



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

Minutes of the meeting of the Scottish Land Commissioners held on Tuesday 7th July 2020

Commissioners Present: Andrew Thin (Chair), Sally Reynolds, Lorne MacLeod, Megan MacInnes, David Adams (Land Commissioners), Bob McIntosh (Tenant Farming Commissioner)

In Attendance: Hamish Trench, Sarah Allen, Posy MacRae, Shona Glenn, Emma Cooper, Harriet Donald, Caron Munro (Scottish Land Commission)

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair welcomed Harriet Donald to the meeting and thanked her for taking the time to join.

1. Minutes of previous meeting 9th June 2020

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the discussion subject to the following amendments:

- Page 2, 2nd sentence of 2nd paragraph, change wording to 'It was noted that where this a constraint, it could be addressed by greater use of compulsory purchase powers by local authorities and by the Commission own proposals, if adopted in future legislation, for Statutory Land Rights and Responsibilities Reviews' to better reflect the discussion.
- Page 2, paragraph 3, change 'posy' to 'post'.

All actions have been completed.

2. Quarterly Progress Report

Hamish provided a summary of progress, noting good continued delivery despite challenges of Covid-19 arrangements. He advised that the budget spend for the first quarter is on track and the Commission will continue to reprofile the budget quarterly.

Posy advised that the increase in communications traffic across social media and the website was largely due to the housing and development work.

The main points of discussion were:

- The Scottish Government requests to the Commission in relation to Covid-19 recovery are mainly short-term asks and currently do not impact the budget.

- When the Scottish Government are likely to reconvene the Community Land Ownership Leadership Group.
- DTAS have recruited Karlene Doherty as the Vacant and Derelict Land project manager which the Commission is funding. Karlene will start her post at the end of July.
- The public interest governance and models workstream has been put on hold for the time being but will be revisited later in the financial year. It was noted that the relevance and need for this work is increasing.
- Risk 8 should be reduced over the next month as the sponsor contact in Scottish Government is returning to their role and the new Head of Land Reform and Land Use is starting in August.
- Commissioners sought more information on risk 12 about staff wellbeing. The Commission will be issuing a further survey to staff regarding changes going forward in the recovery process to help with risk 12. The Commission is supporting staff to take time off work when required.
- The Board noted that the Commission's priority is staff wellbeing and that relevant adjustments to delivery should continue to be made.

Action 20070701	Hamish to reflect on how best to progress the public interest governance and models workstream with the team and report back to Commissioners at their September meeting.
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3. Gaelic Language Plan

The Commissioners were presented with the Gaelic Language Plan for approval following public consultation which closes on 10th July.

The Commissioners noted their concerns over the target date of 2024 to have Gaelic as a desirable job skill in all recruitment. It was agreed that the date will be reviewed by staff with a view to bringing it forward.

Commissioners welcomed the structure and content of the plan and confirmed that subject to the final consultation responses, it should be submitted to Bord na Gaidhlig.

Action 20070702	Posy to consult with HR on adding in Gaelic as a desirable skill to the recruitment process and Posy and Hamish to decide on bringing this forward if possible.
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Posy advised that the Commission will be giving staff the opportunity for training and development within Gaelic if desired.

The Commissioners will receive quarterly reporting on the Commission's work against the Gaelic Language Plan and the Commission will submit an annual review of the plan to Bord na Gaidhlig.

4. Regional Land Use Partnerships – interim report

The Commissioners discussed the interim report on Regional Land Use Partnerships. The main points of discussion were:

- Commissioners welcomed the report, noting the significant opportunity in the context of both climate targets and economic recovery.
- Commissioners agreed the tripartite governance model is appropriate and suggested there remain different routes by which participation could be secured. Commissioners proposed an emphasis on participation rather than appointment, particularly to ensure good community participation.
- Consideration should also be given to the process for securing the chair of each partnership, whether this is within the partnership or externally appointed.
- The Commissioners are content with the logical geographical areas of the planned partnership areas.
- The resource and staffing needs of Partnerships.
- Clarity of purpose beyond the initial phase of developing Regional Land Use Frameworks.
- Further consideration should be given to ensure profile and implementation of Land Rights and Responsibilities within partnerships.

Commissioners confirmed they are content with the direction of travel being set out for the interim report as an important step to engage stakeholders in the key issues.

5. Strategic Plan and Programme of Work

Hamish updated Commissioners on the development of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work. It was noted that the Board previously agreed to maintain a flexible programme of work that can be updated regularly, given the fast moving external context.

Commissioners asked that the human rights context be strengthened to reference the need to set property rights in the wider human rights framework. Commissioners also asked for the addition of a section on land and climate change alongside the economy and human rights.

Discussion focused on:

- Improving clarity of themes, particularly ‘modernising land rights’
- Focus of work on diversifying land ownership
- Profile of Tenant Farming Commissioner work
- ‘Theory of Change’ that connects legislative and culture change work
- Potential future work in relation to funding of community land ownership
- Next steps for our focus on vacant and derelict land
- Priorities for the programme of work

Hamish advised that, ahead of publishing the new Strategic Plan, the Commission will be publishing a summary of all our findings and recommendations from our first 3 year strategic plan period.

The Commissioners agreed to discuss the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work further at their informal discussion in August.

6. Tax Scoping Report

Commissioners welcomed the quality of the work carried out and the report written and queried if Alma Economics were to be carrying out further stages of this work. Shona advised that the Commission has an agreement with Alma to carry out future work although it has not been specified what this will be. It was noted that the intention is to work on a series of research with the contractor in this area.

Commissioners discussed the implications of devolved and reserved tax matters and agreed that the Commission should continue to focus on both where relevant. Shona advised that the Commission are in contact with the relevant officials within Scottish Government.

Commissioners agreed the proposed direction, to focus next steps on a) tackling vacant and derelict land and b) diversifying land ownership. Commissioners noted that the context for our tax work has evolved significantly post Covid-19, to put more emphasis on revenue raising and a strategic shift to taxing unearned income. Commissioners asked that consideration be given to publishing the report soon in order to feed into this wider discussion.

Action 20070703	Hamish to consider timing and communications for the publication of the report.
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7. Recovery – Strategic Positioning and communications

Posy advised that the Commission released a blog from Hamish w/b 29th June which will be followed up by a series of guest blogs. The Commissioners welcomed the approach and the rapid development of the blog series to respond to the challenges of recovery and renewal.

Commissioners emphasised that the Commission has significant work and ideas to contribute to recovery and renewal plans and very effort should continue to be made to ensure sufficient profile and connections for our work.

It was suggested that the Commission could bring in an international perspective for their blogs.

8. Covid-19 organisational route map

The Commissioners were advised that the Commission's route map is in line with the Scottish Government recovery route map. The Commission is currently looking at phase three in anticipation of moving forward into this phase soon.

The Chair asked the board to contact him with their thoughts and suggestions on board meetings going forward. It was agreed that the survey on future working arrangements should be extended to Commissioners as well as staff.

It was suggested that restrictions on business travel noted in the route map should apply to Commissioners as well as staff.

Action 20070704	Commissioners to be included in working arrangements survey.
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It was advised that following the results of the staff survey the Commission will review future office arrangements and provision.

Posy advised that from Autumn 2020 the Commission will be holding public meetings online.

9. Any Other Business

Langholm

Hamish advised that he has been in contact with all parties involved in the Langholm sale over the past couple of weeks and there is significant work by a number of parties ongoing on both funding and governance options. Commissioners noted the wider strategic implications for future funding of community land acquisition.

TFC Rent Reviews

Bob advised the Commissioners that he is currently working on a Rent Reviews Code of Practice and the TFC area of work is currently quieter in terms of casework.

Staffing and Remuneration

It was noted that the Staffing and Remuneration Committee have approved the minutes of their recent meeting.

Date of Next Meeting: 1st September 2020

**Scottish Land Commission
July 2020**