



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT SILVAN HOUSE ON THE 3RD & 4TH OCTOBER 2007

Present: Allan MacKenzie
Malcolm Crosby
Edward Shephard
Steve Holdsworth
Jim O'Neill
Antony Griffiths
Hazel MacLean
David Gibson
Joanne McAuley
Liz Richardson
Jon Bates
Sue Gillingwater

Minute Secretary: Sam Telford

Apologies: Apologies were received from Andy Best, John Winterbourne and Fiona Barnett.

1. President's Introduction

Allan welcomed Sue back to GEC and thanked everyone for attending, in particular David who was recovering from an accident in February.

The group expressed their great sadness at the sudden loss of Ian Forshaw and offered their respect and condolences to his family. The GEC felt that Ian was highly respected with the trade union side and did much to protect and promote the interests of FC staff.

2. Minutes of the meetings of 9th & 10th May 2007

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

3. Matters Arising

3.1 National Women's Group.

Joanne reported that she would be attending the next PCS National Women's Group meeting was on 6th November and that an update could be given at the next GEC meeting.

4. Financial Report

Steve reported that as the bid for 2007/8 had been accepted, there were sufficient funds for the Group Organising Committee meeting to take place in November. He added that funds would also be available for branches to organise national campaign meetings if required (agenda item 11).

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.

6. FC Efficiency Programme

Edward said that there was little to report on the Efficiency Review and advised that neither England, Scotland or Wales had yet received a spending settlement. He added that he had spoken with Bob McIntosh and said that FC Scotland could likely be the first to receive details of their settlement.

Edward reported that England had undergone several reviews in 2007, including the regional arrangements review; a review of income and an expenditure within FE; the national office review

which analysed potential co-locations and the mobile Grants & Licenses review. Edward expressed concern that unions lacked an overview of implications for staff in England under the Efficiency Review and said that he would write to Paul Hill-Tout prior to the next England Staff Council, to seek a clearer overall perspective. He said that unions would have to make an assessment on the sustainability of their position in moving forward and make clear to members how PCS are involved in the Efficiency Review.

Action Required: Edward Shephard to write to Director England

The group discussed the implications of the review of Scottish DP Harvesting and noted that joint unions had met with managers of FE Scotland and MES to discuss the report into the review. Malcolm reported that management had made it clear that the review had been concluded and its recommendations accepted by the FE Scotland management board. Consequently, management did not wish to engage unions over this aspect. Malcolm said that joint unions were highly concerned that they had not been given an opportunity to gather views of union members and were therefore not in a position to support the implementation of the review's recommendations. It was noted with concern that the changes being proposed by FES would also have a significant impact on MES staff and it is essential that they be given equal consideration. Edward said that he hoped to enter meaningful discussions with FES on some of the issues raised from the review and the potential impact on staff.

Edward said that Robert Beaney would be writing to staff potentially affected by the proposed changes to gather their views and move the issue forward.

7. Pay

Edward reported that ministers for England, Scotland and Wales had approved a bid submitted by management and added that a response had been received from HMT. Edward reported that he had not been informed of details of the bid but said that negotiations were imminent.

Allan thanked the group for feedback on the pay and reward strategy meeting notes. Edward said that HR had no expectations for unions to agree on or accept any principles at this stage and the group **agreed** that they were not in a position to do so. It was **noted** that further meetings to generate ideas on particular aspects of the pay and reward system were being set up for the coming weeks.

Edward reported that he had received no response from HMT despite sending three letters to raise concerns with the implementation of the FC's pay system and asking to enter discussions to attempt to resolve issues.

8. Motions from Group Conference 2007

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.

Malcolm said that an online survey had been carried out and was pleased to report that it was well received with 124 responses, including 23 non-members. Malcolm added that responses between the pay bands were varied, ranging from PB6b to PB1 and felt that staff highly appreciated the opportunity to make their feelings of the operational review known. Allan concurred and felt that the survey had proved to be very useful and that the tool could be used in future when feedback from staff was required.

Malcolm informed the group that a document detailing statistics and comments from the survey had been prepared by the FCTU office and said that he would edit this to reflect a more accurate

overview of members' concerns. The group noted that the document would be taken forward to the Scotland Staff Council to raise issues of concern with management.

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 said that he had raised the item with the England NOC, who had expressed concern and agreed to discuss the matter with management at the next England Staff Council.

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 reported that the HR People Strategy had been finalised and that he had received a copy prior to the meeting. It was noted that HR were planning a release of the document to staff.

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.

Allan advised that he had written to Director Business Units who had responded, advising that green incentive criteria did exist. He referred the group to Michael Ansell's response detailed in the Conference 2007 Report:

The Forestry Commission's environmental objectives for road vehicles are published on the Greenerways Transport and Travel eConnect site. The main target is CO₂, which is to reduce carbon emissions from road vehicles used for Government administrative operations by 15% by 2010/11, relative to 2005/06 levels. This is measured for all vehicles but control is currently restricted to business use vehicles (Crown Exempt vehicles) and to a lesser extent to hire cars. MES are currently developing a proposal to have a CO₂ limit for CAPES cars. There is no control as yet of CO₂ for business use of private vehicles.

The majority of the FC fleet has diesel engines, apart from dual fuel vehicles. Territorial Mechanical Engineers encourage users to choose the smallest, most fuel-efficient vehicle, which is 'fit for purpose'. To assist with this, Section 7 of the new Light Vehicle Policy for Scotland (March 2007) has a 'decision tree' which guides FC users as to the most suitable choice of vehicle for the activity proposed. The principles of this guidance are being adopted by England and Wales but in reality this reinforces what was already happening in all three Countries.

You will be aware that MES do encourage the use of bio-diesel and now have 14% of the fleet (200 vehicles at 13 sites) running on it.

Although your query is specifically about road vehicles it is the Greenerways Transport group that consider the environmental objectives of all kinds of transport, which is the recommended method. Further information on the Group is available on [Greenerways](#).

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.

Allan reported that in his absence, Malcolm had presented his paper to the FCTU Council at which it was endorsed and taken to the Departmental Staff Council. Edward said that he had raised concerns that the FC Values statement was no longer visible and that the Connect process had lost momentum before they could be properly embedded across the FC. It was noted that Kim Lardge had said that as the People Strategy evolved, opportunities to re-introduce them and help regain momentum would arise. Tim Rollinson had also stressed the need to 'mainstream' the values and they were in the FC Story video.

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 led 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.

Malcolm said that the Scotland Conservancy Staff Council was addressing issue and that he would report back at the next GEC meeting.

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.

Concerns from Motion A7 were taken into consideration during discussions on pay (agenda item 7).

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 that the item had been raised at the Wales Staff Council, at which it had been established that all re-graded posts had gone through JEGS, which joint unions had signed up for.

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 effect 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 addressed under agenda item 7. 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 concerns from Motion A11 had been raised at the Departmental Staff Council. In response to Allan stating at the DSC that that was a lack of clarity on individuals on how they manage their career, Kim Lardge had advised that the introduction of Competency Framework and the Learning & Development Strategy would address these issues. It was noted that Paul Hill-Tout had added that the new regionalised approach in England would provide an improved framework for staff development and interchange within the local area. Furthermore, Tim Rollinson had said that the challenge to providing organisational support was backing it up with resources.

The GEC noted that discussions with management on these issues would be ongoing as Competency Framework and the Learning & Development Strategy developed.

9. Group Conference 2008 (inc. Motions)

Allan confirmed that the Group Conference would take place on 6th & 7th May 2008.

It was noted that motions were required by 21st March 2008 and Allan asked the group to ensure that branches are made aware of the deadline. Allan felt that more time was needed to discuss background information on the motions and for debating. It was suggested that if many motions were carried to conference, discussions and debates were given more time and split over the two days. The group concurred.

The group discussed venue arrangements and agreed that although York was a suitable location, a central venue would be more appropriate. Steve advised that he would be discussing bookings with Sue in due course.

10. Organising

Allan said that PCS Organising & Learning held the organising strategy within the FC as an example of good practice but he felt that the group had difficulties in making the strategy deliverable. Allan highlighted the 5 main objectives from the strategy:

- Increase activity within the group.
- Provide people with small achievable tasks.
- Seek greater representation.
- Increase recruitment.
- Encourage local activity.

The GEC discussed target groups for recruitment and agreed that aiming to recruit from a national level was extremely difficult, as issues that concern staff are mainly local. On questioning the effectiveness of the current 7 branches, Allan stated that demonstrating relevance of PCS branches to FC staff was vital and the group concurred. It was **agreed** that more focus should be made on raising the profile of the branch structures and that there was room for significant improvement in recruitment, activity levels and balancing tasks equally among BEC members. Allan also expressed concern with the lack of response from branches on important issues and felt that better interaction between the GEC and BECs was essential.

Following further discussion on the branch structure, the GEC agreed that the current 7 branches were too great and that the group would look into reviewing boundaries and introducing smaller branches, particularly in England and Scotland. The group felt that this would be beneficial in

concentrating more local activity closer to members, demonstrating relevance of the branches to smaller groups and increasing activity.

Action Required

The following GEC reps are required to analyse branch boundaries, membership densities and report back to Edward:

Hazel MacLean – North Scotland

Jon Bates & Jim O'Neill – North England

Antony Griffiths – Wales

Steve Holdsworth & Liz Richardson – South England

Edward Shephard – To speak to PCS to establish any procedural requirements for amending branch boundaries.

Edward stressed that a plan was needed by the end of 2007 to allow endorsement at AGM's early 2008.

11. PCS National Campaign

Allan referred to the letter that he sent to all group members, advising that they would be receiving a ballot paper from PCS regarding the next stage of the national campaign in support of public services and encouraging them to vote in favour. As a follow-up to this letter, Edward suggested that BECs issue a letter endorsing the GEC recommendation to support the campaign and added that setting up meetings would be difficult due to short notice and logistics. The group **agreed** to take this forward.

Action Required: GEC members to instruct BECs to write to members.

It was noted that the PCS campaign had now been taken up by the TUC and Allan said that he had written to lead reps of the other unions within the FC, outlining the goals of the campaign and encouraging them to support and take strike action if called.

12. Occupational Health

Allan reported that the Core Group had been questioning if joint unions should be engaging more in occupational health issues. He said that FC H&S had switched much of their focus onto health, as safety was becoming less of an issue in the FC. Allan said that this would be raised at the FCTU Council in October to seek a suitable method of switching more focus to occupational health and how to best manage H&S co-ordinators and reps.

Allan felt that it should be joint unions' intention to assist the FC in achieving the best possible conditions for staff and that unions should attempt to be involved in all aspects that will bring about improvements for members. He said that unions should insist upon researching within the department to assure members that legislation surrounding the subject is being adhered to at all workstations.

13. FCTU Communications

Edward said that communications meetings plan was still ongoing and that it was proving to be very useful in obtaining feedback from staff on a range of issues and generating meaningful discussion. He added that Allan, Robert and himself had visited around half of the districts and conservancies across the organisation and that they aimed to have completed the plan by mid-2008.

Edward was pleased to report that the FCTU website was now online and that significant progress had been made in terms of structure, design and content. He said that he would 'launch' the website to all staff in the coming weeks and that promotion of the site would be ongoing. Edward added that he had also set up a forum and encouraged members of the GEC to register, as it would hopefully be a useful tool for discussion and debates.

14. Group Newsletter

Edward thanked the group for giving articles for the newsletter in May. He said that he had received some positive feedback from members and the GEC were keen to release another newsletter following the meeting.

It was **agreed** that it would be useful for the newsletter to contain information on the DP Review, Ops Review survey, SEARS/SRDP update, branch re-structuring, the Efficiency Review, PCS National Campaign, Group Conference Motions, Pay and Occupational Health. Contributors to the newsletter were noted and Edward said that he would make contact following the meeting to confirm action points.

15. Any Other Competent Business

There were no further items to add to the agenda.

16. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be **5th & 6th February 2008.**