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| SF_col_landscape_logo | Strategic Advisory Group |

MINUTES of SCOTTISH FORESTRY STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP

1. 14 June 2022

**Present:**

Dave Signorini (Scottish Forestry Chief Executive)

Eleanor Ryan (Non-Executive Committee member)

Phil Taylor (Non-Executive Committee member)

James Stuart (Non-Executive Committee member)

Richard Morris (Non-Executive Committee member)

Alan Hampson (Head of Policy and Practice)

Zahid Deen (Head of Operational Services and Transformation)

Jonathan Taylor (Head of Scottish Forestry Executive Office)

Doug Howieson (Head of Operational Delivery)

Helen McKay (Chief Forester for Scotland)

Rachel Martin (Head of Corporate Communications – item 6)

James Aldred (Corporate Support Manager – minutes)

**Apologies:**

Ross MacHardie (Head of Finance and Business Support)

**Summary of actions**

* **Action:** JT to share draft Business Plans with SAG by circulation.
* **Action:** JT to seek dates in September for skills discussion.
* **Action:** JT / JA to develop SAG action tracker and forward planner.
* **Action:** DH and team to provide analysis of FGS application scoring
1. **Welcome from Dave Signorini, Scottish Forestry CEO**

The Minutes from the last meeting were agreed.

With regard to item 3, JS declared a potential interest as Convenor of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, as the Authority had resolved to encourage a differentiation of approach regarding grant schemes, which may include the Forestry Grant Scheme.

With regard to item 6, ER declared a potential interest due to her previous work supporting the Public Bodies Unit in the development of the new Model Framework Document.

1. **DS gave an update and reflection on current issues and recent meetings with Scottish Ministers.**

On actions arising:

* The draft updated Corporate Plan and team Business Plans were in development, with guidance being updated and initial discussions underway with cost centre managers.
	+ **Action:** JT to share drafts with SAG by circulation.
* The proposed future discussion around forestry sector skills would be taken up later in the year, given the ongoing work regarding the Forestry Grant Scheme.
	+ **Action:** JT to discuss with HM and seek dates in September.
* **Action:** JT / JA to develop SAG action tracker and forward planner
1. **Update on Forestry Grant Scheme enhancements**

AH updated the Group on the development of proposed enhancements for the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) to deliver further public value from woodland creation, particularly in relation to carbon offsetting and community engagement and benefit from the schemes.

The grant system was due to be replaced in total by 2026, although with some uncertainty as to exact timings, as the legislative basis for the replacement agricultural support regime, with which the future FGS would integrate, was still in development. Therefore, the current question was one of what could be done in the short term to review and enhance the current FGS, with future development of a proposed public consultation for more medium- to long-term changes.

The proposals included measures to strengthen the community consultation requirements of applicants, and increase the requirements to demonstrate the community benefit of schemes – aiming to align with the Scottish Government’s overarching approach on investment in natural capital.

The short-term changes would be expected to start having an impact from the 23/24 planting season.

Issues raised in discussion included:

* The potential for a more integrated approach between the primarily woodland-creation-focused FGS funding, and other funding more focused on the delivery of community benefits from schemes.
* That SF was attempting to work with applicants and the wider sector to improve the community benefit and engagement aspects of applications by sharing good practice and clear expectations. The need for a strong definition of community benefit and good engagement practice was highlighted.
* The potential to develop a segmentation approach to FGS applications, including by size, viability, and expected community benefit. It was noted that a scoring approach is currently in place, and that given the current volume of proposed schemes, a more selective approach could jeopardise achievement of the woodland creation targets, which are strongly linked to wider community benefits via the achievement of Net Zero and carbon sequestration.

The Group requested that the current approach to scoring FGS applications be shared, including the characteristics of applicants.

* **Action:** DH and team to provide analysis of FGS application scoring
1. **Horizon scanning and upcoming issues: workshop**

The Group undertook a SWOT analysis exercise, looking at SF’s perceived strengths and weaknesses across delivery, governance, people and external factors.

The notes of the exercise were captured and would be presented back to SAG.

1. **Updating governance arrangements**

DS presented on proposals to create a Senior Operations Group to consider key operational and delivery issues, and discuss and where possible resolve any regional or practical constraints. The aim was to benefit from organisational expertise in the delivery and operations side of business, and empower decision making at an appropriate level, while freeing up the Senior Executive Team to focus on strategic issues.

Points raised included:

* The importance of the new Group having:
	+ A clear remit and position in the SF hierarchy
	+ Clear record keeping and decision reporting, and escalation and cascade arrangements
	+ Clear substitute arrangements for those non-operational SET members sitting on the new Group.
* The potential for SOG members to act as leads on cross-cutting issues.
* The opportunity to review the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Advisory Group and Senior Executive Team to incorporate reference to the new Group and review remits and relationships.
1. **Future Working Project: Approach and emerging themes/issues**

RM gave an update on the progress of the Project, noting that based on responses to date, the majority of staff were interested in continuing a hybrid working approach, with small minorities desiring fully home- or fully office-based working. The move by Conservancies away from offering drop-in contact towards an appointment-based approach was working well. This phase of the project would complete in August and present recommendations to the SET; the project will then hand over to a new project manager as part of the Improvement Programme.

RM noted that the next phase of the Project would explore the potential benefits of an ongoing hybrid approach, such as emission reductions, improved collaboration, improved staff retention, etc. The Group noted that delivery and productivity should be a key driver of a future working model.

**ENDS**