



**MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION TRADE UNIONS' CORE GROUP
MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER 2007, ROOM 3, 1ST FLOOR, IN
SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH**

Present:	Robert Beaney	FCTU Chair
	Edward Shephard	FCTU Secretary
	Allan Mackenzie	PCS
	Marcus Sangster	Prospect
	Tim Gill	Unite
Minute Secretary:	Sam Telford	FCTU Office

1. Introduction

Robert welcomed the Core Group and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Glen Dobson.

3. Minutes of 1st August 2007

The above were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. Pay

Edward reported that ministers for England, Scotland and Wales had approved a bid submitted by management but added that acceptance was still needed from HMT. In response to a question from Tim, Edward said that unions were not aware of details of the bid.

The group reflected on the discussion at the last meeting on pay and reward in August. Edward thanked those who had responded on the notes produced by HR and said that he would circulate Allan's comments. It was noted that HR had no expectations for unions to agree on and accept any principles at this stage and the group **agreed** that they were not in a position to. It was **noted** that further meetings to generate ideas on particular aspects of the pay and reward system were being set up for the coming weeks.

Action Required: Edward to circulate Allan's comments

5. Efficiency Review Update

Edward said that there was little to report on the Efficiency Review but advised that the timetable for the DEFRA settlement would likely be around the end of October or early November. The group noted that Edward and Tim would be meeting with Simon Hodgson in September to discuss implications of the Efficiency Review for FE England. Edward advised that he had spoken with Bob McIntosh and said that FC Scotland would likely be the first to receive details of their settlement.

6. Health & Safety

Allan presented a paper on Occupational Health following on from the discussion at the Core Group meeting in August and stated that unions have a significant role to play in helping the FC to attain some of the objectives needed to meet the

demands of having a healthy workplace. He said that more focus needed to be placed on workplace environments where staff spend a considerable amount of unbroken time. It was noted that in recent findings by Investors In People, many employers considered investing in healthier working environments as a waste of money, time or was irrelevant in their department. Allan expressed concern that some staff in FC actually wanted better support and development structures to create a healthier working environment and that making significant improvements to personal health at work could also boost job satisfaction, wellbeing, motivation, performance and productivity.

Robert advised that work to improve the delivery of health & safety to members was ongoing. He added that a paper would be submitted to the FCTU Council meeting in October to raise the question of how to better manage H&S and find a suitable method of switching more focus to occupational health. Allan felt that the joint unions should aim to have a better overall perspective of H&S issues in the FC before the next Departmental Staff Council at which issues could be raised and discussed. The group **concurred**.

7. FCTU Website

Edward was pleased to report that the FCTU website was now online and that significant progress had been made in terms of structure, design and content. Edward welcomed the group to give feedback and offer suggestions on changes or additional content to add. The group approved of the overall look and feel of the site and agreed that the overall structure was logical. Following discussion, Edward asked the group to report back with suggested content for each of the individual unions' sections. It was agreed that having a rep from each union to post news items and updates to the their section would be useful.

Action Required: All Core Group members

Edward said that work on the website was ongoing and that further consideration to various elements of the site would be necessary as the site developed.

Robert thanked Edward and Sam for the good work and the group recognised the benefits that the website will bring in improving communication of the joint unions throughout the FC.

8. Communication Meetings

The group re-visited the plan of organising discussion sessions with staff and Robert presented an updated spreadsheet detailing target locations, dates confirmed and workplaces already visited, which were noted to have been around half of the districts and conservancies throughout GB. The group agreed that meeting with staff face to face and discussing issues and the work of joint unions was proving to be extremely useful in improving communication with both members and non-members.

It was agreed that the item would remain on the agenda and that the approach to staff at team meetings is reviewed at a later date when more workplaces have been visited.

9. Management Development Working Group

Edward referred to a paper circulated prior to the meeting on the Evaluation of FCS Management Development Programme and gave background information on the work being carried out to analyse individual development needs of Pay Band 4 managers. The group noted that the MDWG had met the previous day at which discussions had been positive and that generally the programme was being well

received by participants. Edward said that the Executive Board would discuss the scope for using the programme throughout GB.

10. Homeworking Facilities Allowance

Edward advised that the Homeworking Facilities Allowance was last negotiated in 2001/2 and that as part of the agreement, annual increments would be made in line with inflation. It was noted that the rate had not been adjusted since the negotiation and that HR had verbally stated that due to affordability, they could not implement raises in the allowance. Edward was awaiting details in writing from HR including the total number of staff receiving Homeworking Facilities Allowance.

Robert expressed concern with the implications for future negotiations with HR renegeing on an agreement. The group concurred and **agreed** to defer the matter until a written response had been received.

Action Required: Edward to circulate paper from HR to Core Group