



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT SILVAN HOUSE ON THE 3rd & 4th FEBRUARY 2009

Present: Allan MacKenzie
Malcolm Crosby
Steve Holdsworth
Antony Griffiths
Andy Best
Hazel MacLean
Joanne McAuley
David Gibson

Minute Secretary: Sam Telford

Apologies: Edward Shephard, Fiona Barnett, Danny Williamson, Jim O'Neill and Jon Bates.

1. President's Introduction

Allan welcomed the GEC and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Minutes of the meetings of 7th & 8th October 2008

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

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Hardship Funds

Steve said that an account would still have to be set up if the group felt that it would be of benefit. It was agreed that it would be kept on hold until results of the pay ballot were known to determine if industrial action would be taken. Following discussion on PCS Credit Union, Steve said that he would find out more information and report back to the group.

Action Required: Steve Holdsworth

4. Financial Report

Steve reported that the 2008 accounts would be audited as normal and be presented to PCS finance by the 31st March deadline. He said that the group will be allocated the same rebate as 2008 and that this amount should be sufficient to cover requirements in 2009, despite the additional GEC meeting on pay in January.

Steve said that following a meeting with Seamus Darcy, PCS Finance Officer, the group had a clearer picture of the England branches and referred to the tables in the finance report, detailing which branches had an account, funding and a Treasurer. Steve provided the group with an update on branch restructuring as detailed in the finance report:

Branches have been allocated a funding factor of nil because they are new, merged or restructured and they have no history of expenditure levels to apply the correct funding formula to, i.e. we need to ensure that funding follows our England members through this restructuring exercise.

Since Branch restructuring has taken place, previous expenditure patterns are not relevant, as calculations for 2009 would be based on legitimate expenditure during 2007 for the reasons shown above.

The focus now is to create accounts for Midlands and Yorks & Humber Branches since they have BEC's in place, and assist them in making an application for funds this year. For the others we need to track down the present signatories of the accounts to make updates to

allow the current BEC members to become signatories. Where there are insufficient activists for this to take place, the current signatories need to release existing credit from lapsed accounts back to PCS or transfer to a neighbouring Branch, subject to PCS Finance's approval. Should there be a situation where we have scant information about account signatories then PCS Finance can authorise the Unity Trust Bank to release any credit and close lapsed accounts.

If funds are required for AGM's etc and where there is no mechanism to reimburse members T&S expenses, I can cover this either via the Group account or by sending requests for payment directly to Seamus with a clarifying note.

Following discussion, the GEC **endorsed** Steve's recommendations.

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 being carried out.

6. PCS National Campaign

Allan said that the highlight of the National Campaign was currently Pay and that he had attended a pay forum in Clapham in December 08. Allan said that the question of using efficiency savings within departments for funding the pay bill was raised at the meeting and highlighted the fact that under gain sharing, HMT require that efficiency savings are split three ways between the department, HMT and the pay bill. Allan reported that the union was focussing on the funds being spent by Whitehall departments on consultants for the pay bill, but expressed concern that smaller departments such as the Forestry Commission who have already made large efficiency savings will struggle to make any additional savings for the pay bill.

Allan advised that the union were still in talks with the Cabinet Office. He added that PCS planned to hold pay forums around GB to enable members and activists to attend and get involved. Allan felt that if the talks were to fail, industrial action may be the next course of action but said that to bring a strike back on the agenda would be extremely difficult given the lack of public support and financial climate.

7. Pay 2008

Allan referred to the extraordinary GEC pay meeting held in January, at which the group had agreed to recommend voting against the pay offer and Allan advised that the ballot will close on Friday 20th February. It was noted that Prospect, Unite and GMB had also recommended a rejection of the offer to members.

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.

Malcolm confirmed that a series of draft questions and a mock survey had been created but said that due to other priorities such as the FD Review and Scottish Climate Change Bill, the survey had been postponed. The group agreed that the motion would be deferred.

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.

Allan reported that the question of the future of the FC had been raised at the Departmental Staff Council and referred to the minutes of this meeting which state:

5.1 Future of The Forestry Commission.

5.1.1 Asked by Mr Beaney to expand on his view of the future, Mr Rollinson said that, after 5 years in post, he had expected that questions would have arisen on why the Forestry Commission was not being completely devolved, but he had heard nothing. While he appreciated that there can be no guarantees about the future of the Commission, he was delighted that splitting up the Commission was not currently a political issue. However, that was not to say that at some time in the future we would not be split up. The way forward was to work together and deliver what each of the three political administrations wants. If indeed the Commission were to be split up, it would not be because of anything we were doing wrong. Dr McIntosh echoed the Director General's sentiments by saying that, in working with the new Minister for the last 18 months, the break up of the FC has never been raised as an issue. Mr Owen added that Ministers in Wales were proud of its forestry department – which is the Forestry Commission. He said that they would continue to support us if we are useful and relevant, which we increasingly are. It is working and that is what Ministers are interested in.

5.1.2 Mr Rollinson asked the TUS what the view was like from their side. Mr Beaney said that there was tension, worry and frustration among his members and that their perceptions of the future were generally negative. He commented that positive news never seems to filter down. Mr Shephard said that although he did not sense political tension, he was worried that we may be caught up in future political events and that the worst would happen and staff would be affected. Dr McIntosh said that there should be no cause for pessimism, twice as much money was being invested in the Commission as there was 5 years ago and the FC had more staff now than 5 years ago. As a government department we have remained relatively untouched since our inception in 1919. We have the same name and we are in the same business. How many other government departments can say that? In concluding the discussion on the future of the Commission, Mr Rollinson said we do a good job and are valued for that. We are efficient. We are an organisation acquiring new skills and a different outlook and will continue to be a dynamic organisation. That is the key to the future of the Commission.

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.

Malcolm felt that this was ongoing business as the District Review had adopted the Admin Review and that Pay Band 5 admin managers were in place. Allan said that the GEC can report that under the terms of the review, admin staff are having an opportunity to develop. Malcolm concurred and added that by creating a promotions chain opportunity and looking to professionalise the role, they had ensured that admin teams are respected by the organisation and are not treated as expendable.

9. Group Conference 2009

Allan gave an overview of the Annual Group Delegate Conference as agreed in the Group Constitution. Allan confirmed that the Group Conference would take place on 12th and 13th May 2009 at the Ramada Fairfield Manner Hotel in York.

It was noted that the Conference would be attended by:

- Delegates from Branches within the Group.
- GEC members.
- Three Standing Orders Committee members, elected at the Conference.
- One or more scrutineers appointed by the GEC.
- Such other persons as the GEC may authorise.
- Guests, including an after dinner speaker.

It was noted that motions were required by 6th March and Allan asked the group to ensure that branches are aware of the deadline.

10. Group Election Of Officers

Allan advised that branches were required to put forward nominations for the election of Group Officers, which were Group President, Organiser, Treasurer and the Assistant Secretary. Allan said that he will be standing down as President and that he was seeking nomination for Assistant Secretary from North Scotland branch. He added that Edward would be standing down from the Organiser role. Steve confirmed that he was willing to stand as Treasurer again.

The group expressed their thanks to Edward for all his hard work and huge efforts during his time in the PCS FC Group and 9 years as FCTU Secretary. Allan stated that Edward's excellent work hugely benefited members and representatives across the organisation and that the FCTU would not have the strength it currently does without Edward's enormous contribution and hard work over the years. The group concurred.

11. Group Directory Update

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

Action Required: FCTU Office

12. [Scottish Climate Change Bill](#)

Allan reported that Scottish Government consultation had now formally closed and that the FCTU's concerns had been shared by individuals, organisations and businesses throughout Scotland and in many other countries also. Allan said that the concerns had led to over a dozen local meetings around Scotland, around 3500 signatures on the petition and 300-400 responses to the consultation. He stressed that this level of activity would not have happened without genuine widespread concern.

It was reported that Sarah Boyack, Labour MSP for Edinburgh Central hosted a drop in lobby session at the Scottish Parliament on 22nd January and Allan said that this was in support of the FCTU and to help them to have contact with as many MSPs as possible and give them the opportunity to raise the issues and concerns that have arisen from the Scottish Climate Change Bill. He felt that everyone who attended the event thought it was a very worthwhile exercise and for the FCTU it was a huge success. He also said that the fact that there were representatives from all the major parties was a big bonus and that they'd had the opportunity to put their views to some of the supporters of the Bill as well as giving added information and detail to supporters and to those opposed.

Allan said that the FCTU would be waiting to find out whether or not the Scottish Government wishes to press ahead with the plans, or whether it will put its support behind the many other measures that would help with the fight against climate change. He said that they would be meeting with Mike Russell, the Scottish Minister on 5th February to explore the Minister's thoughts on the consultation, what he expects from the unions and to discuss other options that may reduce the need for the land-lease proposal.

13. England Review & Office Locations

Allan said that the Cambridge office working group met on 20th January and that they have agreed the list of posts that are in scope for the move, which is around 40 including Keynsham staff. It was estimated that 20%-40% of staff may move. He reported that terms had not yet been agreed and that management will not move over to redundancy on compulsory terms for mobile staff as jobs will be available in Bristol, but added that the group are looking to augment the voluntary terms with some extra allowances. It was noted that an initial preference exercise to find out what staff do and do not want to do is being carried out and that this will end early March when the next working group meeting will take place. Steve expressed concern with the lack of representation for staff currently working at the Forest Enterprise England office and the implications for these members. It was agreed that Steve would raise his concerns with Edward and that they would discuss the matter further.

Action Required: Steve Holdsworth

The group discussed the FE Estates Review, which will consider the future long-term sustainable role for the public forest estate. The group felt that there was a lack of information available regarding the review and on what the process will be. It was noted that Tim Gill, FCTU England Chair would be meeting with Director FC England to determine how the FCTU would fit into the process.

14. Group Newsletter

It was agreed that the next newsletter will include articles on the Scottish Climate Change Bill, FD Review, STUC, SEARS, Credit Union, PCS National Campaign and Farming. Contributors to the newsletter were noted and Allan said that he would make contact following the meeting to confirm action points.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

15. Any Other Competent Business

15.1 SRDP

Hazel provided the group with an update on SRDP and reported that over the last few months the unions have received a number of comments about the impact that the roll-out of SRDP is having on the quality and quantity of work for some staff in conservancy offices. She said that amongst the concerns expressed are:

- Due to computer systems restrictions Woodland Officers are now undertaking a portion of the work previously done by Admin staff.
- The quality, variety and quantity of work being done by Admin Officers has dropped markedly.
- Due to the pace and timing of the roll out of systems, the quality of training has been poor. For some elements (WIAT and F4P) no training has been provided.
- Changes in the inspection regime, and SGRPID's role in determining the regime, have reduced the quality of the Woodland Officers' role and the service which the FC is able to provide to customers. (This has also led to some local interpretation of the rules which will also impact on the consistency of the service.)
- Numerous other concerns about workflow design within some of the of the systems and the impact that this again has on the quality of work for FCS staff.

Hazel said that on 7th November she and Edward had met with Bob McIntosh, James Simpson and Helen Paterson to discuss the implementation of SRDP to see what can be done to address the concerns. Hazel reported that it was apparent that significant new areas of work were due to be rolled out, though crucially it was unclear what the cumulative impact of these will be on individual jobs. It was therefore agreed that it was time to hold a number of communication events so that members could input their concerns in order for them to assess what changes need to be made. Hazel said that the overall design of the SRDP system is of course largely out of their control, but that there may be scope to alter how we manage the work within the FC, and it is this that they wish to examine.

Hazel advised that the communication meetings at conservancies had been put on hold after some were held at which staff did not feel there was anything to discuss. She expressed concern that this was due to a lack of information provided for staff on SRDP. Hazel said that she would be attending the Scotland Conservancy Staff Council in February at which she would raise concerns.

16. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 23rd and 24th June 2009 in Silvan House.