

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON 3 JULY 2008 AT THE UNITE (TGWU) OFFICE, LONDON.

Present: Official Side

Paul Hill Tout, Chairman
Simon Hodgson
Sarah England
Pauline Marchington, Secretary

Trade Union side:

Edward Shephard, TUS Secretary
Tom Grimwood, TGWU
Mick Hoban, PCS
Steve Holdsworth, PCS
Crispin Thorn, Prospect
John Winterbourne, PCS

1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Apologies have been received from Tim Gill, Julie Saunders, Ron Melville, Stephen Smith, Andy Patmore, Richard Britton and Tim Medlock.

2. MINUTES

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Woodfuel

Paul Hill-Tout said that he would report back, separately, about Woodfuel.

ACTION PAUL HILL-TOUT

Wheldrake Office

Mick Hoban referred to paper 04/08 and said the paper had raised valid queries on the costing and analysis. Crispin Thorn said he understood from the feedback from the Executive Board that a new build is not an option for the Wheldrake site and that as a consequence the current focus of the Working Group was on looking at lease options in the surrounding area. Paul Hill-Tout said that whilst there is no prospect of funding a major rebuild at Wheldrake in the short to medium term, he was content for all other options to be considered including the possibility of remaining on the current site and refurbishing / replacing some of the current accommodation units. Edward Shephard thanked Paul for the clarification and it was agreed for John Scotney to have a meeting with Wheldrake and Clifton Moor colleagues and to revise the Terms of Reference to take this forward.

ACTION JOHN SCOTNEY

Action Points

It was agreed that the Action Points presented at each ESC would no longer be updated and in the future each action point would be dealt with on a meeting by meeting basis.

4. DIRECTORS REPORT

TRAs

Paul Hill-Tout said there had been no developments since the report had been issued. Edward Shephard thanked Paul for the report and said it was a useful update. Crispin Thorn said the reduction in the long-standing TRA posts is welcome and the figures and percentages are reasonable for an organisation the size of the FC. However, there is a concern over ongoing / repeat extensions to TRAs with the key issue being the need to adequately assess the length of a TRA at the start of an appointment. Paul Hill-Tout said this was a fair point and management would try to do this whilst recognising that circumstances can change. Sarah England said she would talk to the 2 HR Managers so that at the start of a TRA the process will become more pro-active.

Cambridge and Bristol Offices

Edward Shephard asked for confirmation regarding the Cambridge and the Bristol offices regarding the long-term strategy and the sense of momentum towards Bristol. Paul Hill-Tout said negotiations are taking place with the landlords of the Cambridge office about an exit deal. At the same time negotiations to find a new property in Cambridge are continuing. Once a suitable location has been found, an exit date from Great Eastern House will be agreed and a Project Plan for the migration to the new location will take place. At present the number of staff working at the Bristol office has increased. In the future instead of having 2 offices the same size, Bristol will be the larger office. Simon Hodgson said the nature of the Bristol office has changed and the new office will create a welcoming and flexible place to work

Public Forest Estate

Crispin Thorn said the terms of reference in the Public Forest Estate study had no regional dimensions reflecting each Regions different priorities. Paul Hill-Tout said this was absolutely fundamental and the Regions are very important and they have a great range of roles throughout the country. Simon Hodgson referred to the ETWF and said that the omission is due to economy of words rather than any thing else.

Edward Shephard asked whether the FC is engaging with Shadow Ministers? Paul Hill-Tout replied the FC would take into account other values and priorities and will be proofing any emerging key policies. No public announcement on the study is expected until the Ministers have agreed the scope and terms of reference.

Tree Safety

Mick Hoban said he attends meetings of the Greater Yorkshire Trees Officers Group and they are not picking up on how best to support leadership and delivery roles on tree safety but are happy to assist with future delivery. Paul Hill-Tout said we are not at the stage to give guidance. The ETWF Delivery Plan, due to be published in the autumn, will clarify some points. The new Mayor of London is given the FC funding to increase London's street trees. The FC will take the lead on this but not on the delivery and we will work with stakeholders to take this forward. In the mean time he advised contacting Gareth Price.

5. ASSET SALES

Simon Hodgson said the FC is waiting for ministerial clearance on this and as soon as we have it the TUS will be consulted. This year's programme is larger than last years, up to 1400ha, with an average size of woods being 32ha but to be focused more on leaseholds in southern England. Paul Hill-Tout said the Minister has asked to see the schedule and this had been provided, along with maps so that woodlands in each Region and their key characteristics can be seen. There followed a general discussion and Paul Hill-Tout clarified the expected figures.

ACTION PAUL HILL-TOUT

6. WORKFORCE PLAN

Sarah England said Tim Gill was on the working group and the EEB signed the Plan off in February. It is linked to the People Strategy and other elements will flow from it. At present we are seeking initial views and thoughts as to where our priorities should be.

Edward Shephard said he welcomed the paper but the TUS are not in a position to support it today and would like extra time to come back with a more considered response.

Sarah England said the paper has lots of suggestions and care is needed not to raise expectations but is happy for the paper to have a wider circulation with this note of caution. The paper is a starting point on key best practices. Revisions to the Plan are expected and will then be integrated with business needs to develop in to a strategic approach to managing change. It was agreed that the paper could be circulated to members and Sarah England would produce some qualifying statement to go at the front of the report. John Winterbourne said he would be happy to co-ordinate TUS responses to be discussed at the next ESC meeting.

ACTION JOHN WINTERBOURNE

7. HR UPDATE

Edward Shephard thanked Sarah for the paper and welcomed it as a regular update. He said the TUS had been struck by the growth to 6 members of staff (some FTAs) in HR.

Sarah England explained the nature of the posts and that the FTA Diversity post sited was for overall business benefit and closely aligned with Programme Group, not solely HR.

Paul Hill-Tout said it was important that we raised our game, especially on Diversity and there will be an increasing need to produce statistics for the Equalities & Human Rights Commission. FC is behind on this agenda and it is taken seriously at a GB level.

Edward Shephard asked if the number of HR manager Operations posts had changed.

Sarah England said there will now be 2.5 spread geographically.

8. UPDATE IN IMPLEMENTING G&R RESILIENCE PLAN

Paul Hill-Tout said the paper, from Richard Britton, sets out the broad plan for what he has in mind. Edward Shephard welcomed the overview. TUS colleagues expressed concern about the scope to switch resource from cost centres to National Office given new pressure.

Paul Hill-Tout noted the comments and said that Richard Britton would be asked to set out a strategic business case with evidence to support the proposed changes. He also confirmed that any proposed changes to G&R cost centre staffing deriving from the plan would still be subject to agreed TUS consultation procedures.

ACTION RICHARD BRITTON

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Edward Shephard proposed a new format to ESC meetings. In future the TUS would have their NOC meeting 4 or 5 weeks before the ESC meeting, this will enable them to be better prepared to produce papers for ESC meeting. Any ESC papers ready at the time of the NOC meeting would be given to TUS. Future ESC meetings would start at 12.30 and end by 3.00pm and dates of the ESC meetings would be agreed at the beginning of the year. Paul Hill-Tout agreed on the model of this proposal.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 6 November.