



**MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT
THE RAMADA HOTEL, YORK ON THE 9TH & 10TH MAY 2007**

Present: Allan MacKenzie
Malcolm Crosby
Edward Shephard
Steve Holdsworth
Adrian Jones (substituting for Jim O'Neill)
Antony Griffiths
Hazel MacLean
Fiona Barnett
Andy Best
John Winterbourne
Liz Richardson
Jon Bates
Gordon Kennedy
Ashley Woodhouse
Steve Osborne (Item 12)

Minute Secretary: Sam Telford

Apologies: Apologies were received from Joanne McAuley, Jim O'Neill and David Gibson. Malcolm reported that David was recovering from an accident in February and the group passed on their wishes to David for a full recovery.

1. President's Introduction

Allan welcomed the group and thanked everyone for their attendance, in particular Fiona Barnett and Hazel MacLean from North Scotland who were attending their first GEC meeting and branch organisers Gordon Kennedy and Ashley Woodhouse.

Allan also voiced a special thanks to Jim Lauder and Liz Stewart who had recently departed from the GEC.

2. Minutes of the meetings of 6th & 7th February 2007

The above minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 National Women's and Disability Groups

Allan referred to paper 04/07 and advised that he would contact Joanne to ask if there was any action required for the GEC to take forward and for clarification on the need for involvement of town committees on campaigning to defend jobs, pay and services.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie to contact Joanne McAuley

In David's absence there was no update on Disability Groups.

3.2 Full Time Country TUS Officials

Antony referred to the discussion from the GEC meeting in February and said that he was still to meet with Sue Gillingwater to assess NOC support needs. Antony added that until the outcome of this was known he had no need to raise the matter.

3.3 Assessment Centres

Antony reported that he had raised the concerns of the GEC at the Wales Staff Council in March when Trevor Owen advised that assessment centres would continue to be used in future, mainly for recruiting team leaders and managers responsible for a large number of staff. Antony said that there were still concerns with the way that management were basing decisions on whether or not to use assessment centres and questioned the reasoning for not holding one for the HR Business Partner post. The group **agreed** that a clearer set criterion was needed.

Edward advised that the post-filling group under the People Strategy would review the use of assessment centres. Following discussion, Edward said that he would write to all GEC members asking for suggestions to improve post-filling processes. This would allow Edward to flag up concerns to the post-filling group and the GEC **agreed** that this was the most suitable way of addressing the issue.

Action Required: Edward Shephard to write to all GEC members

4. Financial Report

Steve thanked the GEC for endorsing the recent claim and announced that it had been accepted. The group noted that the grant from PCS had risen over the last two years and Steve felt that this was partly due to having a strong organising strategy. The group concurred and congratulated Steve for his excellent work as Treasurer.

5. Branch Reports

Allan referred the group to the reports detailed in paper 02/06 and a member from each branch gave an update to the group.

Allan expressed the importance of branch health checks and urged the GEC to ensure that these were being carried out.

5a. GEC Structure

The group reflected on the current structure and posts held within the GEC. The scope of the Vice President role was unclear and following discussion it was **agreed** that there was no requirement for the post to remain. Edward summarised the following positions and holders:

Position	Post Holder	Substitute
Group President	Allan MacKenzie	
Group Secretary	Edward Shephard	
Group Treasurer	Steve Holdsworth	
Group Organiser	Edward Shephard	
FCTU Council	Allan MacKenzie	
	Malcolm Crosby	
FCTU Departmental Staff Council	Allan MacKenzie	Jon Bates
	Malcolm Crosby	
FCTU Core Group	Allan MacKenzie	Malcolm Crosby
Lantra Rep	Ashley Woodhouse	
AFAG Rep		Joanne McAuley
Pay Committee	Edward Shephard	
PCS H&S Forum	Steve Osborne	Liz Richardson
PCS Personnel Policy Forum	Edward Shephard	Steve Holdsworth
PCS Disability Forum	Dave Gibson	Joanne McAuley
PCS Women's Forum	Joanne McAuley	Liz Richardson
PCS National Campaigns	Adrian Jones	
PCS Young Members	Donna MacPherson	
Membership Mapping	Sue Gillingwater	

6. Organising

The group reflected on the organising work carried out in the group conference prior to the meeting. It was **agreed** that goals of the strategy should be re-focused and that new approaches were needed, particularly on recruitment and communication with members and non-members.

Recruitment

Edward expressed concern that recruitment drives were not having the desired effect and the GEC concurred. The group **agreed** that recruiting new members would however remain a top priority and that the basic recruitment tasks would continue to be carried out (i.e. sending packs to new entrants, giving presentations at new entrants events and approaching staff face to face), but that the emphasis should be on demonstrating relevance.

Allan reported that Joanne had made progress on targeting administration staff in Silvan House. He referred to a questionnaire that Joanne had distributed to non-members, questioning their reluctance to join PCS. It was noted that feedback had generally not been positive, with many expressing little interest in joining. Allan advised that a different approach was needed and suggested that the questionnaire be revised, taking the recruiting techniques explored at the group conference workshop into consideration. The group **agreed** and Allan said that he would contact Joanne to recommend this and identify where more resources were required.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

Communication

Edward urged that demonstrating relevance of the union to staff was vital for inspiration and that more tools and resources were needed. Adrian was concerned that many staff were unaware of the work being carried out by the group on behalf of members and that communication was still largely the issue, both from the group and at branch level. Following discussion on ways of conveying successes to staff, the group **agreed** that a newsletter publicising work of the GEC would be of value as current publications such as PCS View had no relevance to the FC. The GEC **concluded** that the first newsletter would include news and information on functions of the GEC and who is involved; the national campaign; group conference 2007; the Ops review; GEC organising strategy and the efficiency review. Contributors to the newsletter were noted and Edward said that he would make contact following the meeting to confirm action points.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

7. Motions from Group Conference

Section 1: FC Policy and Values

Motion A1

This conference instructs the GEC to provide a members report on the review of the operational review affecting FE Scotland. The report should consider what if any cost savings have accrued as a result of the implementation of the operational review. The report should also make comparisons between the previous district structure and today's method of delivering the objectives within FE Scotland, and as well as looking at financial comparisons, workloads, job losses and career paths should be investigated.

Part of the report should include the results of a questionnaire from the GEC that asks district staff about the affect that the operational review has had on them. This conference further instructs the GEC to produce the report by no later than the final GEC of 2007.

The group **agreed** to remit the motion to the Scotland NOC. Malcolm advised that he would take this forward to the NOC meeting in June.

Action Required: Malcolm Crosby

Motion A2

This conference notes with some concern the alignment of FE business with government regions. Conference calls on the GEC to work with the other unions to see that the practicalities of managing land on a geographic basis be seen as of paramount importance over the dogma of re-alignment, the opportunity should also be taken to avoid increasing the travel time of staff, which must, in any case, be seen as a cost to the organisation.

Steve Holdsworth said that he would refer the motion to the England NOC. It was noted that the concerns tie in with the regional arrangements review.

Action Required: Steve Holdsworth

Motion A3

Conference believes that the lack of a coherent up to date HR strategy creates an appalling level of uncertainty for staff throughout the organisation, though especially in England, as both Regional Arrangements and Business Efficiency Plans for FE/ G&L are implemented. We must ensure that our members have up to date information and that our activists are able to assess the potential impact which new measures may have on staff through this period of change. This Conference calls on the GEC to support the work of the TUS in securing from management a firm timetable for the issue of a HR Strategy document, without which the overall England Efficiency Plan should not proceed.

Edward advised that he would request a firm timetable for the production of the HR Strategy. It was noted that Edward and Tim Gill had received verbal advice from Paul Hill-Tout and Simon Hodgson that major change from the efficiency review (agenda item 10) would not take effect without TUS consent.

Action Required: Edward Shephard to request HR Strategy timetable

Motion A4

This conference notes with concern that a green incentive criteria for both CAPES cars and private vehicles as well as the FC fleet does not exist and therefore instructs the GEC to request a green incentive criteria be established to ensure a common approach for all FC business mileage.

The group **agreed** that clarification from Director Business Units that green incentive criteria did not exist was required. Allan said that he would write to Michael Ansell raising the question.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie to write to Michael Ansell

Motion A5

This conference notes that senior officers no longer appear to hold the core values in high regard and as a consequence, act with arrogance and a lack of basic respect in it's dealings with staff. This is one of the many reasons for the current low state of staff morale. This conference therefore instructs the GEC to urge senior staff to re-launch the 'Connect' initiative and the associated Valuing People and Supporting Change training course as soon as possible to encourage senior staff to adopt a more respectful management style.

The group **agreed** on remitting the motion to the FCTU Council before the Departmental Staff Council and Allan said that he would submit a paper at the next meeting in June, expressing concern that the Connect initiative had lost direction.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie to draft paper for FCTU Council meeting

Motion A6

This conference notes with concern that the Forestry Commission has no current grant scheme available to the public in Scotland and appears to have no plans to introduce one for some months. This has lead to uncertainty and insecurity amongst conservancy staff and those in the private sector who are employed as a direct result of public funds being available for planting schemes. This conference therefore instructs the GEC to point out to senior staff the ridiculous position of the FC being an organisation whose core job is to encourage private woodland creation through grant aid having no funds available. The GEC should also ask for an assurance that Conservancy jobs will be secure while staff wait for the introduction of any new grant scheme.

It was concluded that Bob McIntosh had already given assurance that there would be no staff changes before the introduction of any new grant scheme. Following discussion, the group agreed that details should be publicised as part of the newsletter (agenda item 6). Malcolm advised that the Scotland NOC were actively involved with the issue and **agreed** to take the motion forward to the NOC to draft an article and report back to Edward.

Action Required: Malcolm Crosby to report back to Edward

Section 2: Pay and Grading

Motion A7

This conference acknowledges the difficult circumstances during the last pay round, and applauds those negotiating on our behalf for the positive outcome. This conference instructs the GEC that the same two main priorities should be pursued in the current years' negotiations, that is, to maintain progression up the scales, and to safeguard the real value of the top point of each scale. All other considerations should be considered secondary to these.

Motion A7 was deferred to agenda item 9. Pay.

Motion A8

Wales Branch instructs the GEC to monitor the grading of posts to prevent any possibility of systematic downgrading by senior management.

Antony advised he would take the motion forward to the Wales NOC and suggest that they seek agreement from the staff council that the correct re-grading process is being followed under JEGS.

Action Required: Antony Griffiths

Motion A9

This Conference notes with concern that new recruits and new promotes must complete one year of 'Top' or 'Good Performer' in their respective paybands before receiving their first pay progression step. This is perhaps understandable and acceptable for new entrants, but it appears to penalise those existing FC staff who wish to develop and support the organisation by taking promotion opportunities. To clarify this issue more clearly, if a member of staff is promoted to a higher payband on 1st August of a year they do not receive the annual spine incremental pay increase that takes affect in October of that same year. Therefore, a member of staff will remain on their calculated pay increase with effect from 1st August and will not receive the spine incremental pay increase until 1st August in the proceeding year. Following that they would then, along with all other staff, receive the incremental spine increase due on 1st October of the same proceeding year. So although promotes ultimately receive all their due increases, they are potentially salary discriminated for a number of months for taking a promotion opportunity. This issue is further discriminatory for those in payband 5 Ops wishing to take promotional opportunities to payband 4. For example, take a payband 5 Ops member of staff currently on spine 5 (£26,730) who receives promotion to PB4 in August 07. This would move them across to spine 2 of payband 4 (£27,283). They would then forego the annual spine incremental pay increase in October 07 leaving them on £27,283. The issue is that the promotes previous pay band (5 Ops) would progress to spine 6 (£27,389) in October 07, which effectively leaves them out of pocket (at least until the following August 08) for having taken a promotion opportunity! Therefore, this motion instructs the GEC to enter discussion with Management to remove the salary discrimination from existing members of staff who take development promotional opportunities.

Motion A9 was deferred to agenda item 9. Pay.

Section 3: Terms and Conditions

Motion A11

The GEC through this conference are instructed to enter into discussions with the department about the limiting factors now associated with a meaningful and achievable career structure within the FC. This Union is very concerned about the reduced opportunities available, not only with progression to a higher pay band but the crossover and interchange opportunities between different parts of the organisation.

Allan advised that he would cover staff expectations and the need to maximise opportunities within the FC in his paper to the FCTU Council (Motion A5).

8. PCS National Campaign

Adrian referred to paper 05/07 providing an update on the national campaign. It was noted that the industrial action on 31st January and 1st May had minimal effect on the FC with support for the strike being low. The group **agreed** that although many FC staff agree with the principles behind the campaign, it was necessary to give members a clearer understanding of the implications, reasons and effects on the FC.

The GEC referred to the speech from Mark Serwotka, PCS General Secretary at the group conference prior to the meeting and it was agreed that the group now had a clearer insight into the

purpose and relevance of the campaign within the FC. Following an in-depth discussion, there was still concern however at the unfortunate wording of the remit. The GEC felt that persuading the majority of members to give full support and take industrial action would not be possible by promoting the campaign goals in their current form. Allan advised that he would write to Mark Serwotka, asking for a summary of what he said at the group conference and the facts and figures quoted. He said that this would be extremely useful in articulating a greater understanding of the relevance of the campaign and promoting the benefits of supporting it. It was noted that Mark had deemed a call for further strike action over the summer unlikely.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie to write to Mark Serwotka

9. Pay

Allan presented paper 03/07, a draft joint unions pay claim for 2007 negotiations to be approved by the GEC. He referred to the last meeting in February when he had expressed his desire to seek a realistic pay award for members, rather than the inadequate amounts being dictated by Treasury.

Details of the discussion would not be fully recorded in the minutes. However, in light of Motion A7 and A9 (agenda item 7) the GEC **agreed** that high priorities would be focussing on maintaining progression, safeguarding the max of each pay band and addressing some issues related to the progression timetable for appointees and promotees. The group also **agreed** that the claim should focus on overtime and TOIL and abolishing the performance pay system.

Edward advised that he would consult with Michael McCann on the draft claim and circulate to the group for final endorsement.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

10. Efficiency Programme

Edward advised that the Westminster CSR07 settlement date was likely to be delayed and that the outcome would not be known until at least early autumn.

The group discussed the current position in England and Edward said that he would contact the NOC to establish where additional resources were required, identify any key issues and decide on any further action to take on the interim.

Action Required: Edward Shephard to contact Tim Gill

Edward referred to the Silvan House branch report in paper 02/07 and advised the group of the main issues arising from the BSD review i.e. lack of awareness of the impact on administration staff and how the process would be implemented. It was noted that the review report was presented to the Executive Board on 3rd May and Edward said he would be discussing the next stage with the Silvan House BEC.

11. Health & Safety

Steve Osborne informed the group of the scope of the Physical Agents Project for information and presented a paper detailing whom the project board and project team consisted of. The group noted the elements of the project that could be of concern to members i.e.:

- Review on FC systems on management of HAVS, WBV and noise for protection of employees and to meet requirements of the new regulations;
- Close out of the Crown Improvement Notice served on the New Forest District.
- Review of contents of training courses involving machines/equipment associated with vibration and/or noise.
- Production of an Operational Guidance Bulletin setting out revised policy and guidance and launching OGB via training workshops.
- Development of self-audit/Safety, Health & Environment monitoring system.

12. Any Other Competent Business

There were no further items to add to the agenda.

13. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 3rd & 4th October 2007.