



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT SILVAN HOUSE ON THE 2 & 3 FEBRUARY 2010

Present: Mary Irvine
Allan MacKenzie
Steve Holdsworth
Malcolm Crosby
Antony Griffiths
Jim O'Neill
Jon Bates
Joanne McAuley
Hazel MacLean
Alan Brown (NEC – item 7)

Minute Secretary: Sam Telford

Apologies: Amanda Snell, Andy Best, David Gibson

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 6 & 7 October 2009

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

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Hardship Funds

Following discussion, it was noted that Steve would draft a letter to go out to all members to introduce the idea the provide information on how to contribute.

Action Required

3.2 Recruitment

The group discussed problems with the recruitment process within the union and it was agreed that issued would be raised with the Full Time Officer.

Action Required: Sam Telford

4. Financial Report

Steve gave a report on the breakdown of expenditure over the year. He advised that the group was well within budget in 2009 and that whilst they had done well to stay within the limit for 2009, they will likely not be able to carry forward the same amount for 2010. Steve said that the main reasons for the under spend were not having a Group Organising Meeting in November and a reduction of Group Officer expenses. He said however that he would endeavour to maintain the current budget into 2010.

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.

Mary referred to the draft survey questions and the group discussed and agreed the necessary amendments. It was noted that Mary would discuss this with Sue Gillingwater.

Action Required: Mary Irvine

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 the People Strategy was up for review and that he had been invited to a HR Management Board meeting to engage in a discussion on how to build interchange in the different aspects of the FC and that he would hopefully be able to report back at Conference 2010.

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 a paper ([available here](#)) was put forward to the Departmental Staff Council. From the minutes:

Mr MacKenzie introduced his paper by saying that he felt that, while we were good at communicating internationally, we were not so good at a national level. In Britain, we were not the first call for the media on forestry matters. Responding, Mr Rollinson said that the FC was not as good at communicating as we would like to be. We were good at a local and a regional level but not good at a national level. He said we were putting some effort towards remedying this and had just appointed a communications person in England with a campaigning background. He was impressed by the fact that 150 people had applied for this post and this showed we were recognised amongst professionals as being good and doing good things. This reflected public opinion surveys which showed that we are highly regarded as a responsible organisation.

Allan said that the sometimes it is difficult to be approached for a view on forestry because it is a Government department. He added however that internationally, the FC have an unparalleled reputation in forestry issues and is seen as a big player in international forestry terms. Allan felt that locally, the FC does get a reasonable amount of coverage on local issues but tend to fail on a national level and said that management were very aware of this but with the Government status may always face difficulties.

Discharged

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.

Following discussion it was agreed that the GEC were unable to act on this issue, however Allan said it should be discussed at the upcoming FC Scotland Communication meetings where staff

can put forward their own questions to management regarding their concerns. The GEC agreed that local reps need to be encouraged to approach their Area Committee on these issues also.

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 of disturbance allowances existed within the DEFRA family. It was agreed that this would be deferred until the HMT review of expenses was completed and Allan said the FCTU would then enter negotiations with the FC. Allan said the CCSU have stated that the draft report of the review had been worrying, however it had been subsequently considered by permanent secretaries and a less severe way forward has been identified. It was noted that all departments will be required to look at their T&S systems to ensure that all opportunities for cost saving is explored and that they meet business needs.

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.*

Following discussion it was noted that Mary would be writing out to those attending the personal case training asking for available dates.

Action Required: Mary Irvine

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.

Allan advised as part of the People Strategy review, the absence policy was being reviewed and that Director HR has asked the policy team to consider adopting the provision of paid time off for fertility treatment.

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 he had discussed this with HR, who had agreed that fostering plays an important role in society, however as the FC is a business and the obligation for managers to grant additional leave on short notice will place additional pressure on resources and could pose problems in delivering services and operations. HR had stated that the FC recognises the demands placed on staff who have dependants and this is why they offer a range of flexible working options to help staff achieve a healthy work/life balance. Furthermore, the additional paternity leave entitlements which go live in April, following the new legislation being introduced could place a significant strain on the FC's resources which the HR Policy Team will be considering and dealing with in their 2010 work plan. HR said that there is a raft of family legislation currently ongoing and therefore believe that they should hold off from making any legislative change in respect of fostering before taking any action and confirmed they would not be taking this forward at this moment in time.

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 GEC agreed that feedback would be gathered via the FCTU Website and Sam said that he would post an article, asking members to submit their views.

Action Required: Sam Telford

6. Group Conference 2010

Mary gave an overview of the Annual Group Delegate Conference, which would be held on 12 and 13 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 5th March and Mary asked the group to ensure that branches are aware of the deadline.

Sam said that guest speaker invites would be going to Janice Godrich, Jean Lindsay, James Pendlebury, Simon Hodge and Pam Warhurst.

Joanne advised that a motion would be put forward for Distinguished Life Membership for long serving members Steve Osborne and Dick Gossling, and that they would be invited to Conference to receive this award.

7. Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS)

The group welcomed Alan Brown from the PCS NEC to give an update on the CSCS.

Alan said that the ballot, which would run between 4 and 25 February, follows the insistence of the Cabinet Office to proceed with making unilateral changes to the redundancy terms of civil and

public servants. He stressed that the changes will see staff robbed of up to a third of their entitlements if they are forced out of their jobs and will lead to the government cutting jobs on the cheap and that the government is looking to save £500 million through these changes, based on the number of jobs it has axed over the last three years. Alan said that PCS fear the cuts to the scheme could lead to the government cutting up to 100,000 jobs on the cheap. He reported that PCS would be lodging papers for a judicial review, arguing that the changes need to be implemented through agreement with the union rather than imposed.

Alan said that the other five other unions - Prospect, the FDA, GMB, Unite and Prison Officers' Association –, that along with PCS form the Council of Civil Service Unions (CSSU), all agreed to a revised deal on Tuesday 2nd February. However, it was noted that together, those unions represent around 100,000 civil service workers against the PCS' 270,000; that they had not balloted their members and that it is PCS who has continued to listen to its members and is going to continue the fight for them. Alan went on to add:

- The campaign has already resulted in 4,000 letters sent to MPs, 18,000 responses to the Cabinet Office consultation and 35,000 PCS members attended PCS briefings on the topic.
- PCS has also received phenomenal support from MPs, with more than 100 from across the main political parties signing up to a motion expressing deep concern about the Government's unilateral changes. The motion, supported by 105 MPs including former ministers, urges the government to re-examine the 'disappointing and unfair proposals'.
- The union is going ahead with the legal challenge, that was originally to be mounted as a civil service joint union challenge by calling for a judicial review over the changes.

Finally, Alan said that an active union deserves our support and that all members should be encouraged to use their ballot paper now to vote 'Yes'.

8. Asset Sales

The GEC held a confidential discussion on Asset Sales across GB.

9. Mandatory Retirement Age

Mary said that the new Retirement Policy & Procedure would be released in March, following the extensive consultation with the FCTU.

Allan referred to the update on the [FCTU Website](#), and added that from many of the discussions with the unions on this topic, there seems to be reluctance from members to discuss retirement with their managers during PMS reviews and that the unions need to break this barrier. Allan said there also should not be a fear placed on members in talking about retirement and open and honest dialogue should be encouraged. He felt the key is ensuring that members' interests are protected as much as possible when they come to thinking about retirement, so they are not forced into retirement or even prevented from retiring.

10. Discipline Policy & Procedure

Mary advised that HR would be carrying out a post-implementation review and referred to the covering email sent to GEC members prior to the meeting. Mary said the FCTU were concerned that managers have not been properly trained to deal with disciplinary cases and felt that the union needs to keep a watching brief to ensure that the policy is being adhered to and that it is not solely up to the managers' interpretation.

Allan said that the managing discipline policy and procedure is agreed with the FCTU with the caveat that it was reviewed at this point. He said that as long as every manager is following the procedure then everyone should be treated the same. Allan said he had been working closely with HR over the past few months looking to resolve many issues arising from incidents being taken to disciplinary action when they should not be.

11. Staff Survey

Allan advised that the FCTU Office was in the process of analysing the results from the staff survey and findings would be presented to the Departmental Committee in due course.

12. Any Other Competent Business

12.1 Venison

Hazel advised that many staff used to buy venison from the FC and expressed concern with the heavily increased cost of and use of health and hygiene regulations. Following discussion it was agreed that Allan would discuss the potential implementation of venison into the benefits package with HR.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

13. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 22 & 23 June 2010 in Silvan House.