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| SF_col_landscape_logo | Strategic Advisory Group |

MINUTES of SCOTTISH FORESTRY STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP

1. 14 December 2022

**Central Conservancy Office, Hamilton**

**Present:**

Dave Signorini (Scottish Forestry Chief Executive)

Eleanor Ryan (Non-Executive Committee member)

Richard Morris (Non-Executive Committee member)

Phil Taylor (Non-Executive Committee member)

Alan Hampson (Head of Policy and Practice)

Jonathan Taylor (Head of Scottish Forestry Executive Office)

Brendan Callaghan (Head of Operational Delivery)

Helen McKay (Chief Forester for Scotland)

Ross MacHardie (Head of Finance and Business Support)

Marelle Dalziel (HR Business Partner) – Agenda Item 3

**Apologies:**

James Stuart (Non-Executive Committee member)

Zahid Deen (Head of Operational Services and Transformation)

**Outstanding actions**

| **Ref** | **Action** | **SAG Lead/****Staff Member** | **Target Date** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| AP5/June 22 | BC to collate information and provide analysis on the scoring of FGS applications. | BC | March 2023 | Outstanding  |
| 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 | March 23 | Completed: 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)  | MD | March 23 | Feedback provided in minutes. |

1. **Welcome from Dave Signorini, Scottish Forestry CEO**

Dave welcomed the group to the Hamilton office, the base for Central Scotland Conservancy. The day would be split between an introduction to Conservancy work and the teams, and papers covering the People Survey and Skills Development.

The Minutes from the last meeting in September were agreed, with an amendment to note that PT was not in attendance, and BC did attend the meeting.

Matters arising: None

1. **Conservancy update session (informal discussion session not minuted)**

Members of the Central Conservancy gave a presentation of the work within area, the current challenges and opportunities, operations overview and

development activity.

The group also had the opportunity to meet teams within Conservancy.

The members of the SAG thanked Tom, Stewart and the team for valuable insight into their work and hosting the meeting.

1. **The results of the 2022 People Survey**

Marelle Dalziel introduced her paper, and accompanying ‘heatmaps’, highlighting some key areas.

The response rate (73%) although slightly lower than in 2021 (79%) is a good level of participation and this year all Cost Centres received a breakdown report.

Although significant issues exist for our staff, the agency’s Employee Engagement Index still shows employees are committed to the organisation’s goals and values and motivation to contribute to the organisations success.

SF’s Engagement Index has remained broadly the same at 66%, but there was a slight increase from 72% to 74% of those who participated responding positively to the statement ‘I am proud when I tell others I am part of my organisation’.

Learning and Development remains an area which has consistently scored lower results. Marelle highlighted the taken action in response to previous People Survey feedback regarding Learning and Development by investing in two new Learning and Skills Development posts. The Learning and Skills Development Manager took up post in April 2022 and the Learning and Skills Development Officer joined in September 2022. There will be a time lag before results start to feed through into annual results.

In addition Marelle noted that a Learning and Skills Development Strategy for the Agency has been approved which will be underpinned by a series of work plans to address identified needs.

The SAG thanked Marelle for producing a really comprehensive paper in short time after the results were published. Some feedback and observations were provided:

* Overall the results are positive and reflect the external pressures facing staff and that the organisation is still going through change.
* Once detailed written feedback comments are processed, read across to any outlier issues to ensure we are not missing any pockets of concern or specific issues for certain teams.
* Continue with the approach to communicate in the ‘you said, we did’ response, and look to communications at points throughout the year. Bring the people survey to a Leadership Group meeting to highlight the role that leaders have in responding to and driving change – not all top down from senior team.
* ER noted that the results on managers support to carers, balancing work and caring commitments appeared to be lower and/or indicate support did not feel supported in the workplace or by their manager.

**Action:** Marelle to provide further detail on the caring responsibilities data.

***Feedback from Marelle***

*Of the 146 respondents the results were:*

*I feel supported by my manager to balance my work and caring commitments – 52% favourable, 44% neutral, 4% unfavourable*

*Childcare responsibilities – 35% responded yes, 52% responded no, 11% responded prefer not to say/lone parent SF has a higher percentage of staff with childcare responsibilities than the percentage response for those responding to the wider Civil Service Survey (Civil Service 29% responded yes, 62% responded without childcare responsibilities, 3% with childcare responsibilities as a lone parent, 6% prefer not to say).*

*Of those who responded 19 respondents with childcare responsibilities identified as female, 30 male and 3 preferred not to say.*

*Caring responsibilities – 17% responded yes, 75% responded no, and 8% preferred not to say, this is broadly in line with the wider Civil Service (20% with caring responsibilities, 73% without caring responsibilities and 7% preferred not to say). Of those who indicated that they have caring responsibilities 12 identified as female, 10 identified as male, 3 preferred not to say.*

*Career development - There are career opportunities for me to develop my career in my organisation, of those who responded 45% gave a positive response, 29% neutral and 26% unfavourable. More male than female respondents agreed with this question.*

*Marelle has commented - In order to more fully understand the barriers women experience or perceive in relation to career progression in SF Ella Hashemi, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager is scheduled to undertake a short term project to explore these topics in the Autumn. Ella has recently hosted a panel discussion to explore gender equality and career progression as part of International Women’s Day. The issues raised will inform the work to be undertaken later in the year. The introduction of the Employee Passport allows people to open up discussions about what they need to do their work in an open and user-friendly way. That encourages and facilitates good and important conversations but it also means people don't have to re-tell their story time and time again.*

1. **Building Capacity in the Forestry Sector – Helen McKay, Chief Forester for Scotland**

Helen introduced her paper which set out the position on the steps being taken to increase the availability of trained entrants to the forestry sector.

The paper presented the case on the shortage of skilled staff at all grades in all parts of the sector. Scotland’s tertiary education system and the sector are training only a small fraction of its requirement.

This shortage of people coming into the sector will contribute the established difficulties of meeting the woodland creation targets and constrains the sector’s ability to deliver the wider objectives of SG’s Forestry Strategy (manage existing forests) and meet the demands of the future.

Good progress has been made in clarifying the requirements and the current provision, building relationships with the key players, and exploring options within UHI and SRUC on number of places for forestry education.

Helen noted the strategic priorities set out in paper and supporting annexes, and highlighted that current priority is to focus on:

a) senior school pupils to start the pipeline and encourage applicants to the ‘core’ college offer of HNC/HND/BSc/BSc Hons.

b) students doing related first degrees and individuals who have completed related degrees.

c) existing forestry staff who could upskill through for example an apprenticeship or Professional Development Award.

There was agreement from the SAG on these strategic priorities.

The SAG recognised the fundamental importance of addressing the skills gap and long term challenge to bring numbers into the sector, train and retain them and change perceptions of the sector.

Furthermore one the biggest challenges is that people don’t understand the scale and scope of the sector, and would consider it as a career or transferring in from other sectors.

There is clearly work to be done by the sector themselves, the Forestry Industry Leadership Group, the ICF and ConFor all have a role to play, and it can’t all be for government to address or fund.

Linked to that though is the role of government, specifically Scottish Forestry, in supporting the positive messaging, branding and communication of the sector. Whilst we do significant work at the moment, there could be opportunities to be more targeted, linked to the strategic priorities above. Helen will discuss further with JT.

1. **Date of Next Meeting**

The SAG is 13 June 2023. The aim will be to have this meeting with a site visit, location TBC.

**Meeting closed**