

BUSINESS PLAN
PLANA GNOTHACH
2024/25



CROFTING COMMISSION
COIMISEAN NA CROITEARACHD

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FOREWORD

Last year we presented the first annual Business Plan to be based on a new 5-year Corporate Plan. It was also a year which saw the implementation and bedding in of changes resulting from Scottish Government support for increased staffing levels, following the Glen Shuraig workforce review.

The expansion of staffing allowed us to considerably strengthen our capacity for improving and developing our in-house IT systems, and I am delighted to report improvements have continued apace since October 2023, and the focus on expanding our digital applications provision has been maintained.

The Regulatory team have reviewed processes across the team and introduced numerous changes designed to improve efficiency, and continue to look at process and policy changes designed to facilitate faster clearance of applications. The Commission has reduced the outstanding volume of casework to below 800, and will continue to target both the overall outstanding volume, and the median turn around times for applications.

This Business Plan sets a target of 700 or less for the total outstanding casework figure by the end of the 2024/25 reporting year, with individual targets to reduce the median turnaround times on key application types. A new target has been introduced around answering customer queries within the service limits to compliment a revised satisfaction rate, both of which drive a focus on customer service improvements.

To complement the expansion of the regulatory and registration team, the Commission has embarked on a far-reaching improvement plan to simplify and streamline regulatory processes wherever possible. Part of this is at our own hand, but equally important is the legislative changes which we believe are required. The Commission has worked with other crofting stakeholders to provide advice to the Scottish Government on the changes that would help improve crofting for ourselves and – more importantly – for crofters.

All of our teams, from the regulation and registration team through to development and grazings, Residency and Land Use, customer services, and the vital back office teams, are committed to regulating the crofting system fairly and efficiently, and to securing a strong and effective crofting system for the future.

Gary Campbell– Chief Executive

March 2024

PURPOSE OF THE BUSINESS PLAN

Each year, our Business Plan sets out the Commission’s key objectives for the coming year. These are set out in the tables below, which describe our key intentions and aims. During the year, the Business Plan becomes a tool for monitoring our progress and to assist in managing our staff, finances and other resources, to achieve the desired outcomes.

Progress against this Plan will be reviewed regularly by the Executive Team and Senior Management Team and reported to the Board through our quarterly performance management reports. Regular reporting helps to ensure that we remain focused on the priorities and have the right resources in the right place at the right time.

The Corporate Outcomes highlighted in our Corporate Plan 2023-2028 are as follows:

Outcome One	Crofting is regulated in a fair, efficient and effective way
Outcome Two	Crofting continues to thrive and to evolve
Outcome Three	Crofts are occupied and used
Outcome Four	Our workforce is skilled and motivated, and our governance processes are best practice

OUTCOME ONE – CROFTING IS REGULATED IN A FAIR, EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE WAY

We are committed to providing a quality and professional service to all our customers, especially those that make regulatory applications to us or who send us applications for registration of their croft, for us to review and forward to the Registers of Scotland. We are committed to fairness in all our decision-making, and we monitor turnaround times for all the different types of process.

We also seek continuous improvement of our internal processes, to deliver consistent and fair decision making that is compliant with legislation, and that also delivers value for the public purse. By refining how we deliver our services to customers, we can provide a faster, more consistent and more informative service to our customers, thereby improving customer satisfaction and confidence while simultaneously improving value for money.

Narrative

In 2021/22, staff turnover and the ongoing effects of the covid19 pandemic resulted in an increasing backlog of regulatory casework. Recruitment of additional staff to reverse this problem took place between February 2022 and summer 2023. With an expanded team and a strong Board and management focus on processing casework, 2022/23 and 2023/24 saw large increases in the number of regulatory cases discharged, so that by February 2024 the number of live cases was 29% below its summer 2022 peak, and the backlog confined to a limited number of older, complex cases. The aim for 2024/25 is to clear a significant proportion of these older cases while ensuring new cases have a swift and efficient turnaround.

During 2024/25, as part of ongoing improvement work at all levels, we will review our IT approach to case handling, with a view to establishing a Business Case for our future IT operations by March 2025.

Key Milestones

Number	Date	Milestone
1a	June 2024	Agree approach to prevention of identity fraud with Registers of Scotland
1b	Sept 2024	Update regulatory application webpages providing overview of regulatory function
1c	Sept 2024	Develop and implement structured quality checking of regulatory decision-making
1d	Dec 2024	Agree strategic approach for case handling system for the next period
1e	Jan 2025	Design and implement a training program for Regulatory B1 grade staff. Design and implement system integrated procedural guidance for all Regulatory processes.

Key Performance Measures

Number	Aim	Baseline	Target/Indicator	Measure
1.1	Decrease in median turnaround times (Tier 1 approvals)	Figures for Apr 23-Feb 24: Assignment – 14.4 Decrofting CHSGG – 18.2 Decrofting Part Croft – 25.5	Assignment – 14 weeks Decrofting CHSGG – 16 weeks Decrofting Part Croft – 22 weeks	Time taken from receipt to notification of decision
1.2	Decrease in number of live regulatory/registration cases at a point in time	767 on 29 February 2024	Reduce to 700 or below	Number of live regulatory/registration cases on 31 March 2025, using the traditional definition as in Corporate Plan
1.3	All customer contacts that require escalation to a caseworker cleared within the agreed timescale.	95.1% on 29 February 2024	97%	Administrative Records
1.4	Customer satisfaction rates	4.08 in Apr 23-Feb 24	4.25 average	Average rating from all respondents to the satisfaction survey

OUTCOME TWO – CROFTING CONTINUES TO THRIVE AND TO EVOLVE

The Commission has a responsibility to promote the interests of crofting, and to advise the Scottish Government about crofting issues. Our Policy, Grazings, Development and Communications (PGDC) team is in place to support crofters, those interested in crofting, and grazings committees alike. Along with other agencies we will do what we can to ensure that crofting communities continue to be resilient, and benefit from healthy turnover of crofts to new entrant crofters.

Narrative

In 2023/24, the PDGC Team continued and launched a range of initiatives and projects. This included training sessions held around the crofting counties on running a common grazings, facilitated by the Farm Advisory Service. Our Grazings officers have continued to support grazings committees and encourage their formation. Crofting development has involved support, communication and research. A pilot project for croft succession has focused on rural areas with population retention challenges. This involved evidencing the barriers to croft succession and providing information to highlight what crofters can do to prepare for succession to their croft by a new crofter.

In 2024/25 we will expand our policy development work, focussing on developing a vision of the future of crofting as well as supporting the Scottish Government in its preparations for revisions to crofting legislation. The team will continue to maintain and build strong links with stakeholders, promoting the interests of crofting. Connections with crofters are made through events such as grazings focussed groups or agricultural shows. Our panel of volunteer Crofting Commission Area Representatives (CCARs, formerly “Assessors”) have also enabled us to strengthen our collaboration with and input from the heart of crofting communities.

Key Milestones

Number	Date	Milestone
2a	April 2024	Establish steering group to develop a vision for the future of crofting
2b	Aug 2024	Respond to SG consultation on changes to crofting legislation
2c	Sept 2024	Launch development work on croft succession, building on the findings of the pilot project.
2d	Feb 2025	Deliver training events on managing a Common Grazings in collaboration with Farm Advisory Service.
2e	Mar 2025	Publish a discussion paper on the value of crofting

Key Performance Measures

Number	Aim	Baseline	Target/Indicator	Measure
2.1(a)	Maintain or increase the number of common grazings with a grazings committee in office	500 Grazings Committees in office on 29 February 2024	Maintain at 500 or above	Administrative records
2.1(b)	Increase in number of grazings committees who have adopted the new regulation template regulations	1 New set of regulations was concluded by February 2024	12	Administrative records
2.2	Establish correct shareholdings on common grazings by researching and updating records of shareholder situations.	54 single or multiple share investigations concluded by February 2024	No numerical target as demand led. Investigation and response to be carried out within 28-day time period.	Records of administrative action
2.3	Meetings or other substantial engagement with Grazings Committees and shareholders (as required) to support them with the regulation and management of common grazings.	17 significant engagements by February 2024.	No numerical target as demand led. Aim to keep significant engagements below 20 cases through early intervention, provision of guidance, training and mediation as required.	Records of administrative action. (Note that this covers different types of intervention; resolving serious size queries; and helping to address deeper issues.)
2.4	To raise awareness of the importance of considering croft succession, including 'living succession', which is passing on the croft within the crofter's lifetime.	2,050 crofters contacted about croft succession during 2023-24	Contact at least 2000 crofters about croft succession.	Records of administrative action

OUTCOME THREE – CROFTS ARE OCCUPIED AND USED

By ensuring crofters are compliant with their Duties and by working with crofting communities and stakeholders, we can increase the number of crofts that are occupied and well managed.

Narrative

Since 2017, we have been expanding our work to encourage – and where necessary enforce – the requirements for crofters to reside on or near their crofts and to cultivate and maintain the land.

It has been a consistent call of the Crofting Commission's Board that action to promote croft residency and active land use should be high on the Commission's list of priorities. We will therefore continue to investigate reported breaches of duty, work with public and private crofting landlords, engage with croft tenants who report their own non-compliance through the crofting census or whose breach of duties comes to our attention through regulatory casework, and take action to resolve longstanding intestate succession cases where the tenancy has not been transferred within the statutory timescales.

The team places equal focus on owner-occupier crofters as on croft tenants, since the intention of the 1993 Act is that both tenants and owner-occupier crofters are subject to crofting duties. In addition, we selectively investigate individuals who have failed to return their census form but whose address details would indicate that they are not ordinarily resident on their crofts; and we contact landlords of vacant crofts (or parts of crofts) who are not resident and/or do not cultivate the croft, with a view to the seeking a solution either through the landlord ensuring the croft is occupied and worked, or through the Commission taking action under the vacant croft provisions of the 1993 Act to ensure the croft is occupied by a tenant who will comply with the residence and land use duties.

Our approach is both proactive and supportive: we will help advise tenant and owner occupier crofters on the options open to them to resolve their breaches of duty; and likewise, we will work with landlords and help them understand how best to ensure that all crofts are managed in a positive way either through their own actions or by the Commission taking steps to ensure the croft is occupied and worked.

Key Milestones

Number	Date	Milestone
3a	July 2024	Write to a selection of tenant and owner-occupier crofters who have indicated in their 2023 crofting census returns that they are in breach of their duty to be ordinarily resident, obtaining their plans and intentions for resolving the breach and either issuing a notice section 26C(1) of the 1993 Act or establishing that there is a good reason not to issue a notice.
3b	July 2024	Write to a selection of crofters and owner-occupier crofters who have not responded to the 2023 crofting census and whose address would indicate they are in breach of the residence duty. Should correspondence confirm that they are in breach then the case would be followed up in terms of 3a above.
3c	Aug 2024	Launch and publicise a system of investigating reports that owner-occupiers of vacant crofts are not resident on or within 20 miles (32 kilometres) of the croft and/or not working the croft, to determine whether a notice should be issued under section 23(5) of the 1993 Act requiring the landlord to submit proposals for letting the croft.
3d	September 2024	Write to a selection of tenant and owner-occupier crofters who have indicated in their 2023 crofting census returns they are in breach of the duty to cultivate the croft, giving information about their options. This will include both a selection of individuals who are also in breach of the residence duty, and those who are complying with their residence duty.
3e	Aug 2024	Provide input to a communications campaign to raise awareness about crofting duties to crofters and the wider public.

Key Performance Measures

Number	Aim	Baseline	Target/Indicator	Measure
3.1	Number of formerly vacant crofts let by the landlord or the Commission following the Commission initiating action under the unresolved succession (section 11) or vacant croft (section 23) provisions of the 1993 Act.	4 in Apr 23-Dec 23	At least 65 permanent resolutions to breaches of duty, unresolved successions or vacant crofts delivered through Commission action (numbers will be reported separately for 3.1-3.4 but the target relates to the total of the four categories of intervention)	Records of administrative action
3.2	Number of RALU breaches resolved by a crofter or an owner-occupier crofter (i) in breach of their residency duty taking up residence on their croft; or (ii) in breach of their duty to cultivate and maintain the croft resuming cultivation and maintenance of the croft.	29 in Apr 23-Dec 23		Records of administrative action
3.3	Number of RALU breaches resolved by the assignation or renunciation of a tenanted croft, or the letting or sale of an owner-occupied croft.	19 in Apr 23-Dec		Records of administrative action
3.4	Number of RALU breaches concluded by tenancy terminations orders (section 26H), or approval of letting proposals submitted by owner-occupier crofters following a direction to do so (section 26J).	7 in Apr 23-Dec 23		Records of administrative action

OUTCOME FOUR – OUR WORKFORCE IS SKILLED AND MOTIVATED, AND OUR GOVERNANCE PROCESSES ARE BEST PRACTICE

By ensuring that our staff and Board Members have appropriate training and continued investment, we can develop a high-performing workforce. We will ensure that our organisation fulfils its legal requirements and contributes to the Scottish Government’s broader objectives for Scotland, including the reduction of carbon emissions.

Narrative

As a public body, we will fulfil our legal requirements and strive for best practice in our handling of information, our responsiveness to our customers, and our pursuit of clear communication, efficiency and value for money. In the coming year, we will continue to embed our processes for handling information and records in accordance with the requirements of GDPR and the Data Protection Act.

We will improve our assurance of customer satisfaction by ensuring that we have robust and effective mechanisms in place to resolve and address any complaints from customers. We will continue to respond timeously to all complaints and to learn lessons whenever a complaint is upheld.

Every year we will update our Medium-Term Financial Plan and Workforce Plan and take part in the civil-service-wide People Survey, to ensure we take account of the views of staff. An action plan based on the results of the People Survey will be developed and implemented, focussing on the training, engagement, and job satisfaction of our staff.

Just as crofting contributes to environmentally sustainable food production and the protection of biodiversity, we as its regulator will continue to monitor our corporate carbon emissions and to implement measures to reduce them.

Key Milestones

Number	Date	Milestone
4a	April 2024	Finalise action plan following 2023 People Survey
4b	June 2024	Implement enhanced policy on staff support
4c	Sept 2024	Implement action plan following 2023 People Survey
4d	Jan 2025	Update Medium Term Financial Plan and Workforce Plan, the latter including an expanded policy on succession planning

Key Performance Measures

Number	Aim	Baseline	Target/Indicator	Measure
4.1	Employee engagement Index	60% in October 2023	67% or above	SG people survey, October 2024
4.2	Corporate carbon emissions	102 tCO2e in 2022/23	Below 102 tCO2e in 2023/24 with a view to embedding a carbon management plan in 2024/25.	Baseline now captures Scope 1, 2 & 3 including emissions relating to remote workers. Note that this is measured a year in arrears.
4.3	Redeploy efficiency savings within £4.5m core budget		3%	Funding redeployed as a result of efficiencies in existing operations

MEASURING SUCCESS

In our Corporate Plan 2023-2028 we identified a set of high-level performance indicators which are reflected in this Business Plan as shown:

High Level Indicator	2024/25 Business Plan
Reduce regulatory application turnaround times	1.1
Improve customer satisfaction rates	1.4
Reduce the number of live applications awaiting decision	1.2
Keep the number of grazings with a committee in office above 500	2.1
Increase the number of breaches of duty resolved by Commission action	3.1-3.4
Improve our staff engagement rating	4.1
Reduce our corporate carbon emissions	4.2

NATIONAL OUTCOMES

The outcomes of our Corporate Plan are aligned with those of others in the public sector to bring about delivery of the Scottish Government's National Outcomes contained in the new National Performance Framework. We believe that we contribute to 4 of the National Outcomes:

- We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment.
- We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.
- We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy.
- We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination.

A summary of how we have contributed to each National Outcome is included in our Annual Report each year.

BUDGET INFORMATION

We receive Grant-in-Aid funding from the Scottish Government. Public budget decisions which set our Grant-in-Aid allocation are made on an annual basis.

The Crofting Commission has been allocated grant in aid of £4.5m for 2024/25, around 85% of which will be directly allocated for staff salaries, and the remainder covers costs associated with Board members and the standard running costs of the organisation.

In terms of the Business Objectives for 2024/25, we can estimate the cost of delivery for each outcome which is indicated in the table below based on the associated salaries, plus any other costs (for instance for our use of Great Glen House).

Corporate Outcome	Approximate Cost
1. Crofting is regulated in a fair, efficient and effective way	£2.479m
2. Crofting continues to thrive and to evolve	£0.550m
3. Crofts are occupied and used	£0.780m
4. Our workforce is skilled and motivated, and our governance processes are best practice	£0.691m

* Further information can be sourced from the Crofting Commission Medium-Term Financial Plan and Workforce Plan.