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| SF_col_landscape_logo | Strategic Advisory Group Minutes |

1. Monday, 11th December 2023

**SF Meeting Room, Saughton House and Microsoft Teams**

***Draft for approval***

**Present:**

Paul Lowe, CEO (PL)

Ross MacHardie, Head of Finance & Business Support (RMacH)

Alan Hampson, Director of Policy and Practice (AH)

Jonathan Taylor, Head of Scottish Forestry Executive Office (JT)

Brendan Callaghan, Director of Operational Delivery) (BC)

Zahid Deen, Director of Operational Services and Transformation (ZD)

Helen McKay, Chief Forester for Scotland (HMcK)

Eleanor Ryan, Non-Executive Advisor (ER)

Phil Taylor, Non-Executive Advisor (PT)

James Stuart, Non-Executive Committee member (JS)

Richard Morris, Non-Executive Committee member) (RM)

**In Attendance:**

Marliese Richmond, Corporate Planning and Governance Manager (MR)

Margot Abbott, Senior Project Manager (MA)

James Fletcher, Senior Business Analyst (JF)

**Apologies:**

None

1. **Welcome and declarations of interest**

PL welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no declarations of interests made.

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

The draft minutes for the SAG meeting held on 29th March 2023 were agreed.

The following action points from previous meetings were concluded:

* AP5/June 22 - BC to collate information and provide analysis on the scoring of FGS applications. Covered as part of agenda.
* AP12/Dec 22 - MD to look at more detailed feedback in staff survey in respect of caring responsibilities (managers support for carers) and if possible breakdown by location/cost centre. The Survey results showed that 52% of

those participating in the survey responded positively to the statement ‘I feel supported by my manager to balance my work and caring responsibilities’, 44% neither agreed nor disagreed, with 4% disagreeing. Due to the small number of respondents, it was not possible to explore the reasons provided by those disagreeing because the survey suppresses responses where there are fewer than 10 respondents. The Employee Passport has been launched, in respond to the circumstances, disabilities, health conditions or commitments which might impact our work at some point. It provides a framework for staff members to have a discussion with their line manager. EDI Manager has worked with the Comms team to raise awareness of the Employee Passport in the Staff Newsletter. The HR team also continue to raise the Employee Passport with employees and managers where appropriate. SAG members advised that the Employee Passport should continue to be highlighted to staff on a regular basis.

* AP13/Mar 23 - AH, ZD, BC will work with MR to clarify what should be articulated in the corporate plan and produce a draft plan for the end of May. Covered as part of agenda.
1. **End of Year Reflection – Paul Lowe, CEO**

PL wanted to take the opportunity to celebrate the successes of SF, to say thank you to the staff and acknowledge the good job they have done. He has observed increasing confidence and capabilities in staff, and an increasing sense of identity. There is much to be proud of, ranging from the revised UK Forestry Standards, clean set of accounts, increased woodland creation delivery, implementation of the Improvement Delivery Programme, involvement in reshaping the Agricultural Reform Policy, and improvements to our underpinning corporate governance. PL has been on a significant learning curve, and staff have supported him to do that.

The Non Executives agreed, noted the sense of progress, and feel that SF is moving into the future, and that the CEO has played an active role in reaching the current positive position.

1. **Woodland Creation and Strategic Management Information**

SET Sponsor Zahid Deen. Presented by James Fletcher (JF), Senior Business Analyst and Margot Abbott (MA), Senior Project Manager.

**Woodland Creation MI Project**

JF gave a presentation providing a progress overview of the Woodland Creation Management Information (MI) and Strategic MI Project. Seven areas of management information are collected at present, 3 newly available.

| **Report Name** | **Description of Information** |
| --- | --- |
| FGS Summary statistics | Report that covers detailed reporting on all elements of the Forest Grant Scheme. It includes detailed reporting on Woodland Creation at all points during the process. |
| Forest Grant Scheme (FGS) Weekly | Report covers newly submitted applications for Woodland Creation. |
| Summary of potential Woodland Creation | Report summarises current and potential applications for Woodland Creation by claim year. |
| Claims monitor | Report contains the current status of all claims by Conservancy including the Woodland Creation Grant Claims. |
| WC Applications Awaiting Assessment (new, signed off)  | Report itemises, by case, the Woodland Creation applications that have been submitted but have not yet been approved. |
| WC Unclaimed Contracts (new, awaiting sign off) | Report itemises, by case, unclaimed contracts from previous claim years. |
| WC Conservancy Case list (new, awaiting sign off) | Report itemises, by case, Woodland Creation contracts per Woodland Officer. |

**Strategic MI Project**

In relation to MI at present, there are certain limitations and challenges facing SF. MI is largely siloed by business area, with a heavy reliance on snapshot excel spreadsheet reporting requiring manual time-consuming manipulation for staff. This type of format means there is a limited capability to combine data from different business areas to generate rich MI analyse trends.

Establishing a ‘Reporting Hub’ has been a key development. This is a central location, where staff can access authoritative business approved reports. This unified MI data repository will provide a ‘Single source of truth’ across the whole organisation. It will remove the need for staff to save their own versions of reports, leading to better information governance.

With this centralised approach reports originating from Casebook are published at set intervals to an established central Reporting Hub location. The vision is to provide a single, central, accessible and searchable platform, for both internal staff or external customers. It is part of a longer term drive to improve and unify the use of MI tools, and SF’s data management, analysis and information sharing. Internally, this will help provide SF a common knowledge point. It will support decision making, business monitoring and helping to direct limited resources. Externally, better MI will help SF tell its story, demonstrate its impact and progress more effectively to ministers, other organisations and the public. At present, MI pages are being developed on Saltire and staff communications are being planned.

Improving our MI capability relies on identifying better MI software options. We are taking an SG Digital Standard approach – which is to re-use before buying or before building. PowerBI and ESRI have been identified as options. JF took the group through a presentation of the ESRI prototype on SF’s Saltire pages.

The group thanked JF for the comprehensive presentation and the following points were discussed.

* Software options – It was confirmed that open source data equivalents had been considered but as ESRI was already available to SF and is more malleable than open source options, it was utilised as preferred option. It is being prototyped as a preferred option alongside other identified option of PowerBI.
* Various options/prototypes for using data in different ways are being scoped such as setting alert e.g. if cases go over 90 days; automatically updating data at set intervals; and report building tools. Testing and experimenting with options are a crucial phase, with user feedback forming part of this. SAG members encouraged some risk taking in this area to discover which elements of MI would be beneficial. SAG members also emphasised the importance of interaction and user feedback.
* It was agreed that the interpretation of the data was extremely important – the ‘so what’ aspect of data – what story does it tell? A balance will need to be struck between official external information and preliminary internal information. It was suggested that a data ‘dictionary’ could be created for staff/users.

**Action:** Development of MI to take into account feedback from SAG members. Update requested mid 2024 back to SAG.

1. **Corporate Plan and Strategy -** Marliese Richmond, Corporate Planning and Governance Manager, Jonathan Taylor, Head of Executive Office

JT and MR gave an update on the Corporate Plan and Strategy. JT gave a presentation which reminded SAG members of the work has been undertaken to date. With the Cab Sec’s focus on woodland creation in the summer/autumn, work paused. Some work has been undertaken more recently, which is summarised below.

* It is now a Corporate Plan and Strategy, which will be clearer on what we are going to work on, what the outcomes will be, with specific targets, and high level actions on how to get there.
* Through a series of workshops held with SET members, a Vision and Mission has been developed, and current Purpose has been reviewed/redrafted. This was shared with the SAG members.

***Vision***

Scotland's forests are sustainably managed and deliver more for people, the environment and the economy.

***Mission***

We increase our positive impact (on Scotland’s forests) by developing our people, processes, and systems, and are recognised as a trusted, collaborative, and innovative organisation

***Our Purpose***

Current Purpose: The sustainable management and expansion of forests and woodlands to deliver more for Scotland.

Suggested rewording: Scottish Forestry is the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support and regulation.

Or: To deliver effective regulation and support and to deliver policy advice to Scottish Ministers, effective regulation and funding support on forestry.

In terms of next steps for the Corporate Plan and Strategy:

* With the evolving budget settlement and potential constraints, it will be necessary to comprehensively review our priorities and prepare for a range of settlement scenarios and reflect these into the Corporate Plan and Strategy.
* Respond to the outcomes from cross sector Woodland Creation Summit (12.12.23)
* The drive towards Public Sector Reform will need to be threaded through the Corporate Plan and Strategy. SF is linking to this transformation through the Environment Public Service Review as part of the collective conversations taking place at the Environment and Economy Leaders Group.
* It is intended that there will be small, focused group discussions to develop strategic directions and outcomes early in new year, led by SMEs/SET members who will have ownership for those sections. Discussions have been focused on taking a landscape scale approach and potential pooling of resources. Public Sector Reform was requested as a future SAG agenda item.

Public consultation is required to take place across six weeks. The plan is still for to meet an April publication date.

The SAG members discussed the following points:

* *Vision, Mission and Purpose:* It is useful to have a Vision and Mission to accompany Purpose as it describes the full extent of SF’s impact. It was felt that the second option for Purpose was preferable. Reworked Purpose has sharper focus on function. Remove repeat of ‘effective’.
* *Values:* Corporate Plan and Strategy provides another opportunity to refresh work around Values and Behaviours. It will be important to link this to work being undertaken on Women into Leadership.
* *Budget Challenges:* It is anticipated that budgets may be revised downwards. However, there has been no indication that woodland creation targets will change and the regulatory activities of SF will continue to be central.
* *Communications:* It will be important to keep staff engaged in the development of the Corporate Plan.
* *Publication of Corporate Plan and Strategy:* It was acknowledged that while the development of the Corporate Plan and Strategy has been taking place during a period of change, with a pivot to woodland creation, and forthcoming budget restrictions, this should not delay its publication. SF should be clear on its own story.

**Actions:**

* JT/MR to meet with JS to discuss both Corporate Plan and Strategy as well as Risk Management.
* ER/HMcK presenting paper on Women into Leadership to SET. MR/JT to ensure actions on both Women into Leadership and Values/Behaviours reflected in Corporate Plan and Strategy.
* Note rewording of Purpose to remove repeat of ‘effective’ in future iterations of Purpose.
* Schedule discussion of Public Sector Reform at future SAG.
1. **Tree Health Update and Discussion on the management of the bark beetle Ips typographus -** Alan Hampson, Director of Policy and Practice

AH reminded the SAG members that SF is the competent authority responsible for the organisation and performance of official controls and other official activities in Scotland insofar relating to plant pests, plants, plant products or other objects, and professional operators. The UK is signed up to the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), an intergovernmental treaty signed by over 180 countries, aiming to protecting the world's plant resources from the spread and introduction of pests, and promoting safe trade.

In working to protect Scotland’s trees from pests and diseases, there is a focus on:

* Prevention - Keeping pests and diseases out
* Vigilance - Surveys and rapid response
* Intervention - Elimination and containment.

Early detection of pests and diseases is key, as any outbreak can be very resource intensive. The resilience of trees is important, and plant health monitoring is an important tool to pick up ill health early on. Pest outbreaks can be very difficult to contain.

Key policy issues being faced include:

* Managing new threats – Globalisation means that pests and diseases can travel more easily to new geographic areas. The number of incidents and outbreaks is set to increase.
* Assessing the risks posed by climate change – new threats and stressed trees. A warmer climate is more conducive to pests and diseases, and some trees may not be suited to and may not thrive in a warm climate.
* Specific issues include contingency planning for possible loss of West of Scotland pest free area status; and slowing the spread of Phytophthora ramorum in larch trees

AH provided details to the SAG members on the unfolding threat being posed by Ips typographus, the eight-toothed spruce bark beetle. This beetle has been responsible for damage to over 100,000ha in continental Europe. It is now in SE England and breeding populations have been found in Kent in 2021. It was found in Devilla Forest, Kincardine, in Fife in a trap in June 23. It has also been found in a woodland near Falkirk in a trap. It is conjectured that it probably arrived in Scotland from the continent by ship

With climate change and the increase in temperatures, there are perhaps only 15 years left where it may be possible to plan for and manage outbreaks. Beetles will inevitably spread to Scotland, but initially they will not be able to breed due to the extremes of our temperature. Climate change is leading to more unsettled weather, storms and windblow. Windblow provides beetles with habitat where they can live.

The impact of an Ips outbreak could have a major impact both on the forestry sector and wider economy. A 50km exclusion zone for forestry vehicles would have to be imposed around an outbreak – in the case of Ips seen so far in Scotland, this would have covered the movement of forestry products around central Scotland, including major trunk routes (e.g. Forth Road Bridge) and cities (Edinburgh and Glasgow). The considerable practical implications will require SF to get the sector on board with taking action, not only harvesting but nurseries, processing, transport, garden centres, timber merchants etc. Consideration will need to be given to contingency planning in the event of an exclusion zone.

The following points were discussed by the SAG members:

* *Climate Change and Resilience of Trees:* Most trees fight off insect attacks by exuding resin, which requires a lot of water. If trees are stressed due to drought, they are less able to fight off pests. Tree resilience is important to limit spread. Their immunity may be compromised with climate change.
* *Community Engagement:* Inform the public so that they do not become a vector for disease. Scope opportunities to maximise input from ‘Citizen Science’, to increase reporting tree health issues. It was suggested that a Civ Tech project could be used not only to identify disease but feedback on level of stress in local forest populations.
* *Contingency Planning:* Keep ministers informed about Ips and other tree health situations. Need to start preparing for significant tree health threat such as Ips in order to be able to respond to threats with a level of confidence. Develop a narrative with Scottish Ministers, as, in the event of a significant threat, it will require substantial resourcing.
* *West of Scotland Pest Free Zone:* The pest free status of the West of Scotland is vulnerable as pests start to encroach boundary areas. This may affect timber routes into/from Ireland. There are political challenges to this issue. It will be important to keep UK Government, Northern Ireland Office and Foreign Office and others of any export/import controls.

**Actions:**

* AH/Head of Tree Health to take into account feedback from discussions with SAG members.
* Deep dive into Risk/Contingency Planning as a whole for SF at either AAC or future SAG. JT/MR to schedule.

1. **AOB**

Budget: PL confirmed SET discussing range of budget scenarios in preparation for budget settlement over coming week. Following this, there will be communication and engagement with both staff and broader sector. Internal budget meetings will form the preparation for discussions with Ministers on priorities and budget management once final settlement known.

Permanent CEO: New CEO to be recruited in new year. Process being led by Kevin Quinlan.

1. **Date of Next Meeting**

29th February 2024 at 10am

Planned Discussions for Future Meetings

Current planned topics:

• 29.2.24 Budget and Forward Look

• 19.6.24 Women into Leadership; Gender Representation on Public Boards

• 19.9.24 Risk Management Update

**Statutory Advisory Group (SAG) Action List**

| **Ref** | **Meeting** | **Action** | **Lead / Staff Member** | **Target Date** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| AP5 | June 22 | BC to collate information and provide analysis on the scoring of FGS applications. | BC | June 23 | Closed |
| AP11 | Sept 22 | Policy and Practice to work with MR to develop key questions around themes which have already emerged through prior consultation. | AH/Marliese Richmond | Mar 23 | Closed: feeding into Corp Plan process |
| AP12 | Dec 22 | MD to look at more detailed feedback in staff survey in respect of caring responsibilities (managers support for carers) and if possible breakdown by location/cost centre | MD/JT | Next SAG | Closed  |
| AP13 | Mar 23 | AH, ZD, BC will work with MR to clarify what should be articulated in the corporate plan and produce a draft plan for the end of May. | AH, ZD, BC and MR | May 2023 | Closed  |
| AP14 | Dec 23 | Woodland Creation MI – JF/MA to Develop MI to take into account feedback from SAG members. Update requested mid 2024 back to SAG. | JF/MA | Mid 2024 | Open  |
| AP15 | Dec 23 | JT/MR to meet with JS to discuss both Corporate Plan and Strategy as well as Risk Management. | JT/MR/JS |  | Open |
| AP16 | Dec 23 | ER/HMcK to present a paper on Women into Leadership to SET. MR/JT to ensure actions on both Women into Leadership and Values/Behaviours reflected in Corporate Plan and Strategy. | MR/JT |  | Open |
| AP17 | Dec 23 | Corporate Plan and Strategy - rewording of Purpose to remove repeat of ‘effective’ in future iterations of Purpose.  | MR/JT |  | Open |
| AP18 | Dec 23 | Schedule discussion of Public Sector Reform at future SAG*.* | MR/JT | Future SAG | Open  |
| AP19 | Dec 23 | Management of the bark beetle (Ips Typographus) - AH/Head of Tree Health to take into account feedback from discussions with SAG members | AH/Head of Tree Health  |  | Open |
| AP20 | Dec 23 | Deep dive into Risk/Contingency Planning as a whole for SF at either AAC or future SAG. JT/MR to schedule. | JT/MR | Either ACC or future SAG | Open  |