

CROFTING COMMISSION

MINUTE OF THE COMMISSION MEETING HELD IN ST KILDA, GREAT GLEN HOUSE, AT 9AM ON 26 FEBRUARY 2025

Present:	Andrew Thin	Chair
	Mairi Renwick Mackenzie	Commissioner
	Duncan Gray	Commissioner
	Iain Maciver	Commissioner
	Colin Kennedy	Commissioner
	Donald Macdonald	Commissioner
	Rod Mackenzie	Commissioner
	Gary Campbell	Chief Executive
	Aaron Ramsay	Director of Operations
	David Findlay	Commission Solicitor
	Jane Thomas	Director of Corporate Services and minute-taker
	Mary Ross	Regulatory Support Team (item 14)
	Francesco Bertoldi	SG Islands Team (item 18(i) (via Teams)
	Observers	Members of staff and public via Teams

1 APOLOGIES AND WELCOME

Commissioner Thin welcomed everyone to this, the first meeting of the Board since his appointment to the position of Chair. Commissioner Maciver gave a welcome in Gaelic. Apologies were received from Commissioner Macaulay.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

3 BOARD MINUTES FROM 27 NOVEMBER 2024

The Minute was approved as accurate by the Board.

4 REVIEW OF ACTION POINTS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

All Action Points had either been discharged or were items on the agenda, excepting item 4, which the Chief Executive gave an update on. He explained that the Action Point had been discussed with the head of the relevant team and the Chair, providing assurance that future options for the Croft Information database (CIS) are being actively worked on. It was agreed that the Board will re-visit the issue in April 2026.

Action Point 1	The Board will re-visit work on future options for the Croft Information database in April 2026.
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5 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no Matters Arising.

6 AUDIT & FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(a) Update from Chair of Committee

The Chair took the Board members through his report from the meeting which took place on 5 February. He drew attention to the position of Interim Chair of the committee, which was considered later in the meeting, and the view of the committee regarding the need for a refresh of the skills matrix for the Board.

Having attended a Public Sector Reform Summit hosted by the Minister for Public Finance on 17 February, the Chair emphasised the need to stay on top of this issue and requested the scheduling of a Board and Senior Management strategic discussion, which should include reference to medium term financial planning and evolving risk appetite. In addition, a discussion to agree priorities for Board development, performance management and CPD should be arranged. These will be added to the Board Meeting Planner.

(b) Draft Minutes of the Audit & Finance Committee from 5 February 2025

The draft Minutes were noted.

Action Point 2	Schedule strategic discussion between Board and Senior Management on issues related to public sector reform, including reference to medium term financial planning and evolving risk appetite. In addition, schedule a discussion to agree priorities for Board development, performance management and CPD.
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7 2025-26 DRAFT BUDGET

The Chair explained that the budget for 2025-26 had been approved by Parliament. The CEO then gave a brief overview of the settlement, explaining that it does not provide sufficient additional funds to enable the Commission to recruit two new posts but does allow us to fulfil our statutory functions.

Board members noted the low turnover of staff over the last year and the CEO confirmed that management plan on the basis of staff adaptability and the flexible use of resources.

The draft budget was approved.

8 REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3 – OCTOBER-DECEMBER

The Chair noted the high number of items sitting with a green RAG status, which was encouraging. Members agreed that it was a positive report. Members briefly discussed the challenges facing the Commission regarding support for common grazings and grazings committees. Director of Operations, who has recently taken over management of the Grazings Team, informed the Board that he is planning to bring a paper to a future meeting, that the team has been augmented with a new member of staff and that new KPIs have been drafted as part of the 2025/26 Business Plan.

Director of Operations explained that Grazings Workshops represent the pro-active work of the team and there is a desire to try to measure the qualitative impact of this work, whilst also being aware of the need to balance this with the costs involved.

Director of Operations confirmed that a report is compiled after each Grazings Workshop, which shows that demand is high and feedback positive, with the CEO confirming that management are reviewing the value of the work to crofting and that 12 workshops are planned for the year ahead.

Overall, members felt the report illustrates an improving picture on performance and hoped this will allow resources to be targeted to bring improvements in other areas, with a focus on value for money, flexibility and change management.

Action Point 3	Director of Operations to bring a paper to a future Board Meeting on the work of the Grazings team
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9 REVIEW OF STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER – Q3 -OCTOBER-DECEMBER

The Chair explained that the Audit & Finance committee have considered the register and noted there are no increasing risks. It was felt that the risk score for item S9 may increase and that all public bodies must be focused on outcomes, given intense scrutiny of public expenditure.

The Board agreed that a flexible approach needs to be taken to strengthen work on Duties. The Board further agreed to discharge item S1 from the register and that a new risk should be added to reflect concerns on Succession Planning for the Board, if the process on appointments incurs delays like that experienced with the selection of the Chair. The risk would be that Board recruitment for appointments in September 2025 fails to attract the required skillset and/or experiences procedural delays.

Action Point 4	Add new risk to Strategic Risk Register that Board recruitment for appointments in September 2025 fails to attract the required skillset and/or experiences procedural delays and discharge item S1.
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10 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2025-26

The CEO thanked the Director of Operations for his work on producing the draft Business Plan in a new format, to align with other Board performance reports. It has been viewed by Sponsor Division and focuses on the Commission's statutory duties. Commissioners welcomed the new format, commenting on its readability.

The Board acknowledged that there may be some movement as tasks evolve and that the plan gives equal weight to what we must do by statute and that this is likely to evolve further in 2026-27, to reflect a greater emphasis on Duties.

The draft Business Plan was approved.

11 ANNUAL REVIEW OF EQUALITY & DIVERSITY PLAN

The Board noted the work completed on this important area in 2024/25 and were content with the plan.

12 ANNUAL REVIEW OF WORKFORCE PLAN

The Workforce Plan had been scrutinised by the Audit & Finance committee. Members agreed the need for flexibility in workforce planning and were content with the plan.

13 ANNUAL REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS

The Board required no changes to Standing Orders at this time, reflecting that they need to meet frequently and in diverse ways, with short online meetings being easy to arrange, as necessary. The Chair reminded members to keep their Register of Interests up to date and to take care to declare interests as necessary, taking a cautious approach and declaring interests if there could be a perceived conflict.

14 DELEGATED PARAMETERS

Mary Ross of the Regulatory Support Team joined the meeting to present the paper, explaining that agreement was sought from the Board on the proposed amendment to parameters, to better streamline procedures.

Mrs Ross confirmed that the decision taken by the Board at a previous meeting, relating to decrofting applications and 0.4 extents has been acted on and is in place. Rather than pushing more cases to Tier 2, as one Commissioner feared, Mrs Ross explained that the proposal would allow more decisions to be taken at Tier 1, with most Board members agreeing that was what they had taken from the paper.

The Chair reflected that the paper is part of an encouraging trend, with officers demonstrating the desire to delegate and streamline processes and decision-making. The Board approved the recommendations set out in the paper.

This led onto a discussion on the Policy Plan, with the Chair summing up the view of the Board that the onus should be to have a plan which is so clear that applicants apply in a way that ensures their cases are decided at Tier 1.

The Board congratulated the Regulatory Support team for the paper and the hard work that shows how the risk appetite of the Board is being followed.

Decision	The Board approved the recommendations to amend the delegated parameters relating to the decisions on Decrofting Part Croft by a landlord (Sections 24(3) and 25(1)(a)); Decrofting Part Croft by a tenant (Sections 24(3), 25(1)(a) and 25(4)); Decrofting Part Croft by an owner-occupier crofter (Section 24A and 25(1)(a) all of the 1993 Act, and To introduce a new Parameter document in relation to the Extension to a Termed Apportionment (Section 52(11)) of the 1993 Act.
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15 OUTCOMES FROM CROFT VISITS RESULTING FROM THE 2023 ANNUAL NOTICE

Director of Operations presented the paper, explaining to the Board that one of the interesting outcomes from the visits is that the crofts with a non-resident crofter were often being worked, though none had official sublets in place. He was happy to report that the project represented a good partnership with RPID and sought to continue the visits, using a revised criteria.

Addressing the question of value for money, Director of Operations explained that direct costs to the Commission were low as the visits and reports are being undertaken by RPID. The objective is to get the message out to crofters who are not complying with their duty to complete an Annual Notice that the Commission will take follow up action.

Commissioners wished to see this rolled out as a news story, to counter the perception that the Commission does not take action. The recommendation in the paper, that the physical visits should continue, using the selection criteria proposed, was approved.

16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held via Teams on 7 May 2025.

17 ANY URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business, but Board members wished to record their thanks to the Chair for providing regular information updates to them.

18 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

19 AFTERNOON SESSION

Training session on Code of conduct (annual refresher)

Lorna Johnston from the Standards Commission delivered an engaging refresher training session on the Members Code of Conduct.

The Chair thanked Ms Johnston for delivering the session in person, thanked members for their contributions throughout the day and closed the meeting at 3pm