

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

**Tuesday 20 April 2010**

<p><b>Present:</b> <b>Official Side:</b></p>	<p>James Simpson (Chairman), Paul Snaith, Alison McSheaffrey, Kathy Brown (Secretary)</p>	
<p><b>Union Side:</b></p>	<p>Brian Allison (Vice Chairman), Donald MacLeod, John MacBeth, Susan Darcy, Allan MacKenzie, Tommy McGrory, Liz Stewart, Gillian MacKenzie</p>	
<p><b>1. Welcome and Introductions</b></p>	<p>On behalf of James, Paul welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Gillian MacKenzie to her first meeting; she will take the place of Liz Stewart who will be retiring shortly. He explained that due to an overrun of his previous meeting at Pentland House James was running late and that he would Chair the meeting until James arrived.</p>	
<p><b>2. Apologies</b></p>	<p>No apologies</p>	
<p><b>3. Minutes of the Last Meeting</b></p>	<p>G&amp;R Visits were still to be arranged and would commence shortly. Bob McIntosh had visited. The 3 Ops Managers posts had been JEGS'd but did not result in any change.</p>	
<p><b>4. S(S) Conservancy Accommodation</b></p>	<p>An update on the Galashiels Office move was requested. Management were unable to provide full details, but gave assurances that the local implementation committee would be resurrected and kept informed of the situation. James would obtain more details from Bob McIntosh.</p>	<p><b>James to speak to Bob and provide update</b></p>
<p><b>5. Finance</b></p>	<p>The budget for 2010/11 has now been formally agreed and despite dire predictions FCS only lost £200k overall, which was a good result, However depending on the results of the May General Election budgets may be re-opened although not sure how this would effect FCS so presently working with current budget. The election also means the Spending Review (not sure if 1 or 3 years) will not take place until October/November. Although it is too early to predict, current expectations are that we might face a 4% (real) reduction over each of next 3 years. Following results of the staff survey management feel there will be merit in involving staff about how we address this. An Independent Group has been set up to review Scottish Government budgets, the group are looking at choices/options to present to the Parliament. It is not clear if this will affect FCS or mainly focus on larger departments. Their findings are expected to be published at the end of July</p>	
<p><b>6. HR Update</b></p>	<p>IIP - At present FC does not have full IIP accreditation and if we do not pass the assessment in June we would be the only Government body which had</p>	

	<p>failed Investors In People status. The process requires that staff are randomly selected to take part in the IIP interviews. Prior to the interviews HR will talk through the IIP programme with these individuals in an attempt to allay any concerns and draw attention to the on line information which is there to support staff. TUS were a bit concerned as to how staff were selected and if staff could reply openly to the IIP questions. They were assured that the selection was completely random, and that the HR sessions would be based entirely on the information available to staff through the intranet. There was no pressure on staff to take part, individuals can decline. The results are not expected until August. All Management Boards are looking at ways to improve long term status, one way currently being investigated is producing a Communication/DVD Pack for staff.</p> <p>Diversity – A report is submitted to the Management Board quarterly, the statistics include gender split/ethnicity etc. The current focus is on gender and trying to promote more females to join all areas of FCS. An event is being held at Barony College on 26 April to promote this and it is hoped that this will generate a bit of media coverage. If successful it is hoped that a similar event will take place in the Central Belt in the Autumn.</p>	
<p><b>7. Staff Survey</b></p>	<p>It was apparent that the results of the survey should be addressed both on a Corporate Scale and at individual Cost Centre level. Communication Meetings held by Bob McIntosh and Simon Hodge were currently taking place. FCS has engaged Ann McCann from Change Navigators to assist at Cost Centre levels and she is currently covering leadership development. Conservators have been offered her assistance and a session on change management has been set up and is to be attended by both H&amp;I and Grampian Conservancy staff.</p> <p>Alan Mackenzie is to attend a meeting with FES concerning their TUS representatives. James invited him to join a Conservators meeting in the near future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific point for G&amp;R was to improve communications with Conservancies. It was highlighted at the meeting that as a result of the survey every Conservancy office was working through a local action plan.</li> </ul> <p>It was generally felt that there could be wide range of possible interpretation of the questions in the survey and that perhaps the questions on the next staff survey could be expanded or more specific. Although it is realised that consistency between the surveys is necessary and that costs will increase if changed dramatically.</p> <p>James felt a lot of positive progress was being made at Conservancies. In terms of leadership management need to be more effective in highlighting what FCS could expect in the future - staff are more amenable to change if they have foresight of it.</p>	<p><b>Ann – Invite Alan to next Conservators meeting</b></p>
<p><b>8. SRDP</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Started to obtain information from Rural Priorities IT system. Over 10,000 hectares of woodland creation has been approved, although most of it has still to be planted. Around 25% of this is productive timber. Gradually applicant's process is improving although the speed of payments is still slow and is taking up to 3 months to pay some claims.</li> <li>• Following recent audit, Audit Scotland are looking at Rural Priorities Quality Assuring Contracts. Credit Checks are now required.</li> <li>• Difficulty in dealing with non forestry schemes was expressed as officers are dealing with cases they are not trained in. Perhaps a case for a specialised case officer, which was something audit picked up on.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No progress with Case Officer Assistance, unfortunately due to recent Audit attention has moved to other areas. As only FCS requesting this role, may have to request a budget increase to speed things up</li> <li>Staff still felt that FCS was losing its identity and concern was raised to the amount of influence FCS had on SRDP. It was pointed out that due to FCS a lot of changes have been implemented and in reality SRDP is only a part of what RPID do, which as a result does not appear to affect their staff to the same degree.</li> </ul>	
<b>9. Future of Forestry Grants</b>	<p>The attached discussion paper provides background information and was originally circulated to Customer Reps. It is designed to stimulate discussions and does not contain any definite proposals. FCS has attended 3 Regional Meetings and has welcomed any feedback/comments. They have received a mixed range so far some requesting a new scheme and others requesting an evolution of Rural Priorities.</p> <p>Currently we obtain 50% of co-finance from Europe which is expected to reduce to 40% by end of SRDP, so would impact significantly on our budget if lost.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It was asked what discussion there was to encourage more productive woodland creation. James said that it is too early to take any definitive action however it is unlikely that increasing the payment rate for productive conifers would be an appropriate reaction to the problem.</li> </ul> <p>The overall view from FCS is not to make any rash decisions which would push total woodland creation down.</p> <p>James is happy to receive any responses to the paper, and further details can be found on the FCS internet site.</p>	
<b>10. AOB</b>	<p>Conservancy review was put on hold until after the results of the staff survey. We are now in a position to take up the review and James will be asking for volunteers at various pay band levels and locations to take part. The review will focus on how we develop our staff capacity in Conservancies which is directly linked to the JEGs of the Ops Managers.</p> <p>Following on from the Stirling Comms Meeting, Perth set up a working group and submitted a paper to James. As most of the topics are Admin based Susan Darcy has offered to take this forward as an Agenda Item at the next Office Managers Meeting.</p> <p>Brian Allison expressed concern as to why the Grampian office had been selected as one of SEARs Rural Hubs, as the office was not designed and spacious enough to accommodate this. James explained it was only for a 12 month trial and was due to the location of the Conservancy. He didn't expect a lot of use but asked that the Conservancy keep accurate records of take up.</p>	<p><b>James to implement</b></p> <p><b>Susan pass paper to Ann Alexander for Office Managers meeting</b></p> <p><b>Margaret Llyod? To keep record of Rural Hubs up take to be kept.</b></p>
<b>11. Date of Next Meeting</b>	9 September 2010	

