



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT SILVAN HOUSE ON THE 5th & 6th FEBRUARY 2008

Present: Allan MacKenzie
Michael McCann
Malcolm Crosby
Edward Shephard
Steve Holdsworth
Jim O'Neill
Antony Griffiths
Hazel MacLean
David Gibson
Joanne McAuley
Jon Bates
Sue Gillingwater
Andy Best
Fiona Barnett
John Winterbourne
Liz Richardson (item 7, by telephone conference)

Minute Secretary: Sam Telford

Apologies: None

1. President's Introduction

Allan welcomed the GEC and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Minutes of the meetings of 3rd & 4th October 2007

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

3. Matters Arising

3.1 National Women's Group.

Allan thanked Joanne for providing a report on the National Women's Forum Meeting in November. It was noted that a summarised version would be posted in the PCS section of the FCTU Website.

4. Financial Report

Steve referred to the Treasurer's Report highlighting the income and expenditure for the group's activities over 2007. A brief summary of the 2008 claim was provided within the document and Steve said that he was seeking endorsement from the GEC to enable him to submit the claim to PCS HQ. Following discussion on the costs likely to be incurred in 2008, the GEC **endorsed** the claim and thanked Steve for his excellent work as Treasurer.

5. Branch Reports

Allan referred the group to the Branch Reports paper and asked a member from each branch to provide a brief rundown of issues specific to their branch and work being carried out.

6. FC Efficiency Programme

Edward provided a report on the scope and working of the Departmental Efficiency Review. He expressed concern with financial management systems in DEFRA and said that he and Robert had met with Joan Ruddock MP at the end of January in to discuss implications for FC England under the budget settlement. Edward felt that discussions had been positive and reported that the Minister was highly concerned with the level of cuts being imposed on the Forestry Commission.

7. Pay

Michael McCann provided the group with a full and in depth account of the 2007/2008 pay negotiations. He commented that the negotiations had been particularly difficult on account of the Government's imposed threshold and management's position on various issues associated with pay. Members of the GEC offered thanks to Edward and Michael for all of the hard work that they had undertaken during negotiations. The group **agreed** that the best deal possible had been negotiated in the current financial climate and that lessons learned would be catalogued for future pay negotiations.

Following clarification of a number of points and an detailed discussion of the offer and possible outcomes of the ballot, the group unanimously **agreed** to take a neutral stance and allow members to decide upon acceptance or rejection of the offer without pressure from the union. The group felt that members would be reluctant to take industrial action if the offer was to be rejected. Michael advised the group that he would contact Geoff Lewtas at PCS National Bargaining Unit to inform him of the GEC's stance on the final offer.

Action Required: Michael McCann

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 confirmed that he had taken the survey results forward to the Scotland Staff Council and that concerns were raised with management. He added that a summary would be submitted for the FCTU Website.

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 advised that management had assured TUS that ideas on regional alignment and the Efficiency Review would not be any cause for concern in terms of alignment of offices to public forests and travel time. Steve said that the issue raised had become less of a concern since the Efficiency Review had developed further but added that unions should maintain awareness of any implications.

9. Group Conference 2008 (inc. Motions)

Allan confirmed that the Group Conference would take place on 6th and 7th May 2008. It was noted that motions were required by 21st March 2008 and Allan asked the group to ensure that branches are aware of the deadline.

The group discussed venue arrangements and it was noted that the conference would take place at the Ramada Fairfield Manner Hotel in York. Sue advised that she had received the hotel contract.

Action Required: Sue Gillingwater to confirm hotel booking

Edward confirmed that guests to conference would be Mark Serwotka and Michael McCann and that Simon Hodgson would be invited to attend as a dinner guest.

10. Organising

Allan reported that the PCS Organising & Learning Services Committee met on 28th January and had approved all recommendations from the group to form a new branch structure. Allan said that he and Edward had attended the South & East England and the South West England Branch AGMs, at which the proposed changes to branch boundaries were accepted. Allan summarised the main elements of the group structure, which included:

- In England, increasing the number of branches from three to seven,
- Changing the composition of the GEC, and
- Changing the way that delegates are selected to attend our Group Conference.

Allan advised that changes would be implemented in April. The GEC were content that the new structure would encourage more activity and create a localised attitude towards the branches. Allan added that it was vital that BEC positions were filled as soon as possible for the branches to function properly.

Edward informed the group that information on the PCS Group Structures Review 2008 was available to members on the FCTU Website. – <http://fctu.org.uk/pcs/GroupReview.asp>

Allan referred to the draft Group Constitution document provided prior to the meeting. Following discussion the group endorsed the paper, subject to minor changes to the GEC election arrangements and the composition of the group conference, that Edward would make prior to forwarding it to the NEC for approval.

Action Required: Edward Shephard to amend Group Constitution

11. PCS National Campaign

Allan reported that the Cabinet Office had agreed to negotiate about the national campaign demands after many months of refusing to do so. He said that the talks have been taking place in a number of distinct strands with a focus on the avoidance of compulsory redundancies, pay, 'well-being at work' and procedures to govern proposed privatisation.

Allan informed the group that a Joint Task Team (JTT) involving representatives from PCS and the Cabinet Office had been established. He said that the JTT were discussing issues related to achieving common pay rates and structures across the civil service and related bodies, and that the team were also discussing the content and implementation of measures to standardise important aspects of employment conditions, such as annual and maternity leave.

12. 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 Beaney and himself had visited around 3 quarters of the districts and conservancies across the organisation and that they would continue to visit as many workplaces as possible. It was noted that the FCTU Office had received several invites to team meetings for 2008, and that many of the FDMs and Conservators looked forward to having the FCTU present at another meeting. Edward said that the plan would remain a key element to FCTU communications.

The group discussed the joint unions website and Edward informed the group that latest news from the FCTU was available through RSS feeds (Really Simple Syndication) on the home page. It was noted that this was however not supported by Internet Explorer 6 or Outlook and was therefore unavailable via FC computers. The group felt that RSS feeds could be particularly useful for staff who were unable to access the website from work.

13. Group Newsletter

Edward thanked the group for giving articles for the newsletter in October. 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 include information on Communications meetings, SEARS, Forest Research Workload Survey, Lymes Disease, Group Structure Review, AGMs, Women's STUC, National Campaign and pay. 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

14. Vehicle Purchasing Policy

Andy reported that there was a broad concern amongst staff in Wales over the mileage that they now cover, and about the criteria used to select vehicles provided with comfort and safety being the most important issues for them. Andy advised that some members felt that smallest and cheapest are the overriding criteria used. He said that he had contacted MES raising concerns and that he had received a detailed response, stating that Criteria for vehicle choice is defined in country vehicle strategies but is based on advice from, and is endorsed by MES.

The group agreed that the issue should be addressed through the Wales Staff Council.

Deferred to Wales Staff Council

15. Union Facility Time

Antony reported that in some instances in Wales, managers were refusing to grant union representatives with sufficient facility time to carry out necessary union work. He added that there was occasionally pressure from managers for some reps to give up union roles entirely. Antony asked the group to clarify where management can or cannot intervene with the agreement. Edward responded stating that under the [Facility Time Agreement](#), managers needed to recognise that certain facilities need to be provided by the FC to union members and their representatives in order that they can actively fulfil their roles and responsibilities. He said that often managers were required to make adjustments to workloads to ensure that a fair allowance is made for time spent on union activities. The group however recognised that managers were under a great deal of pressure with targets and deadlines also and Edward felt that difficulties with facility time grants should be dealt with on a case by case basis, and be reported to him immediately as they arise.

Allan commented that by increasing local activity and spreading union work among more members and creating more small achievable tasks, it would lessen the pressure for both union representatives and managers. The group concurred.

16. Mileage Rates

In response to a question from Antony, Edward advised that joint unions and management failed to agree on the standard and public transport mileage rates. He said that the rates which are 'dispensed' by HMRC and any increase will make claimants liable for tax and that HR wished to avoid additional tax payments wherever possible. Edward highlighted the FCTU's view that taxation is a personal matter and any reimbursement should be set on the basis of the actual costs incurred by the employee and not on whether or not a particular rate might be subject to tax. Edward said that HMRC are expected to revise these rates later in 2008 and that FCTU agreed to leave rates unchanged pending the HMRC review.

17. Any Other Competent Business

There were no further items to add to the agenda.

18. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the dates of the next meeting would be **18th & 19th June 2008**.