

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

WEDNESDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2007

Present:

Official Side - James Simpson (chairman), Paul Snaith, Ann Alexander, Jean Lindsay, Sharon Davies (secretary)

Union Side - Sinclair Coghill (Vice Chairman), Tommy McGrory, Susan Darcy, Hazel Mclean, John McBeth, Donald Macleod

1 Welcome and Introductions

James Simpson welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced himself as the new chairman. Round table introductions were made for the benefit of new faces at the meeting.

The TUS asked management if the meeting could be held on a more regular basis in future.

2 Apologies

No apologies were received.

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

There was one outstanding action point from the last meeting relating to SFGS Review Administration Group to look at workload implications. Paul Snaith informed the TUS that this hasn't been done and is still difficult to carry out and would be covered further under the G&L update.

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted.

4 General Update incl G&L

JS informed the TUS he would circulate the paper that had been presented to the Scottish Forestry Forum.

Action: James Simpson

JS gave the TUS an update on the present position by informing the meeting that 07/08 funding was already fully committed and applicants should be encouraged to claim in 07/08. Financial year 08/09 was almost fully committed but the FC are good position for delivery however he accepted the TUS point that the industry has been affected by the closure of the grant scheme.

JS then spoke at length and in detail about the new LMC's and the current position of the development of the scheme.

He explained that currently voluntary modulation is being discussed between the EC and European Parliament. Until agreement has been reached in Brussels the available funding for the Scotland Rural Development Plan (SRDP) cannot be finalised or submitted to the EC for approval. Best estimates suggest that the SRDP will not be approved until July. He emphasised that the delay is beyond the FC control. LMC's are being worked on but have quite a way to go. A draft version of SRDP has been with EC since December.

JS went on to explain the 3 tier/pillar systems to be included within LMC and that some of our current grant activities would not be included within the new contract such as restocking, or locational premiums..

He informed the group that the applications for LMC Tier3 would be judged 3 or 4 times per year by a panel which would be made up of ERAD family officials plus some representation from local authorities and local Enterprise Companies.. Once the panel has made a decision, an offer would be sent to the applicant who will be given around 4 weeks to accept the offer. No extension will be given on this deadline which will also help with monitoring budget commitments. .

The IT system is currently being developed with ERRAD and SNH. This will be predominately web-based system however paper applications will be accepted.

PS informed the TUS that SEERAD are the paying agency and were keen to take over the grant payments. IT departments in SEERED and FC are looking at ways to export the information necessary to carry this out. However he did point out that a lot of final details were still to be sorted out such as the legacy cases and delegated responsibility to the FC was a possibility.

FC staff would be expected to advise applicants at pre-application stage. Sinclair Coghill was happy with this proposal.

JS informed the TUS that he was representing the FC and Tracey Slaven was representing On the Ground project at the project board. JS emphasised he didn't see a huge threat to FCS and indeed there were opportunities for FCS.

PS reminded the TUS about the meeting held on the 14 March to inform all FCS staff about the grant scheme.

PS went on to inform the TUS about the On the Ground workshop. Pilot areas

have been set up to focus on a few areas of the country to look at the logistics of who would receive applications and which office would receive the application. Ideas were about to be trailed, feedback from staff would be necessary between now and the scheme opening.

He explained that a project manager had been appointed and Tracey Slaven would get the group together soon. He confirmed the trial areas would be Dumfries and Galloway and the National Parks. JS commented that he would like Dumfries and Galloway area to be extended to cover the whole of South Scotland and didn't think the National Parks areas were relevant for the pilot work on SRDP.

SC stated that there were frustrations within the conservancies about the lack of information. JS accepted this however explained to the TUS that it had been difficult to give staff information before more details were decided. Staff would now be engaged as more details were available.

SC informed the meeting that staff would welcome the opportunity to become involved in developing LMCs - not just from a personal point of view but from staff who show a loyalty to FCS and take pride in working for the Commission.

Timetable for the opening of the new scheme is not certain at the moment. However JS anticipated that this would be late autumn, possibly as late as December.

5 Finance Update

PS passed a paper round informing the meeting of the current spending position. He explained the original corporate plan figures to any funding changes and has renegotiated funding from the Exec. He also pointed out that there was a switch of funding due to FCS taking over as sponsors for CSFT from SNH. He explained that key milestone objectives would be agreed with the trust, which would be for public benefit. Additional £200k from ETLLED for timberlink has been secured, total fund now being £38 million.

Some of the changes were accounting changes rather than reductions. He explained that earlier in the financial year funds had been identified that would not be spent in this financial year. This money has been declared to the Scottish Executive and put into the "CUP" to be drawn down in the new financial year. Grant budget spend next year will be closer to 31 million.

6 HR Update

Jean Lindsay informed the TUS that the occupational health is currently being tendered however Department of Work and Pensions have just issued a new contract therefore it is possible that the FC, SEPA and SNH tag on to this. Kim

Large is the FC representative.

A new company called Barkers have won the tender for FC advertising which was previously Rileys.

The FC, ERRAD and SNH are currently sharing training opportunities which means where there is a space within a training course it will be opened up the other departments are no cost.

The Interchange co-location programme is currently on hold. Therefore no further decisions will be made about the Galashiels office location, although it is agreed in principle.

The last staff survey has been analysed and action plans have been set up to take forward the objectives identified. This will be part of the FC Business Partner's role.

Management Development Programme. – JL explained that there are 56 PB4's in FCS and 50 have agreed to take part in the pilot. 3 assessments centre will be held. There are various parts to the course, - self assessment, 360° feedback, and 1 ½ day assessment centre. Consultants were contracted for the 360°. One was held in October. JL will now be asking for feedback from the course held in October. Another course was held in January. SC commented that he had completed the October course and found it really useful and would recommend everyone to take part.

JL hoped that this could be rolled out across the FC in future however funding would need to be addressed as the cost of the pilot was quite expensive. The pilot identified people who are doing quite well, people who have development needs and people who require a high development need and need a structure programme. More support will be given to them with the aim that staff will feel more supported in their career.

JL informed the group she would be taking up her new role within FCS as FCS Business Partner within the next 6 weeks.

7 Student Placements

SC expressed concern that the FC were only recruiting 9 out of 37 students GB wide. He pointed out that England were not recruiting any students and that he felt the GB as a whole should be supporting the students .

JS advised SC to flag this up to the TUS rep for England, but would be interested to know how many students placed with the FC end up working for the FC on a permanent basis. JL informed the group that no official statistics were available but would think about a way to collate this information. Everyone agreed it was in

the FC interest on a GB basis to employ students as they are the next generation of FC foresters.

ACTION: Jean Lindsay to speak to Colin Sobota about the situation.

Hazel McLean asked about the FC policy on filling posts with fixed term appointments. JL informed the TUS that filling posts with fixed term appointments at the current time was the best option to protect the permanent members of staff for the time being and pointed out that fixed term posts could be made permanent at any time. She stressed that each job would be judged on its own merit.

8 AOB

JS informed the TUS that as part of the "On the Ground" project SNH would be taking up half a floor within Silvan House. Implications obviously will be related to the the staff restaurant and car parking.

Glade user acceptance testing had not been without problems, however has been generally managed well. James Simpson stated he was pleased the Conservancies have been involved in the process and that they had added value to UAT outcomes and that it was much appreciated.

Following his recent visit the Weldrake, PS informed the meeting that general feedback on the England grant scheme is that it is now working well with the exception of reports.

Date of next meeting would be in September 07 and a date would be arranged nearer the time.