



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH ON THE 10TH & 11TH OCTOBER 2006

Present: Allan MacKenzie, President
Malcolm Crosby
Liz Richardson
Steve Holdsworth (Day One)
Andy Best
Antony Griffiths
Jon Bates
Jim O'Neill
Liz Stewart
Jim Lauder
John Winterbourne (Day One)
Joanne McAuley (Day one)
Edward Shephard, Secretary

Minute Secretary: Sue Gillingwater

Apologies: Apologies were received from David Gibson 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 Sam Telford who had replaced Fi in the FTCU office, and who was attending his first GEC meeting.

2. Minutes of the Meetings of 7th June 2006

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

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Graduate Recruitment

The group were advised that despite having received an exceptional response to its requests for graduates HR felt that none of the candidates were of the sufficient calibre, so did not select anyone for the scheme. Reasons for this remained unknown but the group concluded that bad timing may have been a contributory factor. Edward said that HR remained committed to the principle and would operate the scheme again next year. He said that there also remained the question as to whether recruitment schemes targeted at new university leavers favoured younger people and would be in breach of the new Age Discrimination legislation. It was important to ensure that any advertising had to be carried out in a manner that was equally open to mature graduates.

3.2 T&S

Edward reported that this work stream would be taken forward as part of the new FCTU Strategy. Allan urged group members to forward any views that they, or their members might have on this topic to Edward as a matter of priority.

Action Required: All GEC Members

3.2 FChoices

Edward confirmed that although management were disappointed at the final uptake figures the fact remained that they appeared to be locked in to the scheme for a further 2 years at least. Following discussion, it was agreed that a breakdown of the take up figures by grade would help determine the effectiveness of the scheme for members.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

4. Financial Report

Steve introduced a paper detailing the group's current financial position. He was pleased to report that since the June meeting he had received reimbursement from PCS HQ for the cost and part cost of the January and June meetings respectively. GEC members were reminded that all expense claims must be submitted before 31st December which was the end of the current financial year.

5. Branch Reports

Allan referred the group to the reports detailed in paper 07/06. He said that in looking at the format and content of the various reports he felt that although the reports contained a lot of interesting information, it was difficult for the group to identify and pick up any similar trends and members perceptions. Following an informative discussion, it was agreed that the task of producing a Branch report template should be remitted to the new Communications group.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

6. Organising

6.1 Recruitment

Allan underlined the dilemma facing the joint unions in this area. Although he had raised the issue of density maintenance with the other unions he was not sure that they appreciated the full impact of the problem. He said that it was clear that because of the ageing membership population in the unions it was vital for new and younger members of staff to be encouraged to join a union if the joint unions were to remain effective and relevant. Edward agreed and reiterated that recruitment was a key issue that had to be addressed. He said that he, Allan and Liz Richardson had met with Ffion Evans from PCS HQ who had replaced Jodie Moffatt who is currently on maternity leave and was now our organising support contact in PCS. It was clear from that meeting that the group needs to make better use of its recruitment tools, skills and resources in order to maximise the impact on the ground.

Steve felt that a 'corporate marketing programme' was needed to help work place contacts to get the message across and welcomed the introduction of the concept of a joint union Strategy. As part of this, it was **agreed** that the unions should be more proactive in publicising its work and involvement on behalf of staff in key decisions. Liz Richardson said that timing was also a crucial factor; there were a number of forthcoming issues which would provide an opportunity for the unions to launch recruitment drives.

Responding to a proposal from Antony for a group level campaign Edward said that branches had been told that the group would be happy to help target the main hotspots and that branches should come back with their outline plans. With the exception of Alice Holt, Silvan House and South Scotland he had had no feedback from anyone. Malcolm said the important issue was to target new members of staff, it was crucial he said for reps to follow up the introduction of the joint union new starter pack sent to all members of staff with a personal approach. Liz Richardson endorsed this and said simply by distributing items with the PCS logo around offices and by having a bright and informative notice board ensured that PCS was in the fore front. Jon Bates said that as a workplace contact he had not received information on new starts and expressed concern that the communication channels between workplace contacts and branch organisers were not working as well as they could in some locations. It was **agreed** that if it was the case then the process needed to be repaired quickly.

Action Required: Sue Gillingwater

Allan thanked everyone for their input. He had taken on board everyone's comments and would take them forward to the Group Organising Committee meeting in November.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

6.2 Representation

Allan confirmed that although he had completed one health check he had since withdrawn the form used because its content did not provide information in a suitable format for the Forestry Group. He was working to produce a new form which will enable the group to gauge the level of activity of branches and hopes to have it completed in time for the branch AGMs.

Since the last meeting Allan confirmed that he and Edward had undertaken further discussion to try and identify individuals who would be willing to take on specialist roles. Allan added that

although there was still some work to do in this area he was pleased to report that the following individuals have agreed to take on specific topic areas on behalf of the GEC:

Adrian Jones	National Campaigns
Ashley Woodhouse	LANTRA
Steve Osborne	PCS H&S forum and HSE AFAG
Donna MacPherson	Young Members' Co-ordinator
Sue Gillingwater	Membership Mapping
Tony Farndon	Communications

Following discussion it was **agreed** that the Group President and Vice President would take on formal responsibility for individuals undertaking the work done on the GEC's behalf.

The group discussed the remainder of the points contained in paper and **agreed** that the Group Organising Committee and Branch Organisers should be mandated to develop a revised strategy for 2007 based on the priorities identified.

Action Required: Group Organising Committee

7. Group Conference 2007

Steve highlighted the financial constraints of working within the group's small budget and the group **agreed** to his proposal that the number of attendees for next year's conference should be restricted to 40. The group further **agreed** that the Conference should be held in York and take place 8th and 9th May 2007 followed by a GEC on the 9th and 10th May.

Following further discussion it was **agreed** that places at conference should be open to all members with workplace contacts actively encourage to attend. Various options were proposed concerning a guest programme. It was **agreed** that the Group Organising Committee is mandated to discuss and reach a final decision on a guest list and a format for the conference.

Action Required: Group Organising Committee

8. Motions from Group Conference

Edward presented an update to the group which detailed each of the 17 motions submitted to Conference in May and the action that had been taken since the meeting in June.

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.

Allan confirmed that the motion had been taken back to the North Scotland Branch where it had been agreed that the motion should be re-submitted at the 2007 Conference.

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

Edward advised that both motions had been remitted to the Silvan House NOC to take forward, but had been muted by the fact that BIP has been subsumed by the introduction of the efficiency programme.

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.

Liz Stewart advised that the matter had been referred to the Scottish NOC and had been deferred pending the Scottish Staff Council Meeting in December 2006. This was endorsed by Malcolm who added that the matter was ongoing and tied up with funding. John Winterbourne reported that implementation of the SFGS scheme in England was running behind schedule but he said that the issue was due to be discussed at the forthcoming England Staff Council.

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.

Edward confirmed that all motions had been remitted to the Pay Committee.

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*

Malcolm advised that this motion had been superseded by the fact that HR are looking at producing an over-arching agreement. He confirmed that all the elements were present in the Country agreements which he hoped would be incorporated in to a GB system.

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.

Edward reported that generally NOC's were now receiving definitive information regarding TRA's in their area.

In summarising Edward said that it would be useful for the GEC to revisit the motions again at the meeting in February in order to monitor their overall progress. This was endorsed.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

9. Reports from National Women's and Disability Groups

Allan presented two information papers from Joanne McAuley and David Gibson on these issues. He said that he would go back to both individuals; David to ask him to look at the HR Strategy in relation to the work he is involved in and ask him to report back on any key areas and Joanne for her recommendations as to what as the GEC should be doing with regards to the points she has raised.

Edward advised that because Joanne had been unable to attend this section of the meeting she would be forwarding colleagues a report on the Strike Action Meeting she had attended.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie and Joanne McAuley

10. Pay 2006

The Group Executive Committee held a detailed discussion on pay, which the meeting agreed would not be recorded in the minutes.

It was noted that formal pay negotiations could not commence, as Management had still to receive clearance from Treasury. However, Edward briefly outlined the key elements of the discussions which took place during an informal preliminary meeting with Keith Gliddon and Richard Williamson.

11. FCTU Strategy

Allan stated that it was imperative that the joint unions continued to provide a service that was robust enough to meet the needs and aspirations of members. Since the last Core Group meeting he said work had been undertaken to review and adjust the focus of the FCTU function, and to devise a programme for the joint unions that would deliver for members.

Allan outlined the aims and processes of the programme which would:

- Refocus the strategic direction of the FCTU Council by increasing the emphasis on pro-activity,
- Demonstrate delivery on members' concerns,

- Add value to union membership in the Forestry Commission,
- Add value to Forestry Commission as an organisation.

The owners of the programme would be the FCTU Council and the Core Group would be the managers of the programme. Allan advised that the Core Group had endorsed the initiative and agreed that it should be submitted to the FCTU Council for ratification at its next meeting.

Responding to a question from Malcolm, Allan said that Robert Beaney was taking the lead in ensuring that each union takes responsibility for carrying out the work required. He stressed that the work was not undeliverable and it is work that has to be done for members.

12. HR Strategy

Edward introduced the draft HR Strategy for discussion. Jon Bates welcomed and thanked HR for the opportunity to discuss and comment on its content. This was endorsed by the Group.

It was concluded that more time should be allowed for people to consolidate and submit their views to Edward to assist him in formulating a formal response to HR.

Action Required: GEC Members to forward responses to Edward Shephard by 20th October 2006.

13. Efficiency Programme

Edward provided a detailed report on the scope and workings of the Departmental Efficiency Review headed by Keith Gliddon, which is currently underway, and which will continue through to the spending round of 2007.

14. Any Other Competent Business

14.1 Full Time Country TUS Officials

It was **agreed** that Antony would submit a paper for discussion at the next GEC meeting outlining his suggestion in more detail.

Action Required: Antony Griffiths

14.2 Assessment Centres

Antony expressed concern that there did not seem to be any criteria in Wales for determining which posts should have an assessment centre. It was **agreed** that the Wales NOC should be asked to monitor the situation and that Antony should report back its findings to the Group.

Action Required: Antony Griffiths

15. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be **6th and 7th February 2007 in Edinburgh.**