

# MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON 1 NOVEMBER 2007 AT THE TGWU OFFICE, 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, TUS  
Martin Johnston, PCS  
Tom Grimwood, TGWU  
Mick Hoban, PCS  
Steve Holdsworth, PCS  
Steve Smith, Prospect  
Crispin Thorn, Prospect  
Edward Shepherd, TUS Secretary  
Julie Saunders, PCS  
Andy Patmore, UNITE  
John Winterbourne, PCS

## **1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES**

Apologies have been received from Tim Medlock and Ron Melville. Paul Hill-Tout introduced Sarah England to the ESC. Sarah will be taking over from Ken Milsom who retires in December. Tim Gill introduced Andy Patmore who is a new representative on the TUS.

## **2. MINUTES**

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

## **3. MATTERS ARISING**

### Greenerways

Simon Hodgson said he would be presenting a paper to EEB on 6 Nov, which follows on from the GBEB paper, recommending Greenerways is built in to Business Plans and the Corporate Planning. We have a corporate commitment to ISO (trading organisation). This will be a long-term development similar to signing up for UKWAS. As a company we have a statutory commitment to sorting out our waste. The TUS will be kept informed of progress at future meetings.

## Habitat Regulation

Richard Britton said this became law in the summer. Work since then reflects agreement with Natural England of achieving through best practice and not licences wherever possible. There is a well-developed set of EPS webpages to provide good support to the forestry sector and a series of seminars, facilitated by the FC, will take place in the regions in the next few months.

## Woodfuel Strategy

Paul Hill-Tout said he is close to trawling for 3 posts to take forward the Woodfuel Strategy. One post is a PB1, which reflects the responsibility of the post and the other 2 posts are PB3 and are funded by extra timber receipts and working with RDAs.

## **4. DIRECTORS REPORT**

### Update

Since the report was written there have been 2 good news stories. Simon Hodgson updated the ESC, the Dalby Visitors Centre received the Prime Minister's award for best public building. Sport England awarded Bedgebury an innovative tourist award. Richard Britton said Sherwood has reached the final 4, along with Sustrans, the Eden Project and a project in the Black Country, in a competition for a lottery bid of £50 million. If successful, the Sherwood project has potential to significantly improve the visitors' interest and use of the forest area.

Paul Hill-Tout said he and Tim Rollinson met Joan Ruddock on 15 Oct and was pleased to report it was a very positive experience. The Minister and the Defra officials were very enthusiastic. Laura Jones, who is on the Leaders Unlimited Programme, would be leading preparing a paper for, a study on the public forest estate. The FC estate is the biggest land resource the Government has to carry out its policies. A broad consensus the Public Forest Estate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would enable a better appreciation of what it does and to make sure assets are deployed in the best way in the future. ESC will be kept informed of progress.

On 23 October Paul Hill-Tout, Simon Hodgson and Jim Lyon hosted Helen Ghosh, Defra Permanent Secretary of State and with Peter Unwin, DG, Natural Environment Group, at Thames Gateway and then at Thetford Forest. The meeting was very helpful in awareness with top Defra officials of what does and where we fit in. .

### Staff

Ken Milsom said that during Laura Jones's secondment to Leaders Unlimited her role as RD is being filled by Matthew Woodcock, Jo O'Hara is also being seconded to Leaders Unlimited , working with GO West Midlands. Her post at the FC has not yet been filled.

## Howard League Award For Work With Probation Services

Tim Gill said the work with the probation services is to be encouraged and work with young offenders is a useful project that is to be supported.

## 5. EFFICIENCY REVIEW UPDATE

### EFFICIENCY REVIEW UPDATE

Charlotte Cane said this paper is a progress report and is moving to the Business Planning stage. The CSR07 settlement is to be allocated by Defra and agreed, hopefully, by December. The TUS voiced concern over consultation on confidential papers with their members and the need to start engaging them with proposals. Paul Hill-Tout said when we have the settlement we will provide an updated report to ESC but to speculate on this now would not be helpful and it is not until we have the specific proposal can we go through due process. It was agreed that members should be given time to consultation with staff and for this to then be agreed with their line managers. Simon Hodgson said each Region has. Not all had come up with immediate cash savings but Regions will finalise this with local TUS. East England is the only Region to have a concrete proposal so far.

#### Annex A -Overview - Each Annex was then discussed separately

John Scotney said the response from staff in the regions concerned had been excellent. All involved had been very co-operative and shown a very professional attitude to the reviews.

Crispin Thorn explained that the TUS would need time to go back to the members following the discussions before any response could be given to the proposals. This was accepted by the official side. Paul Hill-Tout added that he hoped that as much as possible could be done through correspondence.

John went on to outline the general approach to the review process. Mick Hoban asked if there had been a consistent approach to all of the regions reviewed on such matters as diversity and Greenerways. Paul Hill-Tout responded by explaining that the approach had been consistent but would obviously be subject to regional variation.

NE England Region – John Scotney said that this region is complex because of the geography of the office locations and of the region. The management proposal in this region is to carry out further research work on the 3 options short-listed. No decision has been made and further work is required on this review. The TUS accepted this.

SW England Region – John Scotney explained the management proposal which is for a new build option at Buller's Hill as the way forward using the savings in rent for the Mamhead office to offset the cost. Chris Marrow and Laura Jones have always been aware of this as a possibility and the 2 offices already do a lot of work together with a lot of interaction between teams. The TUS accepted the principle of the proposal and agreed to set up consultation meetings with local staff and report back to the official side.

Yorkshire and The Humber Region - John Scotney explained that this had been a 2-stage process for the EEB. The first stage had been to propose that the current accommodation at Wheldrake was no longer acceptable and also that there was no justification for the Clifton Moor office to remain as a separate office. These 2 proposals were agreed by the TUS. The second stage proposals were to choose between a build option at Wheldrake or to lease a new joint office on the outskirts of York. The final recommendation being to lease a site on the outskirts of York. The TUS again requested time to consult their membership and agreed to set up local meeting and report back to the official side in due course.

NW Region – John Scotney began by thanking Brian Mahony for his help on the report and with H&S issues. He went to explain that, as covered in the paper, the geography of the region had led to only one possible management proposal which for this region is to stay as they are, but to use shared services whenever possible. This was agreed by the TUS.

#### Annex B - Efficiency Plan – Proposed Future Management of Farm Woodland Legacy Administration

Richard Britton said this paper is the result of several months' work and was needed to inform to the Business Plans. The FC will make the first round of payments before Christmas, this will be on an annual basis for the next 10-15 years. The next part of the plan is for the payment work to go to Regional level and there have been full discussions with RDs. A lot has been learnt from the work at W Midlands Region. Some Regions do not have a strong business case, other regions are anticipating taking the work on. The casual contracts at Cambridge will run out soon but there is still the capacity to carry on with some work. The time is now right to move the work to SW Eng, to SE Eng and to retain the work at W Mids. John Winterbourne asked if any extra PB6 staff would be recruited in the regions to deal with this work. Richard Britton said no significant numbers of permanent extra staff would be recruited but in the SE Eng Region they have 2 staff retiring and their posts will be replaced. Steve Holdsworth asked about the time scale for the rolling out of this work in relation to the office relocation. Richard Britton replied, SE Eng Region is remaining as it is so this applies only to the SW Eng Region. The transfer of files will happen soon and then the office relocation will be planned after they have the files. TUS agreed to these proposals.

#### Annex C – Staff Council Issues

Ed Shephard said this was originally an email to Paul Hill-Tout from a discussion with Simon Hodgson in September. Point 1 - most of the issues have been covered today and Management were thanked for their assurances. Point 2 - there is a concern about staff cuts and the work being redistributed to remaining staff who may end up with too much work. Paul Hill-Tout said he recognised the general concern but stressed that England had more staff today than in 2003. In practice, solutions would have to be worked through in each cost centre. If there is a concern it must be brought through due process with line managers.

Point 3 - Ed Shephard asked what the extra timber receipts were being spent on. He was advised of a range of projects including woodfuel, recreation facilities and roadstone.

## **6. DEVELOPMENT OF HR IN ENGLAND**

Sarah England said she'd been appointed to the new role of HR Business Partner in May. The post has been changed to involve more strategic work. The first task was to work out how to move the HR agenda forward in England and to come up with a transition plan for the start of the 2008/09. Meetings were held, during the summer, with all CC Managers to discuss how they see HR changing and the overall sense was to keep HR support in England. There is a proposal to change the roles of the 2 HR support roles to that of Operational HR Advisors at PB 4 level. Discussions will be held with the staff concerned following the discussions at Staff Council and it will be up to the individuals to decide if they want to continue working in the new area in a new way. If they decide not to, suitable positions will be found. Tim Gill thanked Sarah for this assurance.

Sarah England said from April 08 it was intended to make better use of staff in Silvan House for operational work and that with the review of our recruitment policy and procedures, it was expected that the role of HR members of staff on all recruitment boards would be reduced once managers had been appropriately trained. Sarah reassured the Staff Council that managers would only be allowed to do this once an appropriate level of competence had been reached.

Ken Milsom said HR staff in England would report to Sarah England and Sarah reports to Paul Hill-Tout. Tim Gill thanked Sarah and supported her proposals. Paul Hill-Tout said, in the spirit of the transition plan Sarah would provide progress reports as a regular item.

## **ACTION SARAH ENGLAND**

### **7. DIVERSITY**

Paul Hill-Tout said this was an important issue for FC and wider public services. Sarah England said this was an update paper on cross-cutting work between Helen Townsend and herself. Sarah explained that the early draft of GB Diversity Strategy cuts across everything we do as a business and the critical thing would be training all our staff in Diversity. Core requirements for embracing Diversity as a Government body needs to be tackled and the roll out of this has to be right. It was hoped that staff training would be tailored for staff with different needs. Tim Gill thanked Sarah for the paper. He asked if a member of Staff Council could be involved in the training. This was agreed. Crispin Thorn said he has wholehearted agreement with this and TUS have supported Diversity for a long time.

### **8. AOB**

PMS

Tim Gill asked for it to be recorded that this matter had been raised at the ESC even though it is a GB issue. Crispin Thorn said this had been a local staff council paper.

Paul Hill-Tout said there is a special bit of AOB. Ken Milsom is retiring in December and this is his last Staff Council. Paul expressed his appreciation to Ken for all his work over the years. Tim Gill supported Paul's words. Ken Milsom replied it has been a pleasure working with the ESC.

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

13 March 2008