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Clare Adamson MSP
Convener Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Scottish Parliament

28 January 2026

Dear Clare,

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND: TIMELINE OF EVENTS

In advance of meeting with the CEEAC Committee on 29 January 2026, I thought it would be helpful to set out a timeline of events relating to the extended absence of the CEO & Accountable Officer (Ms Katerina Brown) during 2025 – a matter which is highlighted in Audit Scotland's Section 22 Report on Historic Environment Scotland (HES). This timeline includes actions taken by the Scottish Government and the HES Board, including those taken by the Scottish Government to ensure that as far as possible appropriate governance was maintained during Ms Brown's absence.

Date	Event
23 April 2025	HES Chair (Dr Hugh Hall) was informed that he would not be offered a second term as Chair and that an appointment process would begin to identify his successor.
2 May 2025	First day of absence of Ms Brown.
28 May 2025	Ms Brown wrote to the Scottish Government's Permanent Secretary stating that in accordance with her responsibilities as Accountable Officer of HES, it was her duty to notify him of any temporary absence greater than four weeks. This point would come on 30 May. She said she expected to be away for a further 2-4 weeks, stated she was fully contactable during this time, and that there were no major events or matters planned in the next few weeks that would require AO approval or sign off in this additional period.
16 June 2025	Dr Hall wrote to SG officials informing them that the HES Board intended to recruit an Interim CEO. Dr Hall also confirmed there were no decisions due that required AO approval.

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19 June 2025	Dr Hall requested that SG assist with finding a candidate to fill the Interim CEO role.
20 June 2025	Ms Brown told SG that she intended to return to work, and would be ready to do so from early July or, after pre-booked annual leave, in late July.
23 June 2025	SG wrote to Dr Hall saying, given the material change in circumstances from a situation where we anticipated a long term absence of Ms Brown on sick leave to one where she had notified her intention to return, SG would not take forward at that time further consideration of potential candidates for an interim CEO role.
24 June 2025	Dr Hall wrote to SG saying that it would not be appropriate for Ms Brown to return to work at present, and that the HES Board had agreed that if she did not accept an offer of paid leave, the Board would move to suspend her.
24 June 2025	SG asked for clarification of the reasons why Ms Brown could not be permitted to return to work.
25 June 2025	Ms Brown wrote to SG to inform them of her intention to return to work.
26 June 2025	Dr Hall wrote to SG to tell them that Ms Brown would not be returning to work, repeated that she would either be on paid leave or would be suspended, and asked for assistance with finding an Interim CEO.
27 June 2025	SG wrote to Dr Hall to ask for clarification of the status of Ms Brown.
30 June 2025	Dr Hall wrote to SG to inform them that Ms Brown had submitted another fit note for four weeks, and that the Board intended to recruit an Interim CEO.
1 July 2025	Ms Brown wrote to the SG Permanent Secretary stating she would return to her role as CEO & AO from the week commencing 28 July 2025.
2 July 2025	SG provided Dr Hall the names of three potential candidates for the role of Acting CEO who, once appointed by the Board, could be delegated Acting Accountable Officer responsibilities by SG.
4 July 2025	SG wrote to Dr Hall asking whether, in the light of Ms Brown's stated intention to return to work on Monday 28 July 2025, it remained the Board's intention to suspend her at that time if a period of additional paid leave was not agreed, and asking what the reasons justifying suspension would be and the lawful basis for taking that action.

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8 July 2025	HES Board Member, Andrew Davis, wrote to SG confirming the Board intended to suspend Ms Brown if a period of paid leave was declined.
9 July 2025	SG wrote to Mr Davis asking for information which would explain the lawful basis for suspension in circumstances where Ms Brown had said she would return to work on 28 July 2025.
9 July 2025	Mr Davis wrote to SG outlining that the Board's rationale for suspension of Ms Brown was related to the grievance submitted about her, and ensuring the wellbeing of senior staff.
30 July 2025	Ms Brown wrote to SG seeking a return to work and citing unfair treatment by the Board.
8 August 2025	Dr Hall informed SG that the HES Board's preferred candidate to be Acting CEO was an external candidate whom the Board had identified.
20 August 2025	Kenneth Hogg, SG Director, met with the above candidate to assess their suitability for appointment as Acting Accountable Officer. KH confirmed to the candidate in the meeting and subsequently to Dr Hall that if the Board appointed the candidate as Acting CEO the SG would be content to also delegate Acting Accountable Officer duties to them.
22 August 2025	Ms Brown notified SG and HES Chair's Committee that she was fit to return to work.
29 August 2025	Dr Hall SG notified SG that he would resign from his role as Chair earlier than planned, with his last day being Friday 5 September 2025.
5 September 2025	Dr Hall's last day in role.
5 September 2025	Ms Brown was suspended by the HES Board.
10 September 2025	Members of the HES Board met with SG Director General Exchequer, Strategy and Performance (Shona Riach), Kenneth Hogg and other SG officials. SG re-confirmed that it was content that the candidate put forward by the Board would be delegated Acting Accountable Officer duties, if the Board appointed them as Acting CEO.
22 September 2025	Sir Mark Jones took up role as new Chair of HES.
2 October 2025	Ms Brown emailed SG and HES Chair requesting a return to work.

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15 October 2025	Sir Mark Jones confirmed that the Board had decided that recruitment of an Acting CEO would not proceed as the CEO & AO would return to work from 20 October.
20 October 2025	Ms Brown returned to work on duties restricted to her AO role, in the first instance to oversee preparation of the Annual Accounts and then to sign them, and then to focus on resolving key issues highlighted by Audit Scotland.
10 November 2025	Two new Board Members were appointed by SG to HES Board on an interim basis.
15 December 2025	HES Chief Operating Officer, Stephen Uphill, started work in a new interim role.
19 January 2026	David Martin began an independent review of HES organisational culture, structure and governance, reporting to Sir Mark and the Board of HES.

As this timeline shows, the circumstances surrounding the absence of Ms Brown - the HES CEO & Accountable Officer - involved multiple overlapping employment and governance issues. The Historic Environment Scotland Act 2014 establishes HES as an operationally independent public body. Decisions concerning the employment of staff, including the CEO, are the responsibility of HES. The Scottish Government is responsible for appointing an Accountable Officer for HES under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. Under the 2014 Act, the Accountable Officer must be a member of HES staff, and under the HES Framework Agreement the Accountable Officer is required to be the CEO.

On multiple occasions between June and October 2025 Ms Brown informed the Scottish Government and the Board that she wished to return to work. On these occasions she was prevented from doing so by the HES Board, by being asked to either extend her period of leave or face suspension, or by being suspended on 5 September 2025. This was the situation for the majority of the five and a half month absence (from early July 2025 onwards). Ms Brown resumed her Accountable Officer duties on 20 October 2025.

Within that context, throughout the affected period the Scottish Government took active steps to minimise the impact of the CEO's absence. The Scottish Government and the HES Board considered whether any existing HES staff could be appointed as an Acting CEO & Accountable Officer for the period of Ms Brown's absence. No suitable internal candidate was available. These considerations took into account, among other issues, the lack of a permanent Finance Director in HES, and no Chief Operating Officer role existing at that time.

At the request of Dr Hall, on 2 July the Scottish Government provided to the Board the names of three potential candidates from outside of HES for the role of Acting CEO, whom if appointed by the Board could then be delegated responsibilities by the Scottish Government to be Acting Accountable Officer. On 8 August 2025 Dr Hall confirmed to the Scottish Government another external candidate of the Board's choosing for the role of Acting CEO. On 20 August Kenneth Hogg, Scottish Government Director for Culture & External Affairs,

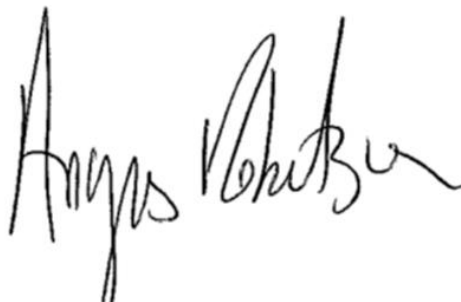
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met this candidate to assess their suitability also to be appointed as Acting Accountable Officer. The Scottish Government confirmed that they would be content to do so. However, the Board decided subsequently not to appoint the individual as Acting CEO.

During this period, Scottish Government officials attended all HES Board meetings. I appointed a new Chair, two new interim Board members, and SG officials assisted with processes to enable the appointment by HES of a new HES Chief Operating Officer and the appointment by HES of David Martin to lead an independent review of HES culture, organisational structure and governance.

Given the issues highlighted by the Auditor General in his Section 22 Report I hope the Committee finds this detailed information helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angus Robertson', written in a cursive style.

Angus Robertson

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