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| SF_col_landscape_logo | Senior Operations Group Minutes |

**21st March 2024,**

**Birnam Arts Centre and Microsoft Teams**

***Draft for approval***

**Present:**

Brendan Callaghan, Head of Operational Delivery (BC)

Doug Howieson, Conservator, South Scotland (DH)

Jason Hubert (JH) attending for Alan Hampson

Steven Hutcheon, Conservator, Grampian (SH)

Helen McKay, Chief Forester (HM)

Cameron Maxwell Conservator Perth and Argyll (CM)

Neil Murray, Conservator, Highland (NM)

Keith Wishart, Conservator, Central Scotland (KW)

Matt Young, Conservator

**In Attendance:**

Bastian Altrock (BA) attending for agenda item 4.

Rosie Ballantyne (RH) attending for agenda item 4.

Jack MacKay (JM) attending for agenda item 6.

Jenny Greaves (taking minutes)

**Apologies:**

Zahid Deen, Head of Operational Services and Transformation (ZD)

Alan Hampson, Head of Policy and Practice (AH)

1. **Welcome and declarations of interest**

BC welcomed everyone to the meeting. BC welcomed Matt Young to the meeting.

Previous minutes were agreed, and the following actions can be closed:

| **Ref** | **Action** | **Lead / Staff Member** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1.2 | SOG members to read policy and get back to NM with any comments. | NM | Closed  |
| 1.3 | H, S & W policy to go to CEO for sign off. | NM | Closed |
| 1.4 | NM to share outcomes of recent H&S audits with group. | NM | Closed  |
| 1.6 | NM to send around the comments from Jamie Hammond to the group to agree a response from SOG. AH needs comments by the next steering group meeting. | NM | Closed |

* **Action: JG to ask Pat to attend next SOG meeting to give an update on the Carbon Code.**
1. **Woodland Creation progress update**
* Paul Lowe wanted figures for 2023 / 2024. Complicated to give accurate figures at this point as still some to claim, and possibly some small schemes still to go to clearing.
* There have been a few FIOs around figures.
* Approx. 14,000ha have been approved.
* Of this 7,300ha have been native which is the highest area of NBL since 1991.
* Likely that 11,500 – 12,500 will be planted. This is consistent with what was predicted last summer.
* Over 4,000ha have been claimed. There are some big contracts that are pushing to get finished and claimed.
* There hasn’t been much reaction to the last briefing note from the industry, including the AMBER WC.
* Large conifer schemes are almost fully committed. Can approve 25/26 claim years
* KW highlighted that Harvesting and Processing (H&P) is going to be massively oversubscribed.
* BC suggested that a panel may be need to award the H&P so that it is not just based on points.
* KW said that there are lots of the same businesses submitting multiple applications.
* General discussion on how to prioritise H&P including the number of nurseries applying, whether a reduced grant could be paid, whether small community native nurseries are capable of producing the amount of trees required. Ultimate decisions could good to minister and H&P is always a good news story. Nurseries need consistency to plan ahead.
* CM stated there was excess despondency around the cut in grants and wants it to be made clear the tap hasn’t been turned off.
* BC: Ministers are listening but there is no change on the budget. One recent response is that 10% of next year’s budget can only be accessed if applicants accept lower £/ha rate. The main companies are unlikely to agree to that, although one company has said they will accept the lower rate as a delay in planting is more costly to them.
* NM asked for clarification on clearing dates.
* BC said they are as before but this may change.
1. **Deer**
* BC: Ongoing discussion around deer. Need a clear SF position.
* Main regulations are in forest planning and in relation to grants.
* There is a new deer management plan template.
* The regulatory approach the SF adopts will need to be consistent across Scotland, can’t just be in priority areas.
* KW: Lots of discussions needed across Scotland, not just a local issue.
* **Action: NM: Will send around the email clarifying position SF position.**
1. **Specialist teams project - Rosie Ballantyne**
* RB gave presentation on the paper sent around and the Specialist Teams Project.
* ZD has already fed back that he would like to see more information on resource requirements.
* RB: What tasks in the table should be priorities?
* General discussion: Complex and infrequent tasks are those which would be most useful to have a specialist team for. Straightforward but frequent tasks are a conservancy resource issue.
* DH suggested it would be SPHN work and windfarm work. NM added that not just windfarms but general planning work, this would also give Scotland wide consistence on planning responses. Also EIA enforcement work is infrequent but complicated.
* KW: Unauthorised felling investigations are disruptive and take a lot of time. It would be good to have a specialist team on those. SH agreed.
* NM need to look at communications round the role out of specialist teams and it needs to be handled sensitively. Change management hasn’t been good and this has been highlighted in staff survey.
1. **Matt Young – Projects**
* MY talked about the projects he is going to be working on.
* WO to Tech Officer promotion board. Discussion on how this would work and who it is aimed at. DH said that Case Support Assistants (CSOs) need to also be considered because it is a highly skilled job. Communications around this needs to mention that other roles will be considered in the future. NM also said that ops managers may not look at this in a good light.
* HM suggested that interview training should be provided.
* UKFS Version 5 training. MY said that ICF are putting together training on UKFS, this would be for the whole of UKFS not just changes from Version 4. It will take around 16 hours to work through. They are also producing a ‘lite’ version that will just focus on the changes.
* CM pointed out that the training could be too onerous for too small a gain. Experienced WOs will know most of the UKFS and will only need to know about the changes. JH said that WOs will need clear guidance on the 65% rule and how that relates to LTFPs and forest management units. Also a need to clarify relationship with UKWAS.
* Learning for casework
* This is about upskilling and building on the WOODs training. Also to include Ops managers and CSOs and national office. Need to choose from a menu of 30 courses. There has been a request for three posts based in National Office for this project.
1. **Developing a drones policy – Jack MacKay.**
* JM has got SF a Civil Aviation Authority operational authorisation. This means that all SF drones will hold the SF operator ID. The accountable manager will be Jack MacKay.
* Currently three of the tree health team have had the training (plus JM).
* JM has written a draft policy, needs to be signed off. HM gave her view that it was in the governance of SOG to sign this off. All **agreed** it was.
* General discussion on use of drones in conservancy work, especially useful for windblow and restock inspections.
* BC thought further discussion around the use for drones is needed.
* **Action: JM to send around document to be read and signed off.**
1. **Fair work Policy – BC**
* BC talked about the Fair Work policy that states that companies receiving public money need to comply with the fair work policy which includes paying staff the real living wage (£12/hr)\*. This includes direct employees and sub – contractors as well as the businesses that supply goods (such as nurseries). Piecework may get an exemption.
* A statement will be added to the grant guidance. And SF will only check high value schemes. Evidence required will be a letter from the applicants’ accountant.
* Not landing well with the sector when mentioned in relation to UKWAS.
1. **NM talked about the SOP on accident and incident reporting.**
* Documents all been checked. Final question to answer is who to contact after serious incident. It should be conservator and then SET team member.
* Discussion on who it should be. **Agreement** is should be the conservator, the relevant SET member and CEO.
* **Action: SOG to look at SOP and get back to NM with any comments.**

1. **Date of Next Meeting**

24th April 2024.

**SOG Action List**

| **Ref** | **Meeting** | **Action** | **Lead / Staff Member** | **Target Date** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1.1 | Feb and March 24 | JG to invite Pat and / or Andy (WCC) to next SOG to give update. | JG | 23/04/24 | Closed |
| 1.7 | Feb 24 | AH to arrange for Helen Sellers to bring paper to the next SOG meeting. | AH | 21/03/24 | Open |
| 2.1 | March  | JM to send around document to be read and signed off. | JM | 23/04/2024 | Open  |
| 2.2 | March | SOG to look at SOP and get back to NM with any comments.  | All / NM | 23/04/2024 | Open  |

\*For info, The real Living Wage is an independently calculated rate based on the cost of living and is paid voluntarily by employers. The rate is currently £12.00 and is calculated annually by The Resolution Foundation on an analysis of the wage that employees need to earn in order to afford the basket of goods required for a decent standard of living. See table below

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Real Living Wage (UK) | National Living Wage (UK) | National Minimum Wage |
| Age 18+ | Age 23+ | Age 21-22 | Age 18 – 20  | Under 18 | Apprentices |
| £12/hr | £10.42 | £10.18 | £7.49 | £5.28 | £5.28 |