

# MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON 5 JULY 2006 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  
Julie Saunders, PCS  
John Winterbourne, PCS  
John Broatch, TGWU  
Martin Johnston, PCS  
Tom Grimwood, TGWU  
Tim Medlock, TGWU  
Ron Melville, Prospect  
Ed Shepherd PCS Secretary  
Mick Hoban PCS  
Crispin Thorn Prospect  
Steve Holdsworth PCS

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Apologies have been received from Steve Smith and Robert Beaney

## 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true account of the meeting on 29 March with the correction to the date on page 3 to read 2007.

## 3. MATTERS ARISING

St Regis - Simon Hodgson updated the meeting on the closure of St Regis paper mill. Progress is being made using EFIP. The Task Force has met 2-3 times and is due to meet again on 17<sup>th</sup> July. Temporary outlets have been found for some of the volume but it is still unclear about long-term prospects. A 50k tonne parcel of hardwoods is to be marketed to test whether there are alternative markets out there.

Forest Holidays – The public launch of the new joint venture will be at the end of July 2006 at Keldy. Simon Hodgson said that the Limited Liability Company (LLP) is now up and running. It has set itself a demanding business plan and it will be important that there is coherence with the way FE is managing its business. The FC has a 49% share and the Caravan Club has a 51% share. The Staff Council will be updated on the progress of this partnership.

Item 5 Financial Outlook – Paul Hill-Tout said we are half way through finding the £2 million needed for this year and he is confident we will achieve this. There are no plans for redundancies to contribute towards this £2 million. Although £2 million is in itself a large figure it needs to be seen in the context of our £100 million turnover business in England. The disposal programme is in action and the first properties would go on the market this summer through Cleggs. Tim Gill asked to be kept informed and it was agreed that a progress report would be produced for future meetings saying what is on the market and what has been sold. Edward Shephard asked if the introduction of CRoW would have an effect on the market? Simon Hodgson said that the land for sale is often in remote locations and of small parcels and we are not that close to the final sales to know the outcome. Crispin Thorn asked for clarification on a point in the last minutes. The minutes from the last meeting state that money received from sales will be invested back locally even though this is a National programme (page 3 Para. 2). Simon Hodgson ~~replied, as a National body we would aspire to overall re-investment with a strong regional focus but not with regional autonomy.~~ replied that as a national body it had to be a national programme but with a strong and growing regional focus.

#### 4. DIRECTORS REPORT

Graduate Recruitment. Simon Hodgson said that we have had a good response to this with over 400 applications. These will be short listed ready to be called for interviews. Paul Hill-Tout said it is a GB issue and it is expected to find roles for at least some of the successful candidates in England. Ken Milsom said these people would be 'supernumerary' and head office will pay for them.

Tim Gill said the information on sick absence is excellent news. Ron Melville asked if the stress record is increasing and how it compares by grade across the Forestry Commission Ken Milsom was not sure this information was available but agreed to find out.

**Action: Ken Milsom**

Tim Gill asked about the new Defra Ministerial team. Paul Hill-Tout said that they~~they are all from the New Labour school and with the exception of Lord Rooker~~ have a strong economic and urban background. Barry Gardiner will be meeting with Tim Rollinson and Lord Clark the week commencing 10 July. (This is now postponed until 23 October). On the 28 June we supported Barry Gardiner at a House of Commons debate on Squirrels.

Edward Shephard asked about the EFS. Paul Hill-Tout confirmed the consultation is out and will end in August. Defra will lead ~~go through~~ the process, with our support, and the new Strategy ~~will should~~ be out-published around the end of the year. One new issue in this strategy that was not in the previous one is the ~~subject of~~ role of woodlands and forestry in tackling Climate Change. ~~and the role of woodlands.~~ Tim Gill said that there seemed to be problems getting renewable energy initiatives off the ground. Paul Hill-Tout said some energy plants have ~~power stations~~ the licences but as yet no planning permission and that Defra's Energy Crop scheme had a very low uptake but the Government are rethinking support for biomass of all kinds. ~~for Energy Crops in the future and with existing woodlands. He confirmed that arboricultural risings would be an important component of the raw material needs.~~

Richard Britton updated the meeting; to confirm that the first EWGS/~~the FA heading in this paper is misplaced.~~ GLADE payments were successfully concluded in April. ~~in April were~~

~~a success. The FC came through this well but the rest of the 'payment family' is under scrutiny.~~

~~The EIA is proving to be increasingly complex and stretches the skills of staff. In a recent case in the W Midlands we refused consent to take down trees down for Moorland restoration as the bird life would not benefit. A new case, in the NE, where the application is to develop a football pitch on the site of a young woodland is causing legal challenges.~~

Tim Gill commented on the success of Newlands and Paul Hill-Tout said it was due to a ~~very~~ shared and committed approach from staff and all credit to colleagues involved, especially in grappling with the legal tenure aspects.

Commenting on the FE out turn for 2005/6. Simon Hodgson said he wished to record his appreciation to the action of H&M staff who have achieved all key performance targets.

~~Work at all levels and willingness and motivation are appreciated.~~

## 5. EFFICIENCY PLAN AND REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS.

Paul Hill-Tout said ~~it is important that~~ he intended to follow up on his note to all staff dated 13/6/06. He ~~is also happy to for the~~ would also like Staff Council to be fully involved in this from the beginning. Tim Gill proposed 3 Staff Council members to work closely with the management side as follows:

Paul Hill-Tout with Tim Gill  
Richard Britton with John Winterbourne  
Simon Hodgson with Martin Johnson

Contact will be made, via a weekly 'phone call, starting the week commencing 10 July. Both sides will also liase with Joe Watts. If it is necessary to have a meeting with Joe, one will be arranged either via a conference call or a face to face meeting in the Midlands at a venue to be decided to suit all parties.

Tim Gill said that the first letter Paul sent out on 13 June caused a 'knee jerk' reaction with some staff, and in a work force already edgy about the amount of money not there, staff have read into the letter that there will be job losses.

Paul Hill-Tout agreed to write to staff again in the form of a Q&A and with an explanation as well as providing the Terms of Reference for the two other strands of the exercise.

~~This will go out the week commencing 10 July.~~ Paul Hill-Tout continued that by the end of 2011 he expected FC in England would have fewer staff on existing programmes.

~~We may have the same staff but doing different things. However, there is no freeze on post filling, at present. If we can get by without filling posts and not causing unrealistic work burdens and undue stress and pressure to existing colleagues we will.~~

Crispin Thorn ~~said that the creation of the new post in the~~ sought clarification about the new Biodiversity post in the Programme Group. Ken Milsom explained that this post is not a new one but it covers 2 people previously on secondment from the RSPB & the

Woodland Trust who have now gone back to their own jobs ~~but the work is still there.~~ Recycling money from partnerships will fund the post.

Tim Gill asked if this would be an opportunity to consider a wider restructuring of staff posts since jobs have changed and grown at all grades. Paul Hill-Tout said that any changes proposed must remain subject to the JEGS and JESP processes and any particular issues can be raised with Ken Milsom. More general implications of Efficiency Plan proposals will have regard to grading issues as a matter of course.

~~Mick Hoban said he welcomed the reference to Staff Council in Para 6 of Paul's note of 13/6/06 and suggests it is a good base line for the summing up. Simon Hodgson said he did not have a problem with committing to a process of consultation with the ESC.~~

~~Paul Hill-Tout said the NC would be sent various options to consider responding to questions about Natural England and future regional arrangements saying Natural England will become legal in October 2006 and how the FC aligns with it will be what is right for the FC. FC has a window of opportunity over the next few months to decide what is right for us in the regions and to use this as the basis for our alignment with NE. Mark Thornycroft has looked into the co-location of FC offices with Natural England. However, their locations are relatively expensive and there seems little likelihood that we could re-locate at their office on any scale.~~

~~Edward Shephard said that we should recognise the reality of inflation and asked if the subject of inflation and pay increases would be discussed when they meet the new Minister. Paul Hill-Tout said to discuss pay at a first meeting with a Minister is not appropriate. We have to convince the Minister we can do our work using less resources. We must produce our Efficiency Plan first and have all our evidence available before we tackle the Minister on resources. The challenge, in terms of a working environment, is what are the standards to aim for? A further layer of tests and challenges is the base of market testing and delivering public benefits while sustaining what we have. On a wider point it was felt that the Terms of Reference for each strand of the review should be more closely aligned. Generically benchmarking will be one of the tools used to assemble the evidence. Edward Shephard said it is more akin to properly recording evidence that is useful and gave an example of Kielder Forest being managed by the FC or a Scandinavian company, who could do it better and cheaper than the FC. Paul Hill-Tout said he would not rule out the possibilities but we are not doing a real life scenario. There is no Privatisation agenda but we will have to ask ourselves uncomfortable and searching questions. Simon Hodgson said the Public Estate in its present form carries out government policy and we have to prove we are doing it effectively. Richard Britton said with G&L and benchmarking that Wales has a new delivery approach. Scotland is behind England and Defra has benchmarking and gave stewardship as an example. Paul Hill-Tout noted that it would be important to manage issues across the different strands of the Efficiency Review. This would be done by the EB.~~

~~Edward Shephard asked what was meant by the last bullet point of the Terms of Reference of the regional review. Paul Hill-Tout said that we need to look at accommodation as part of the review to ensure accommodation and working arrangements are sustainable for the future.~~

~~Crispin Thorn asked if it was more difficult to review regional arrangements if we have separate FE and FA work streams. Paul Hill-Tout said that the overall Efficiency Plan is the main driver. The regional strand will be a bit ahead of other strands and information it gathers will have linkages to them. Simon Hodgson pointed out that on back-office costs there was also a GB dimension which would also be linked in.~~

~~Paul Hill-Tout drew the discussion to an end by saying that, while there would be regular contact with the named individuals from the TUS as the various strands progressed, there would be no formal consultation with the ESC prior to the National Committee having their opportunity to comment on the draft proposals, considering emerging issues from the regional review.~~

## **6 TUS CONSULTATION**

Ken Milsom thanked the working group for producing ~~this~~ the proposed protocol on consultation. He was happy to sign up to it while pointing out that a lot of effort is needed from both sides to keep it moving. Tim Gill said the TUS are willing to make the effort for this. ~~Paul Hill-Tout endorsed the paper.~~ The paper was agreed.

## **7. FWS/FWPS Legacy Transfer**

Bill Heslegrave made a presentation on the background to plans for the transfer of FWS/FWPS legacy work from RDS to FC.

A copy of Bill's presentation is at Annex A.

Crispin Thorn thanked Bill for the presentation and the paper. He said there is no clear evidence yet of efficiency savings sufficient to absorb this work. Paul Hill-Tout added we have to capture what is being progressively achieved in efficiency savings in EWGS/Glade, bank them, quantify the workload of new business and manage a balanced transition which is clear to all staff. Paul Hill-Tout said the Staff Council would be updated on progress in achieving these objectives at the next meeting.

## **8. AOB**

### Smoking at Work

A paper on this subject had been tabled by Emily Ramsay at the GB SC the previous week. It proposed some further restrictions on smoking at work in England and Wales in anticipation of legislative changes in 2007. It had been agreed to put the same paper before the ESC for any comment. Tim Gill said that the TUS in England give the proposals in the paper full support. It was agreed that Ken Milsom would report this back to Emily Ramsay and it was expected that in due course a revised policy note would be issued from Silvan House.

## **9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

12 October 2006