**SCOTTISH FORESTRY EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Minutes**

**Tuesday 17 Nov 2021**

**SET Attendees: In Attendance:**

Dave Signorini (Chair) Marelle Dalziel (MD)

Alan Hampson (AH) Helen Mackay (HM)

Jonathan Taylor (JT) Marliese Richmond (MR)

Doug Howieson (DH)

Rosetta Forbes (RF)

Zahid Deen (ZD)

Ross MacHardie (RMacH)

**Apologies:**

None

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

DS welcomed everyone to the meeting. The previous minutes were agreed. The following updates were received on action points.

**Mentoring proposal** – MD has met with Amy Noble to develop this. There is now a draft pathway which will be brought to SET in January 2022.

AP 65/August*: MD to bring draft Mentoring Proposal to SET in January 2022.*

**KPI Annual Report** – MR has produced a final draft report, and has responded to all comments made by DS/JT. Need agreement on targets re annual sickness absence and staff turnover from SET.

AP4/Jan*: MR to recirculate final draft KPI Report to SET.*

**Engagement with external organisations on Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan** – AH confirmed that this is on track with the exception of CONFOR in relation to a plant supply strategy. Working to obtain a forward look with Forest Research on this issue to progress this. Action completed.

**Recommendations on vacancy list** – MD circulated a Vacancy Report and Summary by correspondence 17.11.21. The following points were raised:

* Need to know about vacancies as soon as possible from line managers (eg from point of resignation). Take into account post may be reviewed.
* Need less time consuming and more accurate reporting of current/upcoming vacancies. Look at potential for reporting via iTrent.
* Recruitment is progressing slowly - only a third of posts agreed through Business Planning process in June progressed.
* Need auditable decision on whether post to be recruited to. New posts come to SET, as would posts with significant changes.
* Every post has post number and budget attached.
* Vacancy management must link with budgets and financial forecasting.

*AP36/Nov: RMacH and MD to work together for Staff Resource meeting on 30.11.21. Cover reporting of vacancies, recruitment management and process, and decision making.*

HMcK left the meeting at this point.

**Budget savings** - DS/RMacH/AH. As noted in Finance Update below, £500K savings completed. Action closed off.

**Lone Worker Safety System** - DS/RMacH. Current costs for Lone Worker Safety System cannot be evaluated using the present accounting systems (which has been a Lessons Learned excerise). Can only assess options from procurement exercise and benchmarking agaist other existing sytesm. Are SET prepared to agree to fund Training, procurement, set up, implementation costs – approx. £50K. Will not be part of SLA. Action closed off.

**Timetable for Carbon Cycle Tool and Report** – AH updated the SET that this has been delayed. Researchers have been asked to take their directions out of the report and present these separately. The report should be covering evidence only, with policy decisions taken at country level. Once the report has been finalised, this will be shared with external reviewers. Input from wider stakeholders will be sought obtain consensus on where the most biggest gains can be made. Timescales still to be clarified.

AP35/Aug: *AH to provide update to SET on timetable for Carbon Cycle Tool and Report in January 2022.*

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

**Comms issued on By-Stander training**

Communications were issued on By-Stander training in Staff Briefing in July. Action closed off.

**New starts on By-Stander training**

There was a discussion about the expectations for new starts regarding By-Stander Training – there are 20 new starts who have not yet had this training. Points raised include:

* Values are part of the induction materials.
* We need to continue the process and conversation begun through the training. Look at different touch points where we can embed the training eg monthly catch ups, part of personal objectives in POP, have as part of recruitment campaigns and ask during interviews.
* Line managers should be engaged and see this as part of their role. SET needs to provide leadership. Need to be explicit that managers should address any issues head on as informal evidence suggests that they are not embedded yet and people not living up to standards.
* If there is a long term commitment towards using an external trainer for new starts then this should be procured appropriately. The alternative would be to train up an internal trainer.

*AP1/May (cont): It was agreed that the points above should be considered, an approach developed, and incorporated this into EDI Action Plan. Monitor impact of what we are doing. DS/MD to lead on this.*

**Tap into SG Diversity Networks** – DS confirmed that SG should be able to open up networks to SF staff soon. RF has also written to HR part of Op Delivery Group to request access.

*AP14/April (cont):* *DS to clarify access to SG Diversity Networks in January 2022.*

**Update to the EDI Action Plan – DS/MD**

In addition to the actions around embedding the Bystander Training and bullying/harassment noted above, there was a discussion on what the focus for next EDI plan should be. The following points were made:

* Commit to extending flexible working as it is inclusive in its approach. It was agreed that flexible working needs to be defined and thought through. Currently, there is uncertainty as to what it is and staff do not know what the offer is. Existing and prospective staff need to be able to relate the options available to their own lives. It is important that any flexible working options supports and enables mentoring and learning and development. It was noted that research/evidence shows young people want flexible working because it allows the possibility of doing other things alongside work (eg volunteering).
* One of the most significant issues is the gender imbalance within and senior posts. SF needs to demonstrate it is taking action. Positive action has not been pushed so far.
* Any actions need to be resourced – both day to day and project level actions.

*AP1/May (cont): Actions on bullying/harassment, flexible working, and gender imbalance at a senior level incorporated this into EDI Action Plan. Resourcing to be identified.*

**3. Budget and Staffing**

**3.1 Budget**

SF’s net funding for the year was set at £83.6m following SG’s budget spending review exercise. There has been an increase of £9.3M made up of £2.7M for Cross Border Funding, £6M for Woodland Grants and an additional £600k for programme and running costs.

The programme and running costs budget now stands at £18.1M. Staff salaries represent around 50% of this expenditure at £9.5m. This is set to increase with the recruitment of staff agreed during Business Planning process.

RMacH pointed the following aspects.

* Transfers In from Transport Scotland (£5M), RPID for Agricultural Transformation Fund (£1.5M), and SG National Transition Training Fund (£0.19M).
* EU Income transfer from RPID for FGS of –£10.5M. Overall the same level of funding will be made against the FGS scheme but our own contribution is reduced.
* £0.5M savings have been returned to SG Exchequer.
* Woodland Grants – Woodland creation is expected to be 100ha under target, which will have an impact on this budget area. Full spend will not be achieved. It is likely that ATF funding £1.5M will be returned to RPID.
* Salaries – Budget pressure of £300k has been eliminated due to slow recruitment. Forecast remains £9.5M. This will be closely monitored. It was queried whether budget allocated to salaries will be spent
* Admin - An unexpected rise in SCOTS charges from SG has seen a slight increase in the forecast of £4.2M budget in this area.
* The spend of programmes needs to be tracked: STTS, Tree Health, and FDP.
* The Miscellaneous part of the budget is to be reported separately. A Development Account has been set up but this has been delayed.

The following areas were discussed:

* SF pays monies to Forest Research on behalf of SG, despite us not being funded to pay Forest Research. The Forest Research MoU is signed by Scottish Ministers therefore SG are responsible for this. We act on behalf of SG and pay for the services on their behalf. SG has not yet fully allocated the required budget to SF to cover this. We are trying to resolve this with SG Finance through ongoing budget returns, discussions and submissions.
* The funding of the extra costs associated with the 1% increased NI charge must be resourced.
* There may be a lack of capital for 22-23 which may affect meeting WC target.

**3.2 Staffing**

MD circulated the most recent staffing report by correspondence in morning. There have been a number of internal promotions over recent months which is very positive.

From the end of the year Duradiamond will no longer be providing Occupational Health services for FLS and SF. The new provider, Optima Health, will be taking over the contract from early 2022 The change in provider will impact pre-employment checks for those joining the Agency.

Internal Audit will be reviewing our workforce planning.

*AP36/Nov: RMacH and MD to work together for Staff Resource meeting on 30.11.21. Cover reporting of vacancies, recruitment management and process, and decision making.*

**4. Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

DH updated the set on the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Group which has now met and been constituted. It has good representation, with every cost centre represented, a good balance of men and women, and broad range of paybands.

DH will act as the conduit to the SET.

The group is working to refresh the Health and Safety Policy. This will be brought to the next meeting.

AH shared advice from the Wellbeing Advisor on the importance of getting outside to provide a break from stress and to move physically. It is important for SET to show leadership on this eg scheduling lunchbreaks.

*AP37/Nov: DH to bring refreshed Health and Safety Policy statement to SET in January 2022.*

**5. Future Grant Support for Forestry**

DH presented a paper seeking to establish a vision around future grant support for forestry covering necessary assumptions, the rationale for public intervention, an understanding of scope and an assessment of outcomes.

One of the key assumptions highlighted is that prior to the EU Exit, only one paying agency was allowed for the delivery of co-financing, provided by SG Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate (RPID). SF should continue to collaborate with RPID as the SG paying agency while retaining our delegated authority over decisions and policy. Any financial platform utilised must be able to interact with RPID. RMacH clarified that Oracle has been awarded this contract.

DH flagged up the issue of subsidy control. In order to maintain the flexible arrangements and intervention rates of the current scheme, SF should exercise as much influence as possible over subsidy regimes.

There are also a range of policy drivers with the potential to impact on the future delivery, direction and implementation of woodland creation and sustainable forest management. SG leadership and stakeholder groups are working together to develop priorities for integrated future land use in line with net zero targets

Timing was also discussed. The possibility of making changes over the next 2 years is limited, but more significant changes to the programme can be made January 2024 and beyond.

A draft list of outcomes and objectives were presented in the paper. It was fed back that some of these are minimum requirements – for example “legal within subsidy control regime and other legal requirements” and “auditable and financially responsive”. These should be presented separately.

There was discussion on the outcome of “recognisable and stable for users of the existing scheme”. It was acknowledged that following the EU Exit, uncertainty will be causing anxieties. However, it was agreed that although the scheme does work for some landowners, we need to consider more widely who else it could work for. used as a mechanism to address other SG outcomes, with a broader impact. The terms and grant conditions, could refer to areas such as Fair Work and Modern Slavery.

It is expected that the Environmental Standards agency will take an interest in this area of work.

As administering grants and providing support to land managers is one of the 3 central areas for which SF has been established, it is important that this area of work is properly resourced and governed. It was agreed that a Project Management Team will be pulled together and there will be further discussion on where this will sit.

*AP38/Nov: DH to pull together details of members for Forestry Grant Support Project Management Team. AH/DH/ZD to discuss where this project should sit.*

**6. Woodland Creation Achievement: strategic options for presenting results**

It is anticipated that the planting target of 13,000ha will not be achieved, despite the fact that SF has achieved more than it ever has in terms of numbers of approvals. This financial year, around 3000ha have been claimed to date. Staff have requested that SET makes a proactive decision on how our performance should be presented, and how other factors may have affected the delivery of actual planting.

The following points were discussed.

* The 650ha allocated to FLS has still to be planted.
* It was felt that it is too premature to go to the Minister at this point.
* It was agreed that it useful to compare this year with the last 3 years in terms of slippage.
* We need to improve our forecasting and track how claims are going with agents – but we do not want to micro mange private sector companies.
* More landowners may be encouraged to apply if our process are lighter touch and we can lower the risk associated with their time investment and efforts in making an application more landowners. This was why funding was allocated to initial assessments.
* In terms of governance, need to establish a regular reporting route on progress both of claims approved and planting carried out.

*AP39/Nov: DS will discuss with FLS the progress towards their planting target. DH to obtain 3 years historical slippage data and present back to SET in January 2022.*

**7. Closed session for SET Members only**

**8. AOB**

No AOB was presented.

| **Ref:** | **Action** | **SET Lead/Staff Member** | **Target Date** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| AP 65/August (cont) | MD to bring draft Mentoring Proposal to SET in January 2022. | MD | Jan 2022 | Ongoing |
| AP4/Jan (cont) | MR to recirculate final draft KPI Report to SET. | MR | Nov 2021 | Completed |
| AP14/April (cont) | DS to clarify access to SG Diversity Networks in January 2022. | DS | Jan 2022 | Ongoing |
| AP1/May (cont) | Actions on bullying/harassment, flexible working, and gender imbalance at a senior level incorporated this into EDI Action Plan. Resourcing to be identified. | MD/DS | Jan 2022 | Ongoing |
| AP35/Aug (cont) | AH to provide update to SET on timetable for Carbon Cycle Tool and Report in January 2022. | AH | Jan 2022 | Ongoing |
| AP36/Nov | RMacH and MD to work together for Staff Resource meeting on 30.11.21. Cover reporting of vacancies, recruitment management and process, and decision making. | RMacH/MD | Nov 2021 | Ongoing |
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