

## Forestry Commission Departmental Staff Council

Minutes of the 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Council held in Silvan House,  
Edinburgh on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2011

### Present: Official Side

Mr T Rollinson – Chair  
Dr R McIntosh  
Mr T Owen  
Dr J Pendlebury  
Mr P Snaith  
Mrs J Lindsay  
Mr F MacCulloch  
Ms E Ramsay (*SC05/11 only*)  
Miss F Alexander (Secretary)

### FCTU Side

Mr R Beaney – FCTU Chair  
Mr A MacKenzie – FCTU Secretary  
Mr M Crosby - PCS  
Mrs M Irvine - PCS  
Mr D Williamson - PCS  
Mr C Tucker - Unite  
Ms L Adams - Prospect  
Mr A Stewart – Prospect  
Mr R Laird - GMB

### 1. Introduction and apologies

Apologies were received from Simon Hodgson, Malcolm Currie (Prospect), Cath Speight (Unite), and Paul Grieve (GMB).

### 2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

### 3. Matters Arising

#### 1. Annual Leave

The meeting was advised that the two year trial permitting staff to buy and/or sell annual leave was still running. At the end of the trial period a full evaluation will be carried out and the results will be discussed with the FCTU.

**Action: P Snaith to undertake annual 10% sample audit of unused annual leave by grade**

#### 2. Procurement

The briefing for the FCTU did not take place.

#### 3. FC Mission Statement

The meeting was advised that after consideration by the DG the FC Mission Statement would not be amended.

#### 4. Performance Management System (PMS)

As the Civil Service is working on a Civil Service-wide PMS, HR is no longer taking forward the review of PMS as outlined in the People Strategy.

#### 5. Workforce Planning

In response to a query from the FCTU on workloads in England, the meeting was advised that this matter should be raised at the England Staff Council.

### **4. DGs Report**

The DGs report was presented to the meeting. In response to questions from the FCTU on plant health, the meeting heard that free trade of plant materials and a more conducive climate has led to an increase in the number of pests and diseases. The focus for the FC is now on management of these pests and diseases.

Following the recent decision by the Welsh Government to create a Single Environment Body in Wales, there are ongoing discussions regarding the future devolved structure of the FC with an emphasis on taking a common sense approach to maintain the strengths of the FC and keep specific areas of work at a GB level.

The FCTU asked that senior managers give a more robust defence to any future cuts in the FC as they felt these cuts impact significantly on the FC as a smaller organisation.

#### **4a. Chief Executive England Report**

In response to a question from the FCTU on the sustainability of work areas in England, the meeting heard that in some instances the FC had stepped back from specific programmes and the work had then been taken on by other groups. It was evident that the FC did not always have to carry out activities and could allow others to take the lead.

#### **4b. Director Scotland Report**

In response to a question from the FCTU regarding Scottish Government reaction to the Single Environment Body in Wales, the meeting was reminded of the Scottish Government manifesto commitment regarding forestry.

In response to questions from the FCTU on the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group (WEAG), the meeting heard that despite negative media comment WEAG was working well and had identified a way forward to manage the compatibility of forestry and agriculture.

#### 4c. Director Wales Report

The meeting was given an update on the recent announcement of the Single Environment Body. The next steps will be to transfer a small number of people on loan to the new project to assist with implementation. The Shadow Body should be in place by mid 2012 however the vast majority of FC staff will remain in place and continue with business as usual. Communications with staff will continue to be paramount and FC Wales will ensure appropriate communication to staff takes place in conjunction with Wales Staff Council.

#### 4d. Chief Executive FR Report

In response to a question from the FCTU on the postponement of the Research Promotion Boards, the meeting heard that FR were awaiting a collective response from the TU side in order to take forward discussions.

#### **Action: FCTU to provide a collective response to FR**

There was a general discussion on spending and resources for plant health.

#### 5. Update on FC Finances

The meeting heard that the Scotland Spending Review 2011 was now complete and there had been significant reductions in Scotland. In England, DEFRA had contributed £5m to the FC to help with Voluntary Exits and restructuring.

The meeting was told that new guidance on procurement has been issued. Local events and workshops have been carried out with approximately 350 staff attending.

#### **Action: FCTU to request an update on procurement if required**

In response to a question from the FCTU regarding impact of the Disaster Recovery Site at NRS, the meeting heard that this item had been at the top of the risk register and was moved forward for implementation in 2012/13.

In response to a question on business sustainability, the meeting heard that the FC was ranked in the middle of the Environment Agency's published league table with an expectation that this position would be improved upon next year.

#### 6. Update on HR

The meeting discussed the HR report and thanks were given to the FCTU for their support and input to the survey of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The evaluation of the EAP showed that staff were using the EAP however further publicity is needed to promote the service.

There was a general discussion on the new Travel & Expenses policy. This appears to have bedded in satisfactorily with staff getting used to the new system. There have been no requests from staff for changes to the system.

The meeting heard that work on SR10 had progressed well due to the support and input of all involved and thanks were expressed from both sides for contributing to effective working arrangements.

## 7. Update on Business Units

The meeting was advised that it was a key week for MES with the business case going to the EB on 7 December for decision and the MES Staff Council being held on 8 December. Staff consultation is on-going and various visits have been made to staff.

## 8. Health & Safety Report

The meeting discussed the report for 2010/11 and heard that the FC accident rate was relatively stable and had been for the last 4 years. In response to a question from the FCTU on baseline figures for contractors, the meeting was told that it was not possible to work out an incident rate for contractor accidents.

The meeting was told that while Lyme Disease is not in the HSE standard 1<sup>st</sup> aid course, it is included in the recommended +F (forestry) element specified for outdoor workers. FR have been asked to 'peer review' recent data on the efficacy of tick-repellent protective clothing. The FCTU suggested that the Lyme Disease figures should include cumulative figures as well as new incidences.

**Action: FCTU to inform Emily Ramsay as to what figures they would like to see included on Lyme Disease**

The meeting heard that the new electronic Accident and Incident Reporting System (AIRS) would capture information on near misses and accidents. AIRS is being rolled out across the FC. The system will be reviewed in 6 months.

The meeting discussed the impending changes to HSE and heard that the FC belief, approach, and commitment to health and safety will not change nor be diluted. SH&E will continue to be proactive in countering risks as forestry continues to be a high-risk area.

## 9. Communication on Pension Information

The meeting heard that the FCTU were disappointed with the consistency of the roll-out of the pension information briefings. Some meetings didn't take place and in some instances there was poor opportunity for questions and answers. Management

expressed their apologies for this lapse and advised that all briefings had now taken place.

## **10. Any Other Business**

No other business was raised.

## **11. Date of Next Meeting**

28 November 2012 at 2:00pm in the Central Boardroom, Silvan House