



**MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION TRADE UNIONS' DEPARTMENTAL
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25TH NOVEMBER, EAST
BOARDROOM, SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH**

Present:	Robert Beaney	FCTU Chair
	Allan MacKenzie	FCTU Secretary
	Lorraine Adams	Prospect
	Mary Irvine	PCS
	Roy Laird	GMB
	Sue Gillingwater	FCTU Network Manager
	Helen Paterson (item 7)	HR Policy
	Mike Cowan (item 7)	HR Policy
Minute Secretary	Sam Telford	FCTU Network Support

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Audrey Campbell, Malcolm Currie and Danny Williamson.

2. Minutes of 25th September 2009

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

3. Matters Arising

3.1 FCTU AGM

It was noted that Sam would write out attendees to confirm a date for the re-arranged AGM.

Action Required: Sam Telford

3.3 Slasher Article

Allan confirmed that the joint FCTU/HR article on recruitment would appear in the next Slasher released in December.

3.4 Efficiency Programmes

Mary reported that she had received a response from Colin Sobota to their letter sent to the HR Business Partners. Mary said that the FCTU had been invited onto a working group in the new year. It was noted that this would be circulated following the meeting.

Action Required: Mary Irvine

4. FCTU Action Plan

It was noted that the DC meeting on 15th December would focus on the Action Plan and the constituent unions would submit their recommendations on the content and priorities.

5. FCTU Strategic Issues Programme

Following discussion, it was agreed that Sue would reformat the SIP paper for Allan's approval. This would then be circulated to DC members for re-endorsement.

Action Required: Sue Gillingwater

6. Communication Strategy

Allan presented the first draft of the FCTU Communication Strategy. Allan asked that the constituent unions consider the content and submit comments at the January DC meeting.

7. Mandatory Retirement Age

Robert welcomed Mike Cowan and Helen Paterson from HR Policy and thanked them for attending to update the FCTU on progress being made to remove the Mandatory Retirement Age within the FC. Mike said that this was a policy change being imposed across all Civil Service departments and agencies by March 2010. Mike referred to the paper which had been considered by the FCTU, outlining the background, the potential impact of the policy change and the required work to roll out the revised policy. He added that HR had also provided draft questions and answers for managers and staff in terms of the communication on the policy change. Sue provided copies of HR's response to the FCTU's feedback.

Mike said the communication plan will make it clear that intention of the policy change is not to place pressure on staff to stay on beyond an age at which they want to retire at and withdraw their benefits. He stated that the driver behind the policy change is about reducing age discrimination in the workplace and the intention is purely to give staff more flexibility in their choice on when to retire, and allowing staff to leave when the time is right for them. Mike advised that the Cabinet Office have stated that relevant departments and agencies could retain a Mandatory Retirement Age for specific posts if there were good business reasons for doing so, and that this was in recognition that the Civil Service is a diverse entity and that not all jobs are office based. However, Mike said that following careful consideration, senior management in the FC had decided not to pursue a business case for retaining an upper age limit for specific posts – the main reason being that age should not be an indicator of fitness to do a job and that the employer should find non-discriminatory ways to ensure that staff are fit and healthy to undertake their duties rather than apply an upper age limit. Mike said that the HR Management Board have decided to take forward some work to help address the issues and concerns which have been raised, for example on strengthening Performance Management so that managers can improve their skills in motivating and getting the best out of their staff. He said that this will cover nurturing talent to support other ways to develop people's careers if there will potentially be less promotion opportunities with staff staying on longer, and also give managers the skills and confidence to address performance which is falling below an acceptable standard. He added that the current inefficiency procedure would be reviewed in the new year. Mike advised that the policy and procedure is designed to support staff and whilst the procedure has clear steps that are a managers' responsibility in encouraging effective succession planning, it would also be clear that the employee needs to take ownership of their decision to retire at a suitable time for them. The DC recognised that the procedure has a focus on the need for open dialogue on retirement plans between the employee and the manager.

Mike reported that they were carefully considering how this policy change will impact on staff and summarised the key points in advising that enhanced guidance would be produced which will clarify how diminishing capability should be addressed in the context of managing poor performance; the equality and diversity team will produce managerial guidance on considering reasonable adjustments; the Your Good Health initiative will continue to promote good health education programs and that the communication strategy for this would be reviewed.

It was noted that Mike had drafted a revised retirement policy and procedure and that it will be submitted to the HR Management Board for endorsement. Mike said that the documents would then go to the FCTU for a final consultation before a final draft is agreed.

8. England Reviews

Allan said that a meeting had been held in Cambridge on 20th November, at which staff were taken through the severance clauses in their redundancy letters. He reported that the Period of Reflection had now concluded and that a letter had been issued to the Cabinet Office from the FC stating that they had met all the requirements of the PoR. Allan felt that both management and the FCTU had work to do to maintain morale of the remaining staff at the Cambridge Office whilst it comes to a complete close. He added that management had to be as sympathetic as possible and considerate to those affected and that the FCTU would remind them of this if necessary.

The DC held a discussion of the Operational Efficiency Programme (OEP). This was noted to be confidential.

9. Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS)

Allan said that many members had asked what was happening about the proposed changes and reported that there had not appeared to have been any progress made as the Civil Service unions have been promised further talks and negotiations and this was yet to take place. Allan added that by the time the formal consultation had ended on 5th October, 18,000 comments had been received, the overwhelming majority of which opposed the proposed cuts to the scheme. He said that shortly after this date, the unions met Cabinet Office Ministers who agreed to tell their officials to return to talks with our unions, which has not happened.

Allan advised that the Government wanted to introduce the changes on 1st January and they have to put forward a change to the Superannuation Act 1986, however in a Parliamentary question asked on 12th November 2009 the following Hansard extract is noted: -

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether the proposed changes to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme will require changes in (a) primary and (b) secondary legislation.

Tessa Jowell: The Minister for the Civil Service amends the Civil Service Compensation Scheme using powers conferred by the Superannuation Act 1972.

Allan said that this means that the Minister is only obliged to lay a Statutory Instrument before Parliament and that these are usually passed with little or no debate.

It was noted that Allan would write to all members and that the DC would have prior sight of the letter.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

10.AOB

10.1 2010 DC Meeting Dates

It was noted that Sam would arrange DC meetings for 2010 and that they would be scheduled for Tuesdays.