



**MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
HELD AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, BRIGHTON ON THE 7TH JUNE 2006**

Present: Allan MacKenzie, President
David Gibson
Malcolm Crosby
Liz Richardson
Steve Holdsworth
Andy Best
Antony Griffiths
Jon Bates
Adrian Jones (sub)
Liz Stewart
Edward Shephard, Secretary

Minute Secretary: Sue Gillingwater

Apologies: Apologies were received from John Winterbourne, Jim Lauder, Jim O'Neill, Joanne McAuley and Michael McCann, PCS full-time official.

1. President's Introduction

Allan welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. He was pleased to welcome Andy Best who was attending his first GEC as a representative from the Wales Branch, and Adrian Jones who was substituting for Jim O'Neill. Allan thanked Kath McNulty, who had stood down from the GEC, for her hard work, but said that he was pleased that she was continuing with her role as Branch Organiser.

Allan expressed his gratitude to everyone for their input to this year's Conference. He said that it had been a very successful event with some good discussion and debate. There were clear messages as well as positive lessons to be learnt from the event. Allan said that the group was well ahead of the other unions in the Commission in its focused approach to organising and the implementation of its strategy and everyone should be proud of what had been achieved.

2. Minutes of the Meetings of 14th-15th February 2006

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

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Financial Report

Steve confirmed that an update on the group's financial bid would be provided under agenda item 4.

3.2 Grading Maintenance Programme

Edward reported that as a result of discussion at the last meeting a number of suggestions had been submitted to HR. The staff working in Grading Maintenance were somewhat surprised to learn that the Director HR had previously said that that Grading Maintenance was not a role for HR; that notwithstanding he said that most of the suggestions submitted had been incorporated in to the programme.

3.2 Non-Pay Benefits

Edward confirmed that an update on HR's response would be provided under agenda item 10.

4. **Financial Report**

Steve introduced a paper detailing the group's current financial position. He was pleased to report that the group had managed to secure a grant of £18,000, which although less than requested, was still an increase on previous years. Thanks to a competitively negotiated hotel rate and the willingness of delegates to 'car share' has meant that the total cost of the conference came in under previous forecasts; this, Steve said, would enable the group to have sufficient funds for the planned October GEC and November Group Organising meeting to go ahead as planned.

Responding to a question Steve said that he was actively seeking the agreed reimbursement of funds for the January pay meeting and the additional night of this GEC Meeting from PCS HQ. Steve **agreed** to update the group on progress in this area.

Action required: Steve Holdsworth

5. **Branch Reports**

Allan referred the group to the reports detailed in paper 02/06. Adrian apologised for the fact that N England branch had not submitted a report on this occasion.

6. **Pay**

Allan introduced the issue of Pay 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 programme of workplace meetings had almost been completed and that the end of the action plan agreed by the joint unions had been reached. He said that any possible further action would be discussed and agreed at the forthcoming FCTU Council later this month. Allan stated that he was sure that the meetings would not have taken place had it not been for Edward's determined efforts and thanked him for his resilience and persistence.

Edward advised that the release of the joint statement had enabled the joint unions to begin to work together with management on some of the issues for the 2006 pay claim. Preliminary meetings had taken place to discuss the question of timing, and the level of possible funding available; the consequence of which was for:

- a. Draft Claim issued for FCTU discussion: 2nd June.
- b. Final claim ratified by FCTU Council: 22nd June.
- c. Claim submitted to EB: 28th June.

Edward further advised that due to delay of the CSR and the current pay climate the likelihood would be for a one year deal this year, with the possibility of a longer term deal from 2007.

Edward asked the group to consider the proposed draft claim. Following careful deliberation, the group acknowledged that there were some minor text changes required but unanimously **agreed** that to support the claim.

7. **Organising Strategy**

Allan introduced the topic of Group Organising and asked Edward to provide an overview of the current position to date. Edward presented papers detailing the current strategy and the outcomes derived from the action planning sessions which took place at Conference which were discussed in detail.

Allan stated that improving union density figures must be a priority for all of the unions. This was endorsed by the group who acknowledged the importance of maintaining the current momentum on recruitment. It was **agreed** that as a first step that it was vital to re-identify and target those hot spots and groups of staff where membership was particularly low as quickly as possible.

Action Required: GEC Members, Branch Organisers and Workplace Contacts

Edward introduced the topic of Group Representation for discussion.

a. Workplace Contacts

Edward reported that the network of workplace contacts was a vitally important structure, which was the envy of the other unions, in that it enabled us to have good communication channels between the centre and PCS members.

b. Branch Structures

Feedback from Branch AGM's was such that it was **agreed** that branch structures should remain the same pending a review in 12 months.

Deferred for 1 year.

c. GEC Structure

Edward advised that the direction of the work of the group was increasingly falling into two main areas of work, campaigning and organising. The members of the GEC provided feedback on his suggestion that consideration should be given to reviewing the GEC structure in order to pull together the areas of work together. Discussion focused on whether the number of GEC reps who had generic roles should be reduced from 2 to 1 per branch and for reps to be elected into specialist roles. Liz Richardson said that it would enable the group to cover a much wider diversity of issues, which would result in an improved service and coverage for members. Antony agreed and said it was easy to get caught up in the volume of issues discussed. A benefit of having 'specialist' reps would mean that they would be more focused on what they brought to and took away from meetings.

Edward summarised the current specialist roles as follows:

Position	Post Holder	Substitute
Group President	Allan	
Group Vice President	Malcolm	
Group Secretary	Edward	
Group Treasurer	Steve	
Group Organiser	Edward	
FCTU Council	Allan	Liz Stewart
	Malcolm	
FCTU Departmental Staff Council	Allan	Jon
	Malcolm	
FCTU Core Group	Allan	Malcolm
Lantra Rep	Steve	Liz Richardson
AFAG Rep	Liz Stewart	Joanne
Pay Committee	Edward	
PCS H&S Forum	Edward	Liz Richardson
PCS Personnel Policy Forum	Edward	Steve
PCS Disability Forum	Dave Gibson	Joanne
PCS Women's Forum	Joanne	Liz Richardson

It was accepted that Lantra, AFAG and the PCS H&S Forum required reps that had a frontline knowledge and understanding of the issues involved. Liz Richardson proposed that Steve Osborne should be asked to represent the group on the three committees. This was endorsed and it was **agreed** that Allan would contact Steve after the meeting.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

The GEC then looked at a list of potential specialisms which incorporated the following issues:

Young Members
Diversity
National Campaigns
Recruitment
Learning
Mapping
Communication

After discussion Adrian Jones, Sue Gillingwater and Liz Stewart each expressed an interest in taking on areas of work relating to National Campaigns, mapping and learning. It was agreed further discussions would take place over the coming months to follow this up.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

It was decided that the concept of how to incorporate the areas of specialism into the work of the GEC required further thought. It was **agreed** that the matter be deferred to the next GEC meeting to allow individuals the opportunity to consider the matter in more depth.

Deferred to the October GEC Meeting

It was **agreed** that the action planning outcomes and new strategy should be remitted to the Group Organising Committee to take forward at its next meeting currently planned for November. Following a suggestion from Steve it was **agreed** that the GOC should attempt to bring forward the meeting to an earlier date so that it would be in a better position to advise the GEC of future programmes and progress at its meeting in October.

Action Required: Group Organising Committee

Edward asked for the group's thoughts on aligning the Forestry Group Conference with the other union groups at the PCS Annual Delegate Conference. Responding to a question from Allan, Edward said that there was significant pressure for the group to align its conference to the same time of year if not the same venue.

Malcolm said that he did not think that National Conference had sufficient relevance to members and was generally opposed to the idea aligning Conference with the rest of PCS. Liz Richardson said that the aim was not to change the existing format of the event but to change the location to align with National Conference, and to let members know that they are part of, and supported by, a bigger union than just the Forestry Commission Group. The cost of people having to travel down on a Sunday along with the distance factor, Adrian felt, might be prohibitive. Following a full and informative discussion, the overall feeling was that the matter should be deferred to the October meeting.

Deferred to October GEC Meeting

8. Motions from Group Conference

Edward presented a paper to the group which detailed each of the 17 motions submitted to Conference in May. It was noted that motions 9,12,14,16 and 17 were either rejected or guillotined and that motion 13 was remitted, the group fully discussed the remaining motions and **agreed** the following:

Section 1: FC Policy and Values

a. Motion A1. – Connect

This conference believes that Senior Staff have abandoned the 'Connect' programme and have returned to an unacceptable hierarchical and dictatorial style of management. This has alienated and disenfranchised staff leading to poor morale, increased absences due to stress and distrust throughout the organisation. Conference therefore instructs the GEC to work with the other unions to persuade senior management to lead by example and stand by the values they agreed to, and adopt more open, inclusive and effective management style, which has respect for staff at its very core. We consider that a reinvigorated 'Connect', with all staff behind it, can liberate the FC from

outdated and disrespectful behaviour and allow the organisation to move forward and tackle new challenges imaginatively and effectively in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

It was **agreed** that Allan would go back to the North Scotland Branch in order to seek clarification and guidance on this motion.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

b. Motions A2 and A3

Motion A2 - This conference notes with dismay the continued lack of information regarding Business Improvement Programme (BIP) and the impact that this is having on staff in Silvan House. The appalling level of uncertainty created by the lack of information and the apparent delays in implementation have resulted in a significant number of posts either remaining unfilled or being filled by temporary staff. Conference calls on the GEC to work with the other unions to seek a resumption of normal post-filling until a clear timetable for decision making is available.

Motion A3 - This conference notes with concern the continued failure to conclude the Business Improvement Programme, to publish a firm timetable for its conclusion, or to keep staff informed of progress. As well as not completing the Programme, it has become apparent that there is now confusion over its scope. Conference calls on the GEC to support the TUS in securing a statement from management prescribing the scope of and timetable for completion of BIP, as well as an assurance that regular updates on progress will be sent to all staff

As both of the motions relate to BIP it was **agreed** that they should both be remitted to the Silvan House NOC to take forward.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

c. Motion A4

The Conference notes with concern, the implementation of the new Rural Development Regulations Review (the revised SFGS Scheme) in 2007, together with the co-locating of Rural Agencies (Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, and SEERAD). This may well result in a reduction of staff at all levels and possible devaluation of skills in remaining jobs. We therefore instruct the GEC to work with other unions within the FC to find out the facts and to assess the potential impact on staff. We want to ensure that the staff are provided with clear and honest up to date information and have an involvement in the decision making process.

The group concluded that further research would be required to assess what impact the implementation of the new Rural Development Regulations Review in England and the co-location Rural Agencies in Scotland would have on FC staff. It was **agreed** therefore that Jim O'Neill, Liz Stewart and Andy Best would be mandated to carryout this work and report back to the GEC. It was further **agreed** that the issue be raised at the forthcoming meeting of the Scotland NOC.

Action Required: Jim O'Neill, Liz Stewart and Andy Best

Section 2: Pay and Grading

d. Motions 5,6,7,8 and 10

Motion A5 - Conference notes with great concern, management's decision to cease negotiations at the end of 2005 and impose a pay settlement against the wishes of staff. This decision imposed a settlement, which had been rejected by a ratio of four to one by union members, and both overrode and undermined the views of the majority of union members. Conference calls on the GEC to work with the other unions to seek an assurance from management that they will never seek to impose a pay deal on staff again without having exhausted all of the options for negotiations.

Motion A6 - This conference rejects the assertion by FC management that the maxima of the Commission's pay scales, and those of pay bands three and four in particular, are too high, when compared to other government departments. It supports the assertion by the TUS negotiators that by choosing to ignore the underlying differences in our pay structures, and focusing only on the pay scales themselves, such comparisons paint a false picture of the Commission's scales. Conference calls on the GEC to continue to support the work of the TUS pay negotiators by engaging with HR in ensuring that any future comparisons are done fairly, transparently, and on a like for like basis.

Motion A7 -This conference notes that with considerable restructuring and change over the last few years; standards of work loads, staffing levels, and responsibilities have been eroded. Conference therefore calls on the GEC to work in partnership with the other unions to negotiate a review of job grading and salary scales that ensures that proper consistency is maintained across the FC, and between the FC and other departments with whom we are closely connected.

Motion A8 - This conference instructs the GEC to safeguard the overall value of operational pay scales in future negotiations and to resist any attempt to reduce or eliminate operational pay. The only exception to this may be where alternative consolidated and pensionable salary elements of at least equal value are achieved in exchange, for example through a JEGS based upgrading exercise.

Motion A10 - The conference asks that the GEC in negotiations with the Department consider replacing the top performer percentage, outside of normal pay awards, with a small lump sum, failing which it should be dropped altogether.

It was noted that the above motions all related to pay and joint unions campaigns and it was **agreed** therefore that they should all be remitted to the joint unions pay committee and core group for action.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

Section 3: Terms and Conditions

e. Motion A11

This conference notes with concern that senior management are rewriting the Staff Handbook without the full agreement of the trade unions - an example of this being Chapter 6 "Unsatisfactory Attendance Due to Sick Absence. The conference therefore instructs the GEC to insist on full agreement before implementing any further changes, to ensure there is no erosion of staff terms and conditions.

The group concurred that this motion already formed part of the union's policy but noted its content.

f. Motion A13

This conference notes that there is no longer a coherent system for monitoring job trawls within the FC, and therefore instructs the GEC to: -

- 1. Formulate a practical system to monitor job trawls.*
- 2. Appoint an individual with responsibility for implementing such a system.*
- 3. Report back to members after 12 months on the efficacy of the new system*

It was **agreed** that Malcolm would compare the current systems used in England and Scotland for monitoring job trawls and report back to the group in October.

Action Required: Malcolm Crosby

g. Motion A15

This conference notes that the 6 month rule for temporary responsibility-allowance is not being adhered to by FC management and therefore instructs the GEC to investigate:

- 1. The number of staff currently in receipt of temporary responsibilities allowance (TRA)*
- 2. The actual and proposed duration of the current TRAs.*
- 3. For those that have or are proposed to exceed 6 months; the reasons for this.*

As a result of these investigations conference further instructs the GEC is work with the other unions to press managers to ensure that any TRAs which have been extended beyond 6 months without good reason, and brought to a swift conclusion.

It was concluded that this motion should be remitted to the NOCs to take forward.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

9. Travel & Subsistence

The group considered a paper submitted by Edward and **agreed** to recommend that the FCTU submit a T&S claim for 2006. It was further **agreed** that the claim includes seeking increases in the standard mileage rates above the thresh holds set by HMRT. The group concluded that it was important that members were informed at each stage of the process.

Action Required: FCTU Council Members & Edward Shephard

10. FChoices

Edward advised that information received to date showed an uptake of 129 out of 3200 members of staff had subscribed to the scheme. A full analysis would be carried out as soon as more detailed information was available.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

Responding to a question from Jon, Edward confirmed that he had received a response to his correspondence on this matter. The total cost for the scheme, he said, was far greater than management had anticipated; in terms of the tendering process, he reported that a full tendering process had not been carried out but that it had probably met the legal requirements.

11. Any Other Competent Business

11.1 Graduate Recruitment

Malcolm asked the group for its views on the introduction of the graduate recruitment scheme and on the current recruitment process in general. The general feeling was that the one of concern at the introduction of this scheme and it was **agreed** that Edward should go back to HR on this matter. The group noted that there are issues about interchange and development opportunities but they were separate to the mechanisms of the post filling process, which over all worked quite well.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

12. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 10th and 11th October 2006 and held in Edinburgh.