



**MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT SILVAN HOUSE ON THE 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2008**

**Present:** Allan MacKenzie  
Malcolm Crosby  
Steve Holdsworth  
Jim O'Neill  
Antony Griffiths (by telephone)  
Andy Best (by telephone)  
Hazel MacLean  
Jon Bates  
Sue Gillingwater  
Joanne McAuley  
David Gibson  
Kevin Greenway – PCS NEC (7<sup>th</sup> only)

**Minute Secretary:** Sam Telford

**Apologies:** Edward Shephard, Fiona Barnett and Danny Williamson

**1. President's Introduction**

Allan welcomed the GEC and thanked everyone for attending.

**2. Minutes of the meetings of 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

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

**3. Matters Arising**

**3.1 GEC Attendance Record**

It was noted that branches would receive an attendance record following the meeting.

**3.2 Mileage Rates**

Allan reported that Edward had received a letter from Director HR, pointing out that the main aspects for the FC using HMRC's authorised mileage rates are:

- It is a nationally recognised and accepted approach for business mileage, used widely by employers in both the public and private sectors;
- It is calculated by HMRC on the basis that it is fairly recompensing the majority of drivers;
- It ensures that the FC as the employer does not have to pay NIC's on higher rates;
- It also ensures that employees and the FC do not have to process higher rates via the payroll (NIC's could only be correctly processed via PAYE). Administrative costs would also be added.

Allan said that the HR policy team had queried mileage rates with HMRC and had received a response stating:

***The Employer Liaison Team recently approached Policy Division on this and the response received is as follows:***

***'The Government have recently reviewed the level of AMAPs (HMRC's authorised mileage rates) and concluded that as the rates have to cater for a wide variety of drivers and were***

*never intended to reflect the actual costs of motoring for every car. The current rates are still sufficiently high to cover the business motoring expenses of most although admittedly not all drivers. The Government therefore announced in Budget 2008 that they did not intend to increase the mileage rate.'*

*'As changes can only be done as part of the Budget cycle and Finance Bill – as they are statutory rates – the current rates will be in existence at least until Budget 09.'*

Allan confirmed that HR were not prepared to increase mileage rates above the HMRC's authorised rates but that they are prepared to lobby HMRC.

It was noted that HR were planning to approach the HMRC Policy Team direct to ask whether steadily increasing fuel costs (assuming these continue) are likely to change this approach and enquire into the basis of HMRC's mileage thresholds.

### **3.3 National Women's Group**

Joanne provided an update to the group on the FC's Gender Equality Scheme and presented a copy of the Annual Monitoring Report. Joanne reported that PCS criticised the absence of union involvement, implementation strategy and timescale.

## **4. Financial Report**

Steve said that despite the significant price rises in both accommodation and travel, the GEC and Conference delegates had been most diligent in keeping claim levels to a minimum and added that to date, 2008 figures have kept close to last year's figures.

Steve said that the choice of venue for Conference had recently come into question following a review of the group's accounts by the PCS Finance team. This was said to be because of the Ramada Jarvis delegate rate but Steve emphasised that as the hotel is being used as a conference venue and accommodation provider, the cost was reasonable. Steve reported that he had written to the PCS Director of Finance explaining their position.

Finally, Steve advised that he would be preparing a group budget submission in time for the February 2009 GEC.

## **5. Branch Reports**

Allan asked a member from each branch to provide the group with a brief rundown of issues specific to their branch and work bring carried out.

## **6. PCS National Campaign**

Allan reported that national membership ballot in the civil service and related public sector areas on industrial action over pay was being held between 24 September and 17 October. He said that PCS were distributing a great deal of campaign material such as briefing notes and posters, and that the FCTU Office had also circulated additional material by email and via the FCTU Website.

Allan said that PCS were asking the group to hold branch meetings with members regarding the campaign to encourage a consistent YES note throughout the whole of the Forestry Commission. He said that the reason for the group not doing this was that members were not interested in attending meetings, but added that meetings do not have to be arranged from the centre if any branch feels that they need to hold a meeting.

The group discussed the campaign strategy and potential outcome of the ballot. It was noted that if there were a majority YES vote, there would be one day of action. Allan stressed that it was not the intention to cause friction between the union and the Forestry Commission, but that the campaign is about the way the Government is treating Civil Servants. He said that the only way to resolve the number of issues involved in the campaign is by everyone supporting it and taking action when called and that it is only through showing our solidarity with and being united alongside our fellow Civil Servants that we can have any chance of persuading the Government to relax the current pay policy which caps our pay at 2%.

The GEC concurred and agreed that the relevance of campaign has at last found resonance with PCS members in the Forestry Commission. However, it was recognised that many members feel

insecure about jobs, financial burdens and the prospect of the UK going into a deep recession. The group agreed that it was not a good time to take industrial action but that PCS have been campaigning for a number of years and this has to be the time within that process to take this very necessary action. Further agreement was made that if the group is to keep the momentum going, then they need to ensure that all members are encouraged to support the democratic ballot result and support the day of action if called.

### **6.1 Sector Options**

Allan advised that PCS HQ were questioning which sectors their bargaining units should fit in with and said that the Scottish Sector Planning Group has asked the Forestry Commission Group to advise on their preference. Allan added that our members could easily belong to the Scottish sector but that it may be more appropriate belonging to a UK wide employment based sector. The group was informed that the choice was between the Scottish Sector and the Sector that includes areas such as DEFRA. Allan said that Danny Williamson was approaching the NEC to ask if members in the FC be split between the two sectors and that he would report back to the GEC.

### **6.2 NEC Liaison Officer**

A summary of Kevin Greenway's discussion will appear in the October GEC newsletter.

### **6.3 Hardship Funds**

Steve reported that he had obtained information from PCS regarding Hardship Funds. He said that if needed, the group should take a GEC decision to set up a hardship account and elect a small sub-committee to administer claims, be the signatories to the account and set up rules and guidelines for awarding payouts for hardship.

The group agreed that there are the members who can be helped to participate in strike action with hardship assistance and that having the account could help to raise the profile of the campaign and build support.

Steve agreed that he would contact PCS HQ to discuss setting up the account.

**Action Required: Steve Holdsworth**

## **7. Pay 2008**

The group held a confidential discussion on the details of the pay negotiations. Allan reported that an informal pay negotiations meeting was held on 16<sup>th</sup> September and that management had outlined what the main elements of this year's offer might be and indicated that that they were still awaiting approval from Treasury.

It was noted that the next pay negotiations meeting would take place on 21st October.

## **8. Motions from Group Conference 2008**

### **Section 1: FC Policy and Values**

#### **Motion A4 - Carried**

*Conference requests that the GEC carry out a survey of all staff on the status of operational pay given that there has been a range of views on the subject ongoing for a number of years. The GEC should analyse responses and put forward recommendations in time to debate the issue at Branch 2009 AGMs.*

It was agreed that the group would produce a survey for members on operational pay. Jon suggested that when the group have results of the survey, they could gauge their opinion on how to proceed and then survey non-operational staff if necessary. The group agreed and Jon said that he would produce questions for the survey and circulate them to Steve and Malcolm by the end of October.

**Action Required: Jon Bates**

### **Section 2: FC Policy and Values**

### **Motion A5 - Carried**

*This conference notes with concern the potential effects of devolution on the Forestry Commission as a UK-wide organisation. The GEC is instructed to look at the possible future ways in which the Forestry Commission might be expected to change, and determine what approach PCS should take with each permutation.*

The item was deferred to the February 2009 GEC meeting.

### **Action Required: Wales BEC**

### **Motion A6 – Carried**

*This conference notes with concern that the Terms of Reference of the “FES Forest District Administration Review” have a limiter applied of “a presumption that savings will be generated of a scale which cover the additional staffing need identified by the Operations Structure review” with the implication that, as savings from the full FES Operations Review were not as great as expected, any further savings will have to come as a result of reduction in administration staffing. This conference instructs the GEC to request a full financial cost/savings analysis from the FES Operations Review with a comparison against the planned savings; and also instructs the GEC to promote the benefit of maintaining a healthy administrative staffing level without shrinkage in staff numbers being forced by errors made elsewhere. This will ensure that the administrative teams are accorded due professionalism and respect by the organisation and are not treated as expendable.*

The item was deferred to the February 2009 GEC meeting.

### **Action Required: Allan MacKenzie**

### **Motion A7 - Carried**

*Conference condemns the ongoing practice of employing consultants and contractors to undertake work, often at great expense, that could be done by FC staff. The true cost of this is often masked by assigning the costs to other budgets. We need to focus on the provision of in-service training to improve efficiency and the quality of our services to enable staff to deliver their programmes. This approach often undervalues the skills and competencies of existing staff who could have achieved the required results themselves and at a far reduced cost.*

*Conference therefore calls on the Group Executive Committee to engage with Senior Management to ensure that the use of consultants and contractors is justified and that skills transference is built into the process. Senior Managers should also provide details of the cost of consultants to the unions and to introduce safeguards against abuse of the system by formulating a set of guidelines on the scope and use of these services in consultation with the Unions.*

Allan reported that Mary had advised that four posts have been advertised internally as a development opportunity to facilitate skills transference. He said that it was not official yet but there is another upcoming opportunity and that there is ongoing dialogue with managers.

## **9. Group Conference 2009**

The group discussed arrangement for the 2009 Conference and Allan confirmed that it would take place on 12th & 13th May 2009 at the Ramada Fairfield Manor in York.

Allan advised that the Standing Orders Committee would be providing a briefing note for the branches. He asked that the GEC note the following.

- A full group membership is required for 11<sup>th</sup> May.
- Emergency motions are required by 8<sup>th</sup> May.
- The Conference booklet will be produced and sent to branches by 9<sup>th</sup> April.
- A list of delegates is required by 20<sup>th</sup> March.
- All motions must be with the Standing Orders Committee by 6<sup>th</sup> March.
- All branch AGMs must be held between January 30<sup>th</sup> and February 27<sup>th</sup> with delegates to Conference being nominated at those meetings.

## **10. Group Election Timetable**

Allan advised that the group election would likely be held in March 2009 and advised that nominations would be taken for Group President, Treasurer and Organiser.

## 11. New Roles & Future Direction

Allan confirmed that he had been elected FCTU Secretary at the recent FCTU Council meeting and that he would take on the role in the near future. In response to a question on his role as Group President, Allan said that he would make a decision on whether to remain President at the February 2009 GEC meeting.

Allan presented a copy of a new PCS recruitment drive booklet and said that a similar booklet could be produced for the Forestry Commission Group by PCS. He explained what the booklet contained and how it could benefit the group. Following discussion it was agreed that Allan would advise PCS on Forestry Commission relevant content to include in the booklet.

### **Action Required: Allan MacKenzie**

Allan stressed that there is a risk of overall membership density dropping if the unions fail to recruit a sufficient number of new members. Allan highlighted the changes in membership density since the figures were last analysed and reported that although the total number of FC staff has remained static, the union membership percentage has decreased. He said that GMB, Prospect and Unite lead representatives were producing mapping data for the FCTU Office and that the Departmental Committee would be analysing these figures and using the information to determine where the main focus on recruitment should be.

## 12. Group Directory Update

The GEC referred to the Group Directory provided prior to the meeting and amendments required were noted.

### **Action Required: FCTU Office**

## 13. Reviews in FC & FR

Hazel provided an update to the GEC on SEARS and reported that Danny Williamson was asked to look into the unsatisfactory arrangements for engagement with the OTG project and SEARS. Hazel said that there were concerns that the FC group does not appear to have been fully involved in what little consultation there is through no fault of their own. She said that another concern was that there does not appear to be a clear line of communication for consultation/negotiation with the group in relation to issues affecting FC employees involved or scoped into this project, and subsequently no clear line for raising collective or individual membership issues.

It was noted that Danny had determined the approach adopted by the PCS Scottish Government Group and Hazel said that they're understanding was that all unions and union sectors with members who are impacted should receive formal invitations to regular consultation meetings with SEARS project leaders. Hazel outlined Danny's recommendations:

**1. We raise with the Commission the apparent breakdown and lack of communication between the SEARS project team and the PCS FC Group.**

**2. That we urge the Commission to press on SEARS the importance of ensuring that the Group are notified of all joint meetings and consultations in due time and are fully informed of all developments.**

**3. That we agree with the Commission's HR formal arrangements for consulting on "People" issues emanating from SEARS which directly impact of FC members.**

**4. That we agree with the Commission's HR arrangement for engagement around discipline, grievance handling etc for employees involved in SEARS.**

Hazel felt that the issues for the FC were from the impact of SRDP and it was **agreed** that the GEC would adopt recommendations 1 and 2. Hazel agreed to take these forward.

### **Action Required: Hazel MacLean**

Malcolm confirmed that the District Review concluded on 8<sup>th</sup> August at which it was agreed that four districts would be lost in Scotland. He said that Moray has been combined with

Aberdeenshire; Fort Augustus and Inverness had been merged with part of Inverness also going to Dornoch; Lorne was split between Lochaber, West Argyll and Cowal & Trossachs; Ae had been amalgamated with Scottish Borders.

Malcolm said that there would be no compulsory redundancies and that any staff members who have lost their role will be retrained and re-deployed. He reported that five posts had been upgraded and that there would be some new promotion opportunities.

Allan updated the group on the ongoing review process in Forest Research. He said that there was a great deal on re-branding being implemented and said that there would be a Climate Change centre, a centre for Forest Resource Management, an Ecology and a Human Sciences Centre. Allan confirmed that the internal market within FR would be removed and that TSUs would be integrated into these centres. He said that the FCTU refused to be part of an FR efficiency group due to the objective of cutting posts and limitations in its scope.

Jon reported that FE England was going through the business planning process for 2009/10 and 2010/11 and that a request was made to find efficiencies to total 4.4% of the salary bill. He said that cost centres have been charged with achieving the saving. Jon expressed concern that the saving was unachievable with costs increasing and the timber price dropping. He said there will be large implications and that support from the centre will be very important.

#### **14. Terms & Conditions Update**

In Edward's absence the item was not discussed.

#### **15. Group Newsletter**

Allan thanked the group for giving articles for the newsletter in June. 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 Pay, the National Campaign, SEARS, 2009 Conference and timetable and Hardship Funds. Contributors to the newsletter were noted and Allan said that he would make contact following the meeting to confirm action points.

#### **16. Any Other Competent Business**

##### **16.1 FCTU Constitution**

Allan referred to the paper provided prior to the meeting for information. He advised that under the new constitution, the FCTU was moving away from the larger periodic standing committees to a more dynamic method of working, and that over the last few years the focus of GB joint union work has switched to the Core Group. Allan said that the constitution was now looking to strengthen the role of the Core Group and build a stronger link to the Area Committees into this.

##### **16.2 Woodland Officer Post**

Jim reported that a Woodland Officer Post was advertised and that three applicants passed the sift. He said that following this, each of them were contacted by HR explaining that the trawl was being made external. Jim expressed concern that HR did not follow proper procedure and said that the reason for the late external trawl was to provide the manager with more choice.

Following an in-depth discussion on the issue, Allan said that he would raise the matter with Edward and report back to Jim.

**Action Required: Allan MacKenzie**

#### **17. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the dates of the next meeting would be 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> February 2009.