**SCOTTISH FORESTRY EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Minutes (Draft - Official)**

**23 May 2023, Silvan House, Central Meeting Room 1 and Teams Meeting**

**SET Attendees:**

Dave Signorini (DS)

Zahid Deen (ZD)

Jonathan Taylor (JT)

Brendan Callaghan (BC)

Ross MacHardie (RM)

James Aldred (JA) – minutes

**In Attendance:**

Helen McKay (HM)

Marliese Richmond (MR) – for item 3

**Apologies:**

Alan Hampson

1. **Minutes and actions of previous meeting**

The minutes of the 3 March and 27 April meetings were approved.

On actions arising and outstanding:

* AP6/May 22 Health and Safety Policy Statement – noted as closed.
* AP4/Nov 22 Business continuity plan – noted as still underway. JT noted that no issues requiring activation of the Plan had been flagged in relation to either SF’s or FLS’s upcoming office moves.
* AP1/Jan 23 Woodland officer recruitment and studentships – noted that the 19 May budget discussion had confirmed the available financial envelope for woodland officer recruitment, and that the studentship programme was likely to be deferred to next financial year. Noted as closed.
* AP1/Mar 23 SLA resourcing – JT to bring paper to June meeting or circulate by correspondence.
* AP1/Apr 23 Woodland creation statistics: Submission to be sent to Cabinet Secretary around one to two weeks prior to stats release
* AP2/Apr 23 Announcement handling for woodland , and how it links/times with other major announcements, i.e. Enhancements or Economic Study
* AP3/Apr 23 Concerns regarding tree planting on agricultural land – BC reported that while discussions were underway regarding the interaction between woodland creation and farm payments, the sphere of possible action was limited due to timelines surrounding the upcoming Agriculture Bill. It was resolved to amend the action to “ensure that policies and practices are joined up with the Agriculture Bill, land reform developments, etc.”, and BC undertook to bring progress back to a future meeting for stocktake and review.

1. **Prioritising change in Scottish Forestry**

ZD introduced the paper, noting the challenge of increasing woodland creation targets and expected shortfalls in delivery, together with the past and planned volume of change across SF. The organisation therefore needed to pivot more towards delivery and consider new actions to support this and the possible deprioritisation of other actions.

The paper proposed a set of priority actions with provisional costs and savings attached.

RM noted the recommendation to seek increased funding from the Scottish Government, and noted that previous feedback to ministers had been that SF had invested a lot in staffing over past year. Increased funding was therefore likely to be a hard ask, particularly in the current financial climate, and strong messaging would be needed. DS noted that a full business case was likely to be required by SG Finance, with evidence and evaluation built in; a possible alternative if additional funding were rejected could be to propose using some woodland creation funding to support improved processes.

JT noted that the proposals chimed with previous discussions and that organisational redesign could potentially bring quick wins. Decisions on this paper could also influence the development of the Corporate Plan if organisational priorities were to shift.

On the existing backlog of woodland creation work, BC noted that during training on the woodland creation pre-application process, variances in practice between Conservancies emerged as to when applications were allowed to be submitted, with some requiring full completion of pre-application due diligence prior to submission and others permitting submission without such completion. Clear expectations were planned to be communicated at the June Customer Representatives meeting.

Other points raised in discussion included:

* The need for clear evidence on staff retention rates to support the proposed salary supplements.
* Whether trade unions would be willing to consider such supplements if they resulted in variable payments within the same salary grades.
* **Action: ZD to bring more detailed options analysis back to SET to allow decision making.**

1. **Quarterly risk register review**

JT noted the recommendation from Internal Audit that the corporate risk register be brought to SET quarterly for a sense check on processes around risk and risk management, and for the top organisational risks to be updated on and discussed if necessary.

MR reported that the Scottish Government risk management team had recommended the SF update its risk appetite statement to complement the risk register and consider specific appetite levels for business areas, and had offered to facilitate a workshop for SET and non-executive members. SET agreed to support such a workshop.

* **Action: JT / MR to arrange Risk Appetite workshop for SET & SAG members**

The SG risk management team had also suggested that all SF staff should have a relevant level of risk management training. SET supported this in principle but noted that work would need to be undertaken to identify relevant staff and programme appropriate training.

SET then reviewed the risk register and received updates on risks as follows:

* On cybersecurity, JT reported that there were expected to be no cybersecurity implications from the upcoming office move, as the new location was part of the SCOTS network. A review of cybersecurity-related policies and practices was planned for summer 2023.
* On the Service Level Agreement, ZD reported that FLS had advised that they were willing to provide backstop HR services, hence the reduction in the stated risk.
* On woodland creation, JT noted that the proposed actions would provide mitigation if agreed to by the Cabinet Secretary.
* On climate change, JT noted the need to clarify the definition and scope of the risk as stated.
* **Action: JT to review previous discussions to identify any potential additional risks to incorporate.**

1. **AOB and items by exception**

JT noted reduced team capacity in Internal Communications due to long term leave.

Regarding DS’s move to the position of interim Director of Environment and Forestry, JT reported that BC would become interim Accountable Officer, with SET collectively acting as de facto Chief Executive until an interim appointment could be made. The process for that appointment would be announced by the end of June.

It was agreed to move the planned AAC meeting to the 13th June and defer the planned SAG visit to the end of July.