



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD IN THIRD FLOOR ROOM 3, SILVAN HOUSE, ON THE 11TH & 12TH OCTOBER 2005

Present: Allan Mackenzie, President
David Gibson
Malcolm Crosby
Andy Bennett (sub for Jim O'Neill)
Adrian Jones (sub for Jon Bates)
Liz Richardson
Steve Holdsworth
Liz Stewart
Kath McNulty
Antony Griffiths
Joanne McAuley
John Winterbourne
Gordon Kennedy (Item 7)
Edward Shephard, Secretary
Sue Gillingwater, FCTU Office
Michael McCann, PCS full-time official (Day 1)
Jodi Moffat, PCS Organising & Learning Services (Day 1)

Minute Secretary: Fiona Hopkins

Apologies: Apologies were received from Jim Lauder, Jim O'Neill, Jon Bates and Ashley Woodhouse.

1. President's Introduction

Allan welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. A special welcome was offered to guests Michael McCann (PCS full time union official), Jodi Moffat (PCS Organising and Learning Services), and Gordon Kennedy (Branch Organiser, South Scotland).

2. Minutes of the Meeting of 6th July 2005

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

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Pilot Investigation of Operational Working in Wales

Edward advised that due to a lengthy agenda on this occasion, Kath and Antony had **agreed** to delay their report on this item until the next GEC meeting.

3.2 PCS Annual Delegate Conference Briefing

Edward confirmed that Joanne's briefing paper outlining the events that took place at this year's ADC in Brighton had been circulated to the group.

4. Financial Report

Steve provided the group with a paper outlining the group's current financial position and an explanation of the factors contributing to this. He confirmed that due to additional unbudgeted organising work a supplementary grant had been required to fund the October GEC meeting, and that the group would need to discuss next year's bid in order that sufficient funds would be available for the group's activities.

5. Branch Reports

Allan noted that the branch reports received had been circulated. Antony offered a further update on events that had taken place recently with regard to Wales. He advised that none of the applicants interviewed for the post of Director of Wales had been successful, and that the post would now be re-advertised internally in order to find a suitable candidate.

6. Pay 2005

Michael McCann provided the group with a full and in depth account of this year's pay negotiations. Michael explained that the union was in a good position in terms of understanding what its FC members wanted to achieve from the pay deal. However, he commented that the negotiations had been particularly difficult on account of the Government's imposed threshold of 3.49% and management's position on various issues associated with pay.

Members of the group offered their thanks to Michael and Edward for all of the hard work that they had undertaken during this year's talks. Following clarification of a number of points and an in-depth discussion of the offer and possible outcomes of the ballot, the group unanimously **agreed** to recommend that members reject the pay deal offered by management.

In response to this, Michael **agreed** that he would forward draft documentation to be issued to members which would outline the negotiations that had taken place and the final deal offered by management. Michael also told the group that he would contact Geoff Lewtas at PCS National Bargaining Unit to inform him of the GEC's stance on the final offer.

Action required: Michael McCann

Edward advised the GEC that he had made a request for all ballot results to be forwarded to him by all of the unions no later than Thursday 3rd November 2005.

7. Organising Strategy

Allan introduced the issue of the group's organising strategy and advised that Edward had circulated an updated version of this document. Edward provided a summary of the work that had been undertaken so far in order to achieve the action points set out in the strategy.

In respect of the objective for carrying out branch healthchecks, Allan confirmed that he had received documentation from each of the branches and was now in the process of collating this data.

Following clarification of a number of issues, Edward asked the group to provide feedback or suggest any additional training/support they felt might be appropriate for branch organisers and workplace contacts. Andy commented that he had attended a PCS branch organiser's course, which he had found particularly beneficial, and recommended that other organisers attend this. In response to a concern expressed by John relating to workplace contacts and workloads Edward stated that the group should remain realistic with regard to what could be achieved through workplace contacts, and recognised that contacts working within larger workplaces might require additional support.

Steve told the group that difficulties had been experienced in filling branch roles and that a number of reps now held multiple positions, and asked what could be done to address this matter. Jodi advised that this was a common problem within branches, and suggested that a regional organiser could visit each branch and talk to staff face-to-face with a view to encouraging members to come forward and play a more active union role.

Kath commented that a number of workplace contacts in Wales had been in touch with her to ask how they should approach the issue of recruiting new members. Edward suggested that Jodi's recruitment session could be repeated at other locations, although Kath stated that problems could arise if workplace contacts were required to travel to attend.

Edward raised the issue of phone trees and Liz Richardson confirmed that she had devised an email tree for her branch. Jodi told the group that phone trees were an ideal means of improving communication, gauging opinion quickly, and adding impetus to the issue under discussion.

Edward stated that the group now needed to focus on the work streams of recruitment and generating positive messages. Edward suggested that the compilation of briefing sheets highlighting GB issues could be a valuable opportunity to put across positive messages to members and potential members. Edward further commented that a standard format could be developed for the briefing sheets to allow branches to use them for outlining local or country specific issues. In response to a question from Kath, Edward confirmed that it would be a good idea for the sheets to have a review date to ensure that all information contained in them was up to date. The GEC **agreed** that it would be beneficial to establish a working group to develop this work stream. Malcolm suggested that the working group should be composed of non-GEC individuals which would allow different perspectives to be voiced and would also reduce the impact on workloads of GEC members.

With regard to recruitment, Edward requested that each of the branches develop a recruitment plan to identify 'hot spots' of groups of non-members and prioritise their recruitment activity. The branches were asked to provide an update on what

work had been undertaken at the next GEC meeting on 14-15th February 2006. Sue confirmed that she would be pleased to offer support to any individuals that contacted her.

Action required: All Branches

Following discussion, Edward commented that the original organising strategy document would require to be updated to reflect the activities scheduled to take place during the second phase of the strategy.

8. Group Structures Review

Allan drew the group's attention to a paper that had been issued by Edward for consideration in respect of the effectiveness of the group's current branch numbers and boundaries, as well as the future of the group's annual forum/conference.

Edward asked the group to consider whether the current structure remained appropriate, although he commented that as the workplace contacts had only recently been implemented it might be too early to make a judgement on this.

Malcolm commented that creating more, smaller branches could be problematic, as more roles would need to be filled. He advised that his branch had overcome difficulties in relation to poor attendance at branch meetings by holding meetings at alternate locations on each occasion. Steve also confirmed that if more branches were created the group would be unlikely to receive any additional funding for these. John suggested that it might be beneficial for the group to look at how other groups were dealing with similar issues.

With regard to conference, Edward confirmed to the group that a number of options were available. He advised that PCS group conferences are held prior to the ADC in Brighton, however the group **agreed** that they did not feel this would be appropriate for the Forestry Group. Malcolm suggested that the group could increase its links with central PCS through contacts such as Jodi and Michael.

Following an in depth discussion of both issues, the group **agreed** to continue with an annual conference for 2006, to be held in late Spring/early Summer. The group also **agreed** that they were happy, in principle, to look again at existing branch structures with a view to perhaps compiling some form of discussion paper in the Spring, although they recognised that any changes could not realistically be implemented until 2007.

9. Plans for 2006

Allan advised that Edward had circulated a paper containing recommendations for the group's plans for 2006. Steve commented that he would be submitting a bid for an increased amount of funding for 2006, in light of the funding shortfall experienced in 2005. In response to a question from Adrian, Steve confirmed that branch funds could be used to pay for travel and subsistence claims, which would reduce the burden on the group's main funds.

Malcolm suggested that it might be beneficial to invite branch organisers to attend GEC meetings. In response, Edward confirmed he felt that it would be wise to

budget for separate meetings for branch organisers in the event that additional meetings were required. In response to a question from Kath, Edward commented that the group would need to have a clear view as to the purpose of each organisers' meeting held to avoid repetition of any work already carried out by the GEC.

After further discussion, the group **agreed** to hold three GEC meetings during 2006, and that additional funds should be sought from central PCS to finance next year's organising activities.

10. Forestry Training Services

Edward provided the group with an information paper on progress that had been made to date in respect of the proposed changes to FTS. In response to a query from Allan, Edward outlined the different types of mobility clause and the expectations associated with these. He then explained mobility clauses (and their implications) with specific regard to FC contracts and FTS staff.

Edward confirmed to the group that one of management's drivers for proposing to implement such change had been to improve communication links with FTS trainers. However, he commented that the poor communication channels in place could be as a result of a variety of factors, and remained unconvinced that the solution lay in changing the trainers' geographical location.

The group was advised that Kim Lardge would be attending a meeting with the FTS trainers later that week to discuss their concerns, and that a union meeting with trainers would be held soon after.

11. TSU Review

Edward advised that an information paper, which included a copy of correspondence issued by Janet Dutch, had been circulated to provide an update on the proposed changes. Following discussion of the issue, Edward confirmed that the Forest Research NOC was now dealing with the matter.

12. Any Other Competent Business

12.1 Staff Survey

Malcolm asked what progress had been made in respect of the staff survey results, and whether the issue of stress would be pursued. Edward confirmed that he had asked the Core Group to highlight any concerns arising from the survey results, but that no responses had yet been received. He further confirmed that the issue of the staff survey results would be raised at the Departmental Staff Council meeting on 25th October, for discussion.

12.2 Disability Forum

David told the group that he had attended the PCS Disability Forum the week prior to the GEC meeting and that one of the main topics highlighted had been the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector. David advised that this would be introduced in December 2006 and that employers would be required to carry out an equality impact assessment. He also provided

details as to how the scheme would affect terms and conditions of service associated with sickness management.

12.3 Pay 2005 - Potential Action

Picking up on a deferred item from earlier in the agenda, Liz asked the group to consider what action should be taken in the event of a 'no' vote from the pay ballot. The group discussed possible strategies and suggestions for action included letters to the DG, letters to MPs, work to rule, press releases (compiled by PCS central office), and a petition signed by members and non-members.

12.4 Business Improvement Programme

In response to a query from Malcolm, Edward confirmed that no fresh news was available in respect of BIP, but that he had asked for the matter to be raised at the forthcoming Departmental Staff Council meeting.

12.5 South & East England Branch GEC Position

Adrian questioned whether it would be possible for a member of another branch to take up the unfilled South and East England GEC position. Edward advised that unfortunately the group's constitution did not allow for this, as individuals had to be elected onto the GEC. He added that it might be possible to co-opt individuals onto the GEC but that the group would first need to consider how best to manage such arrangements.

13. Meeting Dates for 2006

It was agreed that the next GEC meeting would take place on 14-15th February 2006 at Silvan House, with a start time of 1.30pm.