**SCOTTISH FORESTRY EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Minutes (Draft - Official)**

**31 October 2023, Saughton House, E1 Meeting Room**

**SET Attendees:**

Paul Lowe (PL) – Chair

Brendan Callaghan (BC)

Zahid Deen (ZD)

Alan Hampson (AH)

Ross Machardie (RM)

Jonathan Taylor (JT)

James Aldred (JA) – minutes

**Apologies:**

None.

**In Attendance:**

Helen McKay (HM), Chief Forester

Kevin MacMillan (KM), Head of Project Management Office, for item 3

Marelle Dalziel (MD), HR Business Partner, for item 4

1. **Welcome and declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

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

The minutes of the 26th September meeting were approved subject to any further comment.

On actions arising from previous meetings:

* ZD/Kevin MacMillan to review proposed timetabling of Process Efficiency Project – Long Term Forest Plans – noted as complete and closed.
* Interaction between SF and the Agriculture Reform Programme: BC/AH to shape key challenges and propose approach to SET – BC reported that engagement with Agriculture colleagues was underway, with SF holding a seat on the relevant steering group. Noted that a paper would be brought to the December SET meeting for discussion.
* Future Working Recommendations: Bastian to produce and submit implementation plan – noted that this had been received by correspondence and closed.
* Woodland creation action plan: Brendan to circulate table of woodland creation posts – taken under AOB.
* Woodland creation action plan: Alan to liaise with Executive Office on arranging pre-summit meeting of SET and others as required to discuss expectations, handling and potential outcomes from the upcoming Woodland Creation Summit – noted that this was in diaries and closed.
* Woodland creation action plan: Jonathan & Kevin to work on an action plan, ‘Routemap’ and update communications approach – noted as on the agenda.
* Budgets and resourcing: SET to engage with Ross to discuss and confirm training budget requirements – noted as on the agenda.
* Budgets and resourcing: Ross to provide lines to Paul for input at Directorate level – noted as complete and closed.
* Ross to circulate updated proposals on accommodation costs for agreement – clarified that this related to estates costs; for update at next SET meeting.

1. **Woodland creation update**

KM presented the draft route map, action list, and dashboard for discussion.

In discussion, suggestions included:

* Sharing the draft route map with the Land Use Transformation Board to flag interdependencies.
* Reviewing the significance of highlighted milestones
* Revising the title to “Route map to increasing woodland creation” to focus on increased delivery.
* Reviewing the action list for completeness and prioritisation.
* Presenting the reviewed outputs to SAG for feedback.
* Sharing the final product with Ministers and/or at the upcoming Woodland Creation Summit.

**Actions:p**

* **SET to provide feedback and suggestions to KM by Friday 3rd November**
* **KM to summarise feedback via correspondence for review**
* **KM/JT to liaise on design input**

JT updated on related communications, noting recent internal comms spotlighting woodland case studies and woodland creation in the context of Climate Week. SET noted the need to manage expectations of any achievement over 18,000 hectares, suggesting “achieving and sustaining” 18,000 as an appropriate target, and to highlight the shared nature of woodland creation as an endeavour, requiring applications and effort from the forestry sector.

HM undertook to explore an appropriate role for the Chief Forester in supporting sectoral and general communications, for discussion at a future meeting.

1. **Career Progression for Woodland Officers**

MD introduced the report, noting that a key aim was to expand the complement of staff capable of dealing with complex technical work, and to provide capacity for staff supervision and development.

The preferred option sought to provide the opportunity for career progression of Woodland Officers to the role of Technical Officer, with associated promotion boards; and to permit such promotions, and those of Assistant Woodland Officers to Woodland Officer posts, to occur within the staff member’s current Conservancy rather than requiring a vacant post to be available. If occurring within the Conservancy, the post being vacated would not be backfilled. However, a vacant Technical Officer post would revert to Woodland Officer level to support a career progression pipeline.

Regarding management arrangements, it was noted that Technical Officer and Operations Manager roles were at the same grade, so it was proposed that Technical Officers report to the relevant Senior Operations Manager.

MD noted that the promotion board approach would include interviews and practical assessment elements, and that Learning & Development were working with Conservancies to develop a competency framework to support promotion decision making.

MD further reported that the relevant trade unions had been consulted and were supportive of the proposed approach, noting that it demonstrated SF’s commitment to staff retention and development.

**SET approved the preferred option,** subject to amendment to allow Conservancies and HR to mutually consider the proposed reversion of vacant Technical Officer posts to Woodland Officer grade on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the appropriate grade composition of their staff complement.

SET requested some further work be undertaken:

* Confirmation of the expected additional on costs (pensions, salaries, etc.).
* Review of the potential equalities impacts of the approved approach.
* Transfer of the options appraisal into corporate format for the record.
* **Action: MD to implement.**

1. **Six-month budget review**

RM introduced the paper, noting the potential scope for up to £1m of flexibility to use grant funding to offset overspends in other resource budgets.

**Actions:**

* **SET to flag any potential developing underspends to RM.**
* **SET to identify ‘shovel-ready’ projects for the reallocation of potential underspend**
* **RM to circulate budget envelope for 2024/25 once confirmed**
* **RM to follow up on issue of EU funding draw-down and whether this will accrue to SF budgets or be revenue-neutral.**

1. **AOB**

SET discussed potential backfill for the currently vacant Delivery & Improvement Conservator post, and the possibility of further posts providing a strategic overview of regulations and strategic thinking around woodland creation and Future Grant Support for Forestry, potentially funded from FGS budgets.

**SET approved** backfill recruitment to the vacant Delivery & Improvement Conservator post and a fixed term FFGS Project Lead.

* **Action: ZD / BC to liaise and scope a) a joint post of Strategic Lead for Woodland Creation and Regulations b) two separate fixed term posts each covering one element.**
* **Action: BC to review draft JD for strategic post.**

BC noted that funding had been allocated for three training capacity posts but that SET approval for the creation of those posts was outstanding.

* **Action: BC to circulate detail of posts for approval by correspondence.**

ZD noted the potential loss of established woods from increasing storm activity and other climate change impacts.

* **Action: AH to bring timber production forecast to a future SET meeting for discussion.**

AH reported discussions at SOG reporting an increased number of instances of staff being treated poorly by sector contacts.

* **Action: AH to liaise with JT on acceptable actions policy.**