**SCOTTISH FORESTRY EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Minutes**

**Tuesday 18 Jan 2022**

**SET Attendees: In Attendance:**

Alan Hampson (Chair) Marelle Dalziel (MD)

Zahid Deen (ZD) Helen Mackay (HM)

Jonathan Taylor (JT Marliese Richmond (MR)

Rosetta Forbes (RF) Gary Henderson (GH)

Doug Howieson (DH)

**Apologies:**

Ross MacHardie (RMacH)

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

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

* Timetable for Carbon Cycle Tool and Report (AH)– Forest Research to finalise report by end of January. Action closed.
* Mentoring proposal (MD) – This had been suggested as a way forward for encouraging and skilling up women in the organisation in order to take on senior positions There has been a lack of resource to take this forward. It will sit within EDI Action Plan – see discussions below. Action closed off as being taken forward through EDI Plan.
* Forestry Grant Support Project Management Team (AH/DH/ZD) – In short term, will sit outwith Improvement Programme. Meeting taking place next month to tease out different aspects. There was reference made to the SAG discussion in December, and the longer term aim to be able to prioritise certain outcomes and the best applications. Consider how digital solutions can be utilised. Action closed off.

The 2 points above led to a discussion on the need to look at resourcing across the organisation and broader workforce issues. Any decision to take forward programme/project should scrutinise the level of change and benefit. There should be a realistic assessment of the resources required when any decision is made on taking forward a piece of work. Our Workforce Plan needs to be linked to the implementation of Improvement Plan, and integrated to the Business Planning cycle. Require governance around this.

* Presentation of historical slippage data (DH). DH is preparing a paper for the Minister on achieving planting targets vs claims made. Will circulate this to SET. Action closed off.
* FLS progress towards planting target (AH) – AH still to follow up with FLS on whether their target is increasing in line with their increase in funding.

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

MD flagged up the need for any actions being undertaken through a proposed EDI Plan will need to be properly resourced. RF updated the group that a new EDI Manager will be joining at end of Feb (backfilling existing post).

It was agreed that MD and ZD will work together to discuss specific parts of a draft EDI Plan (such as the mentoring proposal), review what should be put into place and the resources/staffing required, bringing this to SET in April.

More broadly, it was agreed to develop a more  holistic approach to developing our workforce  to help prioritise and resource future tasks and  projects.  A Workforce Plan scoping paper will be developed for the April SET meeting by Zahid Deen.

*AP1/Jan 22: MD and ZD to scope out a draft EDI Plan with staffing/resource requirements mapped out, for discussion at SET in April.*

*AP2/Jan 22: ZD to present Worforce Plan scoping paper to SET in April.*

**3. Budget and Staffing Information**

Gary Henderson (Senior Finance Manager) attended for the budget part of the meeting in RMacH’s absence.

**3.1 Finance Update**

GH drew the SET’s attention to the following points:

* *Planting:* It is estimated that new planting within this financial year will fall below our 13k ha target and is likely to be closer to 12k ha. This could equate to an underspend of around £5M.
* *Salaries:* Despite the approval of new posts, ongoing delays in recruitment and emerging vacancies has led to a reduction of £500K in this area, and it currently stands at £9.3M.
* *Tree Health:* Tree health budget was set at £830k after a reduction of £150k as part of the SG savings exercise. The Tree Health Team has required additional budget funding to respond to recent outbreak of phytophthora. This is likely to be in the region of £180k, and will be funded from our Contingency budget balance.
* *Underspend:* Expenditure is currently 23% of forecast budget, due to low net spend on Woodland Grants and historical trend for the majority of spend to occur in the final months of the year. This will be partially offset by using £1.7M woodland grants capital funding for Cross Border Research services. SF has been reporting a £5M underspend based on expected planting of around 12,000 hectares to SG in our monthly budget monitoring returns. This is being monitored closely through joint work with Grants Team and any position change will be disclosed promptly.

There was a discussion on the Contingency budget, the balance of which increased substantially from just under £200k to nearly £600k, as a result of delays in recruitment, emerging vacancies and continued impacts of the pandemic. Although some of this balance will be offset againt Tree Health activity, the SET members were asked to identify other available projects or programmes where investment can be utilised in the remainder of this financial year.

JT noted that the SET is required to endorse the significant change to SF’s staffing position following the SET meeting in November where additional staffing posts were agreed. The SET members agreed that they were content with the staffing changes.

*AP3/Jan22: SET members to identify and discuss with GH/RMacH potential projects which will be completed by 31.3.21 which could be funded through contingency monies.*

**3.2 5 year Spending Resource Review**

GH also discussed the paper setting out the requirements, timetable and impacts on SF for the next phase of the Resource Spending Review (Phase 3) 2022-2027. The key requirements are:

* Review (Strategic Approach to Budgeting) figures and refresh/update after analysis of future requirements.
* Consider any potential areas for savings or new income.
* Provide narratives and evidence of what each budget headings and level of funding will achieve.
* State how budgets align with three priorities of climate change, child poverty, and a stronger, greener, fairer economy and set the mission of the Resource Spending Review.

Contributions and information will be required from across SF in order to establish accurate forecasts and to qualify what our programme areas will achieve with allocations we are requesting. The information being provided should be split into the 3 categories of climate change, child poverty, and a stronger, greener, fairer economy. There will be a significant impact on staff time, particularly in the Finance team and in the early stages of this high priority exercise (Jan/Feb 22), resulting other work areas and tasks being de-prioritised and delayed or suspended.

The following points were discussed:

*Integrate priorities:* It will be important to align the 3 priorities of climate change, child poverty, and a stronger, greener, fairer economy with our activities. The Environment and Forestry Directorate has also made reference to these priorities. They should be threaded through our next Business Plan and Corporate Plan. SF needs to consider strategically how our existing and planned activities will link with these – community use of outdoor space and green learning; the decarbonisation of the forestry sector etc.

*Recurrent grant payments* – as our planting target rises to 18000ha, it is essential that there is a guaranteed resource to do this. There needs to be closer working on capital and grant resources.

*Potential cuts* – Any review may result in resources being cut so need to put forward a strong case for SF.

SET noted the impact the 5 year spending review will have both in the short term and medium to long term.

**3.3 Staffing**

MD provided a vacancy update. There are 48 vacancies across the organisation, 33 arising from the 21/22 business planning process, and 15 existing posts. Since December, two new people have started.

There is considerable pressure on the HR Team at present due to staff members moving on within the staff team. It will not be possible for them to deliver a surge of posts. Recruitment also creates a huge pressure on managers.

MD/RF requested that the SET members provide the following feedback:

* Which posts are business critical and need to be prioritised?
* Which posts can be grouped together and recruited to as part of a campaign?
* Which posts will need to be evaluated (JEGs)? It was noted that if there is a high degree of specificity in a job, this increases the pressure. It is important that information presented to HR relating to a post to be JEGs-ed is comprehensive – SF staff to work with HR Business Partners on this.

It was agreed that MD/RF to present a draft populated vacancy prioritisation template, making it clear the information which they require from SET members.

It was highlighted that staff will want to see which posts are coming up and when, so they can make plans as to what they wish to apply for.

*AP4/Jan 22: MD/RF to pull together draft populated vacancy prioritisation template SET members by 19.1.22. SET members to feedback by 21.2.22.*

**4. Standing Item – Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

DH updated the group on the progress of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

* Terms of Reference has been drafted which has now been shared with the Trade Union. To discuss membership of TU on the group. It was confirmed that Tom Hobbs is the Chair, and any queries should be put to him in the first instance. DH will be the link between the Committee and SET.
* Produced draft Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy Statement which will be discussed in detail at next meeting on 20.1.22. DH clarified there is a focus on wellbeing, which is a shift in culture for SF. No longer solely focusing on hazards such as working on a live harvesting site; but in addition, the cumulative physical and mental impacting of working from home, for example. It was suggested this go to SAG in March for discussion.
* The Committee will also start to map out a holistic Health, Safety and Wellbeing Risk Profile for the organisation.

*AP5/Jan 22: Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy Statement to go to SAG in March for discussion.*

**5. Key assumptions – to inform SF’s future target operating model (ZD)**

Firsty, ZD expressed his gratitude to his team in setting up and transcribed the Assumption sessions which ran across the organisation in December, and to those who participated.

This package of core information can now be used as a baseline position as to where the organisation is now; and what we need in between to get to where we want to go. ZD sought feedback from the SET members as to whether the consolidated assumptions generally reflect the expected direction of travel for Scottish Forestry over the next three years and if there are any key assumptions which had not been captured.

The following points were discussed:

* *Value of the exercise:* SET members felt that the exercise had been very valuable for many different reasons. It has been a useful engagement and reflective exercise, involving staff from across the organisation. It has helped to identify which activities are business as usual (rather than what is part of the Improvement Programme). It will help to demonstrate to politicians that SF cannot do everything and that priorities must be set.
* *Clear messaging for staff:* It will be important to get the messaging right on this. We need to be clear on the links between the Target Operating Model and the Improvement Programme: that the TOM is the Programme Model, and the Improvement Programme is the plan which will deliver on this. Some of the terms used will need to be explained. It should be made clear how we are changing the structure of the organisation. Make sure each SET member provides same consistent messages for managers and staff below them.
* *Career paths:* There is a mismatch between how our organisation has been set up and what we are required to do. This is reflected in our POPs/staff objective setting. Need some discussion around career paths. Refer to leadership ambition of trust and empowerment approach.
* *Additional information/assumptions:*  Review the presentation and themes, possibly link it with our strategic objectives.More on organisational flexibility and responsiveness. Potential joint funding with other organisations and future parentneship projects. Relationship with SG and our links to programmes should be brought out more. Information on SLA.
* *Constraints:* Make it clear that the future of SF hangs on Ministers/Parliament – they are the overarching decision makers.

In terms of actions to be taken in the short term, ZD clarified that the new Programme Manager begins in March. They will work on developing the TOM. The broad principles of the TOM can be presented to SAG (advisory body) in March, and approved at SET in April (decision making body).

JT referred to the exercise which will take place over next few months to review SF’s Framework Document. As this may need to refer the TOM, key Improvement Programme staff will need to have a session about the Framework Document with JT/MR.

*AP6/Jan 22: ZD to revise Assumptions using feedback from SET. ZD to present TOM to SAG in March, for approval to SET in April. JT/ZD to set up session on Framework Document.*

**6. Future Operating Model for Conservancies (DH)**

DH provided an update and a range of papers on the proposals to change the Conservancy Operating Model from Beats to Geographical Areas. This will enable SF to increase staffing, technical and support within the Conservancies to deliver woodland creation targets. The changes proposed will offer opportunities for career development and progression for existing staff. The key changes will be:

* The traditional beat structure will transition to a geographical structure
* Technical Officers will be recruited to work in three Conservancies (Central, Perth and Argyll and South) to work on emerging issues (such as tree health) and to provide mentoring and support.
* Four new Case Management Officers will be recruited internally for Central, Perth and Argyll, Grampian and Highlands and Islands Conservancies.
* Three new Operations Managers will be recruited in Grampian, Central and Perth and Argyll to establish area teams.

Details of the new Conservancy structure charts were presented.

DH provided a range of papers to enable discussion on an implementation plan, a go live date and to discuss and recruitment milestones. The intention is to fully implement this operating model on 1st of April after the conclusion of the consultation and SET sign off. The draft timetable proposed is:

* *January* - SET Sign Off. FTUS/staff consultation. Recruit Case Management Officers. Prepare Ops Manager, Technical Officer, WO, AWO, AWO Promotion Board. SET video on consultation, recruitment and go live date.
* *February* - Complete FTUS /staff consultation and formal response. Communicate to SF staff around consultation, next steps and go live date of 1st April. Recruit Ops Managers and Technical Officers.
* *March* - Communicate with staff and stakeholders around go live date of 1st April. Recruit WO, AWO and AWO promotion board. Preparation of AWO hub recruitment.

SET members highlighted that this is an ambitious timetable – DH acknowledged that all the components may not be in place by then, but there is the potential for leeway on this. The SET agreed to the operating model, recruitment planner, timetable (with caveat re slippage around recruitment).

DH updated the group that it is now under FTUS consultation. A copy of the business case and supporting documentation has been issued to Malcolm Crosby, detailing the proposals to change the Conservancy Operating Model from Beats to Geographical Areas. Feedback has been requested on the information which has already been presented.

There was considerable discussion on the communication of and consultation on these proposals. It was confirmed that the Conservancy Staff Tables which had been circulated earlier had personal information (names, salaries, notes on circumstances of staff), therefore sharing this information should be limited. Official Sensitive status would also apply. Different information would be shared with different recipients.

* It was agreed the notes column will be deleted from Conservancy tables but that other details will remain.
* RF/MD will contact Malcolm Crosby by email, with the mapping of new posts and Conservancy Staff Tables. It will be made clear that this is to aid his understanding but should not be shared further at this point.
* Conservators will also have the full set of mapping/tables.
* Individual staff members affected by changes will be made aware of the changes being proposed to their posts prior to any FTU meetings. A standard core script will be followed. The information shared will be limited to that relevant to their individual situation.
* Communication around the conclusion of the FTUS consultation will be provided to SF colleagues through an FAQ document and the staff briefing along with a video message. Communication around the establishment of the new operating model with stakeholders will require input and advice from Comms colleagues and will require updating of the SF Map browser Conservancy administration layer beforehand. An email to all staff has been drafted, and wording has been agreed. It contains links to business case and to structures.

SET approved release of this information. Information to be shared with FTU 19.1.21. Further cascade from 21.1.21.

It was made clear for audit purposes that at the SET staffing discussions in June 21, senior Woodland Officers were renamed Technical Officers. As noted in the accompanying paper, during the SET staffing discussions on 30th November 21, approval was reached for 3 additional Ops Managers, 3 additional Technical Officers and 4 Case Management Officers.

*AP7/Jan 22: RF/MD to send full information to Malcolm Crosby re proposed changes 19.1.21. DH to work with Conservators to cascade relevant information re proposed changes to individuals affected on 19.1.21 and 20.1.21. DH to work with Comms Team on providing information on the consultation exercise from 21.1.22 to wider staff.*

**7. Options for the development of SF’s Public Register.**

DH introduced a paper on the options for the development, modernisation and improvement of the woodland creation, felling permission and forest plan public registers (PR). The register contains information including case reference and a link to a basic (non-species) map, property name, case type, total area, conifer or broadleaves, conservancy office, local authority area, nearest town, grid reference and consultation end date. (The EIA public register is excluded from this options review.)

SF’s public registers are used to advertise forestry proposals and provide an opportunity for interested parties to contact local conservancy offices to obtain further more detailed information about specific cases. Applicants should undertaken due diligence consultation with statutory consultees (local authorities, HES, RPID, SEPA and Nature Scot )and community stakeholders / interest groups, so that by the time that SF places the proposals on the public register, appropriate mitigations have been implemented on the scheme design.

There are a number of issues associated with the public register. This can include the post code of the woodland owner being recorded – rather than the proposal area - resulting in wrong community council being identified. Often, objections are submitted at public register stage because consultees have not been properly consulted or because they do not agree with mitigations. This presents an additional burden to Woodland Officers, and pushes the responsibility of due diligence onto them. It adds to the length of time that it takes SF to resolve issues before submission to clearing.

Feedback from community groups, individuals, stakeholders and statutory consultees is poor in relation to the public register.

* It can be frustrating to users, especially if there are complex and numerous entries.
* It can be difficult for the community to assess the overall scale of land use change. In some cases, community consultees do not feel equipped to a level of understanding necessary to form a judgement as to the suitability or impact of the proposal.
* A lack of transparency in the register information pack or because of a lack of consultation can lead to complaints on social media or to politicians.

Overall, this can lead to feelings of mistrust and significant additional level of workload.

The Public Register has been in use in its current format for many years. No investment has been made in improving the public register since it was first developed by the Forestry Commission. It is a top priority process improvement candidate in the SF improvement and delivery programme. In addition, the Minister has made it clear that community engagement, empowerment, wealth building and just transition are strategic priorities. The public register in its present format does not easily deliver these priorities.

Two options were presented for consideration (it was noted a third option may be presented in due course).

* Option 1. Retain the existing public register arrangements where this is SF led activity. SF will continue to be the “public face” of future opposition to land use change decisions in this option.
* Option 2. Convert the existing public register arrangement to an online consultation portal, where SF will take a judgement on suitability of the proposal in line with SLC / LRRS / UKFS / SFM before signing off issues logs and issuing a contract or permission or Forest Plan. SF will be the public face of compliance rather than the public face of land use change decisions.

The following points were discussed.

* Overall, there was more support for option 2. It was felt that SF tends to take ownership of activities where this is not necessary. This option would push the transaction costs around consultation onto applicants and encourage both applicants and stakeholders to step up. It would bring SF activities in line with planning and meet strategic priorities around community empowerment. It would enable SF to follow the advice offered by SAG on supporting the best WC proposals. It will enable SF to take on more of a gatekeeping role, rather than process and rectify incomplete, ill consulted applications.
* It was agreed that this is significant change to the way SF works. It needs to be part of the new TOM – and it will mean more change for staff to absorb. It must be resourced properly and mapped against other changes. A digital solution will need to be developed.
* Comprehensive consultation must take place. Although it should be discussed with Conservators and Customer Reps Group, SF must also be very mindful of including communities and other stakeholders in the development of a new Public Register solution, and do this in an engaging way.

*AP8/Jan 22: DH to take the feedback offered by SET members to develop the options around the Public Register still further.*

**8. Communications from SET**

Rachel Martin (Head of Corporate Communications) was invited to the meeting by AH to provide a ‘balcony view’ of the meeting and to make suggestions as to how the SET can become more transparent and more visible to the organisation. Various engagement approaches were tested across 2021 – all staff get togethers; virtual tea breaks with the Chief Executive; regular SET videos – and these need to be evolved further.

RM offered her feedback:

* SET members need to be seen as leaders and trusted as experts. Staff, however, need to feel that they are part of the decisions making process.
* Staff want to know which topics are coming up; tell staff what was discussed and when it is going to be shared with them.
* There are key topics and campaigns which need to be communicated: long term vision; workforce planning and new TOM; the new SLA these need to be properly planned and resourced campaigns
* Keep SET engagement authentic and tap into SET members’ individual passions (such as AH’s experience of dyslexia).
* Plan to use Saltire as a library which can be used to search what has been discussed.
* Identify a replica similar to Yammer as a channel which enables staff to have a voice and engage on an ongoing basis on various topics.

*AP9/Jan 22: RM to continue to attend SET meetings and formulate further ideas on how SET should best communicate with staff.*

**9. AOB**

None.

**10. Closed session for SET**

MR/RM/MD left the meeting.