

MINUTES OF MEETING OF FORESTRY BUSINESS UNITS STAFF COUNCIL THURSDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2006 - MES HEAD OFFICE STIRLING

Trade Union Side

A Gillies, GMB, TUS Vice Chair
N Russell, FCE
A Stewart, Prospect, TUS Secretary
B Hamilton, PCS
E Williams, T&G
R Laird, GMB
R Beaney, TUS

Management Side

Craig Heaney, Chairman
J Livingston, MES
D Killer, FCE

M Shearer, Secretary

Agenda Item 1: Introductions

Craig Heaney welcomed everyone to the meeting. Pleasing to see such a good turnout.

Agenda Item 2: Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from D Taylor, E Shephard, J Brown and M Purvis. As Edward and Robert were not official members of the FBUSC it was agreed that apologies from them were not required.

Agenda Item 3: Minutes of 22 September 2005.

Minutes were agreed a true record.

Agenda Item 4: Matters Arising

Page 2, Trawls - TUS had not been notified of a further trawl that had been issued within FBU, FCE Wales. It was agreed Secretary would send HR a reminder.

ACTION: Secretary

Page 3, TUS PMS Flyer - a draft of this was tabled at the meeting and it was agreed FBUSC members would provide feedback to A Stewart within 2-3 weeks. C Heaney was pleased to receive this and it was good to see everyone embracing the system. Regarding the Audit of PMS, mentioned at the last meeting, he advised that the issues arising would be built into the new HR Strategy. FBUSC thanked A Stewart for providing the draft. R Beaney was especially pleased that the draft gives out the message to individuals that they are the owners of their FJP but commented that TUS still had a difficulty with PMS being linked to pay. Remarking that the quality of FJP reports compared across the organisation were of a good standard a course had

been identified and was being introduced across FBUs. This would address any problem areas and compliment report writing standards.

ACTION: FBUSC

Page 5, Employee Opinion Survey - Agenda item. Querying whether the LSC had held a meeting in Wales, C Heaney was advised by E Williams that it had and the briefing given at this had been well received.

Agenda Item 5: Business Briefing (C Heaney)

All BU Heads had attended the FE England Operations meeting yesterday. These meetings take place across all 3 Countries and their purpose is to address Country specific operational issues. All very positive and joined up session.

The end of the financial year was only 6 weeks away and the outturn projected to Countries continued to show programme increases and efficiencies from FBU. With a £35.5 million spend, it was a considerable task to ensure this all balanced with projected forecast by the year end. Team working, which was always good within FBU, was especially essential at this time and all 3 unit's teams were working well. Other services within FC looked closely at the FBU model and how well it performed, indeed the recently appointed Procurement Officer had attended an FBUMB meeting with prior knowledge of the FBU's strong performance in this area.

Examples of added value from each activity. With the 26% rise in fuel MES have had to contend with, they have halved the cost to the FC through efficient working across a number of areas. All Country programmes for FCE have increased due to windblow, Scotland 'catchup', Wales, etc and they also had the addition of a large volume of non-SLA work in England. PSS - the levels of plants and stock required across FC now fully utilised all 3 Nurseries and the use of improved Sitka spruce continues to increase. All in all, strong examples of efficient working.

Continual awareness of what's going on within all parts of the FC and improvement from FBUs is vital to their future. C Heaney would be introducing a Business Wise paper in the coming months which would advise of the efficiencies being captured by FBUs and what they can deliver over the coming 3 years, linked to SR2007. He agreed that this would be copied to TUS.

ACTION: C Heaney

A further challenge, not just for FBUs but for the whole of FC, was to close all accounts by 28 April (2 months earlier than in past years). A considerable amount of work is required to achieve this deadline but all is progressing well. It was also agreed that J Livingston, J Morgan and D Killer would list the

challenges and targets ahead for 2006/07 from each of their BUs and copy this to TUS.

ACTION: J Livingston/D Killer/J Morgan

Communication: a second meeting with the DG was planned for 23 March in Dunkeld. The first meeting had taken place in Welshpool and a good turnout was recorded. Rather than link in with the meetings being held across GB, FBUs were keen to have all PBs involved in these discussions, hence the separate FBU meetings. N Russell advised that there was a bit of concern being raised about the purpose of these meetings and, considering the length of time since the DG announced the visits and the purpose, it was agreed that it would be useful for the Secretary to forward this information back out to FBU CCs prior to the 23 March meeting. All FBU staff would be encouraged to attend. Concluding the briefing, he advised that FBU brochures (set given to R Beaney) had been issued to all staff. Also, FBU website now published and receiving approximately 2000-3000 external hits per month. He advised that the FC EB was also looking at the FC brand at present and crystallising the FC story to show how this should be delivered at different levels.

ACTION: Secretary

Agenda Item 6: Update on FCE Repositioning

David Killer, Andrew Stewart and Edward Shephard had met on 29 September to discuss and agree changes to the document to be issued to both staff and TUS. Comments from staff were encouraged within the document. Meetings had now taken place in England and Scotland and most issues were resolved. The timescale for moving to one CC per Country and the repositioning of Alan Dickerson was April 2006. Staff recruitments etc, to bring levels up to that required within the new structure, were ongoing. N Russell expressed concern that the FTAs did not allow FCE to bring new blood into the organisation. Excellent candidates had applied but could not meet all the requirements of the FTA. D Killer was keen to promote within FCE where this was possible and fill vacancies at the lower level with trainees. Meeting discussed the difficulties in obtaining trainees in some parts of the country and also considered parallel working, although costly to the organisation, was perhaps a good vehicle to use. TUS and FBU all supported bringing trainees into the organisation and agreed BU Heads and N Russell should provide a paper with proposals. A Stewart proposed, and it was agreed, that it was timely for a fresh communication to be sent to staff updating them on the current position regarding FCE Repositioning. Also a fresh look at the staff workloads would be beneficial, especially in areas such as West Argyll and Cowal and Trossachs. It was agreed this would be tackled after end of year. C Heaney advised that developing staff skills across the FBUs by Further Education at local colleges was encouraging and that the Secretary would be drawing together this information across FBUs. Aim to have major Cost Centres make best use of their facilities.

ACTION: BU Heads/N Russell/Secretary

Agenda Item 7: Working at Heights

R Laird introduced this item, suggesting that an audit/health check of the equipment being used, especially ladders, across all BUs would be advisable. J Livingston had obtained feedback from MES managers on this. The legislation had been introduced in April 2005 and the only significant change to the previous legislation as it affects MES was the definition of 'work at height'. The main focus of the legislation is on the building trade. Training on working at heights had taken place at workshops where a need had been identified. As 'Duty Holders' managers assess the risks of working at heights and identify firstly if there is a need to work at height and if it cannot be avoided to ensure safe working practices and appropriate work equipment are used. No major concerns had been raised by Workshops or REB and they were generally happy with compliance. R Laird stated the main concern was overloading ladders. He asked if they are correctly rated and who checks this. J Livingston stated this would form part of the Risk Assessment but agreed to address the TUS concern and raise awareness across MES Cost Centres.

ACTION: J Livingston

Agenda Item 8: Employee Opinion Survey

TUS had received copies of the FBU report which is now available on the EConnect page. This site will provide an update from Departmental Heads across the FC on the Action Plans being developed/implemented. Individual Action Plans had been developed for all FBUs. FCE were addressing the results via EFQM, MES were holding meetings across GB and PSS had developed their own Action Plan. J Livingston was optimistic the GB meetings would drill down to the next level. Progress would be reported at the next FBUSC.

ACTION: BU Heads

Agenda Item 9: TUS NOC Meetings

J Livingston introduced this item. MES managers were becoming concerned at the costs involved. He had noted that the last 2 NOC meetings involved MES staff and FBU Staff Council issues; asked that due to the similarity of the FBUSC and NOC could these meetings not take place on the same day. R Beaney provided the background to the NOCs. They were introduced at Unification and did not deal with Staff Council issues alone, but addressed issues within their respective areas, local, national and H&S, etc. NOCs have the flexibility to hold meetings at times that best suit the location and they meet approximately 2-3 times each year. J Livingston thanked R Beaney for the background and it was agreed that Alistair, Chair of the BU NOC would discuss J Livingston's proposal at their next meeting.

ACTION: A Gillies

Agenda Item 10: Report Writing Training

J Livingston advised that this training course had been considered in the light of differing standards of reporting across the FBUs. The first course had run last week and he was impressed with how the course dealt with the issue. He asked TUS to support this initiative as it was important that the right people attended. E Williams thought that the need for report writing should be identified as part of FJP discussions and that reportees who were unhappy with the standard of their report should raise with ROs and COs. This item was concluded with a suggestion that it should be considered for inclusion in the TUS PMS draft flyer.

ACTION: All

Agenda Item 11: Any Other Relevant Business

a. Pay 2005

TUS stated that staff were unhappy and confused in relation to the imposition of the pay award and expressed their concern about how we motivated staff in the light of it. C Heaney acknowledged the increase went into January salaries and commenting on the ongoing dispute with HR, felt it was important not to let this influence the successful FBU culture.

b. BIP/BU Review

B Hamilton asked how staff would be kept informed re BU Review. C Heaney advised that progress of BIP could be followed via EConnect. BIP is now part of the wider Efficient Government Review and had been broken down into 4 Phases and workstreams; BUs became involved at Phase 3. He believes FBUs have a good track record on efficiency but the FC will continue to fully appraise different options to ensure overall value for money.

Agenda Item 12: Date of Next Meeting

28 September 2006, 1100 hours, Stirling.