

MINUTES OF MEETING OF FORESTRY BUSINESS UNITS STAFF COUNCIL THURSDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2005 - MES HEAD OFFICE STIRLING

Trade Union Side

R Laird, GMB
J Brown, Prospect
A Stewart, Prospect, TUS Secretary
A Gillies, MES Balnacoul
B Hamilton, PCS
E Shephard, FCTU

Management Side

Craig Heaney, Chairman
J Livingston, MES
A Drake, FCE
D Taylor, Personnel

M Shearer, Secretary

Agenda Item 1: Introductions

Craig Heaney welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Edward Shephard for altering his schedule to allow him to attend. He advised the meeting that Alan Drake was attending in David Killer's absence.

Agenda Item 2: Apologies

Apologies received from Robert Beaney, Norrie Russell, Eric Williams and Mike Purvis. Being advised that Mike Purvis is still off work ill, those present recorded their best wishes for a speedy recovery and return.

Agenda Item 3: Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of 7 September 2004 were agreed as a true record.

Agenda Items 4: Matters Arising

There were no matters arising but it was agreed to go through the Minutes and provide an update on selected items.

a. Staff Development and Succession

Craig Heaney advised progressing well within the FBUs at different stages. Interestingly 50% of staff within his reporting line were content with the positions they currently held and this exercise had allowed a link to training requirement and succession. Margaret Shearer advised the meeting that following on from an agreement reached within the FBU Management Board, information on Basic Learning Skills would be introduced to each FBU work unit to provide staff the opportunity to take advantage of this package. Various training mediums were available through the Basic Learning information pack. Also Open University packs were being introduced to management units and staff would be equally encouraged to consider future development via this route. Querying whether FBUs had a map of the staff requirements for the next 2-3 years, Edward Shephard was advised that the succession planning and development page added to the previous year's PMS end of year report was the vehicle to be used to draw this together.

Mention was made of the successful FCE Foreman Course delivered, having identified the level of training required by this grade to undertake the job and manage the team. Other training currently ongoing was in EFin and POP, as within FC B1 order books would be withdrawn from 1 April 2005. The change is to achieve faster closing of End of Year accounts and improved quarterly reporting. Querying backup if the system failed, Alistair Gillies was advised that contingencies were being developed to respond to this. An increase in the number of holders of GPCs across the FC was expected.

b. Longman/Inverness-Smithton

Still on the drawing board with final costs being worked up between the architect and the project team. To be presented to C Heaney and H Insley; prior to any final decisions being taken the project must prove to be financially viable. J Livingston advised the aim was for completion in the next financial year. The financial appraisal required to be updated and C Heaney advised that he was keen to work to a fixed price solution.

Agenda Item 5: Business Briefing

Craig Heaney began his briefing by informing those present of the impressive working within Business Units and the teamwork and culture he observed when out and about.

Country requirements from BUs for the coming year: 3 key delivery requirements:

1. To hold FY2005/06 at the approved budget level.
2. To deliver 4% efficiency savings on the SR2004 period.
3. Realise the full potential of staff within FBUs to ensure a coordinated approach to Country challenges.

Specific points worth noting:

FE Scotland - Moving away from leased machinery to Capital. Reinstated £1.5 million of roads and reinstated additional vp plant requirement.

FE England - Business Plan commentary stated the "BU performance was transparent and making a major contribution to FEE performance."

FC Wales - Would be covered on the agenda but they were currently considering the options available to bridge the funding gap.

Moving forward it was unlikely that staff numbers would remain static. The key is to shape staff with the specialist knowledge and skills that adds more value than anyone else. Querying staff numbers across BUs over the next 2-3 years, Edward Shephard was advised that plans for the next 3 years in England and Scotland were stable, based on programmes. FCE had secured

additional work via windfarms and community/recreation work. MES had offset the ever-increasing fuel prices this year by obtaining improved procurement prices. Silvan House had published a £400k reduction for the coming year and savings from this would be distributed from the centre. SR2004-08 shows a slight increase but this would have to be brought back into line.

Andrew Stewart queried how staff could network with FD Managers and was concerned that there could be a hangover amongst staff left from the disagreement on how the Scottish Operational regrouping had been implemented. J Livingston advised that the new structure within Scotland lends itself to BU structure and is focused on operations which is preferable. A Drake had identified similar/shared objectives from the new structure although these may need to be realigned over the next 2-3 months. C Heaney advised that BUs networked at various levels and he felt that planning could always be improved across the FC. He was hopeful that the new structure in Scotland would assist in achieving this.

The meeting was advised of a report which would be produced by Richard Earle and Peter Weston to identify further specialist support opportunities.

Concluding, he advised of new FBU pamphlets which would be drawn together for the forthcoming RHS, taking into account forestry devolution and new working boundaries.

Agenda Item 6: Business Improvement Programme

Staff had been initially advised of this by EMail from Director General. The Programme has been expanded slightly to areas outwith Silvan House. Edward Shephard advised that the reasoning behind this was to form a view of where the business wishes to be in 5-6 years time. Staff needed to be able to input to the process and an Intranet site had been set up for this purpose. TUS were keen to input to the process also. It is important that services are benchmarked against the best in the public and private sector.

Agenda Item 7: PMS

A Stewart opened this item by advising that staff felt PMS does not engage them and many are unclear of how their FJP fits into the business programme. C Heaney advised that an audit of PMS was underway and it was agreed Margaret would copy out the Scope of the audit to TUS. There was agreement within TUS that the system is designed for mainstream forestry and admin. Roy Laird stated that mechanics etc feel the FJP is not a tool they could use to improve themselves or their unit. D Taylor advised that Fiona Wright and Bill Maclachlan were currently looking at a new system for 2006/07 and outlined some of the interesting points drawn from Defra's new

system. After a discussion on the current system and proposals for new, it was agreed that both TUS and FBUs saw the need to reinvigorate the PMS process and were happy to jointly endorse this.

ACTION: Secretary

Agenda Item 8: FC Wales

A Stewart stated that there were many rumours circulating about proposals for Wales and sought clarification on how these would affect BU staff. C Heaney advised that FBUs had submitted an initial BP (October 2004), based on the status quo programme; with like for like efficiency savings of £937k over the SR2004 period. Although acknowledging this effort, FCW are currently undertaking a review of activities and a proposed structure for FC Wales will be completed by July 2005. It should be noted it is inevitable we will see a reduction in FCW staff numbers. Scale and process not yet clear. There is not an automatic assumption that the private sector is best. There is no automatic assumption that DP and Fleet must exist. Where a BU is the best way of contributing to the new organisation goals and objectives, it is likely to remain. E Shephard advised that within Wales they were still working to identify the source of the deficit and drawing together a strategy for the Welsh Assembly. C Heaney advised that BUs deliver an in-house service that will not be beaten on cost or value. J Livingston advised that if the submitted FBU BP is accepted work will remain for existing staff for the coming year. A Stewart enquired where he would find information to assist the TUS in taking this forward and was advised that the BP provides this.

Agenda Item 9: Future of REB

A Stewart advised that staff in the unit were informed via a team meeting that their future had been subject of a discussion at the ITC Service Board. C Heaney advised that a draft paper had been drawn together by the ITCSB for the EB. The matter was then raised at the FBUSB who had agreed that there was no business case presented and referred the matter back to ITCSB to reconsider. In the interim period it had been clarified that mobile telephony was not a significant part of REB business. Currently J Livingston and A Mitchell were meeting to take this forward as part of the WAN upgrade. A tender is being drawn together for Mobile Computing and mobile telephony forms part of this. For the time being it had been agreed with A Mitchell that mobile phones would be retained within REB. J Livingston added that he believed there would always be a need for a radio network as mobile phone cover is not available in remote areas. Any move for REB had been ruled out until the new network develops and potentials and realised.

Agenda Item 10: Freedom of Information/ERMS

Craig Heaney advised that since 1 January 2005 Business Units had received a number of requests under the FOI. Within FBUs Information Managers were trained and in place. Above this level Iain Hampson undertook the

Information Adviser role and above that Colin Morton in Silvan House. Appeared to be working well.

Margaret Shearer advised of the progress made towards an Electronic Record Management System within Business Units. Scanning of all documents not electronically received was not required and it was proposed and agreed that FBUs would look at updating copiers to include scanning facilities only when they had reached their life end. Action agreed:

- a. Once the corporate (Top Level) file list is created, MES would fit their own structures underneath and Margaret would be undertaking some work to create consistency across FBUs.
- b. At a date to be agreed with all FBUs (dependent on a. above) existing paper files would be closed, file lists would be uploaded into ERMS and new paper files would be opened to mirror the computerised structure as and when required.
- c. On receipt of paper mail recipients should contact senders to request an electronic version.
- d. Paper files would continue to be retained with a marker placed on the ERMS folder that a paper document was the next in a folder's sequence.

Agenda Item 12: Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was agreed for 1100 hours on 22 September 2005.