is clear that woodland creation on land subject to crofting tenure can be validated and is eligible for the creation of carbon units	DF	Begin by May		
6	Separately, a dialogue is started with Scottish Forestry in order to facilitate SFGS applications by grazings committees, should committees wish to go down the subsidy route rather than the private/WCC route. Currently it is understood that applications are at a very low level.	DF	Begin by May		Run together with 5 above
7	Forestry expert to attend May Board Meeting (closed session) to provide Commissioners with more information to allow them to decide what role the Commission will take on this topic. Communications then to be prepared publicising this.	FB	May Board		On Planner
8	Draft paper for Vision of Crofting in 2036 to be presented at a future Board Meeting	HM/CEO	Future Board meeting (Oct)		On Planner
9	Position Papers to be drafted on key regulatory areas during the next 12 months.	CEO	After 'Vision' paper		

MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES – ORAL

CROFTING COMMISSION MEETING

20 March 2024

Report by the Chief Executive

Business Plan 2024-2025

SUMMARY

The Business Plan for 2024/2025 can be found here:

<https://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/userfiles/file/appendices/240320/Business-Plan-2024-25-DRAFT.pdf>

BACKGROUND

The Commission wishes to publish its annual Business Plan prior to 1 April 2024. The main section of each Business Plan comprises the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – the specific actions (milestones) that the Commission intends to deliver and the targets it will adopt for various key measures. The Board was invited to consider what milestones and measures should be set for the year ahead, based on the draft at the link above, at their meeting on 6 February 2024.

The Business Plan is based on and consistent with the 5-year Corporate Plan which was agreed between the Crofting Commission and the Scottish Government. The final draft has been shared with Scottish Government.

CURRENT POSITION

The draft Business Plan was revised following the Board meeting in February and has been populated with baseline and target data. It now comes to the Board for formal approval. The approved plan will be published on 31 March 2024.

RECOMMENDATION

The Board is invited to approve the Business Plan for 2024/25.

Date 8 March 2024

Author: Gary Campbell, Chief Executive

CROFTING COMMISSION MEETING

20 March 2024

Report by the Director of Corporate Services

Crofting Commission Budget 2024/25

SUMMARY

As part of the governance framework, the Board should approve the Commission's budget prior to the start of the financial year.

BACKGROUND

An initial draft budget was presented to the Audit & Finance Committee at its 1st November 2023 meeting based upon an assumption of an award of £4.470M for 2024/25. An award of £4.500M was confirmed by the Scottish Government's within its national budget published in December 2023. This represents a £330k (7.9%) increase on 2023/24 and is based upon the business case for the enhanced staffing of the Crofting Commission approved by the Cabinet Secretary in April 2022.

The Executive Team subsequently presented a final draft balanced budget for 2024/25 for scrutiny at the meeting of the Audit & Finance Committee on 24 January 2024. The budget was not materially different to what was presented to the Committee in November 2023.

CURRENT POSITION

The Audit & Finance Committee recommends the draft 2024/25 budget:

<https://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/userfiles/file/appendices/240320/7-Annex-A.pdf>

to the Board for approval.

Impact:	Comments
Financial	In line with good governance, the Commission's Financial Standing Orders state that the Board should approve the Commission's budget prior to the start of the financial year.
Legal/Political	N/A
HR/staff resources	N/A

RECOMMENDATION

The Audit & Finance Committee recommend that the Board formally approves the 2024/25 Crofting Commission Budget.

Date 24 January 2024

Author Neil Macdonald, Head of Finance, Crofting Commission

CROFTING COMMISSION MEETING

20 March 2024

Report by the Director of Operations

Regulatory casework update

SUMMARY

This paper forms the regular update on casework within the Commission.

BACKGROUND

This paper forms the regular casework update position supplied to the Board.

CASEWORK UPDATE

Casework figures

The Board are asked to review the most recent casework update for the end of February 2024, a copy of which can be accessed at **Annex A** and query anything from that as wished.

Recruitment

The Regulatory team recently completed its recruitment exercise, which saw four vacancies being filled. Three of these were through internal promotion, and one has been filled by an external candidate. Training has commenced (by the point of the Board meeting) and the position for casework administrators (A4 grade staff) is being reviewed. A further update will be provided once recruitments across other teams complete.

ONGOING STRATEGY AND POINTS OF FOCUS

Geographic working

The Regulatory team is currently finalising a modified geographic working split which partially removes dedicated officers for each area. Historically the Commission Regulatory team has tried models which have had the Administrator resources work to dedicated geographic areas, as well as completely non-geographic working. The B1 resource has always worked to fixed geographic areas. Both of these systems have benefits and drawbacks, however the Regulatory management team, after consulting the wider Regulatory team, are implementing a hybrid system where all staff will generally be allocated to a geographic area, but will also take elements of work from all other areas on rotation. This system will bolster the resilience of the team by sharing area specific knowledge across a wider number of case workers, and help build skillsets for each across all application types. This change is not expected to have any negative impacts on applicants.

Quality checking

The Regulatory team are also in the process of finalising the first stage of ongoing quality checking. This will reintroduce the checking process previously carried out on Regulatory applications in the past, with a goal of ensuring a consistent approach to all non-discretionary aspects of case processing, and minimising incorrect entries and data issues in the Register of Crofts. These quality checks will feed into individual objectives moving forward, and will form another part of regular, ongoing performance management within the Regulatory team. Upon successful rollout this system will be built upon and expanded to cover all aspects of non-discretionary Regulatory decision making¹.

Decision making principles

The Director of Operations, working with support from a wide range of colleagues including the acting Director of Policy, has produced a draft policy paper for the Board at a future date, which aims to review some core principles under which decision making is done, specifically around invalid and incomplete cases. This thinking is ongoing and a paper is expected to be presented to the next board in May with proposals.

SUMMARY

The Regulatory casework outstanding position continues to be positive, with clearance remaining high and the Commission benefiting from a lower intake of applications across January than historically . Within the team, work continues to safeguard against future resilience issues and to streamline internal processes.

Impact:	Comments
Financial	n/a
Legal/Political	Scottish Government as closely monitoring the Commission's progress towards regulatory casework targets.
HR/staff resources	To date, turnover of staff in the Regulatory team has remained low. Ongoing recruitment may affect the rate of clearance moving forward.

RECOMMENDATION

The Board is invited to note the update as well as the most recent casework monthly update and to challenge these as it feels required.

Date 26 February 2024

Author Aaron Ramsay, Director of Operations

¹ The discretionary aspects, due to their nature, are being addressed by other methods such as cold case reviews.

February 2024 casework update sent to the Board on 2nd March 2024.

[February 2024 casework update](#)

CROFTING COMMISSION MEETING

20 March 2024

Report by the Chief Executive

External Comms Strategy

SUMMARY

A high level communications plan (see Annex A) to highlight key dates and guide external communication themes for discussion for 2024.

BACKGROUND

This plan was created to guide the external communications of the Commission over the course of 2024. The details within will guide proactive communication and will be in conjunction with reactive communications on topical issues.

CURRENT POSITION

This plan will enhance and guide the external communications of the Commission and allow communications to be more structured and prepared.

Impact:	Comments
Financial	None
Legal/Political	None
HR/staff resources	None

RECOMMENDATION

The Board is invited to approve the one year high level external communications plan.

Date 6 March 2024

Authors Heather Mack, Head of Policy, Development and Grazings
Kirsteen Currie, Comms Officer

ONE-YEAR EXTERNAL HIGH LEVEL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

INTRODUCTION

This document outlines a one-year external communications plan. The plan aims to effectively communicate the Commission's activities, achievements, and future plans to its diverse audience, including crofters, stakeholders, and the general public.

Target Audience

- **Primary:** Crofters, crofting communities, and their representative bodies.
- **Secondary:** Stakeholders with an interest in crofting, such as land managers, government agencies, NGOs, and the media.
- **Tertiary:** General public in Scotland and beyond.

Objectives

- Raise awareness of the Crofting Commission's role and responsibilities.
- Increase understanding of crofting and its importance to the Highlands and Islands.
- Promote the benefits of crofting for economic, social, and environmental sustainability.
- Encourage engagement with the Commission's activities and consultations.
- Build positive relationships with key stakeholders and the media.

Communication Channels

- **Website:** Regularly updated website with clear, accessible information about the Commission, its services, news, and events.
- **Social media:** Utilize platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to engage with audiences, share updates, and promote events.
- **Email newsletters:** Targeted email lists for crofters, stakeholders, and the media to distribute news, updates, and consultations.
- **Press releases and media outreach:** Proactively engage with media outlets to secure coverage of the Commission's work.
- **Publications and reports:** Produce clear and concise publications, reports, and leaflets on relevant topics.
- **Events and presentations:** Attend and participate in relevant events and conferences to connect with stakeholders and raise awareness.

Key Messages

- The Crofting Commission is committed to supporting a thriving crofting sector in the Highlands and Islands.
- Crofting plays a vital role in the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the region.
- The Commission offers a range of services and resources to support crofters.
- Crofting is a sustainable and productive form of land management.
- The Commission is committed to transparency, engagement, and collaboration.

Sample Activities (throughout the year)

January: Issue a press release summarising the Commission's achievements in the previous year and outlining key priorities for the coming year.

February: Expand a social media campaign to promote returning the Crofting Census, highlighting the importance of the information and encouraging public engagement.

March: Host a webinar on a topical issue relevant to crofters, such as changes to our parameters or a discussion around peatland restoration. Launch a women's network on International Women's day so that we can create a distribution list of women crofters.

April: Begin the duties campaign to encourage crofters to be aware of and comply with their duties.

May: Publish high level data from the Census returns, linking these to our duties campaign.

June: Participate in the Royal Highland Show to showcase the Commission's work and connect with stakeholders, focusing on our work to improve knowledge and understanding of duties.

July: Attend agricultural shows throughout the Crofting counties to support crofters and their communities with understanding duties.

August: Participate in local agricultural shows and events to connect with crofters and the wider community.

September: Have a crofting duties week within the Scottish Parliament, complimented by an evening reception and a members debate.

October: Hold the Commission's annual public meeting to present its work and answer questions from stakeholders.

November: Begin the census communications for the 2024 census, encouraging crofters to check that their details are correct online.

December: Publish an article and social media posts reflecting on the year's activities and looking ahead to the future of crofting. Forthcoming appointment of new Commissioner as another opportunity to engage with women.

Evaluation and Measurement

- Track website traffic, social media engagement, and media coverage.
- Conduct surveys and focus groups to gauge stakeholder perceptions of the Commission's communications.
- Monitor progress towards achieving communication objectives.
- Regularly review and update the communications plan based on feedback and results.

CONCLUSION

By implementing this comprehensive external communications plan, the Crofting Commission can effectively engage with its target audiences, raise awareness of its work, and achieve its objectives. The plan should be a flexible document, adapted and updated as needed to reflect changing circumstances and priorities.

Additional Notes

It is important to consider the Gaelic language and cultural sensitivities when communicating with crofting communities.

Collaboration with other stakeholders, such as the Scottish Government, FAS, RPID and others, can be beneficial in amplifying the Commission's messages.

CROFTING COMMISSION MEETING

20 March 2024

Report by the Chief Executive

Workforce Plan 2024-2029

SUMMARY

The Board is invited to approve the attached draft of the Commission's Workforce Plan. The Plan was considered by the Audit & Finance Committee at its January 2024 meeting.

BACKGROUND

The Workforce Plan is updated annually and can be found here:

<https://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/userfiles/file/appendices/240320/Workforce-Plan.pdf>

It describes the Commission's approach to the management and development of its staff, and links to the Medium-Term Financial Plan in regard to the possibilities of future budget and staffing expansion or contraction.

CURRENT POSITION

The Workforce Plan was substantially revised in January 2024 to take account of the latest staffing position and the budget provision for 2024/25. The Audit & Finance Committee considered the document at its meeting on 24 January¹ and the Board is now invited to approve the document.

Impact:	Comments
Financial	The Workforce Plan sets out in broad terms, how the Commission might respond to a reducing or increasing real-terms budget in the coming years.
Legal/Political	The Workforce Plan is part of a suite of governance documents required of the Commission as an NDPB.
HR/staff resources	The Workforce Plan sets out a range of activities to help secure a strong, well trained and motivated workforce.

RECOMMENDATION

The Board is invited to approve the Workforce Plan for 2024-2029.

Date 21 February 2024

Author Neil Macdonald, Head of Finance, Crofting Commission

¹ Audit & Finance Committee comments were captured within the draft AFC minute that was presented at the Board Meeting on 6 February 2024.

CROFTING COMMISSION MEETING

20 March 2024

Report by the Chief Executive

Annual Review of Standing Orders

SUMMARY

The Standing Orders governing Commission meetings were revised slightly by the Board at annual review in March 2023. They now come to the Board for annual review, with no recommended changes.

BACKGROUND

Standing Orders represent one of the key governance documents in the Commission. They are shown here:

<https://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/userfiles/file/appendices/240320/Standing-Orders-V15-at-March-2023-002.pdf> and were last revised in March 2023. The annual review offers an opportunity for the Commission to ensure every member of the Board is familiar with the details contained in Standing Orders and content with the working document.

CURRENT POSITION

During 2022 and 2023, minor adjustments were made to Standing Orders following Board consideration in February and October 2022 and March 2023.

The Standards Officer does not recommend any further changes at this point.

Impact:	Comments
Financial	No financial implications.
Legal/Political	The Commission is required to adhere to Standing Orders as a Scottish Public Body.
HR/staff resources	The Standards Officer is responsible for ensuring the Board adheres to the provisions set out in Standing Orders.

RECOMMENDATION

The Standards Officer does not recommend any further changes are made to Standing Orders at this point.

Date 21 February 2024

Author Director of Corporate Services

SCOTTISH LAND AND ESTATES - Oral

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8 May 2024 - St Kilda

ANY URGENT BUSINESS

EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC