

**MINUTES OF MEETING OF FORESTRY BUSINESS UNITS STAFF COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER 2007 - MES HEAD OFFICE STIRLING**

Trade Union Side

Alistair Gillies, GMB (TUS Chair)
Gavin Queen, Prospect
Lawrence Villa, T&G
Eric Williams, T&G
Jamie Brown, Prospect
Roy Laird, GMB
Bruce Hamilton, PCS (TUS Sec)

Management Side

Michael Ansell, Chair
Jeffrey Livingston, MES
David Killer, FCE

Mgt Shearer (Secretary)

Agenda Item 1: Introductions

MA welcomed everyone to the meeting. The meeting noted the sad loss of Ian Forshaw and recorded their appreciation for his contribution to the Forestry Commission.

Agenda Item 2: Apologies

Apologies received from M Reilly, N Russell and P Bulloch. TUS expressed disappointment that there continued to be no HR presence at the FBUSC. MS to raise with HR.

ACTION: MS

Agenda Item 3: Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of 1 March 2007 were agreed.

Agenda Item 4: Matters Arising

page 1 Qualifications for Mech and Civil Engineers on FC website. Still outstanding.

ACTION: HR

page 4 Employee Survey 2005. JL had now issued the feedback paper to MES staff and this will be followed-up.

ACTION: JL

page 4 MES Apprentices. JL reported that HR advice was that they were unaware of any discretion on the part of managers and that this has not happened elsewhere across the FC. JL stated there was discretion only on recruitment but not on promotion. RL asked why apprentices could not be recruited instead of promoted from FTAs and was advised that the issue was one of promotion therefore recruitment rules did not apply. TUS recorded their continuing disappointment.

page 4 Local Staff Council Meetings. GQ advised that the Welsh FCE LSC had met. No discussion on the merger of MES and FCE Wales LSCs had taken place.

Agenda Item 5: Director's Briefing

MA advised that the transformation of BusinessWise to Value for Money Delivery Plan (VMDP) had been completed. The list of efficiencies contained in B Wise had been converted into something more tangible. £2.2 million savings over the CSR period have been identified through efficiencies and FBUs are expected to hold down costs by this amount. This includes Chapelhall and also business cases from each of the Units. Renewable Energy has not been included in VMDP. VMDP will now be incorporated into BPs for the coming year. In an effort to reduce costs, Stirling Office has been included in VMDP and a variety of options are currently being considered with the favoured option at this stage being sharing the office with staff from SEPA. AG asked why Chapelhall was included when the SubGroup had not yet reported. JL advised that the proposal had been issued to the SubGroup and had been fully discussed. The report will now be updated in the light of the FE Scotland Harvesting Review. He advised that the Review runs across the whole of Scotland and in an attempt to minimise the impact on staff this will be considered together with the Chapelhall Review.

Renewable Energy: MA advised of the strategy to better exploit resources across the GB estate. He mentioned the departure of S Forsyth and advised that REBU were working in 2 areas, firstly assessing and developing existing projects in the light of the current market and taking fresh legal opinion on how binding some of the existing projects are. The aim is to increase the income to FC from these projects. Secondly, REBU will, via an ITT, identify the remaining potential (wind and small-scale hydro) across GB. REBU will use experience gained earlier to recruit a new Project Manager with a bespoke team and agree this with the 3 Countries. There was potentially spin-off work for both FCE and MES and this potential was gaining momentum due to the increased costs coming from the construction industry.

He advised the FC Story had stalled slightly due to On The Ground development. FC Scotland were undertaking a series of communication meetings and all FBU staff would be invited to attend. The equality agenda will be taken forward by the new FC Diversity Officer due to take up post, mid-October.

Agenda Item 6: Briefing (J Livingston)

JL advised that he would focus on the savings to be made within MES in respect of VMDP. The main one is the movement from contract hire to operating lease. The lease will cost less but this will be partly offset by management of vehicle including procurement and disposal, which will be undertaken by MES. Seventy vehicles have now been ordered with operating lease. Leases for cars would be extended from 3 to 5 years. Customers were

being encouraged into smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicles. Bio-diesel has been criticised in the press recently but MES will continue to promote its use and ensure that FCE supplies do not come from palm oil grown in recently cleared tropical rain forest, which is not sustainable. MES will introduce savings to Countries through the use of Timberlink and an updated mobile phone contract. MES were also looking at further efficiencies from external initiatives, ie wildlife video monitoring and managing other Govt Dept fleets. Approaching P6, there were 2 main issues for MES. Repair costs were running above budget at 50% (some of this due to the age of the fleet) and lease extensions were higher than expected. External income on the other hand looked improved on previous years. Mention was made of additional Capital being available in Scotland and possibly in Wales which could lead to additional purchases. MES would hold its Annual Conference in November and the Who We Are initiative will be launched and rolled out across MES.

Agenda Item 6: Briefing (D Killer)

DK advised of considerable additional work for FCE across GB made up by SLA work amounting to £0.5 million in England, £3 million in Scotland and £135k in Wales. There was also a noticeable increase in non-SLA work. A series of FCE posts were being filled both internally and externally. DK mentioned the continuing struggle to recruit competent staff externally some of which was due to the glut of CE work available. The JEGs exercise resulting from the FCE restructuring exercise was being finalised. He outlined the challenges for FCE in the coming year's Business Statement but asked FBUSC members to treat the figures with caution as these had altered since the Statement was drawn up.

- a) Forest Access Condition Survey: van ready and work now commencing.
- b) Additional work: £2800k has risen since Business Statement was drawn up.
- c) Externally funded projects: working well, many projects on the go.
- d) Staff/work balance - ongoing.
- e) VMDP savings to include bulk purchase of stone, pooling contracts together, intelligent procurement, stress laminated timber bridges and external income.
- f) GIS Roads Extension - maps being completed.
- g) Professional advice: assisting/advising in these areas.
- h) Unit costs: under control.

Agenda Item 7: DP Review

AG advised the meeting that the TUS felt it was inappropriate to discuss this matter at this time. JL stated that he would respect the TUS view but advised he had meetings organised for this afternoon to discuss the implications with MES staff in affected areas.

Agenda Item 8: Update on Chirk Closure

EW advised that a considerable amount of time had passed and staff would appreciate being updated on this proposal. JL advised the matter had not moved as quickly as he would have wished. FC Wales had asked MES to consider future workloads and other options. Information was being collected from Wham, the Silvicultural unit and FDs. When this information comes to hand it will be submitted to the Subgroup for consideration. The Business Plan submission in Wales has been put back, which provides more time for the proposal to be considered. The local Roads Authority/LA had expressed interest in the Chirk site either for salt storage or site purchase. EW felt the only way to improve the speed of response to customers would be to use 2 outstations around Chirk. JL advised he was happy to continue to take on board views and suggestions. JL will arrange for BC to write to SubGroup members updating them.

ACTION: JL

Agenda Item 9: Cost of Transferring Chapelhall Work to Other Workshops

JL advised that this had been revisited in the light of the Harvesting Review. The outcome was a proposal to move the operation to Inver. He advised that the SubGroup from MES Scotland LSC had reached a decision in principle and the report will be updated and re-issued. Concern was expressed about managing and financial control of the Chapelhall work from 2 locations. JL advised that T Groat would continue to manage the Chapelhall operation when it moved to Inver and that this contributed to reducing the impact of the Harvesting Review on staff. The move also delivered a cost reduction. JL advised that a paper with revised costs would be issued to the SubGroup and thereafter the findings will be relayed to the MES Scotland LSC. He went on to say that staff would be advised of the likely implications of the DP review at 3 pm today. TUS asked management not to continue with this stating it could have implications for MES if it were to result in compulsory redundancies. TUS stated their position that it had been remiss of FE Scotland management not to consult on the DP review and that if JL issued his note to staff today identifying workshops and posts this would compound it. AG went on to say, in his opinion, this was in breach of employment law and that during the DP review the Staff handbook had been ignored. JL contested this and said it did not breach employment law and since MES staff had access to the DP Review, and it identified staff reductions in MES, it was now reasonable to let them know if their jobs would be affected or not.

Agenda Item 10: Workshop Manager Post, Balnacoul/Longman

JL advised that this had been deferred until the effect of the Harvesting Review on MES was known. With the findings of the Review now known a recruitment exercise to fill the post would proceed.

Agenda Item 12: Prescription Safety Glasses for Mechanics

LV introduced this item by stating that the goggles supplied to staff were uncomfortable if you wore them over glasses and he felt they were no longer appropriate. He mentioned FC HSM34, which applied to both admin and operator staff who required glasses for work with VDUs. LV also mentioned the use of face masks in some parts of Wales. LV raised a further point, which was the frequency with which those working in Workshops required to replace glasses as they deteriorated quickly in Workshop conditions. JL advised that HSM6 applies and is being used by MES and that safety glasses were not suitable for many of the tasks undertaken in Workshops as they do not provide adequate protection. LV understood that safety glasses were not a substitute for goggles but pointed out that mechanics' glasses were subject to excessive wear and asked if MES would fund replacements. JL said he would consider this further and consult with Health & Safety.

ACTION: JL (see Addendum to Minutes)

Agenda Item 14: Any Other Relevant Business

- a. This would be GQ's last FBUSC meeting and he was thanked for his input over the years.
- b. BH asked whether the VMDP information would be issued to staff in a similar format to BusinessWise. MA advised that he was keen to avoid a glossy type of publication but would consider how best to draw the information together.

ACTION: MA

Agenda Item 15: Date of Next Meeting

Outwith the meeting the following dates were agreed with BH for 2008 meetings:

19 March 2008
17 September 2008

Addendum

Here is a response to the above issue as raised by Lawrence Villa at the FBU Staff Council meeting of 26 September 07.

The hazards encountered by mechanics in MES are such that neither normal spectacles or safety spectacles can be used as a substitute for goggles. MES mechanics must wear goggles over spectacles as required in Health and Safety Memorandum 6. Any problems that arise from wearing goggles over spectacles should be raised with the local manager. They will be passed to the Fleet Engineer who will co-ordinate any investigation and if necessary will look into whether more suitable goggles can be obtained.

The Forestry Commission does not refund spectacle wearers for wear and tear to their spectacles and MES does not have discretion to change this. As stated above, spectacles must be protected by goggles whenever they are exposed to harmful effects, so there should be no undue wear attributed to work.

The Forestry Commission will pay for an eyesight test for staff who use VDUs as set out in Health and Safety Memorandum 34. The Forestry Commission will also pay for spectacles if they are required for the distance at which the screen is viewed and if they are pre-requisite for the user to operate the VDU.

The Head of Safety, Health and the Environment and the Head of Human Resources Policy were consulted on this issue and their views are included in this response.

J Livingston