MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND
STAFF COUNCIL MEETING
SILVAN HOUSE

TUESDAY 28 JUNE 2005

Present:
Official Side- James Ogilvie (Chairman), Paul Snaith, Ann Alexander, Kathy Brown (Secretary)

Union Side- David Robertson (Vice Chairman), John MacBeth, Sinclair Coghill, Nick Mainprize, Keith Miller, Dinah Beattie

1. Introduction and Apologies

James Ogilvie welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Jean Lindsay, Edward Shephard and Susan Darcy.

David Robertson pointed out that National Office no longer had a Union Representative at these Staff Council Meetings. It was agreed that National Office members would be asked for nominations by both James Ogilvie and the Union side.
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Action: James Ogilvie/David Robertson

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting/Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted.

There were no matters arising however David Robertson asked for additional agenda items for the Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS) and Staffing Levels. It was agreed SFS would be dealt with as Agenda Item 3.5 and Staffing Levels would be discussed as part of AOB.

3. Overtime Payment Difference for PB4s and PB3s between FC & FE and between Conservancies

Sinclair Coghill pointed out that there appeared to be a lack of consistency regarding the payment of overtime between FCS and FE and between different pay bands. Paul Snaith explained that FCS had to make an estimated overtime provision in the Business Plan. There were no financial constraints but overtime was not expected to be excessive. If costs centres exceeded their budgets they would need to apply for a variance. In 2004/05 overtime expenditure exceeded budget by £10k. He added that

Conservators and National Office Managers must oversee and monitor their team's overtime needs. Managers should look at their team's work patterns and exercise judgement but he stressed that it was very important to avoid individuals working excessive hours. Ann Alexander pointed out that Conservators and National Office Managers receive monthly updates of hours worked with overtime expenditure and that they have the opportunity to submit revisions. She added that the overtime budget for this year is £62k compared to £37k last year.

David Robertson was pleased to hear of the significant increase in the budget and that there were no constraints on the amount of overtime. Keith Miller made the point that a high proportion of overtime claimed related to travelling time.

3.5. Scottish Forestry Strategy

James Ogilvie advised that Ross Finnie had launched the public consultation on the Review of the Scottish Forestry Strategy at the Royal Highland Show on Friday 24 June. David Robertson asked what Management's perspective was on the review. James Ogilvie advised that there were elements of necessity and also desirability for the review. It was agreed when SFS was launched in 2000 that it would be reviewed in 2005. He commented that the SFS had been well received and that it was likely that the review would be more of a refinement than a complete revision. He added that it would include items such as Health and Energy, which are now much more prominent.

David Robertson asked if Conservancy staff would be given the opportunity to comment. James Ogilvie advised that Hugh Clayden, SFS Review Project Manager, had met with Conservators and attended Regional Forestry Forum meetings but it was noted that Conservancy staff could be more involved. James Ogilvie agreed to take this point forward with Hugh Clayden and Conservators.

Action: James Ogilvie

4. SFGS Issues

James Ogilvie informed the TUS of the Project Management Framework for the revision to the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme. A Project Steering Group chaired by Bob McIntosh and four Working Groups chaired by Alex Morris, James Ogilvie, Simon Hodge and Paul Snaith will manage the review and the various work streams ensuring that any new grants fit within the new RDR. Ministerial approval for the review process was awaited and the TUS would be kept informed.

James Ogilvie explained that there were internal drivers for change and that the grant scheme would need to be revised in line with the RDR. Nick Mainprize raised the point that changes were putting extra pressure on Conservancy staff who were still trying to adjust with Boundary Changes. The pilot stewardship grants had added to the workload. There was also concern about the revisions to the charter time process adding further pressure. James Ogilvie explained that the aim of the charter times

process group is to find a level playing field in recording charter times (including the use of ‘with applicant’ status) thereby introducing a fair comparison across Conservancies.

James Ogilvie raised the possibility of a peak in applications in the lead up to the closure of the current SFGS in December 2006. He said that it was the intention to introduce the new scheme in January 2007. (Note that this may now be later on in 2007 – jfo.) Dinah Beattie asked if Management would consider a moratorium to allow time to clear backlogs and prepare for the launch of the new scheme. James Ogilvie responded saying that it may be an option to run backlog SFGS contracts for the planting season 2007 and implement the new scheme later in 2007.

5. Land Management Contracts (LMCs)

Alex Morris gave an update on Land Management Contracts. The FC was as yet unsure of the Forestry options involved. He will know further details by the end of July. He pointed out that he was meeting with SEERAD next week.

Nick Mainprize asked about Conservancy involvement with LMCs and stressed the importance of planning ahead rather than taking a reactive approach. He questioned if staff would need to record and reference applications, in addition to GIS, constraints checks etc. Alex Morris advised that, as the interim LMC arrangements will only be in place until the final tier is launched in January 2007 the intention is to keep things as simple as possible. He confirmed that it made sense to reference the applications and that Woodland Officers would be involved in looking at plans with forestry options. He would have more information about the SEERAD and Conservancy roles following his meeting with SEERAD. Also, by the end of July, there will be a clearer indication of the number of LMC applications with forestry options.

Alex Morris said that a date of 16 August had been set for FCS and SEERAD to go over plans and that this date had been given to Conservators and Operations Managers. He added that in the longer term it was expected that there would be greater integration between SFGS and LMCs and that FCS was looking for grants to fit new RDR. David Robertson replied saying it was key to give staff information and the opportunity to feed into the process. Dinah Beattie requested that Office Managers should also be kept informed of progress. The discussion highlighted the need for more efficient cascading of information to Conservancy staff.

6. GLADE Update

Rachel Chamberlain provided an update on GLADE. She informed the meeting that Alan Mitchell had taken over Roger Herbert’s role following his retirement from the FC. She pointed out that FC England were going live with GLADE next month however FCS were not confident at the moment that GLADE would be an improvement to the current system. The current proposal is to implement GLADE in Jan 2007 taking on board RDR implementations.

Discussions regarding the effects on Conservancy workloads followed. The TUS voiced their concerns about the effects that the introduction of GLADE, LMCs and RDR would have on staff. James Ogilvie replied that he understood TUS concerns that some of these new areas may lead to a higher level of workload. Part of the case for introducing a GIS-based GLADE system was to reduce the administrative burden by e.g. avoiding the need for multiple keying and providing more efficient management information. There would thus be work savings and new workstreams but at this stage it was impossible to quantify the overall effect on staff workloads.

David Robertson pointed out that workload levels differed between each Conservancy. He agreed that it was not known how much time GLADE would free up but he suggested that it was time to look at the wider picture of what Conservancies do, including their promotional and advisory roles. The TUS stressed the need for Management to avoid a reactionary process and that more forward planning is needed. At the moment there is no grand plan, initiatives and it appeared that additional staff resources are introduced on an ad hoc and reactionary basis. James Ogilvie agreed to note the TUS concerns.

7. Update on RDR and its effect on FCS staff

It was agreed that this item had been covered at earlier Agenda items.

8. Staffing Levels

It was agreed to deal with this additional item at this point of the meeting. Following on from the discussion on the GLADE Update, David Robertson asked if a review of staffing levels was planned. He mentioned that as part of the Conservancy Boundary discussions, it had been agreed to review staffing levels when the new Conservancy structure had bedded down. It was thought that it had been agreed to carry out such a review after a six-month period. This was referred to in the minutes of the Staff Council Meeting which took place on Wednesday 10th March 2004**.**

James Ogilvie commented that Management had responded to demands for additional resources over the last year agreed but he agreed to consider the staffing review suggestion.

Sinclair Coghill highlighted the concerns of Conservancy staff that there would be a number of changes coming in the near future. He expressed relief that SFGS had been delivered and pointed out that it had been a difficult tool to deal with. He noted that RDR was a main driver for change to the grant scheme and he queried the internal drivers. James Ogilvie responded that there was an internal driver, based on soundings from external sources, to achieve a simpler system. It was acknowledged that it may not always be possible to simplify grant schemes to satisfy all applicants, whilst ensuring that SFGS is delivered and necessary management information recorded.

9. Location of New Offices involving other Government Departments

David Robertson expressed TUS concern about retention of the FC identity if the proposed 'on the ground project' office co-location moves take place and questioned whether this would be the start of merging different Departments together being similar to DEFRA. He asked how these organisations would work together. James Ogilvie informed TUS that a paper on this subject had been copied to Ed Shephard and Malcolm Crosby. He circulated a copy of the recent 'On the Ground Project Director' job advertisement. It was agreed that once the successful candidate was in place that this topic would be a fixed Agenda Item for further meetings. The TUS would be kept informed of progress.

10. Pay, increases and Performance Pay

David Robertson acknowledged that this item was more appropriate as an overall union matter. However the TUS felt that it was worth letting FCS Senior Management know how FCS staff felt about these issues. Members at the top of the salary scale have effectively had their pay effectively "frozen" for four years and that this was only agreed reluctantly by TUS to enable pay progression for those below the salary maximum under the previous 3 year pay settlement. The TUS felt this disrespected their loyalty to FCS and created resentment and disaffection by those most experienced staff adversely affected by the "freeze". Concerns were also expressed by the TUS about the comments from Human Resources that "perhaps the top of some of the pay scales were too high".

Nick Mainprize also voiced concern about the change in Performance Pay procedures during through the reporting year. James Ogilvie felt he was unable to comment on this matter but asked if the TUS wished the minutes to be copied to Kim Lardge, Director Human resources. The TUS agreed to this.

Action James Ogilvie

11. Pensions

David Robertson drew attention to the number of staff who were content to go on strike over pension issues in order attract Government attention. Staff were concerned about the possibility of having to work additional years and the loss of the final salary pension scheme. Similarly to the agenda item on Pay, it was agreed that Pensions was not appropriate for discussion at this meeting but that it was a useful opportunity for the TUS to record staff concerns. It was again agreed that these minutes would be copied to Kim Lardge.

12. Any Other Business

Management and TUS recorded thanks to Rachel Chamberlain and Alex Morris for their helpful contributions to the meeting.

13. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that future meetings would be held every six months. To co-ordinate the timing with the joint meeting with FES in December, it was agreed to hold the next meeting on Wednesday 28 September at 11am.