



**MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT SILVAN HOUSE ON THE 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2009**

**Present:** Mary Irvine  
Allan MacKenzie  
Sam Telford  
Steve Holdsworth  
Malcolm Crosby  
Antony Griffiths  
David Gibson  
Jim O'Neill  
Jon Bates  
Joanne McAuley  
Danny Williamson

**Minute Secretary:** Sam Telford

**Apologies:** Amanda Snell, Andy Best, Hazel MacLean, Kenneth Knott.

**1. President's Introduction**

Mary welcomed the Group and thanked everyone for attending. Mary felt that the slightly shorter than usual agenda will allow the discussions to more be focussed on taking action on the key issues. The Group concurred.

**2. Minutes of the meetings of 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

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

**3. Matters Arising**

**3.1 Hardship Funds**

Allan said that the Group need to look at what is happening outside the FC and the effect that it will have on members and they have to lead the culture change in advising that there will come a time soon when members will need to take industrial action. Allan felt that having a hardship fund in place will allow members to see that the GEC is prepared to take action and help to raise the profile of the campaign.

Steve said that on further investigation on some of the more established groups within PCS and their hardship funds, communication and security of the process were the more important issues to consider when setting up an account. Steve suggested that applications to the hardship fund by any member are done in two stages. Firstly, proof that they took the industrial action which would be authorised by a Branch officer. The application would then go back to the member who would explain their circumstances and why they should receive payment and finally it would go to the GEC for approval.

Steve raised the question of funding and advised that funds could not be transferred from existing accounts therefore there would have to be some form of fundraising. The GEC discussed the possibility of levying members and agreed that £2 per member would provide sufficient funding however there would be flexibility allowing members to pay more if they wish. Mary said this would be discussed further with group officers following the meeting.

**Action Required**

**4. Financial Report**

Steve gave a report on expenditure for the Group's activities in 2009.

## 5. Motions from Group Conference 2009

### Section 1: Pay and Grading

#### Motion A5 - Remitted

*The GEC were asked to carry out a survey of all staff on the status of operational pay at the 2008 Group Conference. The GEC were to analyse responses and put forward recommendations in time to debate the issue at the 2009 conference.*

*If no progress has been made, then the GEC is again instructed to 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 2010 AGMs.*

Allan advised that Sue would be sending out the draft questions for the survey.

**Action Required: Sue Gillingwater**

### Section 2: FC Policy and Values

#### Motion A8 - Carried

*The conference would like statistics on staff interchanges to be reviewed . The GEC is therefore asked to gain and compare statistics on staff interchange between the comparative FC management units eg Forest Districts and Conservancy and Business units such as Forest research. These results to be published via appropriate mechanism.*

Allan said that he would approach HR to ask for statistics and ask for an update on the People Strategy as it is the key document that outlines what staff do, how we deal with staff and how changes will take place.

**Action Required: Allan MacKenzie**

#### Motion A10 - Carried

*This conference regrets the FC's loss of status within the media and wider public as the leading voice in tree and woodland issues, therefore we instruct the GEC to demand that the FC at a GB level work to re-establish its position especially with regards to NGOs and other Government departments.*

Allan said that he would be submitting a paper to the Departmental Staff Council in November through the Departmental Committee. It was agreed that Jon would provide content for the paper.

**Action Required: Jon Bates, Allan MacKenzie**

#### Motion A13 - Carried

*Asset sales are a major concern for England members where the current targets for disposals is higher now than it ever was under the conservatives. Where previous sales have been to balance the books the last round was clearly to contribute directly to shortfalls within DEFRA's own budget . The disposals programme is not achievable or sustainable and should only be used as an option for reinvestment within that Region.*

*There is no clear strategy for these disposals and it is clear that more work needs to be done by the TUS to raise the profile of this programme. The GEC is therefore instructed to create a publicity/ media campaign centred around a GB strategy to save our public forest estate, building on the work carried out most recently in Scotland over the Scottish Climate Change Bill. Such a strategy, along with a plan for the associated campaign, should be agreed by the GEC before the next round of Branch AGM's in Feb/ Mar 2010.*

Steve advised that the issue of asset sales had been taken forward by FCTU England and would be discussed under agenda item 11.

#### Motion A16 – Composited with A14

*The conference is concerned that in the current Scottish FD review implementation process that a number of staff complement discussions are taking place, this is resulting in a reduction in staff from the numbers in place before the review. We were assured that no staff reductions would take place as a result of the review. The GEC is requested to confirm that the staffing level/complements are not the remit of local implementation groups to decide, and ensure that these post numbers should remain open until filled, preferably within the next six months.*

Malcolm said that the District Review was not about reducing numbers and that any staff reductions will be due to funding difficulties and not the review. He felt that the motion should not have been composited with A14 and agreed that he would clarify this in the next newsletter. It was agreed that any further issues would be taken to the GEC. It was noted that Kenneth had raised some issues and Mary said she would contact him for further information and discussion.

**Action Required: Malcolm Crosby, Mary Irvine**

### **Section 3: Terms and Conditions**

#### Motion A17 - Remitted

*The GEC was asked to look at adding to the 2008 pay bargaining, a special disturbance allowance for those low paid staff who are required to work away from home on a regular basis. This would be an extra allowance to baseline salary in specific circumstances.*

*If no progress has been made, then the GEC is instructed to look at adding this to the next pay bargaining round.*

Allan advised that there was no consistent approach on disturbance allowances within the DEFRA family.

Mary said that she would be meeting with Director HR to discuss this and would report back.

**Action Required: Mary Irvine**

### **Section 4: Union Policy and Values**

#### Motion A19 - Carried

*This conference recognises the excellent work being carried out on a daily basis by local reps within the Forestry Commission. The large increase in the number of personal cases means that reps have become more and more involved with the problems staff face in their daily working lives.*

*The GEC is therefore instructed to:*

- 1. Review how personal casework is delivered at branch and group level.*
- 2. Put in place a comprehensive personal casework training programme to increase numbers of union reps who feel confident in handling cases at branch level.*
- 3. To appoint a GEC personal casework co-ordinator.*

Mary thanked the Group for the recent feedback indicating that they would like to be trained on dealing with personal cases. Mary had contacted PCS to establish if it would be possible to set up a two day course relevant to the FC that could be tagged onto two GEC meetings and would notify the reps of the outcome. Danny confirmed that it would be funded by PCS and not through the Group account.

### **Additional Motions**

#### Motion A20 - Carried

*Approximately one in seven couples in the UK undertakes some kind of fertility treatment. Currently the Forestry Commission does not provide any paid time off for fertility treatment or for investigative procedures which may lead to fertility treatment.*

*The World Health Organisation defines health "as a physical, mental and social issue not simply related to disease and infirmity", it is now widely accepted that infertility is a health issue.*

*Using this information conference instructs the GEC to enter into negotiations with the Forestry Commission during 2009 to obtain the element of paid leave for members of staff undergoing fertility treatment; this motion suggests at least 10 days as a fair period of time.*

Motion A21 - Carried

*This conference is concerned that Fostering is not included in any of the "Family Friendly Policies" currently available in the Forestry Commission. It is believed that fostering is seen as short term whereas; adoption is seen as a permanent arrangement and has attracted the necessary legislation. Fostering can be a very demanding role, requiring regular attendance at meetings and training sessions.*

*Therefore the conference calls upon the FC to recognise the importance of fostering and the need to grant additional paid leave to a member of staff registered as a foster carer and instruct the GEC to enter into negotiations in 2009 with the FC to obtain this outcome.*

Allan said that he would discuss the issues in motion A20 and A21 with Director HR.

**Action Required: Allan MacKenzie**

Motion A22 - Carried

*Open plan working and hot-desking have for many become the accepted way of undertaking their day to day work in the FC. Conference instructs the GEC to compile evidence during 2009 that ascertains;*

- *how many members of staff are working in an open plan regime*
- *how many members of staff are hot-desking as a normal consequence of their job*

*Further to this staff should be questioned on what they find good and bad about these working practices and ask for suggestions for change.*

*Once the evidence has been gathered and analysed then members of the GEC should discuss with the FC their findings and where appropriate resolve particular issues emanating from the survey.*

The Group agreed that a survey would be created to gather feedback from members. It was noted that Mary, Allan and Sam would work on this and aim to release the survey in November.

**Action Required: Allan MacKenzie, Mary Irvine, Sam Telford**

**6. Group Conference 2010**

Mary confirmed that the 2010 Group Conference would be held on 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> May. It was agreed if the 2009 rates could be matched it would be held at the Ramada Fairfield Manor in York.

The GEC discussed the format of the conference it was noted that feedback from the 2009 Conference indicated that delegates preferred the motions only based conference. The Group however agreed that the motions process needs to be properly formalised, with training for delegates being provided in the afternoon before the conference. It was further agreed that the GEC would meet in the morning of the first day to form a position on each motion. Also, the Standing Orders Committee would be invited to the February GEC meeting to discuss the format.

It was noted that possible guest speakers would be Jean Lindsay, James Pendlebury, the new Chairman, Janice Godrich and Michael Ansell, and invites would be sent out in due course.

**7. Recruitment**

Mary advised that the FCTU Departmental Committee were arranging a meeting with organisers from the national unions and would be forming a recruitment drive across GB.

Allan referred to the mapping data paper that Sue had prepared for the meeting. The GEC were concerned with the overall union membership density and recognised the importance of increasing recruitment.

Allan said that Director HR would be issuing a joint statement from management and FCTU in Slasher, highlighting why being in a union is important.

## 8. Facility Time

Mary advised that the Group would be making contact with all PCS reps to determine what the activity levels are, how much facility time is being used what effect it is having. Allan added that within certain agencies in DEFRA, there is a management perception that too much facility time is being used and felt that this is therefore this would be very useful information. Allan said that facility is the time that your normal job should be *reduced* by, not simply an add-on.

It was noted that Mary and Allan would be working on a template to go out to reps and that the 'Management of Trade Union Reps' booklet for managers would be revised.

## 9. Civil Service Compensation Scheme

Mary said that as the GEC will be aware, the Cabinet Office has published proposals for changes to the civil service compensation scheme (CSCS). The Group recognised that if implemented, the changes will leave many PCS members tens of thousands of pounds worse off in the event of voluntary or compulsory redundancy. Allan reported that the CCSU have now approached their lawyers to invoke a judicial review and that this would happen as soon as possible following the close of the consultation on 5<sup>th</sup> October. Allan said that 7441 members had copied PCS into their response to the consultation and that over 16000 in total had made response to the Cabinet Office. Allan added that the proposals were causing concern for members in the FC, particularly where redundancies were happening such as in Cambridge with the office closure. It was noted that there was a guarantee for Cambridge staff leaving after January 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 ensuring that the business rules already negotiated would be honoured; however there was still uncertainty for those leaving beyond 2011 for business continuity.

Allan said it was very important that people understand the dangers being faced in this and there will be instances in future where people will be asked to leave the FC on flexible terms, not compulsory receiving an *average* of two years pay. He said there was a great deal of uncertainty with the new proposals that the FCTU office and HR had received many enquiries. Allan stressed that the new scheme will also affect those looking to leave early with enhanced pensions.

Danny reported that the number of responses compared to other consultations done previously shows the scale of upset and anger among members throughout the Civil Service. He said this has also been expressed in the consultations meetings across GB and that the majority of members are prepared to take industrial action if necessary. Danny said that in August, the General Secretary had said that it had not been a genuine consultation and instead was a three months notice of change. He said however that the CCSU had met with Yvette Cooper MP who had told her officials that they must meet with the trade unions at the end of the consultation, that was not part of the original plan and this was believed to have been due to pressure from the campaign and responses to the consultation. Danny said that the legal advice given to PCS indicated that they had a good case to defend those already working in the Civil Service (but not necessarily for new recruits), and that the Government should find it difficult to take away people's accrued rights. Danny felt it was important that members realise that after the next election there will undoubtedly be a cull of the Civil Service and the Government will very likely target pensions once again. He said that both parties will be watching the campaign against the CSCS proposals very closely to see how much of a fight members are willing to put up and they will take solace if there is no resistance from the trade unions.

Danny advised that the NEC will be meeting following the close of the consultation and will come to a view on the next stage of the campaign and will keep members informed.

## 10. England Reviews

Allan reported that the consultation for the Public Forest Estate Study ended on 28<sup>th</sup> September and that FCTU England's response was available on the FCTU website.

Allan said that the England Staff Council had met on 1<sup>st</sup> October and Allan gave an update on the Operational Efficiency Programme and said that members were being kept informed via the FCTU Website.

Allan said that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Period of Reflection meeting for the Cambridge Office closure confirmed that a further member had agreed to acquiesce and one member had secured another role within the wider civil service. He said the meeting therefore focussed on identifying actions to support

the remaining two staff seeking redeployment and this included discussing potential options with other civil service employers and the identifying support available from HR.

Allan advised that FCTU England were in discussions with management over asset sales and had raised concerns at the England Staff Council.

**11. Group Constitution Review (SOC)**

Allan advised that the current Group Constitution held no information on the Standing Orders Committee and they had therefore been following the National Constitution. Following discussion it was agreed that it would be amended to include this and it was noted that SOC members would stand for one year. An amended draft would be circulated to the GEC by e-mail for comment.

**Action Required: Mary Irvine, Allan MacKenzie, Danny Williamson**

**12. NEC Liaison Officer**

Kevin Greenway was unable to attend therefore the item was not discussed.

**13. Group Newsletter**

It was agreed that the next newsletter would include articles on recruitment and the Scotland Operations Review.

**14. Any Other Competent Business**

14.1 National Women's Forum

Joanne reported that some other departments within the wider Civil Service had withdrawn childcare vouchers for efficiency savings and felt that the Group should be aware as despite the largely unpopular FC Choices scheme, there was a considerable uptake on childcare vouchers.

14.2 FCTU Political Agenda

In response to a question from Jim, Allan advised that the FCTU would be seeking meetings with future Environment Ministers and said that they already had a current dialogue with Roseanna Cunningham MSP for Scotland issues. He added however that getting access to Ministers in Westminster and the Welsh Assembly can be difficult and it is something that FCTU would be working on.

**15. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2010 in Silvan House.