



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH ON THE 6TH & 7TH FEBRUARY 2007

Present: Allan MacKenzie, President
Malcolm Crosby
Edward Shephard
Martin Johnston (substituting for Liz Richardson)
Steve Holdsworth
Adrian Jones (substituting for Jon Bates)
Antony Griffiths
Jim O'Neill
Liz Stewart
Jim Lauder
John Winterbourne
Joanne McAuley
David Gibson
Sue Gillingwater
Donna MacPherson (Item 7)

Minute Secretary: Sam Telford

Apologies: Apologies were received from Andy Best, Jon Bates and Liz Richardson.

1. President's Introduction

Allan welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. In response to a question Allan reported that he would be seeking re-election. GEC members expressed delight with the work Allan had done as President and agreed that Allan had been an effective focal point for the group, and that his recent letters had been well received by members.

In thanking GEC members for their support, Allan noted that levels of recruitment and activism remained two of his chief concerns, and asked the GEC to use the opportunity of the meeting to consider what more could be done to make progress on these issues.

Following discussion, the group noted that current members were becoming more active and that membership was increasing. However, it was agreed that improving communication with members and non-members was vital to making the union more accessible and that the group should do more to convey successes and use these as a selling point.

2. Minutes of the meetings of 10th & 11th October

An amendment under agenda item 8 to 'John Winterbourne reported that implementation of **SFGS (changed to FWPS)** scheme in England was running behind schedule'. The minutes were otherwise accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 FC Choices

As requested Edward presented a paper detailing a breakdown of the Choices scheme uptake by pay band. The GEC noted that despite the mid-year enrolment opportunity, uptake remained very low. Edward reminded the group that the FC are locked into the scheme for a further two years at least. It was further noted that the low uptake of childcare benefits from the scheme, could be partly due to difficulties with tax credits.

3.2 National Women's and Disability Groups

David Gibson informed the group that he had recently attended a PCS Scotland Disability Network meeting where Phil Madelin, the union's health and safety officer, reported findings from some other departments of members with disabilities being interviewed for disciplinary

and medical reasons at home without union reps present. Phil had advised that members could invite reps to these hearings if required. David was also planning on attending a Disability Forum meeting on 22nd February 2007 in the form of a workshop, which was intended for setting out plans for the year ahead. David said that he would give a report on the outcome of this meeting at the next GEC.

Joanne McAuley reported that the National Women's Forum met on 5th December and presented a report from the forum for noting. Also provided was the PCS motion Joanne submitted to the Women's STUC with the speech she made attached. Joanne stated that she intended on preparing a report from the next forum for the GEC in May, detailing any action points.

Action Required: David Gibson and Joanne McAuley

3.3 Full Time Country TUS Officials

Antony referred to his paper issued to the GEC and welcomed thoughts on the justification of aggregating union work into Full Time Country FCTU Official posts. Antony reported that the idea had been put to Ian Forshaw, who appreciated the reasoning but was sceptical given the increasing constraints put on budgets. Edward said that he felt the likelihood of creating 3 new posts was slim and advised that they should continue to review resources already in place, as he believed the balance between work carried out at country level and in the centre could still be improved. Edward made reference to Sue's current efforts to assess any support needs which the National Organising Committees might have and it was **agreed** that Antony would if necessary raise the matter again once the outcome of this was known.

3.4 Assessment Centres

Antony gave an update on his findings from monitoring the situation with assessment centres being used for recruitment in Wales and said that they had been on two occasions for Forest District Manager posts. Antony had discovered and expressed concern that there was no set criteria for basing decisions on whether or not to hold assessment days. He reported that Ian Forshaw had stated that assessment centres were a very useful means of assessing managers responsible for a large number of staff and wide remit of work. This would be raised at the next Staff Council meeting in Wales.

Jim Lauder reported that he had also spoken with Jean Lindsay, HR Business Partner who confirmed that there were also no set criteria for when to hold an assessment day in Scotland.

Action Required: Antony Griffiths

4. Financial Report

Steve referred to the Treasurer's Report outlining income and expenditure for 2006 and informed the group he intended on submitting a similar claim for 2007. The proposed claim was endorsed by all.

5. Branch Reports

Allan referred the group to the reports detailed in paper 02/07.

6. Organising

Allan reported that the Group Organising Committee had met in November and that they had discussed further ways of increasing activism within the PCS Group. Allan voiced special thanks to Ffion Evans from the Organising & Learning division of PCS for support. He informed the group that the GOC had come up with several work-streams to be taken forward.

Main points from this were:

- a. Branch Organisers must have the most up-to-date information to allow effective communication with Workplace Contacts on goals for organising.
- b. The Workplace Contact pack would be rewritten to stress the importance of local activism.
- c. A members briefing leaflet would also be prepared.
- d. They would have to ensure that the role of Branch Organisers was best benefiting Workplace Contacts and members.

Edward added that a redesign of the joint union New Starter pack was under way, in order to make it more informative and linking it more closely to the New Entrants events. He also reported that the flyer sent out to Fixed Term Appointees had very little response and that they would reflect on this and consider focusing on an FTA recruitment drive again in future.

In response to a question from Allan on targeting particular groups for recruitment, Edward said that putting effort into an admin related recruitment drive could result in a significant increase in membership, as there were a large number of non-members in this particular group. Edward also pointed out they were a large part of the core membership base and that the GEC had more knowledge of issues faced by admin staff, than for some other groups. Joanne and Liz volunteered to consider organising a strategy for this.

The GEC endorsed the strategy being developed and agreed that effective organising was essential for motivating existing members into becoming active within the union and inspiring non-members into joining.

Action Required: Joanne McAuley and Liz Stewart

7. Young Members

Allan welcomed Donna MacPherson, who has taken on the role of trying to develop a young members' network in the Commission. Donna reported that she had recently had an opportunity to attend a conference with young member coordinators from other departments, and had picked up a number of useful ideas for developing this area of the group. It was noted that at the beginning of the year, out of 189 staff under 27, only 29 were members of PCS. The GEC agreed that this was an important area for the group to target resources: it was agreed to provide Donna with as much support as possible, and to defer the item for a further update at the next meeting.

8. PCS National Campaign

Adrian gave an overview of the current national union campaign, and presented a paper on the strike action taken on 31st January 2007. It was reported that although the strike had major effect on other government departments, the impact on the FC was minimal with support for the strike being quite patchy. Several opinions were offered as to why this might be the case, including a lack of resonance of the campaign issues within the FC, unfortunate wording of some campaign material, and the unreasonableness of some of the campaign goals.

The group **agreed** that it was important to support the campaign, and that emphasis should be placed on those elements of the campaign that were of most relevance to FC members. One such element would be the TUC's 'Work Your Proper Hours Day' on 23rd February 2007—an annual event focussing on work/life balance and working time issues. Fairtrade was also considered to be of value and further thought would be put into making this element relevant to the FC. Allan advised that he would co-ordinate the promotion of both elements of the campaign.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

9. Motions from Group Conference 2006 Update

Edward presented an update to the group detailing 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.

Edward reminded the group that the motion had been taken back to the North Scotland Branch where it had been agreed that it 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

Both motions had been remitted to the Silvan House NOC to take forward, though the closure of the BIP project had clearly affected the need for action on these.

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.

Malcolm advised that the matter was an ongoing issue and although the Scottish NOC was actively involved, the issue had not yet gone far enough to fully assess.

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 said that it was confirmed at the last GEC in October that all motions had been remitted to the Pay Committee. He added that Motion A6 had been pursued as far as possible within the current negotiations and that performance related pay under Motion A10 would be flagged up as part of the longer term pay claim.

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 confirmed that all the elements of the motion were now present within the FC.

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 to 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.

10. Group Conference 2007

Allan reported that plans for the Conference had been discussed at the GOC meeting in November. After discussion, the group **agreed** on using the first day for training and discussion for workplace contacts and representatives, and the second to debate motions from branch AGMs.

It was **agreed** that having an after dinner speaker from the Senior Staff Group would be of value and members agreed to offer suggestions ASAP. Allan advised that Michael McCann, PCS full-time Official would be also be invited.

Action Required: GEC members

11. Pay

The GEC noted and **endorsed** the decision of the Core Group to end the pay dispute. The group felt that the campaign had been a success and that lessons learned would be catalogued for future pay negotiations.

12. FCTU Strategy

Edward stated that he had been asked by the joint unions to take forward two areas of work:

NOC Support

There were concerns that following devolution the National Organising Committees had been experiencing difficulties with a lack of resources and that more central resources should be used to provide them with support. Edward said that Sue was in the process of meeting with the NOC chairs and secretaries, in order to discuss any specific issues, after which the Core Group would

agree any specific action plans.

Communication

Edward reported that the recent pay campaign had highlighted a number of communication issues. The Core Group was currently looking at a number of areas, including the cost/benefit of members meetings, the use of notice boards and the possibility of developing a joint unions internet site.

The joint unions would consider further progress on both of these items later in the month.

13. Efficiency Programme

Edward provided a brief summary of a meeting he had attended with the TGWU in December. The meeting had discussed the possible need for engagement with MP's, MSP's, AM's and Ministers if the CSR07 finance settlement has serious detrimental impact on members. He said that a format for taking any necessary action was being developed.

The group discussed the current position in England and Edward said that additional support would be given to England NOC members, as requested. It was noted that Scotland and Wales budgets would not be known until after forthcoming elections. Finally Edward advised the group that he was in the process of setting up a meeting with the Chairman to discuss this and other issues.

14. Any Other Competent Business

14.1 Greening Our Activities

Malcolm referred to the GEC extraordinary meeting on pay held by telephone conference in December. He said he thought there was a potential to save on costs and CO² by using the facility more often and that he found it very useful for the pay discussion. It was agreed that telephone conferencing was not suitable as a general alternative to face-to-face meetings, but that it could be used in the event that a member was unable to travel or was only required for a specific agenda item. Further agreement was made on considering other methods of greening the Group's activities and this would be discussed at a future meeting.

14.2 Career Structures & Development

Martin reported that members in South & East England districts were concerned with progression and differentials in the current Pay Band structure: in particular difficulties with progressing from Pay Band 5 with so many Pay Band 4 posts remaining static. Martin said he was asked to raise their concerns with the GEC. After discussion it was agreed that Martin would seek clarification of instructions for the GEC to take forward.

15. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 9th and 10th May in York following the Group Conference.