

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON 18 JULY 2007 AT THE PCS OFFICE, WANDSWORTH, 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
Martin Johnston, PCS
Tom Grimwood, TGWU
Mick Hoban, PCS
Steve Holdsworth
Steve Smith, Prospect
Crispin Thorn, Prospect
Ed Shephard

1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Apologies have been received from Ron Melville, Tim Medlock, John Winterbourne and Julie Saunders.

2. MINUTES

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Terminology

Crispin Thorn said there is still some confusion over the use FE, FA and FC terminology. He stated that the issue is further exacerbated by the use of the terms (FE/FA) in internal discussions/papers/titles and yet for external purposes the desired branding is the FC.

Paul Hill-Tout said Mark Pritchard is facilitating the process of producing charts for internal and external communication purposes and they will be published on the web.

TRAs

Tim Gill referred to item 4, TRAs, and said that he was pleased to see the numbers of TRAs are coming down. Ken Milsom said 30 TRAs from 1100 FC staff is good and many of the TRAs are for maternity leave cover and special projects. Mick Hoban said it is still useful to see the numbers and requested that the information is still available at meetings.

Asset Disposals

Tim Gill asked if the money raised from Asset Disposals is being reinvested. Paul Hill-Tout said all monies raised are being reinvested on the estate. Simon Hodgson said the money is also being used as a leverage for gaining funds from external funders.

Greenerways

Crispin Thorn said the Head of Sustainable Development from the RDA for Y&TH had asked him if the FC had a specific policy on carbon reduction and he found that although we have the Greenerways project he could find nothing specific in terms of carbon reduction targets. He went on to ask if the organisation was aiming to establish specific targets? Simon Hodgson said he would present a Greenerways action plan to share at this forum.

4. DIRECTORS REPORT

EU Habitats Directive

Paul Hill-Tout said the EU Habitats Directive is an area for current concern and difficulty. He was pleased to report a meeting with Natural England, held on 17 July, went very well and a way forward looked achievable without major risks or burdens, the details of which would need to be worked through.

Mick Hoban said staff are aware of the EPS and the potential workload issues this may involve. Paul Hill –Tout said this is an EU regulation and as a Government Department we have to implement it. The FC and Natural England have met, were pulling in the same direction and would take it forward in a sensible way involving a best practice approach and guidance. This guidance would be co-ordinated to go on both web sites. FC was aware of the potential for more work for staff and of the necessity for training. If there is an increase in workload then the impact of this would be discussed with Staff Council. Richard Britton added that current estimates were that 90% of operations under this new regulation should be covered by best practice and not licences.

Diversity

Paul Hill-Tout said work was starting on an England Diversity Plan within the GB framework for developing a Diversity Policy, and the Staff Council will be consulted on the project plan. It would cover 2 aspects. The first, is the impact on staff development and the second is how the FC interacts with communities in making use of the green space we provide. Mick Hoban said the issue of inclusion is not easy to engage with and agreed it is a big agenda.

Farm Woodlands Schemes Transfer

Tim Gill, referring to the transfer of the FWPS to FC England, asked if the staff transferring from Natural England are on the same conditions of service as FC staff. Richard Britton explained we have 2 new teams. One team, based in Cambridge, is mainly staff on a casual contract. The other team, based at the W.Midlands, is made up from existing staff. However, some staff, based at Cambridge, transferred from Natural England. Ken Milsom said the permanent staff on transfer came under TUPE regulations, that is, they came across on their existing terms and conditions. Ed Shephard asked for a copy of the TUPE transfer letter and Terms and Conditions covering this transfer.

Action Ken Milsom

Oak Processionary Moth

Tim Gill asked if there is a real health risk from the Oak Processionary Moth? Paul Hill-Tout said if the moth is picked up then it could cause a nasty skin reaction. The establishment of the moth is thought to be a response to warmer winters.

Newlands

Tim Gill said it was good news about Newlands 2. Paul Hill-Tout said it was a statement of confidence in us. Ken Milsom said staff recruited for Newlands 1 may now become permanent. This stipulation was included in their original letter of appointment and they will be informed.

New Visitor Centres

Mick Hoban said the opening of Visitors Centres was welcome but it would create issues of new working practices and work patterns for staff, plus related pressures. Simon Hodgson said there was a need to monitor the situation as these working practices are new to the FC and we will learn as things progress.

Butterflies

Robert Beaney asked if the launch of the Butterfly and Moth Strategy was a success. Simon Hodgson said FC was pleased with the way it went and the Butterfly Conservation Society would monitor the progress.

5. EFFICIENCY REVIEW

Paul Hill-Tout said this paper is a work in progress and not the end game. When the proposals went to Staff Council in January there was the possibility of some redundancies but he said it should now be possible to achieve the necessary staff reductions through natural wastage and not redundancy. This has been made possible because of hard work developing increased sources of income. The Review of Regional Arrangements was still ongoing and Staff Council would be kept informed. He noted that plenty of information concerning grants and regulations work had been provided to Staff Council through the MOGAL review work.

Tim Gill responded, saying when he first read the paper he felt bereft of information. He had been expecting more information on how conclusions had been reached and more

comments on progress. Stephen Smith said that management appeared to be making decisions without proper consultation.

Ed Shephard said that at the last meeting the clear expectation was to involve TUS in regular progress. TUS had been anticipating a report on each region was to come to this meeting for a full discussion. The statement on no redundancies was welcome but the TUS had concerns about a potentially unfair burden of work for remaining staff and had insufficient information to form a view.

Paul Hill-Tout said that there was no intention to depart from the process agreed in January and that no decisions would be taken on individual posts without prior consultation with Staff Council. The challenge was to find a way of communicating/discussing the strategic framework without prejudice to consultations on individual post changes occurring through natural wastage over the next 3 years.

It was agreed that management would contact Staff Council with a proposal on how best to set out the detailed thinking underpinning staffing proposals in the Efficiency Plan. There should be a process set down for TUS involvement, including how management might share draft business plans in confidence with TUS colleagues. This needed to recognise that all individuals had the right to decide when they wished to retire from FC.

Paul Hill-Tout confirmed that FC will not be using the current rise in timber receipts to deal with paybill pressures and will maintain current protocols.

**Action Paul Hill-Tout
Simon Hodgson**

**PAUL HILL-TOUT GAVE HIS APOLOGIES AND LEFT THE MEETING.
SIMON HODGSON TOOK OVER THE CHAIR.**

6. HR BUSINESS PARTNER

Simon Hodgson said that Sarah England has started as the HR Business Partner for FC England. She was in the process of visiting all the Regions during July and was writing a report that would be presented to the EEB at the meeting on 4 September and would then be discussed at the Senate meeting on 16 & 17 October. Sarah England would attend the Autumn ESC meeting. Stephen Smith asked would Sarah England pick up Ken Milsom's job. Simon Hodgson said Sarah England's role is on a more strategic level. The development of her role would follow discussions on her report.

7. WOODFUEL STRATEGY

Simon Hodgson said the Woodfuel Strategy had been launched. FC did not know if Defra will provide funding for this but EEB have committed £1/2 million to pump prime work. Work is progressing in the Regions with RDAs. Crispin Thorn said that an early draft of the Woodfuel Task Group Delivery Plan was expected in September.

8. AOB

Tim Gill had 2 items under AOB. The first, Diversity, had been covered under the Directors Report at para 4.

The second referred to FC Branding and he asked how this was progressing. Simon Hodgson said there had, recently, been 2 events for Cost Centre Managers and Senior NO Staff. The information from these events would be cascaded down to staff at Regional Staff meetings over the next few months. It was the intention that all staff could watch a DVD including messages from the Director General, and be given a 'Who we are' booklet.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 1 November