

# MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2008 AT THE TGWU OFFICE, LONDON.

## Present: Official Side

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

## Trade Union side:

Tim Gill, Vice Chairman  
Mick Hoban, PCS  
Steve Smith, PCS  
Crispin Thorn, Prospect  
John Winterbourne, PCS  
Stuart Grainger,

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Apologies have been received from Ed Shephard, Julie Saunders, Tom Grimwood, Andy Patmore, Steve Holdsworth and Ron Melville.

Paul Hill-Tout welcomed Jean Lindsay, Director HR, to the meeting.

Stuart Grainger has joined the TUS replacing Martin Johnson

## 2. MINUTES

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

## 3. MATTERS ARISING

### WOODFUEL

Paul Hill-Tout said that the woodfuel pilot scheme had not been repeated.

### WHELDRAKE OFFICE

John Scotney said he has a meeting Crispin Thorn on 14 November. The Terms of Reference have been revised. The TUS have yet to see them.

### ASSEST SALES

Simon Hodgson said around 40 sites are planned for sale this FY, and, everything is on the market or under negotiation with lessors. £6 million in receipts is the target and £1 million has been received so far. Mick Hoban requested the TUS is fully consulted on future proposals. Simon Hodgson recognised the problem which had arisen because the programme got Ministerial approval late in the year. He undertook to consult fully as soon as possible in the future Paul Hill-Tout said there are ongoing talks with Defra but it is our aim to meet the budget on this matter.

## WORK FORCE PLAN

John Winterbourne apologised for not responding due to sick leave, but the general view was that there were no immediate concerns from Staff Council. Sarah England said she would therefore update the plan and still welcomed Staff Council's input if they had anything to add..

**ACTION SARAH ENGLAND**

## **4. DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Steve Smith said the TRA list seems to be expanding and it is difficult to keep track. He asked if he could speak to Ian Lamb and Norman Trollope to arrange an extra column to be added to the spreadsheet showing when a TRA started. Sarah England agreed to this.

**ACTION SARAH ENGLAND**

Tim Gill said that some Forest Districts have a lot of FTAs but the largest, Kielder, is not on the list and asked for an explanation. Simon Hodgson said the workforce in Kielder is more stable and other teams have more project based work that FTAs are more suited to. However, it was agreed that more information about each FTA is required to understand them better. Tim Gill undertook to set out what additional information would be helpful to Staff Council

**ACTION TIM GILL**

Tim Gill asked if the economic downturn is likely to effect the FC. Paul Hill-Tout said, the combination of the Spending Review, the credit crunch and the downturn in the timber market would all have an effect on business. He said FC has had a good period of investment but there would be much less over the next 2 to 3 years. FC is under no particular pressure on programmes from Defra or Ministers but we need to build on our capacity for communications, advocacy, and skills for the future

Richard Britton said we have an additional £3-4M available in the RDPE programme for EWGS in 2009/10 because the baseline budget is being applied by Defra.

## **5. TUS CONSULTATION**

Steve Smith said this paper was an up date on the process agreed when he, Crispin Thorn, Ian Lamb and Norman Trollope met. Sarah England said further discussion was needed on point 5 before it could be agreed. She also advised that the pilot scheme in the West Midlands for Civil Service recruitment is being rolled out Nationally and the FC will now take part.

**ACTION SARAH ENGLAND/STEVE SMITH**

## **6. GRANTS AND REGULATIONS RESILIANCE PLAN**

Paul Hill-Tout said this is a formal paper as agreed at the last meeting setting out the rationale behind the proposals. Pressures have been building up and additional capacity and skills are needed in the National team. The Head of FA and Regions post will be split in two allowing this to move forward. The new Head of the Regions role will be serving the whole of the FCE on an equitable basis.

Crispin Thorn said he was responding for the TUS and thought the paper did not present a strategic business case. Richard Britton said the evidence was provided last year through the business plan, all RDs had subsequently seen it and the strategic business case had been signed off. Crispin Thorn said from a management perspective this had happened but not from a TUS point of view. He said TUS recognise the pressures but could not see clearly from the paper where the consequences might impact on how it would be resourced. Paul Hill-Tout said the points made by Richard Britton have gone through details of increased programmes and resource transfers from Defra. If the TUS would like this information set out again it can be arranged. He said the FC has a duty of care to staff working long hours with action needed now to relieve these pressures. The implementation of this proposed change will take place over 18 months and will straddle two financial years as the extra staff are added to achieve more resilience. He said that whilst he did not accept that there had been an overall increase in workload in the Regions' team the staff in the Regions would not be cut back in order to strengthen the national G&R team. Crispin Thorn said he welcomed this assurance. Tim Gill confirmed that the TUS was content for the G&R resilience plan to be implemented on this basis.

## **7. ITEM 8 MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

Sarah England said PB 3 & 4 managers can be offered opportunities to undertake level 2 MDP and there has been a good response from staff wanting to apply for this development. However, due to resource issues only 10 colleagues can be supported between Jan & Mar 2009. Tim Gill said he was concerned for staff who did not get selected and may possibly slip through the net. Sarah England said staff and managers have been asked to consider their medium and long term needs. After PB3 & 4 staff have been trained at level 2, PB5 and 6a staff will get training at level 1 with the benefit of support from trained Managers. Paul Hill-Tout said management development has been neglected and it is important for staff to feel ready for training and to be able to consolidate it. Crispin Thorn said the TUS welcomed this news, not much investment had been given to management development in recent years and this scheme will need to build confidence and support in this important area.

## **8. ITEM 7 NATIONAL OFFICE ARRANGEMENTS**

Paul Hill-Tout presented the slides shown to NO staff at Cambridge on 5 November. (see attached).

This sets out the top-level framework for the future of the National Office arrangements in England. Cambridge has had a lease since 1985, which expires in May 2010. In May 2008 our landlords, approached us with a proposal to pay us to vacate the office early and we set about finding new premises in Cambridge. In August, the landlords withdrew their offer. Since then the EEB and the ENC have taken stock of our future office needs, considering the collective capacity of the National team and the scale of fragmentation between Cambridge, Bristol, York and home working.

At the ENC meeting in October 08, it was concluded there should be one Head Office for England and that Bristol should be the base. The key reasons were more current permanent staff and a more competitive location for recruitment.

On this basis, the plan is to take on the lease of a new building nearby in the Bristol Business Park transferring existing Bristol staff to the new location over the next 4 –5

months. The Cambridge Office would close when the lease expires in May 2010 and functions will migrate to Bristol over the next 18 months

For colleagues at Cambridge this will raise a complex range of issues and choices and FC would aim to support them through an agreed change process and business continuity plan.

Tim Gill said this is a great shock and asked for time for the TUS to go away to consider these proposals. He acknowledged the urgency of this matter and will establish a Working Group to liaise with Management. Paul Hill-Tout agreed to consult with the TUS on the implementation of this and said that Sarah England and John Scotney will be the lead contacts.

Stuart Grainger said there is urgency about this and important for staff affected to be able to make an informed decision about their futures.

## **ACTION TUS**

### **9. ITEM 9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Tim Gill asked for clarification on points raised in his letter of 28 October on the handling of a selection board.

Sarah England accepted the points made and said lessons had been learnt from the experience.

### **10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

22 January 2009