



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION TRADE UNIONS' DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 OCTOBER 2011, SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH

Present:

Robert Beaney	FCTU Chair
Sam Telford	FCTU Assistant Secretary
Mary Irvine	PCS
Lorraine Adams	Prospect
Roy Laird	GMB

Minute Secretary: Sam Telford

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Allan MacKenzie and Sue Gillingwater. Robert advised that Allan was unable to attend due to personal circumstances and the DC expressed their best wishes to Allan. Robert said that as the meeting would have been Sue's last before leaving on VE, on behalf of FCTU he thanked Sue for all her hard work during her time with the FCTU; support for the DC, previous Core Group, Council and FCTU network ensuring elections and constitutions were adhered to, and the reorganisation following unification. Robert said Sue also took the FCTU through the recent re-branding exercise which was a good job very well done. Allan had asked that his vote of thanks was recorded, stating that her advice and support since taking on the job had been unstinting.

2. Minutes of 20 September 2011

The minutes were accepted as an accurate recording of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 FC Business Units – MES Integration

Roy advised that a final decision would be made on 8th December, so the FCTU had up until this point to make any challenges and added that management would be providing figures and further information on the bids on 24 October to the unions to consider.

3.2 SR10 – IS

Mary gave the DC a further update following a meeting with Director IS. It was noted that the letter from FCTU to David Felstead was being drafted, enquiring into plans for delivering sustainable IT into the future with a reduced workforce and what recruitment solutions would be used when additional resources were required.

Action Pending: FCTU Office

3.3 Fixed Term Appointments

Lorraine raised further concerns with inappropriate use of FTAs in Research. It was noted that Lorraine would be writing to HR management in FR to address these concerns initially.

3.4 Recruitment

Robert said that the full DC meeting including full time officers would be held as soon as possible to organise a coordinated joint recruitment campaign, initially in England, and Sam said we would look to arrange the meeting when all were available.

Action Required: Sam Telford

4. FC Governance

Robert referred to the letter from the DG on the future governance of the FC. Mary felt the letter did nothing to address or capture the feeling of FC staff across the organisation. Lorraine concurred, adding that there seemed to be no recognition or understanding of the impact of VE and SR10 for those staying on his letters, which was certainly not helping the already damaged staff morale – not just a general lack of morale but with people losing their colleagues who could not see how they would have a secure job into the future, and with the remaining staff being unable to see what work would be reduced or see how the FC could continue, it was extremely low.

Following discussion it was agreed that Robert would invite the DG to the AGM to brief the FCTU better on the current status of the Forestry Commission, both at a country and GB level, discuss the future of the FC with the unions, and hear the concerns they have.

Action Required: Robert Beaney

5. Spending Review 2010

The DC discussed the implementation of SR10 programmes across GB, in particular issues around the FC continuing to move towards being an even more 'top-heavy' organisation, with a seriously unbalanced number of cuts and job merging forced upon lower grades, with SR10 reductions have very little or no impact on the higher grades – the Senior Staff Group especially. It was also still unclear what areas of work would be cut in England to reflect staff reductions, and if FCE management were still working to the proposed structures presented to staff at the beginning of the process. It was noted that Robert would contact FCTU England Chair to ask if he can provide some information on this.

Action Required: Robert Beaney

Robert advised that there would be a question put forward from the Shadow Environment Minister in the House of Commons on the current consultation in England proposing to drastically reduce educational visits to public forests, asking if the Minister would commit to consult teachers, parents and Forestry Commission staff over this attack on outdoor education.

Mary raised the issue of increasing stress in the organisation and management's lack of stress awareness and recognition of the signs of stress. The DC discussed countless examples of increasing stress throughout the FC and again referring back to the lacking tangible evidence on what areas of work would be dropped, Mary said as long as staff continued to willingly absorbing extra work, nothing would be dropped and stress levels would continue to rise. The committee recognised that with the new Stress Policy being published imminently, its rollout would have to be handled very well, ensuring that staff would be properly trained on how to manage stress. Following an update from Lorraine on some details of the upcoming Stress Awareness training, it was noted the Sam would invite Kirstie Brady from L&D to the December DC meeting to discuss the rollout of the training and the policy with the FCTU.

Action Required: Sam Telford

6. FC Business Units

Further to the discussion on item 3.1, Roy stated that the Business Units review was still a chaotic situation, with many problems arising relating to the tendering process, future of the workshops, outsourcing and the VE scheme for BU staff in January.

7. Single Environment Body (SEB) for Wales

Robert provided an update on the SEB and related Ministerial meetings at FCTU level. He said in response to seeking a copy of the Business Case from the Welsh Government, it had been refused and instead they had been offered a presentation on the Business Case, which was yet to take place. Robert added that the benefits of the change for FCW were still yet to be proved, which was a view still shared by ConFor, although EAW and CCW appeared to be showing some support for the creation of the single body.

8. Voluntary Exit Scheme

The DC noted that VE panels would meet in November and discussed some potential issues with decision making criteria and a potential lack of a consistent approach. Robert said that Allan would still likely be the observer on behalf of FCTU again, overseeing the process and that it would be useful to seek his views on how he saw the process working during the first phase of VE.

9. Pay 2011

On the subject of pay progression, Roy advised that the GMB were obtaining legal advice following the imposition of the award without progression, looking into raising a grievance if the legal view supports the view that pay progression is in fact contractual.

10. HR Policy Consultations

Sam said that following the FCTU submitting feedback on the initial Performance Improvement consultation, he would be meeting with HR Policy on 19 October to discuss the response, adding that HR would be responding formally also. He referred to the Sickness Absence review, which was now being carried out with a consultation on key principles of the policy and procedure having begun.

Sam said he was expecting a response on the feedback on the Learning & Development and Induction Policies by the end of October.

11. AOB

11.1 FCTU AGM

Regarding the AGM scheduled for 22 & 23 November, it was noted that an agenda would be sent out in due course. Robert asked that the unions gave some thought on agenda items and how they would like to see the event run.

11.2 Departmental Staff Council

It was noted that agenda items for the DSC on 6 December would be circulated and agreed by email.

Date of next meeting: 13 December 2011