**SCOTTISH FORESTRY EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Minutes**

**Friday 19th February 2021**

**SET Attendees: In Attendance:**

Dave Signorini (Chair) Marelle Dalziel (MD)

Brendan Callaghan (BC)Marliese Richmond (Minutes)

Alan Hampson (AH) Rosetta Forbes (RF)

Jonathan Taylor (JT) Kevin Lafferty

Ross MacHardie (RMacH)Esther O’Neill

John Dougan (JD) Janette Mushet

**Summary of action points**:

| **Ref:** | **Action** | **SET Lead/****Staff Member** | **Target Date** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| AP 65/August | MD will bring mentoring proposal to SET once this has been consulted on with key contacts and developed further. | MD | Aug 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP 1/January | BC/RMcH to discuss potential monitoring and controls for grants and regulatory activities | BC/RMcH | March 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP2 /January | MR to scope possibility of outsourcing data collection work for sustainability reporting | MR | April 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP4/ January | MR and Rob Langton to work with relevant staff members to gather the data and information for the Corporate KPIs available for 20/21, providing an update to SET with proposed draft info and detail on publication date.  | MR/Rob Langton | April 2021 | Ongoing  |
| AP5/ January | SET Members to attend and support the Engage the Bystander training sessions | All/MD | April 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP6/Feb | Promote Engage the Bystander training sessions through staff testimonial in newsletter and release of short film by trainer. | MD | March 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP7/Feb | Update actions around recruitment in EDI Plan | MD | March 2021 |  |
| AP8/Feb | Provide written accessible explanation of grants claims process. Update Cab Sec and finance business partner on potential grant claims underspend and add to strategic risk register. | BC/RMacH | March 2021 |  |
| AP9/Feb | Organise demonstration of iTrent in relation to performance management | JDEsther O’NeillJanette Mushet | April 2021 |  |
| AP10/Feb | Present revised paper on direction of social forestry and options for consideration. | AHKevin Lafferty | April 2021 |  |
| AP11/Feb | Update Conservancy/Team Plans template with feedback from SET | JT/MR | Feb 2021 |  |

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

The minutes to the previous meeting were agreed.

**Matters arising:**

* AP 69/October - BC/RMcH/AH to work together to identify other legal requirements and undertake procurement exercise. It has been confirmed that it is not possible to work with FLS on this issue. The options are to remain with SGLD or move to another arrangement. It was observed that with Brexit now less of an issue, it may no longer be necessary to do this, as SGLD will have more capacity. It was noted that SGLD is not able to offer support with large area of grants work and alternative may need to be sought. Action point to be taken off.
* First Aid Training – It was noted by SET that due to lockdown, the first aid certificates of staff are going to expire and is now a compliance issue. JD confirmed that options for training are being explored.
* The values in the BRAVE format are to be rolled out from March, and there will be an ongoing programme of activities.
* MD has shared several iterations of the (Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Plan) EDI Plan with the Trade Unions, and still awaiting comments. It was agreed that the EDI Plan should be published as soon as possible – MD and Alison Wilson to discuss the communications around the Plan next week. MD to contact Trade Unions to press them for feedback.

**2. Update on Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Plan**

An update on the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Plan was provided.

* RF updated that the SET that the Civil Service has very recently been in contact about the option of conducting a Pulse survey on Inclusion in April. More information will be sought on this and shared.
* Preparation for the Public Sector Equalities Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report is underway by Amy Noble. However, it may be that there will agreement that organisations can delay the submission of these reports due to lockdown and the disruption this will have had in terms of recruitment and progress.
* Bookings continue to be made by staff to take part in Engaging the Bystander training. Some teams/conservancies have made block bookings, and the trainer is happy to support this. To encourage more staff to book, the possibility of a 1-2 minute video by the trainer to go out to staff is being considered. It has also been suggested that staff feedback on the course could feature in the staff newsletter.
* MD is working with Amy Noble and David Gardner to run a report on the equalities information which has been input (on a voluntary basis) by staff at the end of February, and will be repeated in March. It will be possible to assess how many staff are completing this information ion iTrent, and whether there needs to be more communications about this.
* Shifting to the equalities module on iTrent has delayed the availability of numerical data which can be used to review our progress on EDI plan. It was suggested that there need to be clear actions around recruitment in the plan covering 3 aspects: recruitment from advertising to appointment must be fair, inclusive, open and transparent; take action around retention; and promote SF as an organisation which appreciates diversity.

There was a discussion as to whether measuring diversity of SF now as an organisation helps check whether we provide equality of opportunity. (It was acknowledged that we need this information regardless to meet our equalities duties). It was recognised that to actions need to be taken to address that fact that forestry is a male dominated industry: for example, HMcK is now a STEM ambassador; and taking and using images which reflect diversity.

*The SET continues to see the EDI Plan and activities as a priority and supports actions to promote equalities, diversity and inclusion.*

**3. Budget and Staffing Information - MD/RMcH**

MD provided a verbal staffing update – a written report is to follow.

* Since January, 16 people have joined the organisation. Ruth Davies is moving on and Howard Davies is retiring.
* It was agreed that SF should conduct exit interviews and have these as part of the standard leaving process – face-to-face interviews if possible.
* If there are any more requirements for new staff to be put in place, savings will need to be found elsewhere. – not much wriggle room – would need to find savings elsewhere

[Redacted – Policy Development]

**4. Performance & Development approach/policy - Janette Mushet/Esther O’ Neill**

JD introduced the paper on the ‘New Approach to Performance and Development’. Janette Mushet and Esther O’Neill gave further detail. The intention is to provide a policy which is shorter and user friendly; which covers not only performance but staff development, aspirations and wellbeing; which encourages more regular, flexible contacts; and which enables managers to be more aware of their teams progress and issues. It was confirmed that iTrent will be used to input performance and development objectives, with the possibility of linking personal objectives to our strategic objectives and/or values. ‘Check ins’ will be expected to take place on a much more regular basis and iTrent will be used to keep a brief record of these conversations and any agreement on actions to be taken. It will be used to document the End of Year reflection, including employee self-assessment and manager feedback. This will be an easier process as they will be able to view the records made during the whole year.

The SET gave the following feedback:

* They welcomed the simplified approach, the lighter touch and less authoritative tone/language.
* It is positive that it has been developed with the People Policy Group.
* The main area of concern was around using iTrent to record information as the system is not available to be trialled, so it is difficult for SET members to envisage how the system will operate. It was agreed that a demonstration for SET will be set up ASAP.
* There were concerns that more information will be required to be input, and that the system may drive the policy. Check ins will be every few months up to quarterly, but the expectation is that records of the discussions will be brief.
* It was confirmed that the manager will be in charge of setting development objectives and recording these using feedback received from the staff member. There was concern that this is another admin task for the manager. It was stated that across most organisations, the managers set the development objectives so the staff member knows what they are working towards. It helps to maintain the thread with strategic objectives.
* The policy continues to refer to a ‘second manager’ and it was clarified that this was intentionally kept. It was queried whether this could be someone such as a mentor or a confidante. If there is a very flat structure in place, a line manager may have a lot of ‘confirming’ to do.
* It was queried whether the Performance Potential Grid will link through and be accommodated by the iTrent system. It was confirmed that the Grid will be used to guide conversations but will not feature in iTrent. It was emphasised that one category of the Grid is not better than another. It is to be used to identify what a staff member is capable of and what development opportunities can be put into place.
* There were queries around the relationship between iTrent and iLearn, and it was clarified that iLearn is a mechanism for accessing training rather than monitoring performance.
* It was questioned as to how this will link to other areas of guidance. This will need to be drilled down into this once it is underway. It was confirmed that ‘Behaviours’ will continue to be important but will be a feature of the success profiles.
* Information will not only be available digitally on iTrent but will can be printed out on PDF document as well.
* There was a discussion on performance ratings – historically, these did not go anywhere – but it was queried how moderation and consistency should be taken forward. There was consensus that feedback conversations and actions taken by both line manager and staff member should be ongoing.
* There was discussion on the timings for performance and development reviews. It was agreed that Job Plans should run summer to summer, once the busy time of year has passed and the annual business plans are in place.

*It was agreed that even though FLS is working to an April deadline for the new system, SF will launch this new system in July. In May and June, staff will be made aware of the new policy/guidance and training will be rolled out.*

5. New Approach to Probation - Janette Mushet/Esther O’ Neill

JD introduced the paper on the ‘New Approach to Probation’ and Janette Mushet and Esther O’Neill provided further detail on this new approach, which dovetails with the new approach to performance management and is a more streamlined policy.

Discussion and feedback was as follows:

* Probation is important, as it helps provide support for new staff. It provides a framework for their induction, identifying their training needs; and regular check ins assist in addressing any issues they may encounter. Although it is rarely used, it also provides exit procedures is that staff member is unable to adequately fulfil their job duties.
* There was a discussion about timescales for probation. Six months is low compared to other public sector organisations, but high in comparison to the private sector. It may be a difficult process for some staff to accept if they are unused to the concept and term of probation. A drawback of six months is that it may not be sufficient time to assess a member of staff and problems may not become apparent during that period.
* iTrent will be used to support the probation process. It was noted some staff will require more than monthly check ins, especially if they are working from home.
* It was agreed that the restrictions around new starts applying for internal vacancies should be removed. Although it may be difficult for a team if a new employee moves on internally shortly after recruitment, providing opportunities for career progression will hopefully attract people to the organisation.
* As probation affects only a small number of people and has a distinct, short life cycle, it was agreed it should be kept separate to the more general performance management policy and system.

*The SET agreed to support the new approach to probation, with a view to implementing this in July if other factors such as trade union consultation goes according to plan.*

**6. Strengthening Delivery of Scottish Forestry’s Priorities for People and Communities – Kevin Lafferty/AH**

AH introduced the paper on Strengthening Delivery of Scottish Forestry’s Priorities for People and Communities. Kevin Lafferty also provided more context and background to the paper. Direction is required on the development of social forestry and the expectations of what SF will be undertaking in this space in the future. At present, work is undertaken in relation to advocacy (strategic influencing of others policy and resource deployment), advice (advising others how to deliver benefits for people and communities from woods and forests) and action (the projects and initiatives we run ourselves).

SET provided the following feedback.

* Social forestry should be integrated to each of the Team/Conservancy Plans.
* It was felt there should be a focus on advocacy.
* Projects and initiatives run directly by SF takes up a lot of time and resource and should be reduced over time.
* It is difficult to withdraw funding from voluntary organisations – any plans to provide funding should be either sustainable or have clear exit strategy.

*It was agreed that a second paper should be developed which: draws on the annual business plans across the organisation and links; clearly analyses what we can give up/do less of (such as direct activities), as well as invest in (such as advocacy); explains the advantages and disadvantages of restructuring team.*

**7. Data Protection Audit**

Given the time constraints, it was agreed this would be circulated by correspondence.

**8. Business Planning – Conservancy/Team Plans**

JT briefly introduced the template for the Conservancy/Team Plans. Due to time constraints, initial comments were invited with a view to a more detailed discussion at the SF Management weekly meeting.

* Although the Corporate Plan provides us with our 3 year plan and focus, it would be helpful if there could be a section in the template where teams/conservancies can provide a 2-3 years horizon of the strategic objectives and outcomes which they are working towards through the work they are continuing this year.
* Make it clear to teams that what we want to know are the activities which are being prioritised above other activities; the presentation of the marginal changes the team will be making in the year to come.
* It was felt that the template works better for the National Office Teams. JD and BC are preparing a collective statement, framework document which should be referred to and set the context for the individual conservancy plans.

*JT/MR will use this feedback and any additional comments arising from Monday’s SF Management weekly meeting to update the template.*

**9. AOB**

AH informed the SET of plans to initiate work with Conservators and the wider sector about what ‘good woodland creation’ looks like. It was agreed that HMcK should be involved with this. It was supported by the SET and be raised at the SF Management Team meeting.