**SCOTTISH FORESTRY EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Minutes (Draft)**

**Tuesday 17 Aug 2021**

**SET Attendees: In Attendance:**

Dave Signorini (Chair) Heather Conejo (HC)

Alan Hampson (JH) Helen Mackay (HM)

Jonathan Taylor (JT Marliese Richmond (MR)

Doug Howieson (DH)

**Apologies:**

Rosetta Forbes

Ross MacHardie (RMacH)

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

DS welcomed everyone to the meeting. The previous minutes were agreed. Numbering of actions in previous minute to be revised.

The following updates were received on action points:

*AP23/July: DH & MD to look at on boarding material to see how By-stander training is available for new starts.*

Cover later in meeting.

*AP25/July: DS to send Claire the job spec for the Head of Digital.*

Head of Digital changed to Head of Operational Support and Innovation – completed

*AP26/July: MD to update the vacancies document and undertake a stock take of where each post is in the recruitment process.*

Completed – feedback was that this was a helpful, comprehensive document.

*AP27/July: Ross to work with Dave about preparing advice for the Minister regarding the SG budget revision and saving exercise.*

DS/RMacH still to pull together advice for Minister and accrual figures – ongoing.

*AP28/July: Claire to share the SET paper on the future approach to L&D in Scottish Forestry with Peter Scallon, and seek feedback*

Claire shared paper with Peter and awaiting feedback.

*AP29/July: Helen to meet with Peter and discussion the issues the paper raises. The papers/feedback would come back to the SET for a decision.*

HMcK to bring paper to a dedicated SET meeting on this topic. It was agreed the Skills Development Workers are very important posts, although they are further down the pipelines as PB2 being recruited first. Induction and training for WOs central.

*AP30/Aug: Further Action agreed that a dedicated SET meeting would be convened to discuss this paper on Learning and Development. Invite to Peter Scallon TBC.*

*AP4/Jan MR and Rob Langton to continue working with relevant staff members on publication of Corporate KPIs*

KPI Annual Report being pulled together by MR and will be published August 21. RL and MD pulling together staffing figures. MD still waiting to hear from FLS about the reports which we will be receiving as standard from systems such as iTrent, before we can make a decision about what else SF would like to request. May need to wait till FLS HMRI vacancy filled. Add these requests to SLA contract.

*AP13/April JD to work with MD/RF to map out decision tree/flow chart on recruitment procedures. Present options in relation to TRAs.*

Flowchart on recruitment circulated. TRAs discussion below.

AP14/April DS to find out how FLS/SF can be represented on or tap into the SG Diversity Networks.

Ongoing.

*AP22/July: DS & MD to refresh EDI Action Plan during second half of 2021.*

EDI plan to be updated shortly following discussions with Amy Noble.

AP17/May: *RMacH/Doug Howieson and Conservators to review budgetary mechanisms and reporting.*

DH gradually making progress on this, getting a clearer picture on how Operational Delivery budgets develop throughout the year. RMacH and DH establishing how to make better use of Conservator finance support visits.

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.*

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.*

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.*

All completed.

**Matters Arising:**

SET discussed the preparations for staff returning to office. JT provided an update and the following points were discussed.

* Resilience Group taking this forward, working through risk assessments, guidance and steps to be taken to manage the return. There is a formal log of decision making for this group. They are adapting standard SG guidance for staff for SF staff. They are working FLS Health and Safety Team. They are updating current Outdoor Guidance. Guidance will be out week of 23rd August if full checks been carried out and SET has reviewed content.
* The plan is to increase availability of office space to staff gradually. A broadly similar approach is to be taken across Conservancies. SET highlighted that we must ensure there is consistency in the messaging even if there is local flexibility – that people are to feel comfortable coming back. The return to Silvan House will take longer as it is a larger office with more agencies, and there is more equipment and more configuration required. The question over ventilation also needs to be resolved.
* All Office Managers will be required to undertake risk assessments. All staff will undertake mandatory training on returning to office at some point.
* It was clarified that all meeting rooms will only be available once a day because they need to be cleaned. As rooms are adapted and freed up, more meeting rooms are to be made available and put on systems. Due to the lack of collaborative space/limited meeting rooms, the return to the office may not be the big step forward staff are expecting. given limited meetings rooms. Larger meetings of whole function teams will difficult – we will need to identify (external) possible venues.
* Many queries are being submitted by staff on an ongoing basis, such as whether larger scale collaborative meetings can go on for a whole day; and why individuals can attend events such as weddings or travel on flights, but cannot go to office. These queries are helping to shape our approach and guidance.
* A series of Saltire pages have been set up with information and guidance.
* The next phase is to move on to the decluttering of office space and breaking the connection between person and a desk. This element alone has generated a large potential body of work – and it could be a possible springboard to service transformation.
* Those people reluctant to come back to office need to be provided reassurance and to feel included. No one is being forced to come back.
* Another staff survey will be run in Autumn to see how hybrid working is bedding in.

*SET confirmed that they supported moving back to office working. They will review any guidance before this is issued. They are committed to review our approach (in line with SG reviews) to allow staff to raise things and evaluate. Discussions will be undertaken as to when SET members will have presence in office to provide leadership and support. Thanks to the Resilience Group for their work on this was given.*

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

MD provided an update on the final Engaging the Bystander training session which will be taking place on 18.8.21. Only a small number of people have registered, which had been surprising as there are 70 people who have not attended any sessions according to Learning and Development – however, the session coincides with school restarting which may have affected attendance.

The best format for induction sessions for new staff are still under consideration. It is mostly like that the online component will be retained with follow up delivery of a workshop at least annually. It will be important to stress to staff the importance of allowing at least 3-4 hours to undertake the online training.

The option of Training For Trainers has still to considered in detail.

MD will pull together a piece for comms about the attendance of these sessions (110+) and the impact they have had.

*AP31/Aug: MD to issue communications on Engaging the Bystander sessions – attendance and impact.*

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

MD provided an update on the staffing management information provided. Key points discussed:

* Statistics show that we are retaining as many people as are moving on.
* It was agreed that it is useful keeping track of vacancies. It was queried whether it is possible to break the pipeline further with information such as: number advertised but not appointed; and vacancies approved but unlikely to be filled soon. This will assist in identifying posts which are difficult to be filled.
* There should be a list of posts which will be advertised in the coming months made available to staff internally, with information on grade and target date for date of advert. This will help staff with planning their next move.
* We need to plan for retirals and establish if post needs to be changed or maintained, and come to SET for discussion/approval.
* It is important to link staffing management inforamtion and staffing ID to ensure this is taken out of iTrent to remove ‘ghost’ vacancies.

*AP32/Aug: MD to take forward recommendations on vacancy list, including improvements to information on vacancy pipeline and making information forthcoming vacancies available to staff in advance.*

DS provided a brief finance update.

SF is required to identify £0.5M savings. A combination of savings from Tree Health, staffing and FDP to be agreed. Risks linked to cutting Tree Health budget need to be fully considered. Any decisions regarding budget cuts need to be auditable.

*AP33/Aug: DS/RMacH/AH to identify savings from Tree Health, staffing and FDP.*

**4. Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

Health, Safety and Wellbeing has been introduced as a new standing item. This is essential in order to propel this area of work forward. Importantly, Wellbeing is being seen as have the same priority as the topics of health and safety. Having this as a standing item will provide oversight on this area, and a formal structure around the decisions relating to this area, with information shared about decisions made by SET. This will sit alongside the set up of a Health and Safety Committee. In the longer term, information on Health, Safety and Wellbeing will be provided on a dashboard for SET, accompanying the Risk Register.

There was a discussion on the procurement exercise for the new Lone Worker Safety System, which is a joint exercise with FLS, with input from Alasdair Duncan. The difference in costs between the one way and two way systems was discussed, as well as the training and implementation costs. It will sit under the miscellaneous budget. DH to discuss the detail with RMacH.

*AP34/Aug: DH and RMacH to take forward the procurement of the new Lone Worker Safety System alongside Alasdair Duncan and colleagues in FLS.*

**5. Recruitment and Retention Allowances – DH/MD**

The SET discussed the paper presented by DH/MD, the purpose of which was to review the current payment of Recruitment and Retention Allowance (RRA) Woodland Officers.

In autumn 2019 there were significant staffing pressures experienced in Perth and Argyll and Grampian Conservancies. Requests were made by the Conservators that consideration be given to the payment of Recruitment and Retention Allowances. These requests were made on the basis of the impact of unsolicited job offers being made to experienced Woodland Officers, and some experienced staff leaving the Agency. Payment of RRA commenced to specific Woodland Officers, relating to experience and workload, as a temporary measure while the impact of national recruitment campaigns took effect.

It was agreed that this shift towards the new operating model for the Conservancies will make enable better management of workloads and support for less experienced staff. The recruitment of additional WOs will reduce the workload across Conservancy teams. There will also the creation of career progression opportunities within Conservancy delivery teams. As a result, it was agreed that there is no longer a case to pay this temporary RRA to these specific WOs.

*The SET agreed that this RRA should be removed and revert back to Contractual Policy.*

**6. Quantifying the Sustainable Forestry Carbon Cycle interim report – AH and Heather Conejo.**

(HMcK joined this part of the meeting). AH introduced this paper which provided an update the findings, implications and next steps from the commissioned interim draft report “Quantifying the Sustainable Forestry Carbon Cycle” and subsequent excel tool.

Heather Conejo (HC) described the development of this report and highlighted some of its key points. Scottish Forestry, the Forestry Commission and the Welsh Government commissioned Forest Research to undertake a full evidence review, assessment and synthesis of the carbon dynamics (gains and losses) throughout the lifecycle of a forest or woodland including the processing and use of wood products.

The report assesses the carbon stock changes over the life cycle of different woodland types in the UK that take place in all carbon pools associated with the forestry system, consisting of living trees, deadwood, litter; soil; and wood products harvested from the woodland.

The report states that generally, the rate of mean carbon sequestration in the woodland systems initially increases over time, but then reaches a peak, after which the rate diminishes. The timing of the peak rate is variable for different tree species.

This report provides a comprehensive evidence base of the total carbon impacts of different tree species, as well as woodland type management options. This evidence base will enable policy making to optimise carbon sequestration alongside other benefits and as part of sustainable Forest Management. Furthermore, this report allows Scottish Forestry to be better informed and have more comprehensive evidence for questions on the species mix for woodland creation for optimizing mitigating climate change impacts.

HC and AH responded to the following discussion points:

* Forests are dynamic and this makes them more difficult to measure. This tool will help assess the sequestration of particular sites. It will provide evidence for improving forestry practice. However, this tool only assesses the one aspect of carbon sequestration, and does not capture social amenity or biodiversity. It will be a useful decision support tool – for example, in some situations, it could bolster the argument for use of conifers given their ability to capture carbon. It will enable stakeholders to consider and compare the different carbon tonnage benefits of different types of forestry such as commercial versus rewilding.
* It was recommended that different scenarios be run through using the tools so that there are no unintended consequences. It was agreed that some of our case studies should be run through the tool, to show the benefits of carbon accounting. On small farms, for example, forestry could offset emissions associated with raising livestock.
* It was agreed that there needs to be consistency with the Woodland Carbon Code and the outputs should be compared with the WCC look up tables.
* This tool will help with a cross border policy approach and will help pinpoint whether carbon impacts may be different in the different countries.
* It was confirmed that the tool is due to be peer reviewed – Pat Snowdon is taking this forward.
* It was agreed that there is potential for this tool to be linked to grants and ESK with additional training for Woodland Officers.
* New growth rates could affect the results of this tool. It was also asked if the consequences of climate change has been integrated to the tool. Look at the scale and dimension of timber supplies, and primary processing versus imports and where the carbon costs lie. AH/HC to check on these points and to share a timetable for the final report.

*AP35/Aug: AH/HC to use the feedback from SET for the next iteration of the Carbon Cycle tool and report, and to share the timetable for the final report.*

**7. Future Strategic Directions and Organisational Development**

RESTRICTED SESSION.