**SCOTTISH FORESTRY EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Minutes (Draft)**

**Tuesday 30th August 2022**

**SET Attendees:**

Dave Signorini (DS)

Helen Mackay (HM)

Zahid Deen (ZD)

Ross MacHardie (RM)

Jonathan Taylor (JT)

Brendan Callaghan (BC)

Alan Hampson (AH)

James Aldred (JA) – minutes

**In Attendance:**

Marelle Dalziel (MD) – for item 2

Kevin Quinlan (KQ) – for items 4, 8

Rachel Martin (RMar) – for item 4

Helen Sellars (HS) – for item 8

**Apologies:**

None

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

DS welcomed Brendan back to the Executive Team, and welcomed everyone to the meeting. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

On outstanding actions:

* AP8/Jan 22, Public Register developments: BC noted that the current three public registers were planned to be refreshed and combined into a single public register, with the planned FGS enhancements to feed in.
* AP3/May 22, Target Operating Model budget requirements: ZD noted that this had been covered by SET’s July budget discussions.
* AP6/May 22, Health & Safety policy statement: BC undertook to pick this up, with a target date of the end of September.
* AP6/July 22, Recruitment panel training on equality and diversity: JT reported that a training course was being created, with a view to piloting in October 2022.

1. **Update on People Survey Action Plan – Marelle Dalziel**

MD introduced the paper, noting that key action areas raised in the 2021 People Survey had been determined as learning and development; leadership and managing change; workload and wellbeing; and discrimination, bullying and harassment.

MD reported progress made in these areas, in that:

* **Learning and Development:** Two new posts had been approved and recruited to, with key priorities including:
  + The identification of staff learning & development needs via iTrent performance monitoring;
  + The development of a draft Learning and Development Strategy for SET review in November 2022;
  + The development of a formal training programme for Woodland and Assistant Woodland Officers joining from Spring 2023;
  + A review of the induction programme for new starters.
* **Leadership and change:** A bespoke leadership training programme was in development, to be delivered in partnership with Forth Valley College, and areas of good practice within the organisation were being identified for sharing.
* **Workload and wellbeing:** 37 of the newly approved posts had been filled to date, including some involving movement within the organisation yielding outstanding pipeline issues. On wellbeing, L&D staff would engage with the next Health & Safety Committee meeting to determine priorities and requirements, and best points to engage for Mental Health First Aid training.
* **Discrimination, bullying and harassment:** Additional Engaging The Bystander training sessions were planned to take place in November, picking up new starters since the last sessions in June 2021. Going forward, integration with induction sessions would be explored. Previous training sessions had resulted in an increased number of issues being reported, with these addressed through the appropriate formal processes.

In discussion, the importance of communicating to managers their responsibility for the learning and development of their staff, and the need to embed this in managerial roles and objectives, was noted, along with the need to manage managers’ expectations of their new staff in learning and familiarising themselves with SF’s numerous and relatively complex systems.

Key messages were identified as the large volume of work underway in response to issues highlighted in the previous People Survey, and the relatively long lead time expected in delivering the planned Leadership and Change programme, with development and engagement to be undertaken to ensure the programme fitted SF’s needs.

**> Action:** SET to work with MD and Head of Corporate Comms to agree and disseminate messages on planned actions and engagement.

1. **Supporting STEM Ambassadors in SF – Helen McKay**

HM presented the report, noting the aims to increase student demand for college and university provision of forestry courses (primarily through increased awareness of forestry as a career), given the demand-led nature of that provision, and to increase the diversity of applicants to those courses.

In discussion, SET noted mixed perspectives on previous work to raise awareness of forestry as a career, with recent recruitment campaigns to SF roles having led to good feedback from applicants who hadn’t previously considered forestry as a career, but less clear outcomes from previous work with local high schools.

SET therefore **approved** the proposal to work up a pilot model for discussion at SOG, but noted the need to have a clear approach to evaluation of the pilot’s impact.

1. **Report from the Future Working Group – Rachel Martin**

RMar reported on the work of the Group to date, noting that the aim of the test and learn phase over the last few months was to understand both business needs and staff preferences for SF’s approach to future working.

The report recommended:

* The adoption of an activity-based rather than a set-pattern model of office use, initially on a trial basis.
* The trialling of an appointment-only model for office-based stakeholder engagement.
* That the planned ‘where we work’ element of the Group’s remit be taken forward within the Improvement Project.

With regard to the future usage of office space, DS noted the intention to use the outcome of the Group’s work to feed into the development of SF’s Estates Strategy.

KQ noted similar work underway across the Scottish Government to review office space use and capacity, with a cross-Governmental estates strategy in development. RMar noted that SF’s existing workplaces were already being adjusted to meet identified needs, with more flexible working hubs and more meeting spaces being created.

Potential issues raised included the potential for staff to seek a change of base to offices more local to their homes, and the need to ensure appropriate compliance with the chosen attendance approach. RMar noted that a more flexible approach to office bases might open up a greater geographical talent pool for SF recruitment, and that the expectation would be for non-compliance with an agreed attendance approach to be dealt with by managers as with any other compliance issues.

SET **approved** the proposals and noted that the next steps would include an all-staff seminar in late September or October to communicate the agreed approach.

1. **Standing Item – Budget and Staffing Information**
2. **Standing Item: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**
3. **Standing Item: Health, Safety and Wellbeing – Brendan Callaghan**

No update this meeting (next update September).

1. **Building Forest Resilience: paper for September National Stakeholder Group – Alan Hampson / Helen Sellars**

HS presented the paper for SET input and signoff for submission to the National Stakeholder Group, noting the identified need to incorporate resilience measures into woodland creation and management approaches to allow woodlands to cope with climate change. A key challenge would be to identify what characteristics of woodlands would be prioritised for strengthening to improve resilience.

HM noted the relatively slow rate of change in the current forest estate of around 2% per year via woodland creation and tree felling, and queried whether that would affect any Strategy’s timescale. BC noted that Forest Plans would provide an opportunity to effect change beyond woodland creation and tree felling, for example through tree thinning and management of open spaces, which could help lengthen rotation times, reduce tree stress, and reduce vulnerability to diseases, for example fungal diseases that thrive in high humidity. However, this could raise issues of training for staff to determine if Forest Plans appropriately met any new resilience requirements.

DS noted the paper’s focus on forestry and woodlands, and queried whether a landscape-scale approach was being considered. A possible role for the Land Use Transformation Board could be considered in this context.

KQ recommended engagement with Forest Research on the development of related logic models.

DS noted the existing regulatory and financial levers available to encourage private sector landowners and investors to take resilience into account, and queried whether resilience was seen as a possible risk to investment returns. AH noted that the private sector’s general approach was to rely on fast-growing species to minimise risk, and HM reported that many major forestry holders already held insurance policies for wind risk.

SET **approved** the paper for submission to the National Stakeholder Group, and noted that a subsequent paper would be brought to a future SET on next steps resulting from the discussion.

1. **Update of FGS Enhancements project arrangements – Alan Hampson & Neil Murray**

AH introduced the paper, noting the Minister’s desire to give the public an opportunity to voice their views on woodland creation, and the potential challenge of managing public expectations around the possibility for change.

HM queried whether there was an opportunity to explore a levy on all forestry stakeholders towards common goods such deer management. AH noted this would be taken up through the Regulatory Working Group.

The proposed use of CitizenSpace was discussed, with some previous experience having been mixed, and the need for wider community engagement noted. AH noted this would be explored in the options presented to the Minister.

JT noted the potential for the FGS to act as a lever to enact other governmental priorities such as procurement outcomes and fair work, and the potential for the Scottish Government to increasingly seek this leverage.

RM noted the potential budget implications of the enhanced Scheme, and the need to forward plan accordingly.

The links between the Enhancement project and the Improvement Programme were discussed, with the current ad hoc engagement approach noted and the development of a clear governance approach recommended.

SET **approved** the report and recommendations.

**> Action:** Policy to generate FGS enhancements policy position briefing for Comms to use in confirming key lines.

1. **AOB**

BC noted that some proposed staff posts were still awaiting SET approval for creation. These would be brought to the Monday Management Team meeting for consideration.