**SCOTTISH FORESTRY EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Minutes**

**24 January 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)

Alan Hampson (AH)

James Aldred (JA) – minutes

**In Attendance:**

Helen McKay (HM)

**Apologies:**

(none)

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

An amendment to the November minutes was noted under item 2, SF Target Operating Model:

In discussion, SET noted:

[…]

That, as per the key assumptions noted in the report, there will not be radical change to the service delivery or architecture of FGS in the next few years, and Casebook will still be our case management system for FGS case types and regulatory activity.

[…]

There was agreement on the architecture/casebook assumptions and it was agreed to extend the timeframe for the TOM [etc.]

The minutes as amended were approved. The December minutes were approved.

On actions arising and outstanding:

* AP1/May 22, future discussion of holistic approach to staff wellbeing: ZD/JT to discuss and clarify requirement by the February meeting.
* AP6/May 22, Health and Safety Policy Statement: BC to bring to March meeting
* AP1/Nov 22, Target operating model: closed as complete.
* AP4/Nov 22, Business continuity plan: noted as ongoing.
* AP2/Dec 22, Communications: core briefs and information management: closed as complete.
* AP3/Dec 22, Risk register: closed as complete.
* AP4/Dec 22, Future grant support for forestry consultation: closed as complete.

1. **Recruitment and Retention of Woodland Officer Roles**

BC introduced the paper, noting measures taken to date to address challenges in recruiting and retaining Woodland Officers and the paper’s recommendations to address residual issues of recruitment and temporary vacancies, as well as proposals for a rejuvenated student scheme.

BC noted that the current model of temporary recruitment to cover vacancies arising from temporary promotions, development opportunities, etc. was resulting in a ‘locked-in’ proportion of resource gaps, leading to strain on conservancies.

In discussion, DS noted the limited data available regarding the level of turnover and any reasons for departure, and the difficulty of quantifying the problem as a result, especially given the recent investment in creating additional resource within Conservancy teams. BC noted that this expansion had provided existing staff with positive steps to promotion but had meant a loss of capacity at Woodland Officer level, and had temporary resource implications while new and promoted staff were trained and supervised.

Regarding studentships, SET noted the unbudgeted resource ask and short timeframe. HM noted that a successful programme could increase the pool of skilled applicants for posts within Scottish Forestry and across the wider sector. On recruitment and training, BC reported that the proposal was for one or two studentships per Conservancy, with a rotation including time in National Office, and that the same cohort training could be used as for Woodland and Assistant Woodland Officers.

On resourcing for the studentship programme, estimate to be around £0.25m per annum, RM noted the potential use of Forestry Grant Scheme funding to support studentships, subject to clarity as to priorities. AH noted that the Forestry Strategy Implementation Fund could provide a contribution towards skills development, but that this would mean less money would be available for projects elsewhere.

On the proposed benchmarking exercise, HM noted that the external environment was currently changing so quickly that any benchmarking risked becoming rapidly outdated. DS noted the volume of recent internal organisational change was also still bedding in.

It was resolved to:

* **Agree** the proposal to allow for the filling of up to 5 temporary woodland officer roles with permanent appointments.
* **Agree** the proposal for a forestry student programme in 2023 **subject to** the proposal of a part-funding approach on the part of Conservancies, and the presentation of clearly defined expectations for the students.
* **Reject** the proposed formal Woodland Officer benchmarking exercise due to organisational change to date, while recognising the need to understand the ongoing retention problem.
* **Request** Operational Services & Transformation to provide updated data on Woodland and Assistant Woodland Officer joiners and leavers from October 2022 to the end of January 2023.
* **Action: Conservancies to propose part-funding proposals and detail expectations for students**
* **Action: Operational Services & Transformation to provide updated data as requested by end of February**

1. **Risk Register: risk review and process discussion**

JT introduced the paper, noting the changes made to the register and surrounding processes had incorporated feedback from auditors, non-executive advisors, and the Audit and Assurance Committee.

Regarding processes and presentation, SET members suggested considering incorporating reporting as to whether a risk was increasing or decreasing, and the relative proximity of risks. ZD noted that elements of some risks were beyond SF’s control, for example woodland creation targets were reliant on sectoral capacity not just SF activity. SET noted the need to have clear risk registers, set criteria for including an item on the Strategic Risk Register (as opposed to Programme or Project Register) and the value to risk management of discussions at other groups, such as SOG.

Updates and potential risks to be considered for addition were noted as:

* Resourcing issues
* Separating out risks around the new HR and Learning & Development software systems from the new financial system
* Review and clarify the current risk against backlog of conservancy work, particularly relating to woodland creation applications
* Explore visual representations of risks, e.g. dashboards
* Check current and residual risk which are the same.
* Show recent movement (e.g. arrow) of risk mitigation, improving, neutral or reverse.
* Introduce issues log

SET noted the report and **approved** the proposed actions.

1. **Silvan House relocation**

RM introduced the report, noting that some investigation into potential locations was still underway, particularly with regard to digital architecture. The presented costings were indicative and did not include fit-out and digital infrastructure issues. A survey seeking staff views on priorities for the new office had been prepared and was due to go live shortly.

In discussion, SET noted:

* The short timescale for a decision to be made and the risks and amount of change/disruption this placed on staff.
* The offer from FLS to co-locate in their preferred location, but that at the time specific details of the FLS offer were not available.
* Feedback to date from staff conversations and Future Working consultations indicating strong support for a customisable, definitively ‘Scottish Forestry’ space.
* The need for access to appropriate meeting rooms and conferencing facilities.
* That existing staff were being stretched in the absence of a dedicated project management resource.
* That there remained gaps in the information available, including around potential dilapidation costs at the end of any occupation; information on digital access and infrastructure; the customisability of office space in some options; energy performance ratings for the various options; and the outcome of the planned staff consultation.

ZD noted cost reduction and emission reduction as key components of the organisation’s developing Estate Strategy and Future Working Programme. SET noted the weighting FLS had assigned in their business case, but agreed that SF would not adopt those scores and would instead use financial sustainability, emissions and customisation as higher weighted criteria. SET then discussed the longlisted properties against these criteria.

Ross undertook to update the proposals, timelines and details and report back to SET.

SET:

* **Agreed** the proposed key aims and criteria for measuring options, and **agreed that** financial sustainability, emissions, and customisability should be high-weighted criteria.
* **Agreed** the shortlisting of Meadowbank House, Saughton House, Victoria Quay and Apex House on the basis of currently available information, with the inclusion of Apex House subject to clarification of FLS’ proposals. Fairmilehead was discounted on the basis of cost and Waverley Court on the basis of limited office customisability and potential IT risks.
* **Agreed** the proposed project resourcing and appointment of a dedicated project manager.
* **Action: RM and working team to update proposals, timelines and details and report back to SET**
* **Action: RM to advise if a final decision is required before the next SET meeting (22nd February)**

1. **AOB**

AH noted the development of a draft [Corporate Planner](https://s0017a.scotland.gov.uk:8443/documents/A42185707/details), incorporating governance and stakeholder meetings, publications and key priorities responsibilities, and recommended that this be reviewed at future SET meetings.

SET noted a proposal for an all-staff physical gathering, and **agreed** to discuss options outside the meeting and report back.