



**MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE HELD AT THE RAMADA JARVIS HOTEL, YORK, ON THE 6TH JULY
2005**

Present: Allan Mackenzie, President
David Gibson
Malcolm Crosby
Jim O'Neill
Jon Bates
Liz Richardson
Jim Lauder
Steve Holdsworth
Liz Stewart
Kath McNulty
Antony Griffiths
Joanne McAuley
John Winterbourne
Edward Shephard, Secretary
Jodi Moffat, PCS Organising & Learning Services

Minute Secretary: Fiona Hopkins

Apologies: No members of the GEC were absent from the meeting on this occasion.

1. President's Introduction

Allan welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. He highlighted that due to the timing of the conference and the need for committee members to meet travel arrangements, this would be a shortened meeting.

2. Minutes of 25th/26th January 2005

The above were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

3. Financial Report

Steve appreciated the efforts that had been made by delegates to keep costs for travel and subsistence low. He advised that after Conference costs and delegates' travel and subsistence, there would be approximately £1000 of group funds left for the rest of the year. It was noted that Edward was due to meet with the union's deputy general secretary in order to discuss the group's future funding needs.

4. Branch Reports

The group was issued a paper detailing the activities of the branches since the previous GEC meeting. Steve offered his thanks to Allan for attending a South and West England branch meeting, and Allan commented that the experience of visiting the branches had been useful for him also.

The group discussed a discrepancy in information relating to TRA duration periods in the South and East England and Wales reports. Edward confirmed that TRAs should generally last 6 months, however, under exceptional circumstances, this could be extended. The group **agreed** to contact Edward and provide details in instances where TRAs had lasted longer than 6 months, in order that action could be taken.

The group also undertook discussion of the NOCs and Staff Councils, clarifying the structures and co-ordination strategies associated with these. Edward confirmed that once all NOC election information had been received, the online reps database would be updated to reflect any changes in role.

5. AGMs/Elections

The group confirmed that all branches had now carried out their AGMs and elections and that all NOC elections had taken place apart from in Research; which was due shortly.

6. Group Organising

Jodi told the group that she felt a next step for the group in terms of Group Organising would be to undertake branch health checks to obtain a general overview of branch functions, and also identify any underlying issues. She advised the GEC to promote their role and offer assistance to the branches, and work on developing a long term and effective communication network.

Jodi advised that the group should forward mapping information to the branches as a priority in order to close the communication gap and to provide branches with a snapshot of their composition. Jodi also promoted the notion of allowing local reps to become more self sufficient, and suggested that workplace 'drop in' sessions relating to pay could be carried out by the local reps. Jodi stated that for an effective communication network to be achieved by the group, important work would need to be done to advertise names and links, and to set up channels for information to be spread more quickly. Edward pointed out that much of the work undertaken to produce a group directory had now been completed, and that once all responses had been received the leaflet would be issued.

The group then undertook an in depth discussion of their thoughts on action planning and how to progress the campaign over the next 6 months. Edward suggested that the group could overcome a number of its basic problems through improved communication, for example by drafting leaflets for both members and reps to advise them of appropriate contacts and also advice on personal cases. He also added that Sue Gillingwater has done a substantial amount of work so far to develop a robust strategy for recruiting new members.

Edward stated that the group had learned a number of valuable lessons in terms of process and distribution, and suggested that hard copies of campaign materials be sent direct to workplace reps for distribution, with email communications being forwarded to branch secretaries for distribution. The group **agreed** this.

In light of the forthcoming pay negotiations, the general consensus of the group was that the remaining group funds should be saved to hold a further GEC meeting. With regard to funding for the branches, Malcolm told the group that he had been successful in obtaining further funding for branch activities direct from PCS HQ.

Following further discussion, the group identified a number of clear next steps for the next 6 weeks of the campaign. It was **agreed** that efforts should initially focus on the last stage of mapping by concentrating on clarifying the names and roles of branch organisers and branch contacts, and making efforts to engage these individuals. The group also **agreed** that it would be beneficial to then test the effectiveness of this structure through distribution of another leaflet with a second message. Edward commented that the group would need to devise a clear plan to recruit non-members within the FC, and suggested that the results of the staff survey could be used as a mechanism to help achieve this.

Allan advised that the distribution of a summary report of the Conference event would draw the group to the close of phase one of the campaign, and Malcolm commented that informing members of the priorities for negotiation derived from Conference could offer some reassurance to members.

7. Issues Arising from Tub Thump

A number of issues that arose from the Conference Tub thump session were discussed in detail by the group.

Operational pay was recognised as being a particularly important issue for members. Edward commented that the majority of operational staff were PCS members, and that it would be beneficial to gauge members' views in order to assess what action, if any, should be taken. Antony stated that he felt the FC should not be promoting operational working, as it was detrimental to the principles of work-life balance strategies. Kath told the group that this issue should be monitored over the longer term and both Kath and Antony **agreed** to undertake a pilot investigation in Wales with regard to operational working with a view to pinpointing what the solutions to this issue could be. Kath and Antony **agreed** to provide the group with their plan of action and questionnaire in time for the next GEC meeting.

Action required: Kath McNulty and Antony Griffiths

The group also approached the issue of rewarding long serving members, and Jim pointed out that this topic could enable the union to increase communication with these members. Edward commented that it would be difficult to address this issue in view of the new age discrimination legislation coming into force next year. Allan suggested that the group use the theme of staff (in general) feeling undervalued for the campaign, as opposed to focusing on long serving members

in particular. Edward added that further consideration of value and reward issues would be undertaken once the staff survey results were published.

The issue of childcare vouchers and salary sacrifice schemes was raised by Steve. Edward clarified that this issue had been raised previously at the Departmental Staff Council, however, HR have been unable to progress this scheme on account of hold ups on the part of the Scottish Executive.

8. Pay 2005

Edward told the group that the pay claim had been agreed by all of the unions and subsequently submitted to HR. He confirmed that no response has yet been received.

9. BIP Update

Edward advised that there had been a distinct lack of information circulated with respect to BIP. He told the group that he had attended a presentation by Alan Mitchell on BIP, and that work stream information relating to BIP could now be found on the FC Intranet. Edward confirmed that he had experienced instances whereby the over 60 age group of staff had been targetted as a pre-BIP manoeuvre in terms of staff reductions, and asked the GEC to keep him informed of any cases of this nature that arise.

10. Harassment and Bullying

Edward provided the group with a brief update on the issue of harassment and bullying, confirming that the training course for harassment contact officers had now taken place. He confirmed that work would now be undertaken to develop a support system for the harassment contact officers, and added that support guidance for harassment contact officers, reps, and members would also be drafted to assist with harassment and bullying cases.

11. Sickness Management

Edward drew the GEC's attention to a paper issued in relation to sickness absence statistics for 2004, for information.

12. Stress Action plan

Following on from the issue of sickness absence statistics, Edward pointed out that the statistics showed a significant increase in the number of days lost due to stress and other mental disorders. Edward advised that he was keen for the union to be seen to be making steps to tackle this issue.

Edward confirmed that he has had an initial meeting with both Emily Ramsay and Fiona Alexander to discuss what may be done to improve support and management of stress within the FC. Edward suggested that it would be useful to map questions in the staff survey relating to stress with causal indicators produced by the HSC, in order to obtain a clearer understanding of which aspects of work have been causing the most stress to staff within the FC. He also commented that the largest peaks of sick absence for stress at Pay Bands 5 and 6b was a major issue, and highlighted that a lack of control and a lack of release opportunities could be significant contributory factors towards stress levels in these staff.

13. Specialist Tours

Edward drew the GEC's attention to a paper issued in connection with the proposal to end the current specialist tours system, for information.

14. Management Development Programme

Edward drew the GEC's attention to a paper issued with regard to the work undertaken so far by the Management Development Programme, for information.

15. Any Other Competent Business

15.1 Annual Delegate Conference

Joanne **agreed** to circulate a briefing outlining the main events that took place at this year's ADC event in Brighton.

Action required: Joanne McAuley

16. Date of Next Meeting

The group agreed to keep the next meeting date of 13/14th September although they acknowledged that this might need to be rescheduled as a result of the pay negotiations.