

**Minutes of the Alice Holt Staff Council meeting  
held on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2004 in the  
Video Conference Room**

**Present:**

**Local Management**

Dr. P Freer-Smith (*Chairman*)  
Mr K Charles  
Mr A Davies (*Secretary*)

**Trade Union**

Ms T Houston (*Vice Chair – Prospect*)  
Mr D Durrant (*PCS - outgoing*)  
Mrs S Stephens (*PCS*)  
Mr R Cobb (*PCS*)  
Mr N Fielding (*Prospect*)  
Mr S Coventry (*T&G*)  
Mr J Awdry (*T&G*)

The meeting opened at 10:20am

Dr. Freer-Smith welcomed everybody and especially Anthea McRiley who was attending as an observer and a prospective representative of 'Prospect' on this Committee.

- 1) No apologies were received
- 2) The Minutes of the last meeting (**28/04/03**) were agreed.

Two points were raised:

- a) PFS proposed and it was agreed that the label of 'sides' be abolished and that the 'Official Side' be known as 'Local Management'

**Action: Secretary**

- b) DD drew attention to the fact that there had not been a local Staff Council meeting since April '03 but that local issues were raised at Joint Staff Council Meetings

**Noted**

- 3) Matters arising from the Minutes (28/04/03):
  - a) Para 2a. **FR's internal working group reports.**  
KC has sent e-mail to all staff alerting them of publication of these reports on the Intranet.

**Discharged**

b) Para 2c. **HOB Communications.**

The position has been resolved with the appointment of Dr Xanthe Christophers.

**Discharged**

c) Para 2d. **Staff awareness of tests for research promotions.**

KC sent e-mail to all staff reminding them of the two tests.

**Discharged**

d) Para 2e. **Smoker's Shelter.**

The general consensus amongst the members was that there should be some smokers to act as representative for this item

KC raised the issue of whether smokers should clock-out for their smoking breaks.

DD suggested that the respective line managers should control this

Both items shall remain on agenda for further discussion

P F-S and KC raised the fact that official assistance is still available for smokers who wish to quit.

e) Para 2f. **FDR – FR Quinquennial review**

An e-mail was sent to staff to alert them to these documents

**Discharged**

f) Para 2h. **Gents toilets.**

The extractor fans on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and the cleaning regime have been checked and appear satisfactory. Staff should let Mike Wheeler know if they have any complaints.

**Discharged**

g) Para 2k. **Educational outing.**

SS reported that a very successful educational outing was held this year

P F-S suggested that it should be held again next year and would leave it to Shirley Stephens and Janet Lacey to liase.

**Action: Shirley Stephens**

h) Para 3. **Progress on the new culture in the organisation**

FR has successfully passed the recent liP review. AMcR reported in her capacity as FR's 'Connect' representative that it was planned to hold another Staff Survey next Spring

**Noted**

i) Para 4. **Car Parking for visitors and parking around the lodge**

Parking bays in the visitors' car park have been re-marked.

**Discharged**

j) Para 5. **Programme for TSU Review.**

P F-S reported that the two units had now been merged and that a TSU strategy for the new unit is being produced. A TSU-wide meeting had been held by the new Unit Head and that a paper was being presented to the December meeting of Forest research Executive Board [FREB] by the new Head. P F-S had requested figures from Heads of Divisions about their intended TSU usage in order to assist TSU in producing their Business Plan.

TH and DD pointed out that it is difficult to predict TSU usage due to the delay in letting HoDs know what their funding would be for the coming year and the nature of the work carried out as demand varies so inconsistently. TH also pointed out how the work cycle tends to increase in the latter parts of the working year.

P F-S acknowledged these difficulties and said that the workload existing at the beginning of the year would be adjusted to take account of increases that we knew, historically, were likely to happen later in the year.

**Noted**

k) Para 6a. **Staffing issue: - New Hydrologist post**

This item has been actioned and the post is now sited at Talybont.

**Discharged**

4) **Staff Welfare – KC**

KC raised two points under this item:

a) There shall be a continuation of the annual 'flu' jabs at the Alice Holt and the Northern Research Site with Fieldstation staff given the opportunity to receive 'flu' jabs from their local GP which we would pay for.

b) KC presented some figures that emphasised the positive results and the success of the trail run of the Skin-sense clinic.

KC and NF discussed the different possibilities, financial implications and locations for the clinic running for other members

of Forest Research working in Fieldstations who, statistically, could be most at risk. KC will consider arrangements for enabling access to the clinics by Fieldstation staff.

PFS suggested the idea of perhaps holding it annually in different locations to compensate its functionality effectively

**Action: KC**

5) **Out of hours working - TU**

TH highlighted the discrepancy over a recent weekend meeting, which highlighted discrepancies between the way staff members were paid overtime. Some received as either TOIL, overtime pay or flexi-time or a variety of all three. The TUS asked that there be some consistency.

A lengthy discussion ensued and a general consent was agreed that there needs to be a set procedure to ensure that staff are made fully aware of what their options and entitlements are for partaking in work outside of their contracted hours before the event takes place.

RC and NF reported that there had also been confusion about staff entitlements with regard to night working. This appears to have been resolved but KC offered to look at what was available to staff with the appropriate manager/TUS representative, should another period of night working be envisaged.

**Action: KC**

6) **Communications - TU**

TH pointed out that effective communications are essential to fully engage staff in the most recent news and events.

DD expressed his concern with the patchy/inconsistent communications from Heads of Division down to their staff and for important information to be available immediately to all staff. He also expressed a concern with the outstations being poorly communicated to creating barriers for effective communications.

P F-S agreed that good communications were vital to the efficient running of our organisation. He thought the FR Newsletter is well received and noted that the FREB minutes are now routinely placed on the Internet days after the event but thought that with the new Divisions becoming bigger, that this is an area where we could not afford to be complacent. He offered to speak to Divisional Heads about TUS concerns.

**Action: P F-S**

7) **Recruitment – TU**

TH raised the issue of staff feeling uncomfortable when applying for external vacancies. She proposed that if staff were given the option of

attaching their most recent PMS report to their application for an externally advertised vacancy, the Board would be better informed of all the facts. KC agreed with this proposal and likened it to a Board being in possession of employee references prior to the interview. This would be made available to staff as an option. TH also asked if Janet Lacey could issue a separate note to staff when we advertised a vacancy externally. KC thought that Janet did this already but would make enquiries and ensure that this was done.

**Action: KC**

8) **Reorganisation – TU**

There is likely to be another Staff Survey in April/May 2005. The TUS thought that management should do more to encourage staff to participate in the survey and it was agreed that the Chief Executive would be asked to speak to staff and encourage their participation. AMcR as our 'Connect' representative, agreed to talk to Bill MacLachlan about concerns about anonymity for staff when completing the form. She shall also ask Bill to seek the advice of a Senior Statistician about why 'location' is needed on the form to make it more difficult for information to be tracked back.

**Action: AMcR**

9) **PMS – TU**

DD raised the point that PMS reviews are ignored and not established for all staff. He pointed out that a job plan should be made annually for each employee even if it does change.

DD then proposed that the last page of each review could be sent to admin as an auditing process to ensure that everyone is being reviewed annually.

KC agreed with this, but proposed that only a sample should be collated in order to save time and increase efficiency. P F-S felt that this was most probably an issue throughout the whole Forestry Commission and will raise the issue at the next management meeting.

**Action: KC and P F-S**

10) **Maintenance – TU**

TH acknowledged the fact that there is no official way of reporting stock depletion for toilets. KC said that Reception is the first port of call and he will send an email reminding staff of the procedures.

**Action: KC**

11) Any other business

**Connect Bulletin – TU**

DD pointed out that there was no account number for the connect bulletin work in which allocated staff take time to script as it is left to divisional heads to fund it.

An account shall be generated for this process

**Action: KC**

**Workshops – TU**

TUS reported that staff were concerned about the continued existence of the Workshop should a member of the Workshop team retire. P F-S said this matter is being addressed as part of the TSU review and that part of this review will include Divisions being asked to forecast work that they would be commissioning from the Workshop.

**Action: P F-S**

**Site Review – TU**

P F-S stated that the Quinquennial review required us to review to consider the development of the Alice Holt site. He had little to report but the matter is discussed at the Commissioner's meeting, when we have feedback this will be relayed to staff.

**Surface of Path to Bentley Station**

TUS concerns about the surface of the path to Bentley Station were raised. A poorly constructed path spoils the first impression some visitors have of FR and can put staff at risk. KC reported that he is in discussion with the local FDM as the path belongs to the District and not FR. The FDM has been negotiating with the company presently re-surfacing the A325 and they have agreed to re-instate the path using planings that will be compacted. This work is likely to start in February.

**Action: KC**

12) Date of next meeting

The need and date for the next local meeting will be decided following the next address to staff by the Chief Executive at the next 'Joint' meeting in the Spring.

The Chairman thanked David Durrant for his constructive work on the TUS at the numerous meetings he had attended and wished him a long and happy retirement.

The meeting closed at 12:00pm