

**MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND
STAFF COUNCIL MEETING
SILVAN HOUSE**

WEDNESDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2005

Present:

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

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

1. Introduction and Apologise

James Ogilvie welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Sinclair Coghill, Susan Darcy and Ed Shephard.

2. Minutes of Previous Minutes/Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous minutes were accepted.

David Robertson referred to item 10 of the previous minutes and asked if Kim Lardge had provided any comments in relation to this item. No response had been received.

3. Staffing Levels

David Robertson referred to item 8 of the previous minutes and asked James Ogilvie if he had considered the staff review suggestion referred to in the minutes of 10 March 2004.

James Ogilvie responded by saying that he couldn't find any specific reference in the 10 March 2004 minutes to a staffing review. As far as he was aware they referred to a review of the Central Conservator post and an examination of the PB4 complement at a later date. He pointed out that since the Boundary changes several staff changes had been implemented, which included some posts being JEGS'd and the addition of extra posts at PB4 level. Paul Snaith added that Management felt that things had settled down but were always open to views and proposals made by Conservators.

David Robertson made the point that the TUS represented all Conservancies and preferred to take a holistic approach with a long-term view. He also made the point that in fairness to all staff the TUS asked that a consistent approach be taken for all Conservancies. The TUS asked to look at the March 2004 minutes and copies were handed out. Nick Mainprize referred to page 6 paragraph 2–, which stated that “these conclusions be resumed at some point and not forgotten about”. Paul Snaith replied that this didn’t imply a full scale review would be carried out. Discussions followed regarding workloads and the impact that current and forthcoming changes were having on staff. The Staff side pointed out that Conservancy staff were under increasing pressure due to the increasing number of changes and challenges – closer working with other agencies, Land Management Contracts, new grants and GLADE. The additional work and challenges involved in dealing with consultees was also mentioned. There was a need to consider staffing levels and an ideal structure to deliver the required outputs, including how Conservancies relate to National Office. James Ogilvie decided that there was no present need to review the staffing levels throughout Scotland. Nick Mainprize asked if staffing levels was on the agenda of the SFGS Review. Paul Snaith agreed that SFGS Review Administration Group would look at workload implications.

Action: Paul Snaith

4. Glade Update

Rachel Chamberlain provided an update on GLADE. She informed the meeting that FCE had gone live with the system and Wales were due to go live early next year. It was still FCS intention to implement GLADE in January 2007. The Felling Licence system would be ready at an earlier stage, hopefully, in May 2006. It was proposed that training for the Felling Licences would commence next August. Rachel will approach Conservancies to find out who best to train in this area. She also confirmed that it had been agreed to await further development of the mapping request facility before it is launched in FCS. David Robertson asked if applicants would be informed about the delay as SFGS literature includes a reference to the mapping request facility being available in 2005. Rachel confirmed that everyone of the SFGS user database would receive a briefing update.

Rachel reminded everyone that the FCS Intranet was regularly updated to keep everyone informed about the GLADE project. David Robertson was pleased that good communication issues were in hand. He then asked how the GLADE system would cope with the new grant scheme and closer integration with SEERAD – for example referencing. James Ogilvie advised that as soon as the new scheme emerged it would be necessary to take a close look at how the system will work. On the Single Paying Agency question, Paul Snaith said discussions had taken place with SEERAD and it was possible that the new RDR regulations would allow FCS to continue to carry out all grant administration,

including making grant payments to individuals and act as agents for SEERAD as the Paying Agency. SEERAD are keen to maintain status quo and for FC(S) to process and pay grants as far as the regulations will allow. If this were to be the case a SLA would be set up with SEERAD. It is hoped for details of the regulations in October and FCS would then meet with SEERAD for more detailed discussions. Keith Miller said that this was very encouraging, as it was not what everyone had been anticipating.

The meeting thanked Rachel for her useful update.

5. SFGS Review Update

James Ogilvie updated the TUS on the SFGS Review. He informed them that the Steering Group were due to meet next week. It was felt that progress was going well and it was hoped to have enough information by December 2005 for general consultation. He thought it was very unlikely that there would be any transitional arrangements between the old and new schemes; a clean break was desired. It was hoped to close the old scheme in 2006 and open the new one in April 2006. He then asked if Conservators had been providing staff with frequent updates. Dinah Beattie responded saying that Working Group minutes had been provided via the intranet, which she found very useful. Nick Mainprize felt that Rachel Chamberlain's recent visits to Conservancies had also helped to bridge some gaps.

6. Conservancy Citizen Charter Times (impacted by other departments)

Dinah Beattie made the point that although this item was being raised under 'Charter Times' her first concern was the pressure being put on colleagues due to failures in systems and more recently the new procedure for reporting problems to G & L. However, Dinah went on to make the point that the recent changes in the process for reporting system faults could impact adversely on Charter Times. Under the new system all faults must be logged through Assystnet, who provide a 3 day response period. Although, generally, they replied within this time she was worried that this 3-day period may affect their Charter Times. Dinah also informed the meeting about recent problems with the WGS and Felling Licence databases; these had a catastrophic effect on some Conservancies with substantial data loss due to a back up failure in BSD. These problems had caused stress and affected staff morale in addition to impacting on service and citizen charter times. Ann Alexander asked to be kept informed when systems fail or are down for long periods of time causing stress on the admin teams. James Ogilvie advised that these problems would need to be raised at a GB level so he will take them to the next Service Board Meeting.

7. Any Other Business

David Robertson pointed out that the Buchan Forest District review was under way and depending on the outcome, this could have an impact on Grampian Conservancy.

Jean Lindsay informed the TUS that Human Resources were currently pulling together the results of the latest Staff Survey. Unfortunately FCS and FES figures had been taken as a whole. When completing the survey, the menu option FCS was used by staff in both FCS and FES locations resulting in FCS receiving 158% completion return. She pointed out that the results of the survey will be looked at in an open and transparent manner and that Bob McIntosh was keen to take the results seriously. The TUS will be invited to provide a member to sit on the working group.

Jean Lindsay then provided an update on the Management Development Programme. She stated that the MDP Working Group had met 3 times and that the TUS was represented by Ed Shephard. In the 1st stage of the programme she would talk to Conservators and FDM's. The Group will be looking at investing in staff development both in current roles and for staff with potential to further their career.

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the date of the next meeting would be Thursday 23 March 2006.