

## PCS Forestry Commission Group

### Proposals for changes to Group Structures 2008

#### Introduction

- 1) Over the last few years the GEC has on several occasions discussed the merits of revising the number and boundaries of our branches. At our meeting in October (2007) we agreed in principal that the time was now right to progress this matter and mandated the Group Organising Committee (GOC) to draw up proposals.
- 2) The GOC met on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> December and the purpose of this paper is to seek the GEC's agreement to recommended changes to; the number and boundaries of our branches, the composition of the GEC, the arrangements for our Group Conference and amendments to the Group's constitution as outlined below.

#### Purpose and Outcome

- 3) The GEC's discussions over the last few years have looked to consider what steps we might take to increase recruitment and activity within the group, and *inter-alia* to increase a sense of ownership of current issues at the workplace and branch levels. One of the views expressed by some GEC members on several occasions is that the large geographical size of our branches is not conducive to supporting local organising. The GOC therefore interpreted its mandate to:
  - a) Review the current branch structure, and suggest amendments that would assist in improving local recruitment, activism and organising;
  - b) Make consequential proposals for any necessary or desirable changes to the composition of the GEC and arrangements for our Group Conference;
  - c) Identify opportunities to bring our group constitution more into line with the PCS model (this latter point has previously been highlighted as being desirable by PCS HQ).

#### Options for branches

- 4) Prior to our meeting the GOC sought feedback from the individual branch committees on the appropriateness of the current branch structure and whether or not any changes might aid our organising efforts.
  - a) The feedback from **North Scotland**, **South Scotland** and **Silvan House** branches was that they are largely content with the current arrangements, with particular feedback from South Scotland that any attempt to sub-divide their branch would be viewed as a retrograde step by its members.

- b) The feedback from **Wales** was that whilst they considered the option of sub-dividing the branch into two (north and south), the current management structure for FC Wales means that most 'issues' will affect all staff within Wales and that a single branch probably remains the most appropriate. This will also maintain the clear links to the current collective bargaining arrangements. The branch did however identify scope for improving their activities, and will seek to implement these out with these proposals.
  - c) The feedback from the three **England** branches was that their current geographical size is a hindrance to their organising effort and that change would be supported. Excessive travelling times and distances to branch meetings was cited as a particular concern.
  - d) The GOC also sought initial feedback from PCS HQ, and the Assistant General Secretary on behalf of the NEC has endorsed our intent and direction of travel.
- 5) On the basis of this feedback and earlier discussions at GEC, the GOC considered five models:
- a) A One Branch Model: a single GB branch with a local 'organising areas' based on individual or small numbers of, adjacent workplaces.
  - b) A Four Branch Model: One branch each for England, Scotland, Wales and Silvan House.
  - c) A Six Branch Model: One branch for each of the Forestry Commission Trade Union National Organising Committee areas.
  - d) A Seven Branch Model: the status-quo.
  - e) An Eleven Branch Model: the current arrangements for Scotland, Wales and Silvan House; and seven branches in England based on the PCS/TUC regional boundaries.
- 6) Much of the first afternoon of the GOC meeting was spent discussing and evaluating the relative merits of these options. The notes of our qualitative evaluation of the options are given at appendix 1, and a summary of our thoughts are as follows:
- a) The GOC considered that the one branch model had significant potential benefits in terms of; efficient centralised administration, a clearer defined purpose and strategy, a greater ability to target resources based on organising need, and a flexible local structure that could easily respond to FC organisational changes. In the end however the GOC rejected this model as it felt that the local organising areas would lack cohesion and identity, the centralised administration would run counter to our desire for 'local ownership' and the model would probably be resisted by those branches that are content with the current arrangements.
  - b) The GOC rejected the four branch model as it felt that whilst the model has strong link to the FC's organisational structure, it considered that larger branches would be difficult to operate and would require an additional layer of 'local organising areas' as outlined above along with their inherent concerns.

- c) The GOC similarly rejected the six branch model as it felt that whilst this model has strong links to the joint unions' collective bargaining structures, it has the same inherent weaknesses on the four branch model. In addition two of the potential branches; Forest Research Branch and the Forestry Business Units' Branch would geographically cover the GB and would only be able to operate on a virtual basis.
- d) The GOC considered that the seven branch (status-quo) model has one significant merit in that it requires no change and would thus enable the Group to maintain focus on other organising priorities. The feedback from branches however suggests that this model is currently difficult to operate, and is therefore not a 'preferred' solution.
- e) The GOC considered that the eleven branch model has significant potential benefits with the smaller geographic size of the branches in England hopefully resulting in increased attendance at union meetings (due to reduced travel times and distances) with consequential improvements in activism and ownership of issues. Aligning the branches with the PCS/TUC regions should also help to improve links with, and support from, the PCS regional officers. The model also does not necessitate changes to the Silvan house, Scotland and Wales branches (but see below with regard to Scotland. However one significant with this model is that it will require an overall increase in branch officers, and some branches may struggle to fulfil all committee roles/tasks.

7) **Recommendation one:** Having considered the models as outlined above the GOC recommends that the group moves to an eleven branch model: the current arrangements for Scotland (though see recommendation two below), Wales and Silvan House; and seven branches in England based on the PCS/TUC regional boundaries.

- 8) In making the above recommendation the GOC remains concerned about the geographic size of the North and South Scotland branches. In South Scotland, whilst the branch is currently operating well, the GOC is concerned that the majority of the branch's work falls on a small number of volunteers, some of whom have multiple union roles; and the GOC should like the branch to consider what steps it might take to increase the number of activists and to more evenly distribute the administration, organising and bargaining workload across the branch. The GOC is concerned that the North Scotland branch covers such a wide area that it is not even possible for the branch to meet at a single location for an AGM.
- 9) Based on the feedback from branches in Scotland, one area of concern that was identified was **West Argyll Forest District** (WA). WA has been identified as an area in which recruitment could prove fruitful. North Scotland branch (where WA currently sits) has not been able to increase membership or representation, and indeed has even found it impossible to hold a meeting in the area. It is felt that South Scotland branch may be able to provide better support to WA members and increase activity due to their better geographical position. This view is supported by South Scotland branch.

10) **Recommendation two:** That West Argyll Forest District is moved from North Scotland Branch to South Scotland Branch.

11) Maps of the existing and proposed branch boundaries are given at appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

### Proposals for the GEC

12) The current structure of the GEC arose out of a number of compromises established at the time of the merger of the PTC and CPSA unions. At this time the NEC concluded that the small size of the FC Group's membership meant that the group did not merit an annual conference and consequently that GEC members could be elected, two from each branch; with a Group President elected by the full group membership. As the GEC will be aware the NEC's position on these issues has now changed, and we are being encouraged to operate, in as far as it is appropriate, in line with the standard PCS model.

13) The GOC therefore considered two issues. Firstly, where the size of the group allows, the standard PCS model is for every branch to be directly represented on the GEC; with the Group Officers (President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Organiser and assistant secretary) elected by the whole group membership. In all instances the group's full-time officer acts as the Group Secretary. Secondly, having decreased the size, and increased the number of branches in England, the GOC opined that it would not be appropriate to continue with each branch electing two GEC members.

14) **Recommendation three:** Having considered a number of options the GOC recommends that the future GEC comprise:

- a) Two representatives from each of the North Scotland, South Scotland, Wales and Silvan House branches, to be elected by the members of each branch (i.e. as per the current arrangement)
- b) One representative elected by the members of each of the seven England branches.
- c) A president, treasurer, organiser and assistant secretary elected by the whole group membership.
- d) The group's full-time officer acting a group secretary.

### Proposals for the Group Conference

15) As a result of the points outlined in paragraph 12 above, the group conference has evolved in recent years from a basic forum to discuss policy to a motion-based member-led event more akin to the national delegate conference format. The GOC believes that this has yielded benefits in terms of the relevance of, and the level of interest in, the conference.

16) Having looked again at the standard conference model, the GOC remains of the view that a formal conference controlled through a standing orders committee is not appropriate for a group of our size. We do however feel that further benefits in terms of relevance and ownership could be gained by moving away from the current

arrangements where conference places are allocated across the group on a first-come-first-served basis, to one where branches are invited to send mandated delegations.

17) **Recommendation four:** The GOC recommends that the current arrangements for group conference are broadly retained, but that delegates are invited to conference as part of mandated branch delegations with: five delegates from each of the North Scotland, South Scotland, Wales and Silvan House branches, and two delegates from each of the seven England branches.

### Implementation

18) An outline implementation plan for the above would be:

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|----|---|--|
| 1  | Seek GEC's agreement to the proposals in this paper.                                  | December 07                              |
| 2  | Seek NEC's approval to the proposals in this paper.                                   | January 08                               |
| 3  | Finalise conference arrangements and draw up delegation, motions and mandating guide. | January 08                               |
| 4  | Existing branch AGMs are briefed on the proposals.                                    | Jan 08 – Mar 08                          |
| 5  | Seek GEC's agreement to revised group constitution.                                   | Feb 08 GEC meeting                       |
| 6  | Seek NEC's approval to revised group constitution.                                    | Feb 08                                   |
| 7  | Group President to call and chair inaugural meetings of the new branches in England.  | Mar 08 – Apr 08                          |
| 8  | New England branches are vested.  | 1 <sup>st</sup> May 08                   |
| 9  | Group Conference.   | 6 <sup>th</sup> & 7 <sup>th</sup> May 08 |
| 10 | Elections for Group Officers are held.  | End of May 08                            |
| 11 | GEC Meeting   | June 08                                  |

a) In addition to the above:

- i) All commix changes will be handled by the Group Organiser.
- ii) The Group Treasurer will manage the transfer of funds between the England branches in conjunction with the union's national treasurer, and will oversee the preparation of budget bids for 2009.

19) **Recommendation five:** That the election for Group President (under the current constitution) be delayed until no later than the end of June 2008 in order to fit with the timetable outlined above.

## Conclusion and Action

- 20) Over the last few years the level of organising activity within the group has increased significantly to the point where we are now seeing real benefits in terms of membership and activity. The GOC believes that the recommendations contained in this paper form a logical next step in our organising effort and should assist all branches in increasing the level and depth of activity.
- 21) GEC members are kindly asked to consider the recommendations contained in this paper and where appropriate to indicate your agreement to them as soon as possible.

**Edward Shephard**

*Group Organiser*

## Appendix 1: Evaluation of Options.

Five options were considered as summarised below.

### **1. One Branch Model**

A single GB branch with a local 'organising areas' based on individual or small numbers of, adjacent workplaces

#### Pro's

- Would result in reduced administration at local level.
- Enable efficiency at centralised functions
- Enable Local structures more flexibility
- All would work to a common strategy
- Structure would reflect the FC Structure
- Would enable clearer communication channels
- Structures allows for a more targeted approach for organising.

#### Con's

- Idea would be too big a change for Reps and Members
- Would result in an increase in the workloads of central post holders
- Principle would result in a loss of local area control

### **2. Four Branch Model**

One branch each for England, Scotland, Wales and Silvan House.

#### Pro's

- Structure would reflect devolution in the FC and Nationally
- Countries could organise and take things forward at their own pace

#### Con's

- Under this structure some members would not be represented e.g. Research and Business Units.
- Would only identify and deal with own Country issues
- Would result in the loss of focus on GB issues
- PCS Country Strategies may not reflect Forestry Group Strategy
- Spotlight would be on Countries and would lose focus on local issues
- Would cause problems with travel and location of AGMs.

### **3. Six Branch Model**

One branch for each of the Forestry Commission Trade Union National Organising Committee areas.

#### Pro's

- Provide relevant representation of members
- Enable stronger links to FC Senior Managers
- Allow more focus on Research and Business Units
- Allow for a defined hierarchy

### Con's

- Under this structure stronger communication would be required
- Would result in the loss of focus on GB issues
- Would make it difficult to engage with PCS Regional Organisers
- Two branches (Research and Business Units) would be virtual – no dedicated PCS Regional Organiser support.
- Structure would require a third tier of administration to allow it to function
- Potential duplication of the NOC Role

## **4. Seven Branch Model**

The status quo.

### Pro's

- This option has dedicated people in key posts already
- This option is already funded so requires no change
- Involves no major change

### Con's

- This option has proven not to work for everyone
- Currently has lack of activity and ownership
- Is geographically challenging

## **5. Eleven Branch Model**

The current arrangements for Scotland, Wales and Silvan House; and seven branches in England based on the PCS/TUC regional boundaries.

### Pro's

- It is an entirely new and different concept
- It will hopefully generate more local ownership and greater identity
- Has the benefit of tying in with PCS Regional boundaries
- Provides better local PCS union support (Regional Organisers)
- Offers the opportunity to operate a staged implantation
- Provides greater opportunities for directly targeting members
- GOC already has the mandate to start the process now

### Con's

- Could present a problem in identifying the additional key activists required
- Creates fixed structure
- Local administration required for 11 areas