



**MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD IN THIRD FLOOR ROOM 3, SILVAN HOUSE, ON THE 14<sup>TH</sup> & 15<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2006**

**Present:** Allan Mackenzie, President  
David Gibson  
Malcolm Crosby  
Jim Lauder  
Jim O'Neill  
Liz Richardson  
Steve Holdsworth  
Kath McNulty  
Antony Griffiths  
Joanne McAuley  
Jon Bates  
Edward Shephard, Secretary  
Sue Gillingwater, FCTU Office  
Michael McCann, PCS full-time official (Day 1)  
Kevin Kelly, PCS National Vice-President (Day 2)

**Minute Secretary:** Fiona Hopkins

**Apologies:** Apologies were received from John Winterbourne and Liz Stewart.

**1. President's Introduction**

Allan welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. Allan told the group that he had attended a number of branch AGMs the previous week, and commented that the meetings were generally well attended and had generated some particularly interesting discussions. He also advised that Kevin Kelly (PCS National Vice-President) would be joining the group on Day 2 to discuss Group Organising.

**2. Minutes of the Meetings of 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> October 2005 & 6<sup>th</sup> January 2006**

Edward put forward one amendment in respect of the minutes of 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> October 2005 noting that Michael McCann had been recorded as a guest when he was an official member of the Council. The minutes of 6<sup>th</sup> January 2006 were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

### **3. Matters Arising**

#### 3.1 Operational Working in Wales

Allan confirmed that Antony and Kath's item on operational working in Wales, which had been deferred from the October meeting, would be discussed as agenda item 11.

#### 3.2 Group Organising (Identification of Hotspots)

Edward confirmed that feedback from the group on workplace hotspots for recruitment would be discussed under agenda item 7.

#### 3.2 Pay 2005 (Recommendation to Core Group)

Allan advised that the proposals put forward by the GEC at the last meeting in connection with Pay 2005 had been submitted to the Core Group and that this issue would be discussed under agenda item 6.

### **4. Financial Report**

Steve provided the group with an outline of the group's spending for 2005, and advised that a somewhat higher bid for funds had been submitted for 2006. Steve confirmed that the additional funding had been requested as a result of the expenses associated with the increased amount of organising work now being undertaken by the group and also in order to hold a slightly larger Group Conference in 2006. Steve **agreed** to provide the group with an update on their financial status once he had received a response from HQ in relation to the bid.

**Action required: Steve Holdsworth**

### **5. Branch Reports**

Allan asked the group members to provide a brief rundown of the work that had recently taken place in the branches. A number of the branches thanked Allan for his attendance at their AGM meetings and it was noted that a great deal of activity, particularly in relation to recruitment, had taken place following the launch of the Pay Campaign in January. Wales, North Scotland and Silvan House all advised that they had reformulated their meeting strategies for 2006 as a means to encourage higher levels of attendance and improve communication links with members.

### **6. Pay 2005**

Allan introduced the issue of Pay 2005 and the current Pay Campaign and asked Edward to provide the group with an update on what progress had been made.

Edward advised that the GEC's position on the way to move forward had been agreed by the Core Group and confirmed that the unions were now in an official dispute with the FC. Edward also described in detail the implementation of the Pay Campaign thus far, its future direction, and what work would be undertaken in the coming weeks.

Allan asked the group to consider their position (in respect of Pay 2005) for the forthcoming Departmental Staff Council meeting (21<sup>st</sup> February 2006), and Michael expanded on a number of approaches that could be adopted. Following careful consideration, the group unanimously **agreed** to support Michael's

recommended course of action. Michael and Edward also responded to a number of questions from the group in connection with the unions' Pay Claim for 2006.

## **7. Group Organising**

Allan introduced the topic of Group Organising and welcomed Kevin Kelly (PCS National Vice-President) to the meeting. Edward provided a brief overview of the group organising work that had already been completed and highlighted the work that required to be undertaken during the first half of 2006.

The members of the GEC provided feedback on the FC locations that they had identified as 'hotspots' for recruitment, and shared with the group their plans and ideas for targeting these areas, as well as other locations, within their branches. Edward advised that group members would be asked for further feedback on their organising activities at the next meeting and encouraged them to request assistance if required.

Allan advised that he had recently met with Jodi Moffat (PCS Organising and Learning Services) to discuss branch healthchecks, and that the healthcheck pro-forma had now been reformulated for 2006 to make it more relevant to FC branch structures. Allan also confirmed that work had been undertaken on putting forward positive recruitment messages, and that efforts now needed to focus on producing positive papers in respect of campaign issues.

Kevin congratulated the group on the organising work that had already been done, provided the group with an in-depth insight into the 2006 National Organising Strategy, and advised that this would focus on the five key priority areas of:

- Communication
- Recruiting more activists
- Training activists
- Representing diversity
- Improving membership densities

Kevin then addressed a number of questions from the group in respect of group organising and his experiences of working with companies with a similar geographical structure to the FC. The group also discussed the way in which their organising strategy would fit in with the priorities and objectives of the national organising strategy and national campaigns.

## **8. Group Conference**

Edward advised that the June GEC meeting would coincide with National Conference in Brighton to provide an opportunity for GEC members to observe the proceedings and decide whether to align with National Conference in future years.

Edward told the GEC that the Group Conference would follow a split format this year, with a motions based session on the second day. Edward then asked the group to put forward suggestions for themes for the first day of Group Conference. Following discussion a number of possible ideas were identified

which included Pay, Organising, training and skill building exercises, workshops for action planning, and rejuvenating the 'get active' campaign.

Edward **agreed** that he would arrange for invitations to be drafted to potential guests for the Group Conference, and Allan confirmed that he had asked Jodi Moffat to investigate the possibility of producing a summary report of the event for all members.

**Action required: Edward Shephard**

## **9. Grading Maintenance Programme**

Edward advised that the unions had been invited to submit ideas for a central grading maintenance programme and asked the group to consider which posts/areas might be appropriate for examination. The group briefly discussed a number of issues associated with JEGS and the consistency of scoring, and Antony put forward specific concerns surrounding JEGS and job types such as GIS. Malcolm suggested, and a number of individuals **agreed**, that it would be useful to carry out an investigation of a Conservancy unit. Edward confirmed that the deadline for suggestions to HR was at the end of the following month and asked the group to forward to him any further recommendations for examination in the interim period.

**Action required: All GEC Members**

## **10. Non-Pay Benefits**

Edward provided an informative and detailed synopsis of strong concerns regarding the new non-pay benefits scheme. He confirmed that he had forwarded correspondence to HR in order to seek clarification in respect of a number of issues, and that a copy of this had been circulated to the group prior to the meeting. The group commended Edward on the correspondence that he had drafted and Edward **agreed** to report back once he had received a full response from HR.

**Action required: Edward Shephard**

## **11. Operational Working in Wales**

Antony introduced the matter of operational working in Wales and the group was provided with a brief paper outlining the main issues of concern. Antony commented that the current definition and guidance set down in the staff handbook was unclear and could be interpreted in a number of different ways, compromising equality and fairness in working patterns for operational staff in different locations. Antony advised that his own experiences of working in Wales had highlighted to him a significant disparity in the number of hours worked by different operational staff.

The group discussed the issues associated with inconsistent approaches to operational working practices and it was recognised that this could impact detrimentally on staff work-life balances and morale. Jim O'Neill also pointed out that should FC staff ever decide to work to rule it would be necessary to explore and clarify operational working practices.

Edward advised that the definition of operational working presented in the staff handbook was intentionally worded in a way that could be flexibly interpreted for the benefit of local units, and commented that making the definition more specific

would not necessarily be beneficial. Allan also stated that it should be the responsibility of management in local units to confirm their interpretation of operational working requirements with their operational staff.

## **12. Forestry Training Services**

Edward provided the group with a brief update on the FTS situation. He confirmed that all administrative staff had now been allocated posts in the local area, and that 2 posts for learning co-ordinators based at Silvan House had been trawled. Edward advised that various issues still existed in respect of two training staff whose posts were to be relocated to Silvan House, and a potential structural problem associated with the machine-operator training centre.

## **13. TSU Review**

Edward advised that the TSUs had now reached a formal redundancy situation and that approximately 10 posts would be affected. Edward explained that he would have further information on the redundancy packages being offered following a TSU meeting on Thursday.

## **14. Any Other Competent Business**

### 14.1 FC England

Jim O'Neill raised the issue of paying agency status and the potential demise of FC England. Jim asked the group for their views on the matter, and following a brief discussion, Edward suggested that the issue be raised on the agenda at the next staff council meeting with Paul Hill-Tout. Jim **agreed** that he would provide the GEC with further information, as it became available.

**Action required: Jim O'Neill**

### 14.2 Staffing Levels and Workloads

Antony introduced the issue of reduced staff numbers and increased workloads and told the group he felt this was a matter that should be more openly discussed with management. Edward advised that a starting point for action would be to obtain staff number business planning projections for each country for an estimate of changing staffing levels and raise notes with country directors.