

## **Minutes of Prospect BEC meeting 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006, Silvan House.**

Present:

Keith Miller (KM)

Glenn Brearley (GB)

Andy Stewart (AS)

Lorraine Adams (LA)

Jim Henderson (JH) SOC Chair

Claire Johnston CJ

Edward Shephard (ES) to attend at 11am for a brief time

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Tony Cousins, Ian Kirk and Glen Dobson.

Marcus Sangster was absent and the meeting chaired by LA. Due to various time constraints and input by ES some agenda items were discussed and hence minuted out of order.

### **2. Minutes of the Previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> May were accepted by all and signed by KM.

### **3. Matters Arising**

#### **3.1 Bullying**

This matter was not discussed, it was thought that we might bring this up with Edward on his arrival but there was no time. LA to email ES to follow this up so that the matter might be discharged or deferred until next time.

**Action LA**

#### **3.2 Travel and Subsistence**

Report from MS after raising these issues at Core Group is deferred until next meeting.

**Action MS**

#### **3.3 Membership/Distribution lists**

All agreed that the distribution lists set up by IK were excellent, could all BEC check their local lists and report back to Ian regarding changes in staff etc. It was raised that members of other groups be included on the distribution lists eg the staff councils and NOC to keep them informed of wider activities. IK to consider the suggestion and implement as necessary.

**Action IK**

Following a previous suggestion from TC it was suggested that Prospect advertise a local rep on all FC Union notice boards so that members would have a local contact point. Proformas were sent in a recent copy of Report however if proformas were required then Stephanie So in charge of membership at Chertsey should be contacted on 01932 577022.

**Action All**

CJ asked whether we now had a full compliment of reps or whether we needed to look for further volunteers for any posts. We currently do not have a learning rep however AS thought that ES was now a combined learning rep for all the FC unions. But there was confusion over the exact role of a learning rep. CJ to send information

to LA for distribution and mentioned that there is a budget for training and the possibility of a mini conference to bring learning reps together.

**Action CJ / LA**

### **3.4 FR Climate Change Project Leader**

GB drafted a letter to Ken Charles which was proof read by MS but there had been no response from Ken. The letter was sent via email, however KM queried whether the letter had been sent as he did not remember seeing it. GB said that he had not been able to find the email he sent but assumed that it had been sent. LA to check all her archived email and then the letter could be resent if necessary. LA suggested that it could be due to the collective BEC "signing" of the letter, as Ken has shown of late that he prefers to know who actually drafted any union letters directed to management.

In all this it is important to remember that we are asking for openness from management on the post filling procedure rather than "changing the goal posts" by stealth.

ES joined the meeting at this point and said that he had previously suggested to Ian Tubby (secretary of FR NOC) to draw up an agreement with FR management that they see all a copy of proposals for post filling of both newly created and vacated posts. A copy of a similar agreement to this can be obtained from FC England who already have a working agreement of this type, therefore it would not be a trend setting exercise.

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### **Feedback from Edward on recent FCTU activities.**

#### **FC Choices**

We are currently locked into the FC Choices programme for 3 years so there is to be no change in that however the TU side had been approached and asked for their help to make the system work, but do we actually want to be involved in something so unfavourably seen amongst staff. The situation was discussed and it was decided to continue to monitor the programme before offering any help.

LA suggested that management use the format of a feedback survey to ascertain what colleagues actually wanted from a scheme such as this, rather than continually shooting in the dark.

GB said that he had in fact been contacted by HR to take part in a randomised feedback operation in regard to FC Choices but how large and randomised this procedure was is unknown. However it was agreed by all that having the system amalgamated with our holidays and pensions was unacceptable.

#### **Relationships within HR**

Feedback was requested by BEC on the situation in HR discussion that followed here has been maintained as confidential.

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## **6. Pay 2006**

The pay claim for this year has been received by ministers some weeks ago, the Scottish minister has agreed to the proposal but Ministers for England and Wales

have still to respond. The treasury is looking at the claims very stringently this year and are clearing claims in batches rather than individually. Some provisional meeting dates have been set up and it is hoped that there may be some news in time for these dates.

#### **8. Organising and recruitment**

CJ asked that all BEC and members inform Claire via IK what courses they have attended and what training is desired. Paul Casey is now employed at Prospect as Education officer and Rachel Bennett is working with Union Learning Reps. They are putting together modular training, CJ will send IK a list of what courses are available. There are currently 3 scheduled, "Getting Started", "Age Discrimination" and "Handling Personal Cases 1 and 2". Helen Riddit has temporarily replaced Eddie Coppinger as Health and safety officer.

There is a list of course available to reps on the website and more still on the TUC website. "Getting Started" is a taster course to encourage and educate members to participate with their time. New members of staff are given a talk on Union membership during the New Entrants Course which ES regularly attends, perhaps a more Prospect orientated presence at these courses may be required? Alternatively Staff change notifications are available to all staff on the intranet therefore a welcoming letter could be designed to send along with a joining pack to all new staff as appropriate. LA to look into this with CJ further.

**Action CJ / LA**

#### **4. TUS Organisation**

ES would like the membership of all the unions centralised so that he has access to everyone's information and as a mapping exercised so that specific areas can be targeted. Not only does this have data protection issues but this could lead to members migrating to other unions. There is enough cross communications to be efficient and central Prospect have said that this must not happen.

#### **5. Alice Holt Site Review**

This was discussed on 7<sup>th</sup> July at an FR NOC meeting and was attended by ES. It was decided that a letter would be drafted from the FR NOC to Jim Lynch and Tim Rollison requesting the feedback as promised early summer and stating the views of the NOC regarding the appalling way in which staff have been treated during this unsettling period.

The Alice Holt Staff council is not meeting at the moment due to the lack of a Chair person as such there is no guaranteed forum for dialogue between TU and Senior management. LA said that she would try to chivvy along the FR NOC Chair and Secretary to push this forward more quickly.

**Action LA**

#### **7. Reports from recent meetings**

The minutes from all recent meetings are all available on the intranet however a brief account of the subject discussed are as follows:

##### **Forestry Commission Trade Union meeting (FCTU):**

GIS posts – JEGS and re-grading

Future of the FC and splitting into the separate countries

Future of AH

Pay

Membership mapping

Travel and subsistence

FC Choices – taken up by 128 people and currently under a 3 year contract.

Health and safety – accidents resulting from mountain bikes and the responsibility of the up keep of trails.

Age discrimination – new legislation coming in to force.

Graduate Recruitment Programme – only includes the recruitment of 1 or 2 individuals.

**Departmental Staff Council:**

Forest Holidays is now up and running

Alice Holt development – no news, awaiting the FR framework document due around Christmas.

Director General – giving talks on the direction of FC for the future.

BIP – is now closed but the Efficiency Programme is now up and running.

Health and safety – the number of accidents is low but consistent.

Lone working - the coverage for mobile phones is as good as it is going to be for the foreseeable future therefore staff should be aware where there is and isn't coverage when they are lone working.

Smoking at work – new legislation is in force in Scotland but is yet to come in to force in England and Wales.

Pay – unions still in dispute with management over 2005 but it is hoped that 2006 will be better.

FC Choices – Management are pleased with the overall performance of the scheme.

**10. Retirement Age**

All staff now have the right to go to 65. Severance packages currently include the making up of a pension to the value of an additional 6 2/3 years to age will this now increase to age 65? JH believes that this will still apply to those requiring the extra years to make up their full 39 years of reckonable service. It was questioned whether the pension scheme should be based on the average salary so that those continuing past 60 but with out the drive for their current position could have a winding down/handing over period.

Various proposals have been discussed in the recent pension talks including changing from 60ths to 80ths and limiting contributions to 20%, changing lump sum payments and the amount that is left to dependents. However it must be remembered that although current pension rights have been properly negotiated the government and the chancellor can suddenly and unilaterally change the civil service pension scheme.

**11. BEC membership and conference dates for your diary**

AS, GB, TC, IK SB and LA are all happy to stand again. KM has said that he is happy to vacate the position of Treasurer to allow the recruitment of an alternative volunteer but is happy to continue if the position is left empty.

JH is happy to remain as Chair of the Standing Orders Committee and will check with Barry Gardiner and Isobel Cameron. LA to Check with MS re his position.

**ADC 2006 Timetable:**

16<sup>th</sup> October 2005: Notification to members of the dates for ADC 2006, requests for delegates and requests for motions.

12<sup>th</sup> December 2005: Cut off date for motions.

9<sup>th</sup> January 2006: Finalisation of the agenda.

**AOB**

KM has to put in a request to Prospect for the 2006 budget. TC has requested a 3% inflationary increase of compared to this year's budget of £8,930 which takes the request to £9,200. JH said that there may be additional costs for the Branch next year in the form of a pension conference and a special Civil service conference separate from National conference even though the motion regarding this at last

national conference fell. KM said that additional money had been requested last year because we were in dispute over pay so this and the inflationary increase requested should cover both these events should they happen.

**Next Meeting to held Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February before ADC 2006.**