

MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2007 AT THE TGWU LONDON.

Present: Official Side

Paul Hill Tout, Chairman
Simon Hodgson
Richard Britton
Ken Milsom
Pauline Marchington, Secretary

Trade Union side:

Tim Gill, Vice Chairman, TGWU
Robert Beaney
John Winterbourne, PCS
John Broatch, TGWU
Martin Johnston, PCS
Tom Grimwood, TGWU
Mick Hoban, PCS
Crispin Thorn, Prospect
Steve Smith, Prospect
Tim Medlock, TGWU

1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Apologies have been received from Julie Saunders, Steve Holdsworth, and Ron Melville.

2. MINUTES

It was agreed that 2 changes should be made to the minutes from the meeting of the 12 October 2006. The first is to delete the underlining at the top of page 3. The second is to add the word 'days' in line 3 of paragraph 3 between the word 'staff' and 'where'. Once these amendments have been made the minutes of the last meeting will be agreed as a true account. The corrected minutes will be put on the Intranet and staff will be informed.

ACTION PAULINE MARCHINGTON

3. MATTERS ARISING

Ken Milsom said the Paper on Smoking for FC Employers, in anticipation of the change in legislation in July 2007, was issued to all staff on 20 December 2006. It can be viewed on the HR Intranet site.

Paul Hill-Tout updated the meeting on the options for the NO which need to be considered because of the imminent ending of the lease of the Cambridge office. John Scotney, Mark Thornycroft and Economist staff, from Silvan House, have worked on a paper of financial appraisals that have 11 different options for the NO. This paper will be discussed at a future EEB Meeting and the TUS will be kept informed of progress.

It was agreed to delete the completed matters from the Action Points paper. Mick Hoban asked about the outcome to the action point on 'Corporate Identity.' There is still uncertainty about how to express the relationship between FE & FA. Paul Hill-Tout said this would be discussed at the Cost Centre Managers meeting on 19 February and he will discuss the matter with Mark Pritchard and keep the TUS informed of the outcome. The FC will produce staff charts for our partners' information.

ACTION PAULINE MARCHINGTON KEN MILSOM PAUL HILL-TOUT

Tim Gill said the recently completed JEGS exercise should have been done with more openness. Ken Milsom said that once the decision had been taken to proceed to a JEGS review, the process had followed conventional lines. The Staff Inspector has recommended upgrading and the procedure to fill the JEGS upgraded posts is now proceeding. He acknowledged the concern raised by the TUS about the TRA situation. Stephen Smith asked for clarification on the 2 TRA roles at NO. Ken Milsom said Kay Ellis's TRA was originally for a finance post and she should have reverted after the finance work was transferred to Bristol. However, a post for Facilities Manager came up at this time and Kay assumed that role pending a review of the continuing need for the post. This new role is a different one to the first post. Ian Lamb is still on TRA in the HR Support post. The HR issues have not been resolved yet but the HR Business Partner role will soon be re-advertised. Both Kay and Ian have been fully informed of their positions and have agreed to continue in their respective posts with full knowledge and compliance. There is a 6 months guideline for TRA, however, it is inevitable that some TRAs last longer than this. Crispin Thorn said it is not just the concern for the individual but longer TRAs undermine the transparency of the promotion procedure.

ACTION: KEN MILSOM

4. DIRECTORS REPORT

Paul Hill-Tout said Chris Robinson; head of the Urban Land Regeneration Unit (ULRU) has retired. We no longer have a LRU and the post has gone. Gareth Price is now the England representative on a FC-wide Urban Regeneration Network. Rory Clark is leading for England on the Greenerways project with support from John Scotney. Tim Gill asked about the progress of the HR strategy. Paul Hill-Tout said Mike Seddon is our representative on the new HR Advisory Group. Kim Lardge discussed her proposed strategy with the GBEB in the spring. Tim Gill asked about the role of the business partners. Paul Hill-Tout said the HR Business Partners would have a key role in helping to develop a HR Strategy, which both respects FC as one staff group but also responds to different business needs in each country. Tim Gill asked if the candidates in the Graduate Recruitment scheme had Forestry degrees. Ken Milsom said out of the 200 applicants, we have selected 10 to go to an Assessment Centre. His understanding was that one of these has a degree in Forestry. Normal recruitment for Forest Officers will carry on the current post-specific basis but

this exercise is to recruit people of exceptional ability. Crispin Thorn thought it was an expensive procedure just to recruit 2 people. Mick Hoban asked what is the emerging analysis to retention and recruitment in light of the Age Discrimination and any impact it will have on FC England. Paul Hill-Tout said this is a good point and staff statistics can be produced for the ESC to include data such as age analysis. It was agreed that Tim Gill and Mick Hoban would produce a note of the information they require for Ken Milsom, who will produce the analysis for future meetings.

**ACTION TIM GILL & MICK HOBAN
KEN MILSOM**

Tim Gill asked if the problems experienced at the End of Year payments in 2006 would happen again this year. Last year AO staff at the FDO had to deal with angry customers who had not been paid. Simon Hodgson said with the forward thinking that has been done, learning lessons from last year, we should be OK. Paul Hill-Tout said at the moment there is nothing to suggest we have to take any other actions but that it can not be ruled out. Martin Johnson asked if communication to staff on this issue would be better than last year. Simon Hodgson said last year judgement came late in the day and it is hoped that this would not happen this year.

Mick Hoban asked for a list of disposals for the new Financial Year. Simon Hodgson agreed to provide a yearly schedule of assets to be sold at the start of the FY and at the end of the FY of assets that have been sold and a report on reinvestment projects. Stephen Smith asked if the money from disposals can be identified and is it filling a hole in the core budget. Simon Hodgson said without these asset sales, we would be unable to reinvest. Robert Beaney asked if funding of Woodfuel could be clarified. Paul Hill-Tout said the FC could not fund the Woodfuel Strategy. The Minister has said he likes the strategy and has agreed to write the Forward but the FC will be working with the RDAs, Government Offices and Defra on new resources.

Crispin Thorn said the FC website information relating to Climate Change and the issue of carbon off-setting was limited. He stated that this issue is a subject that is attracting a significant level of interest and it would be useful to confirm the FC lead staff. Paul Hill-Tout said Wilma Harper leads with support from Mark Broadmeadow FC Eng and James Pendlebury FCGB. He continued, the FC would be giving written evidence to the Environment Select Committee on this. Robert Beaney said he thought the first draft consultation document for the EFS, on climate change, was negative. Paul Hill-Tout replied Forestry and Climate Change have changed considerably in the second draft in response to comments made.

5. REVIEW OF REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Paul Hill-Tout said there would be a meeting of the Cost Centre Managers on 19 February to discuss the pacing and the practical implementation. Tim Gill asked about the effect on staff numbers and would there be any redundancy or natural wastage, and is the senior staff structure now in place. Paul Hill-Tout said staffing would be discussed under the Efficiency Plan. The appointment of the new HR Business Partner will complete the senior staff structure. However, we will continue to have a Conservator and a FDM in each region. Within the National framework arrangements for each Region will vary in response to different needs and circumstances. Martin Johnson asked about the funding for the changes. Paul Hill-Tout said this would be built in to the

Efficiency Plan but first managers have to produce proposals on how to take them forward and EEB members will each have a lead role to support cost centre managers. Robert Beaney thanked the management side for their openness.

6. CSR07 ENGLAND EFFICIENCY PLAN

Paul Hill-Tout tabled a handout and apologised it was not ready earlier. The Efficiency Plan was submitted to Westminster last week. Stephen Smith asked if the monies from Disposals are in this equation. Paul Hill-Tout replied that this is not in the EEF submitted to Defra. Paul Hill-Tout said we would have fewer staff in 2010/11 than we have in the organisation today but the number will still be higher than in 2003/04. The reduction of staff will be from a mixture of natural wastage and a severance scheme if financing can be resolved. We need to be clearer about our plans by July 07. More detailed plans would be ready by July.

MOGAL

Richard Britton tabled a summary progress report on the main findings of the MOGAL efficiency review to date. A substantial dataset on the processes of grants, licences and regulatory work had been assembled and was highlighting scope for realising some efficiency savings through the adoption of best practice in certain key areas of work such as inspections (both pre-application and post application types). A future increase in e-business applications was highlighted as an area meriting a detailed strategy to realise significant efficiencies over the CSR07 period. A limited number of structural options for the organisation of grants and licences was currently being tested, although it was noted that the physical location of staff is becoming less of an issue due to the benefits of the new electronic administration system (Glade). Information on structural options would be made available to managers for the preparation of regional efficiency plans. The MOGAL work was set to report by 1 February, and finalise aspects of the future e-business strategy by July 2007.

7. SUSTAINABILITY

Crispin Thorn presented a paper that raised a number of issues relating to the FC's organisational sustainability performance. He noted that the FC leads on woodland management sustainability through its support of UKWAS, however in terms of the FC office estate and managing the organisation's total environmental performance we could be regarded as lagging behind other government bodies such as the RDA's and Government Officer. There is a need to lay down a clear understanding of what is expected of Government estate. Paul Hill-Tout thanked Crispin for the paper, he said Rory Clark and John Scotney are key players supporting development of this work and identifying major items. Mick Hoban asked if the FC had thought of signing up to an independent Environmental Management System (e.g. ISO14001) to verify and monitor our environmental performance. Paul Hill-Tout said this is for the GBEB but will follow it up as a point of interest. It was agreed that future progress on this would be presented in future Director's Reports.

ACTION PAULINE MARCHINGTON RICHARD BARKER

8. FARM WOODS LEGACY TRANSFER

Richard Britton said Natural England is our partner in this and has, in the past, looked after payments. Just before Christmas 06 NE made 80% of the 2006 payments. Weekly reports show a steady progress such that we will achieve the transfer by March. Mick Hoban said he would like to flag up regional capacity differences and implications for how locations can absorb the work. Richard Britton said he was discussing handling in each area. Mick Hoban asked about the prospects for diversifying the role of admin staff as promoted in the Way Forward seminars. Paul Hill-Tout said the vision has not been lost but the priority in the short term was to steer between a feast or famine in admin work.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Paul Hill-Tout took the opportunity to thank John Broatch, who retires on 30 March 2007 after 32 years, for all his work with the Staff Council and with the FC.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

24 April 2007