## Executive Board Meeting held on Wednesday 22 January 2025

**Saughton House, E1 Scottish Forestry Large Meeting Room and Microsoft Teams**

## Present:

* Paul Lowe, Chief Executive (PL) – Chair
* Brendan Callaghan, Director of Operational Delivery (BC)
* Alan Hampson, Director of Policy and Practice (AH)
* Helen McKay, Chief Forester for Scotland (HM)
* Jonathan Taylor, Head of Corporate Affairs and Communications (JT)
* Adam Dearnley, Director of Finance (AD)
* Louise Maclean, Information Governance Manager (LM) – Minutes

## In Attendance:

* Marelle Dalziel, Head of People (MD) – Item 6
* Órla O’Sullivan (OOS), Corporate Support Manager

## Apologies:

* Zahid Deen, Director of Transformation and Corporate Services (ZD)

## Welcome and declarations of interest (as relevant)

* 1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including Órla O’Sullivan who was attending her first meeting since taking up the post of Corporate Support Manager.
  2. No new declarations of interest were made.

## Minutes and actions of previous meeting

* 1. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.
  2. Actions arising from previous meetings:
* 24/11 – No further update reported
* 30/11 – BC had prepared and issued a briefing to advise the Cabinet Secretary of woodland creation activity in 24/25. Noted as completed and closed
* 31/11 – Noted as completed and closed
* 32/11 – It was agreed that a paper would be submitted to the March Executive Board
* 33/11 – It was noted that MD would submit a paper with proposal to the February meeting of the Strategic Advisory Group
* 34/11 - Noted as complete and closed

## Standing item: woodland creation update - All

* 1. BC informed the Executive Board (EB) that he had updated the Cabinet Secretary with the woodland creation position for 2024/25 on 21 January.
  2. BC told the EB that around 9,800 ha of FGS approvals had been granted, this along with an anticipated c750ha of woodland creation planned by FLS, would see 10,500 hectares in total. However for FGS applications there was always attrition in the quantity of trees planted against the quantity approved for a number of reasons including adverse weather and the availability of resources. Attrition rates varied between c10-25% and so the final planting rate was likely to be in the order of 8-10,000 ha. In light of this, it was announced that the claim deadline for customers had been extended until May, as this approach worked well in 2023/24.
  3. BC informed the EB of the growing expansion of renewable energy, power lines and connectivity infrastructure. The building of this infrastructure in and around woodlands had the potential to create woodland removal. Whilst there was a requirement that any compensatory planting should be on a like for like basis, there had been examples of companies conducting native planting, where commercial planting had been affected. In light of that SF had been in contact with Local Authority Planning offices to raise this issue. Furthermore the resources to undertake compensatory planning were the same as for woodland creation and so there was a risk of competition and reduced woodland creation activity. The scale and impact on existing schemes and delivery of this is not fully understood.
* **Action Point:** BC to explore any data and analysis in relation to potential compensatory planting levels, historic and potential future levels.
  1. PL informed the EB that Scottish Government had recently held an investors panel to understand the drivers and barriers to investment in Scotland. It was noted that this might provide insights in terms of the woodland carbon code market. He asked AH to see if the panel results would be useful to share with EB members.
* **Action Point:** AH to seek and circulate insights from the recent Scottish Government investors panel session to Executive Board members.
  1. BC informed the EB that given the current budget position, not yet finalised, around 11,000 hectares of woodland creation (WC) could be funded in 2025/26. The budget included the provision of £6m of one of funding that SG had ringfenced for native woodland creation. He highlighted the intensified levels of

scrutiny on schemes and increased caseload and complexity. BC was asked to review and update the current woodland creation risks in the risk register.

* **Action Point:** BC to review woodland creation related risks on the strategic risk register to ensure that they reflect the increased levels of scrutiny and issues, and also around compensatory planting.
* **Action Point:** AH and Pat Snowdon to brief Ministers on emerging risks, and updates to the climate plan.
  1. JT informed the EB that the woodland creation route map had been presented to the Cabinet Secretary before Christmas and that Ms Gougeon’s comments had been incorporated. It was recently returned from the graphic designer and

was ready to be published. It was planned to launch in early February 2025, and would be accompanied by statements from the Cabinet Secretary and the CEO. Communications colleagues, as well as message to SF staff, would look to have an article on main SG Saltire pages. It was noted that the Project Management Office would have a co-ordinating role in the updates of the route map to EB.

* **Action Point:** Project Management Office to update EB on Route map delivery progress 3 times each year.

## Standing item: Finance update - AD

* 1. AD introduced the paper and members noted the content. AD explained that the budget was tracking well, and asked all Senior Executive Team members to review and validate their budget positions.
* **Action Point:** Each Senior Executive Team member to review and validate their area’s budget and report back to finance.

## Corporate Plan & Strategy and Budget Profiling Update - JT / AD

* 1. JT introduced the update on the Corporate Plan and Strategy. He informed the Executive Board that final comments had been received from senior team members and subject matter experts. JT thanked PL for his comments, that would be taken forward, and all subject matter experts that contributed to the plan.
  2. JT informed the EB that in light of some recent developments, some of the case studies would be revised. PL suggested a page focused on woodland creation, including the route map and Scottish Forestry’s achievements and a page perhaps including an infographic on developments in innovation. JT would revise the timeline, incorporate suggestions, and present the plan back to EB as

soon as possible. The intention was to launch the plan in March.

* 1. AH asked if there was a timescale for the production of the business plan. JT responded that these would follow once the Corporate Plan was approved. AH highlighted the importance of these documents as they provide a structure for planning.
  2. BC discussed the prioritisation process for the Improvement Development Program (IDP) and reflected on a decisions being made and in particular how this affected some long standing projects. PL requested more information on the scale, scope and role of the IDP. AH also noted about a member of the Policy Practice team being on the IDP board, that was agreed.
* **Action Point:** Improvement Development Program update to be added to Executive Board agenda 3 times a year.
* **Action Point:** JT to write to PMO to request that the Terms of Reference for Improvement Development Program be revised to ensure that they reflect escalation routes; reporting arrangements; the scope of the IDP’s duties and responsibilities. Member of Policy and Practice team to be invited to IDP board meetings.
* **Action Point:** JT to request a report from PMO on all projects 2+ years old, including a summary of what they are expected to deliver and circulate to Executive Board members.
  1. AD introduced the finance update. He highlighted some objectives for the 2025/26 cycle, including communication with key budget holders/ leaders ensuring alignment and to start initiating increased two-way integration between the Finance Team and budget holders and a focus on headcount and teams to create a baseline for 2025/26 hiring and staffing.
  2. A number of proposed new roles were discussed. The Executive Board agreed the following:

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| **Area** | **Role** | **Decision** |
| Operational Delivery | Head of Woodland Creation & Regulation – operational side | Approved |
| Operational Delivery | 2 to 3 roles – Operational team Backfills | Further information requested |
| Operational Delivery | Future Forestry Support (new grants) | Approved, but not to progress urgently |
| Policy | Woodland Creation Policy | Approved subject to provision of finalised job |

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|  |  | description and JEGS analysis |
| Finance | Finance Manager | Approved |
| Executive Office | Government Liaison/Case work | Approved |
| Executive Office | Administrative support | Approved |
| Executive Office | External/proactive comms | On pause |
| Project Management Office | 2-3 BAs | Defer |
| Transformation & Corporate Services | System Developer | Defer |
| Policy | Tree Health | Further information required |
| Policy | Possible later role in SFM team – Q1/Q2 | Further information required |

## People Survey Results – Sponsor PL, Presenter MD

* 1. MD introduced the paper and noted that the response rate of 81% was excellent, having been similar to the last survey and considerably higher than the rate for the Scottish Government. Each cost centre had received an individualised report. Further highlights included the improvement in the learning and skills development score. The Executive Board congratulated the Learning and Skills Development Manager and the Learning and Skills Development Officer.
  2. Pay and reward was also noted as a highlight. MD noted that feedback indicated how staff value the flexibility offered by the Agency. All cost centres were encouraged to hold a meeting with staff to discuss the results of the survey and MD noted that the HR Business Partner would be happy to attend these meetings.
  3. MD noted that the Communications Team would be engaged to help communicate the Agency’s response to the results and to keep staff updated on progress. The focus of this work would been drawn from the key themes which have been highlighted, including the purpose and work of SF, improving change management, continued investment in learning and skills development, better systems and processes, and pay and rewards. PL asked for work to develop more of a set of people survey actions that could be reported on and communicated, he requested that the EB receive an update on progress 2-3 times a year.
  4. MD informed the EB that the new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager had started at Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) and that a Wellbeing Officer had recently started. Scottish Forestry had been asked to put together a list of requirements for FLS to consider for their work programme.
  5. HM asked about the reasons behind the score for question C02 in relation to leadership. MD agreed to investigate this and report back.
* **Action Point:** MD to investigate the results of question C02 in relation to leadership, and circulate findings to Executive Board members.

## AOB

* 1. As the last Executive Board meeting with Alan Hampson, Director of Policy and Practice, PL conveyed his thanks to AH for his service over the years. PL noted AH’s knowledge and experience and expressed his gratitude and that AH had added substantially to the work of SF and the other organisations in which he had worked, including Nature Scot.
  2. BC noted that as a result of a recent health and safety audit, a new national corporate health and safety support coordinating group had been established and asked Senior Executive Team members to discuss and recommend a Chair to PL.
* **Action Point:** Executive Board members to discuss and identify a Chair for the new SF National Health and Safety Coordinating Group and make a recommendation to the CEO.
  1. BC noted the upcoming Institute of Chartered Forester’s conference due to be held in Edinburgh in April 2025 and asked for the Senior Executive Team’s position on staff attending the conference either online or in person. SET asked BC to provide some more information so that they could consider the Agency’s response.
* **Action Point:** BC to prepare a proposal for the Senior Executive Team to consider staff attendance at the upcoming Institute of Chartered Foresters conference in Edinburgh.
  1. The meeting closed.

## Date of next meeting

Tuesday 11 March 2025 09:30, Saughton House E1 Spur Large meeting room & Microsoft Teams.





# Executive Board Minutes

