

MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON 16 JULY 2009 AT ERGON HOUSE, LONDON

Present: Official Side

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

Trade Union side:

Allan Mackenzie, FCTU England Chair (acting)
Mick Hoban, FCTU England, PCS
Stuart Grainger, FCTU England, PCS
Stephen Holdsworth, FCTU England, PCS
Ian Everard, FCTU England, PCS
Paul Cody, FCTU England, Prospect
Sue Gillingwater, FCTU England Secretary (acting)
Sam Telford, FCTU Network Support, Silvan House

1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Welcome Allan Mackenzie, Sue Gillingwater, Paul Cody and Ian Everard.
Apologies have been received from Richard Britton, Steve Smith, Crispin Thorn and Tommy Grimwood

2. MINUTES

Agreed as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

REGIONAL OFFICES

Paul Hill-Tout provided an update:

- NE and NW - no proposals being taken forward
- SW - Bullers' Hill project at design stage and being re-considered in the light of cost increases prior to further submission to EB.
- Y&H - Report awaited on possible option to relocate with Defra. Mick Hoban expressed fears about security at this site and a possible decline in grant business through a reduced scope to interact with the public.

ASSET SALES

Simon Hodgson said the 2009/10 programme was underway and half way to the target. The downturn in timber prices had not impacted on woodland sales. Allan Mackenzie raised concerns/queries about the criteria for woodland sales. Simon Hodgson said that these had been agreed by the National Committee and Ministers and research interests would be taken into account in any selection.

WORKFORCE PLAN

Sarah England said this was currently parked until January 2010 and the extra column in the TRA report has been added.

4. PUBLIC FOREST ESTATE

Paul Hill-Tout said he is keen to keep the FCTU fully informed. The aim would be to secure a clear and refreshed mandate. Laura Jones said there would be a series of public and staff consultation events over the next few months. Paul Cody asked if members of the press could be invited to these events. It was agreed that these events are not for public debate with the press and any enquiries should be directed through the correct Communication channels. Allan Mackenzie asked if the timetable could be kept too and could the study be derailed at completion. Laura Jones said we are on track so far but the end game is dependent on responses by Ministers.

5. OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME

Simon Hodgson said a Steering Group and a Working Group have been set. There are 5 strands; Timber Business, Leisure, Other (mineral extraction, burials etc.), Wind power and Alternative Funding Opportunities. The work has started and consultants appointed and the first report is planned for the autumn pre-budget report. Allan Mackenzie asked if members could engage more with this process. Paul Hill-Tout said that staff would be kept informed about the process and would be fully consulted if and when Ministers wished up to consider any changes.

6. FUTURE NATIONAL OFFICE ARRANGEMENTS

Sarah England introduced the paper. Allan Mackenzie said he attended the staff meetings at Bristol and Cambridge and whilst the principles are understood there was still concern over some issues. Paul Hill-Tout said that within the business rules there was a certain amount of flexibility and there would be around 80 jobs with a wide range of future career opportunities at Bristol. Sarah England then explained each of the Annexes.

On Annex D setting out the new P&PG proposed structure, Stuart Grainger expressed concern that it appeared top heavy with potential extra pressures for admin support staff. Laura Jones said there was no overall change in staff numbers or the balance of senior and admin support roles. The key changes proposed were restructuring to serve current needs and increase effectiveness.

On Annex E setting out the new Communications and Executive Office plans. Sarah England thanked ESC for their feedback on the Head of Communications post which would be advertised later in July. Allan Mackenzie asked about the relationship between the Head of Communications in England and Silvan House. Paul Hill-Tout said this post would be the most senior communications position in FCGB but would work within the

FCGB framework. Details would be worked up once the new post holder was in place. Allan Mackenzie said they agreed with the PB1 Comms post but would like more information about the proposed PB2 Head of Executive Office post.

On Annex F setting out the planned approach to developing an integrated Finance team. Stuart Grainger said that colleagues in the current Cambridge Finance team did not feel they had enough information to make an informed decision about their preferences. Sarah England said this difficulty is recognised. If colleagues go to Bristol they will take their posts with them.

On Annex I, on the G&R team. Stuart Grainger said there was concern about a downturn in Grants activity and the staff we are recruiting might not be needed in a few years. Paul Hill-Tout said we have a contractual programme obligations to Defra and EU until 2013 and we are examining other areas in RDP where we may take on additional responsibilities. He stressed that he also wanted to redress the situation where a number of G&R colleagues have been seriously overloaded.

FCTU agreed the recommendations in the paper and Sarah England undertook to consult further on the detailed structures for the Executive Office, Communications and Finance teams.

ACTION: SARAH ENGLAND

7. PROGRESS WITH NATIONAL OFFICE PROJECT WORK STREAMS

Sarah England said the Business Rules and the Q&A were issued to Cambridge staff on 1 June and the second round of preference interviews are now underway and staff have until the end of July to make their final decision about transferring to Bristol. Cambridge staff have had training on CV writing and the second round of training, on a one to one basis, will take place soon. We have a dialogue going with the Department for Works and Pensions for their staff to come to Cambridge to talk about re-deployment. On 31 July Stuart Grainger, Allan Mackenzie, Crispin Thorn, Sarah England, John Scotney and Jean Lindsey meet with the Cabinet Office staff and a CCSU representative to discuss and review the handling of the NO project in relation to Civil Service guidelines.

8. TUS NATIONAL COMMITTEE CHANGES/TUS CAPACITY

Allan Mackenzie said the development of FCTU England needs a presence and permanent arrangements at the Bristol Office and a full set of permanent representatives to the ESC. Sue Gillingwater and Allan Mackenzie are temporary members of the ESC. Allan Mackenzie asked if the 10 day turn around on consultations with Management could be extended. Paul Hill-Tout said that a longer turn round would mean that the planned programme of around 30 new appointments at Bristol could not be concluded on time.

Sarah England agreed to discuss with TUS how best to tackle the problem.

ACTION: SARAH ENGLAND/ALLAN MACKENZIE

9. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mick Hoban expressed concerns about the restoration of open habitats. Laura Jones said FC and Ministers would take stock following the consultation.

Allan Mackenzie asked about the Community Forests and if there would be any likely redundancies in the SW Forest. Paul Hill-Tout said there was an evolution taking place in the delivery models for community forestry. There will be no FC redundancies arising in the SW Forest.

Allan Mackenzie asked if the FC was meeting the requirements through the apprenticeship scheme and if we are attracting the right people. (See Annex 1, attached.)

Mick Hoban asked about the Woodfuel Implementation plan. Laura Jones said the Renewable Energy Strategy published in July make strong references to the Woodfuel Strategy and the Implementation Plan which was under development.

FINANCE

Paul Hill-Tout said that the revised settlement for 2010/11 is based on £25 million of timber receipts. If there is any short fall this year or next the FC will have to make up the difference by 31 March 2011. If necessary, we have agreed with Ministers that this would need to be by asset sales.

10. AOB

BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMMES

Simon Hodgson reported that we now have the baseline data and systems for collecting the information on energy and travel.

STAFF SURVEY 2009

Sarah England said this would be out in September 2009 and staff will complete it on-line. The last survey was in 2004 and these are very important surveys. Allan Mackenzie said FCTU will help with the delivery and this time there will be 4 questions on Diversity and the TUS has 5 questions included.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

1 October, room 502 Nobel House, London.

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Annex 1

Following an enquiry from Allan Mackenzie on the apprenticeship scheme in England at the ESC meeting on 16th July 2009, this annex provides an update on the apprenticeship scheme.

Andy Mason has reported that 27 people attended the week, 1 participant dropped out on day one.

Age Range	Numbers
16-19 years	10
20-30 years	13
30+ years	04

Home Locations	Numbers
Herefordshire & Worcestershire	18
Other (Including Bristol, Gloucester, Norwich, Cardiff, Gwent, Kent, Bolton, Bath & Northampton)	09

Background	Numbers
Unemployed	4
At or leaving School or College	5
Self employed	2
Employed in forestry/horticulture	4
Employed other	3
Through agency such as Probation/After Care	4
No specific information given	5