

**MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON
10 FEBRUARY 2009 AT THE UNITE OFFICE, LONDON**

Present: Official Side

Paul Hill Tout, Chairman
John Scotney
Pauline Marchington, Secretary

Trade Union side:

Tim Gill, Vice Chairman
Edward Shephard, TUS Secretary
Mick Hoban, PCS
Steve Holdsworth, PCS
Crispin Thorn, Prospect
Tom Grimwood, UNITE
Stuart Grainger, PCS

1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Apologies have been received from Richard Britton, Simon Hodgson, Julie Saunders, Tim Medlock, John Winterbourne, Robert Beaney, Steve Smith and Ron Melville.

Paul Hill-Tout said Sarah England was off work ill and John Scotney was attending this meeting to represent her.

2. MINUTES

Crispin Thorn requested that under Matters Arising, Woodfuel the word 'pilot' on line 1 was changed to 'Challenge'. The minutes were then agreed as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

WHELDRAKE OFFICE

It was agreed that the agreed Terms of Reference would be sent out to all staff.

ACTION: John Scotney

ASSET SALES

Mick Hoban asked how the progress towards the target was going in the present climate. Paul Hill- Tout said that deals were in place for the budgeted £6 million with Defra agreeing cover and FC repaying as necessary next financial year. For the FY 2009/2010 asset sales will be £7 million made up from £4 million sales of woodlands and £3 million from buildings and development land.

WORKFORCE PLAN

Tim Gill asked about progress. Paul Hill-Tout said he would ask Sarah England to update the next ESC.

ACTION: Sarah England

TRAs

Tim Gill said the TRA list was a substantial size and asked about the introduction of an extra column to provide further insight.

ACTION: Tim Gill/Sarah England to discuss

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Paul Hill-Tout said the first course took place in January and the next course was in March. He said it was important to see the MDP underway.

4. DIRECTORS REPORT

Paul Hill-Tout said the Public Forest Estate study was progressing. The next step was to make arrangements for the Working Group to be set up by March 2009. Paul Hill-Tout and Lord Clark were meeting the Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies, on 11 February to discuss handling. We are not in control of the PFE study. The pre-budget report and the operation efficiency review may have a linkage to the budget report.

Paul Hill-Tout said Laura Jones had now taken up her role as Head of Policy and Programmes and there would be a trawl for her permanent successor in SW Region.

Paul Hill-Tout said he had met the Minister in late January and he was very supportive of plans to consult on the Restoration of Open Habitats from woodland. Representatives from DECC and Defra also attended and supported FC at the meeting. The Minister is keen to know what local people and user groups thoughts as well as the industry and environmental NGOs.

Paul Hill-Tout said the Phytophthora Outbreak was being taken very seriously by Government and Defra have announced a £5 million per annum programme for the control of this disease.

Paul Hill-Tout said Defra had given FC money to cover the shortfall in timber receipts in 08/09 to be paid back in 09/10. He expected a further £6 million shortfall in 09/10 and this has been lodged with Defra Finance and with the Minister. He expects to get the money to meet the shortfall but did not know at that stage about any terms. On that basis there were no plans to cut posts or programmes. The TUS will be kept informed on progress.

Steve Holdsworth said a couple of posts stood out on the TRA list and asked when these would be resolved. Paul Hill-Tout replied that the PB6b post was part of the SW team and would be looked at when the new Regional Director was in post. The other post was the PB4 in the Policy and Programmes Group and would be looked at by Laura Jones as part of restructuring of the Group.

Crispin Thorn asked if the Green Advisor post in East England would be responsible for England or would other Regions have a similar post. Paul Hill-Tout said each Region had a different structure and it would be a matter for each Regional Director in the light of regional priorities. Any new posts would not be created but would be developed from existing posts. Gareth Price was the national lead and it was agreed that Gareth would update ESC on Green Infrastructure work.

ACTION: Gareth Price

Grants Update - Crispin Thorn stated that the TUS welcomed the flexible approach being applied to EWGS in order to maintain incentive levels, in particular the development of the 'additional contributions' for woodland creation and the further development of the WIG / SSSI grants .

Grants and Regulations Resilience Plan update - Crispin Thorn stated that the TUS supported the principle of addressing the current capacity issues within the national G&R team. He went on to say that the TUS had concerns over the grading of the PB1 post but would accept the Staff Inspector's assessment

5. NATIONAL OFFICE WORKING GROUP – UPDATE

John Scotney said Sarah England was grateful to the TUS for their help. First drafts of the Project Plan and the Business Rules for the move to Bristol had been prepared. Preference interviews would go ahead for staff in the 4th week of February and 2nd week in March and there would be a written record of each interview. Stuart Grainger said it would be useful to have a 'time line' to indicate to staff the sequence of events and Business continuity and for the Q & A paper to be revisited and completed. It was agreed that a generic time line and a team specific time line would be produced and the Q&A would be revamped and circulated to staff.

ACTION: John Scotney

Tim Gill said staff were encouraged by the approach being taken to support colleagues through a difficult process. John Scotney said it was hoped that after the preference interviews staff would have a 'case worker' who will support a member of staff through the process.

6. HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Paul Hill-Tout said he wanted to share in principle the proposal to create this new post. The post would be in Bristol and would create an extra layer of capacity and skills FC didn't have. Edward Shephard asked what the new post would do. Paul Hill-Tout said the post holder would lead our communication and help inform and influence key people setting the agenda. Crispin Thorn stated that the TUS had a number of issues/concerns in relation to the proposal. In particular, the relationship between the proposal and the current Head of Communications and Secretariat, with the agreed process for structural/grading changes being based on the JEGS process and consultation with the TUS. It was agreed to provide TUS with the full job description for the new post and related further information available at the current stage of the National Team migration process.

ACTION: Paul Hill-Tout

7. AOB

Paul Hill-Tout thanked Edward Shephard for all his effort and hard work for TUS and wished him well in his new role.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

16 June and 1 October.