**SCOTTISH FORESTRY EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Minutes (Draft)**

**Thursday 13 May 2021**

**SET Attendees: In Attendance:**

Dave Signorini (Chair) Rosetta Forbes (RF)

Steve Williams (Minutes) Bob Frost (BF)

Alan Hampson (JH) Helen Mackay (HM)

John Dougan (JD) Esther O’Neill (EO)

Ross MacHardie (RMacH)

Marelle Dalziel (MD)

**Apologies:**

Jonathan Taylor (JT)

Marliese Richmond (RM)

**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 |
| AP4/Jan | MR and Rob Langton to continue working with relevant staff members on publication of Corporate KPIs  | MR/Rob Langton | Aug 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP12/April | DS and MD to update and circulate the EDI Plan. | DS/MD | May 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP13/April | JD to work with MD/RF to map out decision tree/flow chart on recruitment procedures. Present options in relation to TRAs. | JD/MD/RF | May 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP14/April | DS to find out how FLS/SF can be represented on or tap into the SG Diversity Networks.  | DS | May 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP15/April | AH/Bob Frost to draft submission on National Stakeholder Group for the Cab Sec shortly after election. | AH/Bob Frost | June 2021 | Ongoing |
| AP16/May | *MD and DS to update the EDI Action Plan on the basis of the Mainstreaming Report with an emphasis on taking forward actions.* | MD/DS | June 2021 |  |
| AP17/May | *RMacH/Doug Howieson and Conservators to review budgetary mechanisms and reporting.*  | RMacHDoug Howieson | Begin review August 2021 |  |
| AP18/May | *EO to continue working up Performance Management Policy and ensure the messaging, handling, training and support packages are all in place for a roll out in October this year. EO to come back to the SET in August to update the members of what is planned before roll out.*  | Esther O’Neil | August 2021 |  |
| AP19/May | *BF to produce a plan identifying which elements of the policy framework needs to be developed, how delivered and including timeframes, resources implications, stakeholder engagement and communications.* | Bob Frost |  |  |
| AP20/May | *BF would engage with policy leads to ask them to take forward any outstanding work on the four policy actions (legislation, subsidy controls, forestry labour and border controls) that still needed SF support.* | Bob Frost |  |  |
| AP21/May | *BF to write to external delivery organisation leading on an action, to provide them with an update on progress and to engage them in discussion on progress, the status of their action and whether these actions remain a priority and will be delivered by March 2022.*  | Bob Frost | Sept 2021 |  |

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

DS welcomed everyone to the meeting. Due to an Admin error the minutes presented for approval were incorrect and will be circulated by correspondence. Record of approval will be included in minutes of the next meeting. In view of this DS said the meeting will proceed directly to the Standing Items.

Before this, AH quickly updated the meeting on the People and Communities Team and said Bob Frost would now be leading the team and details would be included in the next Staff Briefing.

**2. Standing Item – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

**EDI Action Plan Review and Equalities and Diversity Mainstreaming Reports:**

* RF said that they had not had any feedback on the Mainstreaming Report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Her understanding was the Commission were prioritising their efforts in encouraging other organisations to submit their reports before providing feedback to others.
* DS and SET members wanted to record their appreciation to Amy Noble and David Gardner for their efforts in getting Scottish Forestry’s reports to the Commission on time.
* DS said that equality in the workforce is still an issue for Scottish Forestry. Although there are positives, much more needs to be done. In the top quartile, the ratio is 75/25 male to female. Although recruitment is helping balance up the gender gap in the lower grades, the more senior positions need attention.
* RF agreed and said that the organisation is on a journey but one in which we have met our public sector statutory duties comfortably. She added that it was important to embed the Mainstreaming report with Conservators to ensure we change the profile of our staff within the various cost centres.

*MD and DS to update the EDI Action Plan on the basis of the Mainstreaming Report with an emphasis on taking forward actions.*

**3. Standing Item – Budget and Staffing Information**

RMacH provided a verbal update on the budget in relation to paper SF20-21.

* Final expenditure of £43.823M which is £12.6M below SG funding of £56.42M.
* Grants budget – £11.4 underspend.
* Non-grants budget is £1.2M underspent.

RMacH explained that the grants budget has been underspent due to poor weather, the impact of COVID stopping planting taking place and the accounting treatment of prior years’ claims. He added that SG Finance and Audit Scotland have both been informed of the underspends. SG Finance will not be making any adjustments and will absorb it and the EU element of the funding carried over to 2022/23.

RMacH felt that we could review our budgeting and reporting mechanisms in relation to grants. DS and JD agreed that a review would be timely and leave Scottish Forestry in a better position for our spend to reflect better what is actually happening.

*RMacH/Doug Howieson and Conservators to review budgetary mechanisms and reporting.*

**4. Improving Performance**

DS welcomed EO who outlined the key points in her HR Policy – Improving Performance paper SF21-21. The purpose of the policy is to propose an updated and modern approach to performance improvement across the organisation.

* EO said the new approach gives a clearer, more consistent and streamlined process which will help support managers and individuals who go through this challenging and often very stressful process.
* The new four step process would be supported by guidance papers and training so that managers were fully supported.
* The development of the new approach had been influenced by feedback from staff who had experience of supporting performance improvement cases.

After talking through the steps of the new policy, EO asked SET members for their views.

* AH said the process appeared clear but it will take some time to address some problems of behaviour patterns in some people and asked how we would ensure consistency across all levels? He suggested that applying Scottish Forestry’s new BRAVE values could help address this. EO said it would be easy to accommodate the Values into the monthly check-in conversations but it should be recognised that behaviours are just one part of performance. She added that guidance will be provided to help managers as part of the “check-in” process.
* RF said that as we embark on this process managers will not be doing this in isolation and they should be speaking to HR and senior managers as they move up the 1-4 steps scale. Cultural change can cause clashes and we need to view this as a process that will take time to bed in she added.
* RM emphasised that the communications around this new process will be vital in the roll out. MD added that consistency is key and managers need to have confidence to tackle the issue and the language and tone used is very important – as well as the support and training behind it.
* HM raised her worried that managers were often left to “get on with it” and it was not uncommon for stress to cause absences when people are going through the current process. She felt the way this was communicated is vital and agreed that it is a very difficult and sensitive issue. JD had similar concerns in that the training of people to be managers is important. EO said that guidance to support this would delve into the more thorny issues such as long term sickness absence. RF added that managers would have access to HR support throughout the process.

*SET agreed to endorse the new Performance Management policy and asked EO to continue working it up and ensure the messaging, handling, training and support packages are all in place for a roll out in October this year. EO to come back to the SET in August to update the members of what is planned before roll out.*

**5. Policy Priorities**

BF joined the SET meeting and outlined the key points in his Review and Development Of Forestry Policy Framework paper SF22-21. The paper set out proposed policy development priorities for 2021/22, together with the next steps to deliver them.

* There was discussion on the “Policy Statements and “Practice Guides” and “Information Notes” and who they are targeted at. BF explained that they will be read by stakeholders, staff and other opinion formers and will make our policies clear and transparent. These documents will also help Scottish Forestry align our policies closely with Scottish Government.
* HM raised the issue that there are already “Practice Guides” for forestry in circulation so we need to be careful to not mix these up. BF agreed this is a valid point and will revise naming.
* DS asked about accountability and it was agreed that Ministers would need to sign off any high level “Policy Statements” but thereafter Scottish Forestry can work up the rest.
* There was discussion about the list of six policy priorities set out in the paper. It was agreed that “Carbon balance” was an all encompassing subject which cuts across many areas. AH said that a Forest Research study into the subject would help inform our policy and provide good evidence. It was agreed that the first three priorities – Carbon balance, Adaptation and resilience, Community Engagement were all clearer subjects that Scottish Forestry can lead on and the remaining (Deer Management, EU Alignment – breeding birds and forestry, Biodiversity and landscape Networks) were priorities which will need careful handling and monitoring with Scottish Government policy interests.

*SET agreed to work being carried out by BF on the first three policy priorities – producing a plan identifying which elements of the policy framework needs to be developed, how delivered and including timeframes, resources implications, stakeholder engagement and communications.*

**6.  EU Exit & SFS Implementation Plan**

**EU Exit**

BF presented his paper which updates the SET on Scottish Forestry’s EU Exit activity and on-going actions. An internal group was established to take forward this work in September 2020.

* BF outlined that Scottish Forestry had delivered a number of key objectives but Scottish Forestry would need to support on-going activity associated with four issues eg legislation, subsidy controls, forestry labour and border controls. SF leads had been identified for each.

*SET agreed that BF would engage with policy leads to ask them to take forward any outstanding work on the four policy actions (legislation, subsidy controls, forestry labour and border controls) that still needed SF support.*

**7. SFS implementation plan – progress report**

* BF presented the progress report covering the period Sept 2020 – Mar 2021. The report set out progress with delivering the 30 actions under implementation plan and an update on forestry strategy indicators. DS commented that two thirds of the actions have been done or were on track and this was a good outcome.
* AH said that Scottish Forestry were not leading on a number of the actions listed in the implementation plan therefore could only encourage other stakeholders to take them forward.

*SET agreed that BF would write to external delivery organisation leading on an action, to provide them with an update on progress and to engage them in discussion on progress, the status of their action and whether these actions remain a priority and will be delivered by March 2022.*

**9. AOB**

* Business Planning: RMacH to circulate business planning papers to SET members.
* JD asked for SET views on whether “Future Working Model” was an acceptable name for the work being carried out into how the organisation’s staff is to work in future. SET agreed.

**Next Meeting:**

20 July 2021