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| SF_col_landscape_logo | Strategic Advisory Group |

record of SCOTTISH FORESTRY STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP

1. 16th December 2020, Teams Meeting.

**Present:**

Dave Signorini (Scottish Forestry Chief Executive)

James Stuart (Non-Executive Committee member)

Eleanor Ryan (Non-Executive Committee member)

Phil Taylor (Non-Executive Committee member)

Brendan Callaghan (Head of Operational Delivery)

John Dougan (Head of Operational Development)

Alan Hampson (Head of Standards Evidence & Expertise)

Ross MacHardie (Head of Finance and Business Support)

Jonathan Taylor (Head of Scottish Forestry Executive Office)

Helen McKay (Chief Forester for Scotland)

**In Attendance:**

Marliese Richmond (Corporate Planning and Governance Manager)

# **Summary of action points**

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| **Actions** | **Status** |
| * It was agreed that JT would lead an exercise to review which formal and informal activities individuals/teams/conservancies have used to stay in touch
 | In hand with new Head of Corporate Comms |
| * JS agreed to share the ’10-02’ event format with JT
 | In hand |
| * MR to take forward suggestions on the format for the Cost Centre Plans and Business Planning Process January onwards.
 | Completed, incorporated the new plans |

# **1. Welcome and introductions**

DS welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**2. Minutes and actions of the last meeting**

Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

* HMcK has set up meetings with ER to discuss activities to promote procurement as a career and defining professionalism.
* HMcK has also set up individual meetings with JS/PT.

**3. Review of 2020 and first year in post.**

DS shared his thoughts on 2020 and his first year in post with the group. The following points were raised and discussed.

*Internally*

* During a period of constant flux and change, staff have coped extremely well. The work of SF has had to be re-prioritised on a continual basis due to pressures arising from covid, the impact on the economy, and the forestry sector.
* Home working has allowed us to get to know one another and given us an insight into each other’s private lives. Teams have looked after one another’s wellbeing, and there is now much more open conversation about wellbeing. Home working has driven our use of remote technology.
* Our budget processes continue to be based on annual discussions – we do not have a long term financial plan in place. We need to conduct an audit of our activities, resources and finances to ensure we focusing our assets appropriately.

*SF and the Forestry Sector overall*

* Forestry is an area which is expanding and has a high political profile. It has a positive future and is seen to be impacting on wide range of agendas and outcomes. We now participate in a broader range of partnerships (for example, transport and the development of rural roads). The challenge is to deliver on what everyone wants and maintain a balance with operational delivery of core functions.
* Forestry continues to be seen as an important tool for addressing climate change. Land use policy functions are now much more closely drawn together, and we will be working with partners in other areas in the future, eg agriculture, peat restoration.
* SF has prepared effectively for the EU exit. Tree health and the movement of timber are the most significant concerns, as well as potential disruption to trade with border controls.

**4. Review and discussion on the results of the annual Civil Service People Survey**

JD gave went through the key results of the annual People Survey. The following points were discussed:

* Mostly, the scores improved overall. The Non Execs felt that this was a real achievement given the difficult circumstances of 2020. It was noted that the Management and Leadership scores had improved significantly and that staff felt managers lived our values. It was felt that these improvements were down to an open, approachable, proactive style of leadership. Covid has also led to more engagement in conversations about wellbeing, as well as our values being embedded at a strategic level.
* It was agreed that 2021 will also be challenging and there is a risk that staff will embark on 2021 already feeling tired and overwhelmed by ongoing work pressures. The evidence from the survey is that we should continue with this leadership approach and build on our values based work.
* Communication has been key throughout 2020, and the remote technology systems available to staff have improved significantly, with Teams now rolled out. It is essential that we keep staff engaged and improving our communications. It was agreed that JT would lead an exercise to review which formal and informal activities individuals/teams/conservancies have used to stay in touch (eg team events, virtual coffee mornings, drop ins, film club, quiz nights, team box of challenges/treats). JS agreed to share the ’10-02’ format that Loch Lomond and Trossach National Park used to host a whole organisation event, where Teams were able to hear from a key-note speaker, and also share 3 minute films they had put together.
* Learning and Development scores continue to be poor. The Non Execs acknowledged this is difficult to do well in the circumstances – but SG colleagues may be able to advise on how to do remote learning effectively.
* Bullying will become more of a risk as workloads increase alongside restrictions in resources.
* Covid has had a significant impact on staff members’ physical and mental wellbeing, and our number one priority is to create a supportive environment.
* In responding to the findings of the survey, it was agreed that we should continue to use the ‘You Said, We Did’ format – although it was suggested that this should be expanded to ‘You Said, We Listened, We Did’. The Resilience Group has utilised this as a principal form of communication, and it has been well received by staff. It was agreed that there does not need to be a stand-alone action plan, but we need to respond honestly to the issues which have been raised – and also be upfront as to why some things cannot be done.
* Cost Centre level and Pay Band level results will be made available in the new year – it is possible more analysis can be done to see where pressure points are.

**5. Reviewing our Corporate and Business planning processes**

DS presented a paper which summarised and evaluated our corporate and business planning processes, and highlighted areas for improvement. It was noted that Internal Audit will be scrutinising this in the new year. The following points were discussed.

*Suggestions for Improvements to Cost Centre Plans.* A number of suggestions were made for improving the Cost Centre Plan template:

* Call them something else, such as team plans and/or give them a sense of place by referring to their location.
* Use clear plain language and apply ‘the granny principle’ – everyone should be able to understand it.
* It is essential to have the resources and staffing element in the Cost Centre Plans completed in detail, as in the future, these sections will be referred to when budget planning and making decisions regarding vacancy management.
* Some parts of the Cost Centre Plans could remain static for 3 years (in line with Corporate Plan), with only certain sections requiring an annual update.

*Business Planning Process for 2021*

* Use video remote technology to run workshops at the national team meetings and with individual team/conservancies. The corporate planning workshops of 2019 were successful because they were bottom up – we need to demonstrate that we are still listening to bottom up messages.
* Some of the Cost Centre Plans for 2020-2021 were excellent. Use this as a leadership opportunity and enable the Conservators/Team Leaders who completed these to share their plans and provide support to others.
* It might not be realistic to expect all teams to develop full plans for next financial year – full plans might have to be done in steps over 2 years.
* Use these workshops to enable team/conservancies to create the space to invest in this process.
* Enable all staff members to take part and employ different engagement methods to ensure everyone has a voice and can contribute.
* Use the workshops to reinforce the ‘Golden Thread’ message.

MR to take forward suggestions on the format for the Cost Centre Plans and Business Planning Process January onwards.

*Forward Job Plans.* As part of the discussions, MR provided an update on the review of our FJPs. There will be links to our strategic objectives, and this will enable teams and individuals to identify how they can contribute. Importantly, there will now be SMART objectives. Staff will also be asked to estimate their % of time spent on different activities:

* It was suggested we will get the best version of the FJPs once we’ve done the layer above (the CCPs). Improving our CCPs should be the priority for 2021.
* FJPs could be reviewed more regularly, particularly during this period of shifting priorities.
* The review of our FJPs is part of same exercise as our review of our Performance Management Framework.
* There should be a drive for decision making to be cascaded further down organisation – it makes organisation more agile and takes the pressure off different levels of management. It also feeds into our employer brand and employee retention.
* The revised FJPs will feature a section on learning and development, giving staff the opportunity to discuss the skills they need and what their ambitions are. AH fed back that they have dedicated learning and development meetings each quarter which are effective. JD confirmed that draft guidance is coming to SET in January on learning and development.

**6. AOB**

Some suggestions were made for future SAG meetings:

* In the context of the review of UKFS how does this affect Scotland’s position/policies - ‘Are we planting trees in the right place’ and certain operational practices (establishment), and the balance of species, such as productive vs broadleaf.
* Development and the future of Woodland Carbon Code.
* Implications of the 2021 Production Forecast (possibly timed for summer)