

**MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON  
13 JULY 2010 AT NOBEL HOUSE, LONDON**

**Present: Management Side**  
Paul Hill-Tout  
Simon Hodgson  
Sarah England  
Simon Toomer  
Kate Debley (Minute Secretary)

**Trade Union Side**  
Allan MacKenzie  
Sue Gillingwater  
Paul Cody  
Mick Hoban  
Steve Holdsworth  
Ian Everard  
Bob Griffiths

**1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES**

Paul Hill-Tout welcomed everyone to the Staff Council meeting and apologies were noted from Stephen Smith, Stuart Grainger and Martin Johnston.

**2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the last meeting on 11 February 2010 were reviewed and agreed.

It was confirmed that venues for future England Staff Council meetings would alternate between Bristol and London.

There was some discussion with regard to the importance of timely and accurate minutes, and a timetable was agreed for the preparation of minutes in future. Draft minutes will be circulated within 20 working days of the meeting, FCTU will return comments within 10 working days and an intranet link to the agreed minutes will be made available to all staff as soon as possible after this. It was agreed that all staff should be aware that the Staff Council process is undertaken on their behalf.

**3. MATTERS ARISING**

Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting were as follows:

- With regard to the York office, **Paul Hill-Tout** advised that he was unable to report any further developments as a satisfactory response to our building requirements had yet to be received.
- With regard to reviews, **Paul Hill-Tout** advised that every study or review commissioned under the previous Administration is now null and void. Individual processes have either come to an end or are being reconsidered by Ministers; this applies to both the PFE study and OEP work. Paul further advised that he hoped the intellectual value of the work already undertaken will be considered in any next steps.

- With regard to a Bristol office local Staff Council, **Sarah England** and **Sue Gillingwater** advised that preparations for this are now in train, and a constitution is being drawn up. **Paul Hill-Tout** noted that he would be interested to know how many Bristol staff are union members and of those how many have joined the Forestry Commission recently. This may give some indication as to how effectively newer members of staff are engaging in trade union business. It was agreed that **Sue Gillingwater** will gather and analyse information on this.

**Action: Sue Gillingwater to gather and analyse information with regard to levels of union membership amongst Bristol office staff.**

- It was noted that it is a legal requirement for the Staff Council forum to have a health and safety item on each agenda. It was agreed that this should be added to the next agenda.

**Action: Sarah England/Executive Office to ensure that a health and safety item is added to the agenda for the next meeting.**

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

**Paul Hill-Tout** introduced his Director's Report.

By way of additional information, Paul advised the group of Ministerial appointments under the new Administration. Jim Paice is the Minister for Forestry. Paul further advised that there have been three meetings held with the Minister to date; Biosecurity, Forest Research and general introductions.

**Mick Hoban** posed a number of questions with regard to the Director's Report on behalf of FCTU:

- (i) It is stated in the Report that 'we now have a Policy and Programme Manager in place for each of the 5 aims of England's Trees Woods and Forests'; does this mean that the Quality of Life Manager position has been filled?

**Sarah England** advised that Helen Townsend remains the Quality of Life Manager and there will be no further recruitment due to the recruitment freeze.

- (ii) As Kevin Stannard has now taken up post as Deputy Surveyor of the Forest of Dean, are there any further developments with regard to the vacant FMD post at Northants?

**Simon Hodgson** advised that the interim arrangement of Andy Medhurst covering Northants as well as Sherwood will continue for the time being and this arrangement would be reviewed during the process of business planning for next year.

**Mick Hoban** noted that the TRAs list is much shorter than previously and the unions would support this continuing. Mick also thanked the management side for the additional 'funded/non-funded' column in the FTAs list and advised that this is useful data.

#### **5. CIVIL SERVICE RECRUITMENT FREEZE**

**Sarah England** introduced paper 08/10 'Recruitment Freeze'.

Sarah advised that the post-filling form is still 'work in progress' and she would welcome comments or feedback on this.

**Mick Hoban** noted that as FC has no option other than to freeze recruitment, the information provided by **Sarah England** is very useful and FCTU support and congratulate her on this.

**Paul Hill-Tout** advised the group that the recruitment freeze process has been a difficult one, particularly for those colleagues and departments who already had posts in the system. Paul further advised that it will be advantageous for managers to consider recruitment issues well in advance.

**Simon Hodgson** advised that effective business planning would be more easily achieved if colleagues were able to provide notice to management as soon as possible of their intentions over their retirement plans.

## **6. STAFFING AT THE NATIONAL ARBORETUM**

**Simon Toomer** introduced paper 09/10 'Proposed Staffing Changes at The National Arboretum, Westonbirt'.

Simon advised that the proposed changes will capitalise on resources available. The Friends of Westonbirt charity offers capacity which could be more effectively utilised by increasing the facility to manage volunteers.

**Mick Hoban** advised that FCTU would be unable to agree the changes today as there had not been sufficient time to consider the proposal. A written response will follow.

**Action: FCTU to provide written response to proposed staffing changes at Westonbirt within usual response times.**

## **7. RECENT CORRESPONDENCE.**

**Simon Hodgson** referred those present to the recent correspondence with regard to asset sales. Additional disposals will now be required under the Government's debt reduction strategy. The main criteria for determining areas of land to be included in the disposals are as follows:

- (i) Achievability in-year.
- (ii) Minimal impact on revenue streams.

**Mick Hoban** stated for the record that FCTU is fundamentally opposed to increased asset disposals, believing that these are a short-term solution which may jeopardise public benefits in future. However, FCTU will continue to engage with management on the issue and wish to be kept informed of all developments. It was further noted that FCTU will be required to support members on this issue as they will be at the frontline of public reaction.

It was agreed that **Simon Hodgson** would provide a formal response to FCTU's recent letter.

**Action: Simon Hodgson to provide formal response to FCTU letter regarding asset sales.**

It was further agreed that **Simon Hodgson** would provide a letter to FCTU setting out the list of additional disposals under the Government's debt reduction strategy.

**Action: Simon Hodgson to provide letter to FCTU setting out list of additional disposals under the Government's debt reduction strategy.**

## **8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Paul Hill-Tout** and **Mick Hoban** formally thanked both **Allan MacKenzie**, for his work in chairing the FCTU side of the England Staff Council and **Sue Gillingwater** for her work as acting secretary for the FCTU side of the England Staff Council. **Mick Hoban** has now taken over the role as chair. The secretary post remains with **Sue Gillingwater** until a replacement secretary is agreed.

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

It was felt that the next meeting scheduled for 14 October 2010 should be moved to a later date in October to follow the Government's Spending Review.

**Action: Executive Office to arrange revised date.**