

Date: 23 August 2011

Our Ref: BEC 2011/SR10

Your Ref:

To: Jean Lindsay

Silvan House

Mary Irvine
Chair

Dear Jean

FCTU SILVAN HOUSE RESPONSE TO SR10 CONSULTATION

Introduction

The FCTU are pleased to be given the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the SR10 proposals for Silvan House Shared Services and GB Core, and appreciate the gesture of extending the consultation period to 19 August.

Following the publication of the proposals a series of meetings were held to obtain feedback from members that would inform our response to management. We have encouraged staff to submit responses either as individuals or groups and have emphasised the importance of this; in common with the FC England consultation, we asked members to consider 4 questions, in order to focus on the key issues. A summary of each is outlined below.

In addition, attached to this paper are several appendices that reflect the views of staff who are directly affected by the proposals

Q1: Are the proposed structures workable in your view?

Staff feel strongly that the structures proposed are unworkable. In a number of areas the focus appears to be on reducing the number of admin staff whilst there is no tangible evidence of work having been dropped or plans to do so in future; this needs to be stated explicitly.

The earlier round of VER/ES resulted in a reduction of 29 members of staff in Silvan House. The work undertaken by these staff was, in general, merely redistributed resulting in many staff being stressed and overloaded. We have evidence that some staff are regularly losing around 40 hours flexi per month. The latest round of VE will further exacerbate the situation and is completely unacceptable. Of paramount importance is the welfare of staff. Many are now exhibiting signs of stress and anxiety as the full impact of the cuts and the realisation of an increased workload hits home.

There are also concerns that with staff stretched to capacity and beyond, there will be limited opportunities for personal/professional development or career progression, and any sense of job satisfaction and motivation will diminish if not disappear altogether.

“Under the proposal L&D will stop providing non essential courses such as Forestry for Non Foresters, as well as slowing down the delivery of programmes such as MDP 1, 2 & 3 and reducing some technical training delivery. The proposal would also mean less flexibility to deliver any new GB initiatives. Also, as the total numbers of staff change across the FC, L&D will have fewer staff to support through training and development.”

Surely this is a matter for much wider consultation in the FC as there could be implications regarding IiP accreditation.

In the SR10 Consultation Q&A the question “what support will there be for staff?” The response is: “In addition the opportunity to speak to managers and Trade Unions representatives, staff will be able to access the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) at any time for support. In addition outplacement arrangements will be available for staff that are formally declared “surplus.” This is simply not true. We have been told that the EAP will not help; they will not deal employment issues.

Q2: How could the preferred option be improved?

Future structures should represent the business and be resourced from the point of delivery upwards rather than the top down structure proposed. There is a serious disparity at the level of cuts being proposed at the lower grades whilst the more senior grade structure remains unchanged.

Q3: Are there additional factors around this option that have been overlooked?

As stated above, the proposals appear to have been driven by the need to reduce numbers, and not driven by the future needs of the business, and many feel that senior staff who were responsible for preparing the proposed structures demonstrate a lack of understanding of the work undertaken by their teams and the impact that a reduction of resource will have. Often, where a rationale for how the proposed structure would be workable has been provided, the reasoning is unsubstantiated; rather, we have been provided with bland statements. In our view this is going to have a serious impact on staff morale, currently at the lowest point in our history.

Q4: Are there other activities that should be considered for change?

We would not only welcome clarification but also meaningful discussions on which areas of work are to be discontinued, as clearly to expect the remaining staff, plus the limited amount of post-filling that may take place post VE, to continue to provide the current level and range of service is unworkable and unsustainable.

Summary

As Trade Unionists we must reiterate that the cuts are ideologically driven and are unnecessary. We have offered the Government many examples of how the

budget deficit can be addressed without cutting jobs and compromising the ability of the Forestry Commission to deliver its objectives.

The Forestry Commission has continually reviewed its working practices and staff have always risen to the challenges that change inevitably brings. Nowhere is this more evident than in Silvan House where major adjustments to working practices had to be made following devolution. They have done this with good grace. They are a very loyal and dedicated workforce as evidenced by the number of staff who have spent most of their working lives in the organisation. Turnover of staff is very low. This loyalty is not found in other departments. Many staff now feel that they have been abandoned. Morale is very low and the cracks are beginning to show.

Finally, the FC's vision as stated in the 'Fit for Our Future' People Strategy is thus: *'To ensure that employees are prepared, equipped and engaged to manage the changing work environment and to drive the change in a positive and successful way'*. The FCTU consider these proposals as they stand will NOT provide the culture or opportunities for this to be achieved.

Yours sincerely

Mary Irvine

Via e-mail

SR10 MEETING – IS 11 JULY 2011

It was felt that IS staffing levels were now at the end point, namely the structure that was envisaged to be in place for 2015, earlier than expected. Since 01/04/10 they have lost at least 15 staff (12 from within Development & Projects) as a result of VER/ES and staff leaving. All of this has a serious impact on the remaining staff and their ability to deliver their services.

The reduction in resource meant that staff were having to cover too many areas under one job. Staff with a good depth of knowledge in a technical area were not being utilised properly. For example, skilled analysts were not being used as analysts. It also meant that the opportunity to learn and develop new skills was greatly reduced.

Customers will expect the same service they have been getting and are paying for but IS may not be able to deliver this due to a lack of resources. What did this mean in practice? Customers would now have to fund buying in a resource? This could mean that one country would pay for a service and the others wouldn't so we could have countries running at different levels. Was the cost of buying in services reflected in budgets? The objective of SR10 was to reduce the headcount and costs. If the cost of buying in resources isn't reflected in budgets then the rationale behind the calculations and the expected savings is flawed.

In the short term IS skills are in higher demand than ever to help support the ongoing changes throughout the business. Changes in business organisation and processes need corresponding changes to systems and infrastructure but in reality can IS provide the support for this technology with so few IS staff?. For example to deliver invoicing and credit management with fewer FC staff there are tasks that can be automated/simplified when resources in IS permit. Without adequate IS input to deliver change the FC risks being left with a workforce unable to cope with the unrealistic demands being put upon them.

From the organisation structure it appeared that some departments were end loading SR10 proposals. They were still developing applications, delivering what their customers wanted by giving assurances that cannot be met by the remaining IS team whose resources are already stretched. For example, IFOS continue to increase in size and have secured additional external resource from ESRI to help them deliver IFOS Roadmap. In reality IFOS are now aiming to deliver more work and more rapidly than original plans had indicated. Countries have committed additional funds to accelerate the rate of delivery over the next eighteen months. In IS business as usual tasks always take priority and it is frustrating for IS staff and our customers alike when IS have difficulty committing resource to development work. Having insufficient resource to split between BAU and project work is a major issue.

Staff were unhappy that with all the cuts to permanent staff contractors were still being used. Some of them having been employed by the FC for a number of years.

Shared Services SR10 Consultation Document

The level of staffing proposed for the business solutions area and in place now in the Developments & Projects area is of deep concern.

Current Position

The configuration & test team are about to lose 1 PB2 post and 1 PB4 post in the VE exercise. In addition 1 PB5 test post is already filled by a contractor.

The Solution Delivery team includes 8 permanent PB5s of which 3 are part time and 1 is on long term sick. The three PB4 posts have been changed significantly in the past 18-24 months with the emphasis now being on relationship management of our customers. The relationship manager roles have a huge remit and the basic split is

- FE Systems including Forester , SRP , and Wildlife Management
- GB Core systems including Finance, HR, Comms and Research
- Grants and Regulations and country specific applications

The impact of this change is that the analyst skills are being diluted significantly and both PB4 and 5s are being asked to take on much higher levels of responsibility. The traditional split between analysts and developers no longer applies.

Morale of the team is at an all time low and levels of stress are high.

Future Position

The proposed level of staff will struggle to support existing systems which are critical to the business.

The nature of the work is evolving. Much more the team will need to be supplemented with contract staff to give any capacity to undertake new projects. Opportunities for permanent staff to keep technical skills fresh may be more limited as a result of needing to support ageing systems built in relatively old technologies.

Rather than the 1 PB2 post I would think that it is preferable to have a team of PB3s. This would give the flexibility to provide senior and experienced staff for the roles of

- Relationship Manager
- Senior Supplier on Project Boards
- Development and updating of IS strategy on software tools
- Development of extensive network of internal and external contacts
- Management of team including recruitment of external resources
- Management and update of Software and configuration processes

In particular the grading of the relationship manager role is questionable. The current holders of these posts are all PB4 whilst the job description is a close match to the general description for a PB3 given in the HR grading and guidance booklet which states

"Jobs in this band are usually responsible for managing a discrete area of work or a business unit, which may cover more than one function, and are fully accountable for the achievement of objectives and targets within their responsibility. Job holders require considerable knowledge and full understanding of their area of work or subject and its relationship with other parts of the Commission. They must demonstrate the ability to develop and adapt existing procedures or propose and develop new ideas or methods of working and have the acumen to resolve a variety of problems.

Management responsibilities vary depending on the nature of the work; and may range from none for advisory jobs, through heading up a section or team, to managing a discrete work load in a Division or business unit."

Some of the PB5s are already taking greater levels of responsibility and I would consider that at least 2 of the PB5 posts should be regraded to a higher level. This would basically be a senior analyst/developer role and would recognise the high level of technical skill combined with business knowledge. This will be even more important as the team needs to recruit technical staff and the PB3s are working more as managers than as technical experts.

SR10 CONSULTATION – CORPORATE & FORESTRY SUPPORT

There is no chart to show the planned structure, so it is difficult to see what the plans are. However, our general comments are as follows:

PB3 Resource

The Departmental Security post (PB3) is in the new plan as 1.0 and yet the notes suggest that this function is to be shared with IS. A PB5 post in the admin team is also heavily involved in the Departmental security role. We would seek clarification on what security responsibilities would in fact be passed over to IS. For example, the PB5 has recently been asked to co-ordinate the Information awareness training for CFS. It is a mandatory government requirement that all departments complete this exercise annually, although we as a low risk organisation have managed to get that extended to 18 months. Data is held for every member of staff and the DSO and/or PB5 have access to the information and send reports to the countries on who has or hasn't completed the training so it can be followed up. This will remain a core requirement. The ISMF meetings are also co-ordinated through the DSO and we would seek clarification whether there will be a continuing secretarial support role required from within the admin team and exactly what role the PB5 would continue to undertake e.g. the vital role in covering for Emails etc. when the DSO is absent.

PB4 Resource

The PB4 resource at the moment provides various services including:

- Managing contracts, contributions and MoU for Commissioned Research.
- Managing the tender processes in line with procurement advice.
- Monitoring of commissioned research expenditure and resumption of contracts.
- Maintenance of list of all PAG outputs*
- Preparation and Business Plans
- Monitoring of budgets
- Secretarial support to RSMB, RMG, TPG as well as admin support to the Forestry Ministers' meeting
- Management of the publications contract and SLAs with the Countries, including a physical stock take of publications and valuation of stock (three times per year in line with NAO requirements).
- Honours
- GB Annual report
- Appointments of Senior staff
- International Visitors
- Staff management
- Training co-ordinator for Division

If these functions are to continue then they cannot be carried out by a Pay Band 4, 0.6 FTE (22 hours per week).

The current resources (as at July 2011) are 1.68 (Debbie full-time and Lynne 25 hours per week).

PB5 Resource

PB5s in admin support team are being reduced from 3.57 to 1.57. In addition, the following PB5 posts have also been cut: climate change and Corporate Communications and publications. The PB5 post in Corporate Communications also provides a general admin support function to other areas of the Division.

A key function of a PB5 post in the admin team is the Departmental Records Officer for the FC, which will need to continue, as it is the department's responsibility under the Public Records Act to ensure the obligations of the Act are met.

There is currently a PB5 providing admin support solely for climate change. It is not clear what is happening to the work that they do, following the reduction in post. It is difficult to see how this could be accommodated within the admin team, in view of the reduction in PB5 resources taking place there.

PB5s carry out a number of key functions including Secretarial support to many committees, Flexi controller, 10% checks on EEM claims, checks on GPCs, mobile phone checks and staff management. These will remain key functions if standards are to be maintained, but it is difficult to see how these can carry on with the resources planned.

While the PAG process has greatly reduced, there remains some related work that requires admin support (working groups etc.), including producing a list of all PAG outputs each year. This is a very time consuming task which had been carried out by a PB5, but is currently sitting with a PB4, due to lack of resources at PB5.*

The DG now shares his time between FC England and FC GB. When Elizabeth does decide to retire, there could be scope for merging the posts of the Personal Assistant for the DG and the PA to Head of CFS.

Reduced requirement for resource on Division Finance

While we would agree that merging the Business Sustainability cost centre into another Shared Service would make a small saving in staff time. Absorbing the budgets of Plant Health into the general CFS budget would not save time. Plant Health will still require their costs to be identified separately and this is possible using a series of job numbers for a number of accounts. However, it is not possible for salaries and other related staff costs to be attributed to job numbers at source. This means that each month the costs will have to be separated out manually and listed on the budget spreadsheet. Thus, the time saved in running a separate cost centre budget report will be taken up in separating out the costs. Resources will still be required at PB5 level to approve invoices and authorise them in efinancials.

More Strategic approach to meeting support and minute taking

PB5s provide a lot of secretarial support for many meetings within the Division, but this could not continue if the PB5 staffing level is reduced as planned. There has been a suggestion that moving to reduced minutes/action points will save

time. We would argue that this would produce only a small saving in staff time. For example, if staff were to attend a meeting that takes 6 hours, then they will generally take about 3 hours to produce minutes, deal with correspondence and following up action points. If they are asked to produce action points instead of minutes, then the time saving will be negligible. If we are to make real savings then we would need to radically reduce the number of committees that are provided with secretarial support. This would, however, increase the burden on more senior staff.

Reduced general admin support, travel booking etc. as no of people falls.

Travel bookings are in the main being dealt with at PB6b level, but the staff cuts are happening at PB5 and PB4 level. Following previous reorganisations of this division over the years, there has not been a reduction in the amount of travel and related admin work. In addition, the staffing figures for the admin team are being cut by over 30% and the remaining staff by 25%, which is disproportionate.

We would argue that responsibility for all travel bookings should remain firmly with the admin team. It is much more cost effective for an experienced PB6b to find cost effective travel than for several PB2s to be using their time perusing web sites to find cheap flights. At a time when staff numbers are being reduced and budgets are so tight it is imperative that we use our limited resources to best effect. Also, booking through a central point, ensures that expenditure remains within the guidelines and this in turn ensures fairness to all.

The admin support team within CFS also provide admin support to various parts of the Division including IFOS, Corporate Communications, Business Sustainability and Plant Health. This is in addition to any admin support that they have listed within their own Business Plans. This involves many tasks from preparing and monitoring budgets and business plans, monitoring and managing staff flexi time, to organising meetings etc. It will not be possible to continue providing this 'hidden' support with the planned reductions in staff.

When the public enquiry line ceases to be dealt with within CFS, there will still be a need to handle GB public enquiries. It is not clear how these will be dealt with. They are currently covered between the dedicated Corporate Comms admin staff and staff from the general admin team.

In general, following the last round of Early Retirements and Early Exits, the extra work was distributed to the remaining staff. We are already working at capacity and find it increasingly challenging to provide a good quality service to all of the staff who require it. At the same time we are expected to adhere to standards laid down by Internal Audit, NAO and FC policies. If the workload increases further then we risk the health of the staff who remain and we risk not adhering to these required standards.