

MINUTES OF THE 908<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF  
THE FORESTRY COMMISSIONERS  
LEXHAM SUITE, MERCURE LONDON KENSINGTON HOTEL  
17<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2014

Present

Harry Studholme (Chair), Mary Barkham, Amanda Bryan, Ian Gambles, Hamish Macleod, Bob McIntosh, Keith Oates, Wilma Harper, Jean Lindsay

Also Attending

James Pendlebury and Peter Freer-Smith (items 5 and 6 only); Emily Ramsay (item 7 only); Fiona Alexander (Minutes).

**1. Introduction and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Mary Barkham, the new Forestry Commissioner for England. No apologies were received.

**2. Minutes of 25 September 2014**

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

**3. Matters Arising**

i) Appointments

Interviews for the Non-executive Forestry Commissioner for Scotland role were carried out on 4 November and the panel recommended two candidates for appointment. The Scottish Minister has selected George McRobbie for appointment to the role. Subject to agreement from the PM's Office and the issue of the Royal Warrant, it is anticipated that Mr McRobbie will take up the role on 1 April 2015.

ii) Forest Holidays

The outcome of the Delamere planning enquiry is due this week. The meeting also heard that recent meetings with the Chair of Forest Holidays were informative and helpful. With the forthcoming retirement of Dr Bob McIntosh, the FC will consider appropriate arrangements for FC representation on the Forest Holidays Board.

**4. HMRC VAT Compliance Audit**

**Not published as per Section 35 (1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

**5. Cross-Border and Forest Research Corporate Plans (2015/16)**

The meeting heard that the Cross-Border Corporate Plan outlined the key priorities and actions for the coming year as well as success indicators. The timescale for submission of the plan is tight and failure to get it to Ministers by March 2015 will mean it is unlikely to be published before the autumn.

The Forest Research Corporate Plan broadly follows the structure used in previous years and outlines the aims and priorities for FR in the coming year. The plan seeks to meet the direction and needs of the Science and Innovation Strategy with FR adopting a multi-disciplinary approach to ensure that priorities are met as well as the interests of customers and stakeholders.

The meeting discussed the impacts of potential future funding cuts and how they might affect FR. The meeting acknowledged that if decisions on funding are not known until late January 2015, then it would be very difficult to make the required savings.

The meeting endorsed both Corporate Plans and agreed that there should be no delay in submitting the plans to Ministers for approval.

## **6. Cross Border Project Interim Report**

The meeting heard that the project is in Phase 2 with this phase considering the sustainable business models required for the various areas of cross-border collaboration. The project identified four potential scenarios and short-listed five business models that could work in the different scenarios. A high-level evaluation was undertaken and the project is confident that a viable and stable business model will be found, irrespective of scenario.

Following presentation of the Interim Report to the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme Board on 14 October, it was agreed that further work should be done to examine the options for different models. It was also agreed to take forward examining the implications of moving to a refreshed agency model which would deliver the continuing functions of Forest Research and some parts of Corporate & Forestry Support. This piece of work will be progressed as a separate FC internal project and would no longer be governed under the auspices of the WPEP Programme.

The meeting heard that there is a need to find efficiencies whilst balancing the need to provide forest research for British forestry. Internal detailed analysis of the various options is now required as well as input from stakeholders. Once this stage has been completed, viable options will be presented to Ministers.

The Commissioners endorsed the report and agreed the way forward.

## **7. Health and Safety Update**

The meeting was given an update on the work undertaken to date to improve health and safety in the FC. The Health and Safety Strategy (published in 2012) outlines a vision for health and safety in the FC over the next 5 - 10 years. The strategy encompasses everyone who interacts with the FC – employees, contractors, visitors, and neighbours.

The meeting heard that RIDDOR reporting has remained relatively stable whilst reporting of 'near-misses' has increased. Reporting of 'near-misses' is welcomed as they help to identify unsafe behaviours which in turn can be tackled. There is a strong

desire to change and improve the safety culture in the FC and actions achieved to date include the involvement of behavioural safety culture specialists, work on contract management, introduction of a new lone worker system, and leadership events.

The meeting agreed that health and safety was extremely important for everyone in the FC and needed to be both relevant and realistic. The Commissioners thanked Emily Ramsay for her report and the hard work of her team.

**Action Point** Ian Gambles and Bob McIntosh to draft 'thank you' letters for staff on the National Health & Safety Committees.

**Action Point** Emily Ramsay to provide accident statistics for members of the public at the next meeting

## **8. FC Director Scotland Role**

The meeting discussed the future role of Director Scotland given the retirement of Dr Bob McIntosh in February 2015. Since 2012, Dr McIntosh has been fulfilling a dual role with Scottish Government and going forward, his role as SG Environment & Forestry Director will be filled by a Scottish Government employee. Some tasks previously undertaken by Director Scotland will also transfer to Scottish Government. The National Committee for Scotland has proposed that Jo O'Hara (Deputy Director Scotland) becomes an Executive Forestry Commissioner and will take on the roles of Accountable Officer and Head of FC Scotland and the Scottish Government's Chief Forestry Officer. She is also a Deputy Director Forestry within the ENFOR structure.

The meeting agreed that Jo O'Hara should be nominated as an Executive Forestry Commissioner.

## **9. FC Going Forward**

**Not published as per Section 35 (1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

## **10. Director Central Services Report**

The meeting considered the report noting:

- i) Biosecurity remains a key priority with some recent notable interceptions of materials;
- ii) Good work has been undertaken on composting trials;
- iii) The GO Science/Defra report 'Animal and Plant Health in the UK: An Assessment of Future Science Capability' is due for publication on 18 December;
- iv) The Great Britain and Northern Ireland Tree Health Advisory Group met on 12 December and was well-received;
- v) The Roadmap for the devolution of Shared Services was officially launched on 10 November;
- vi) Work to transfer services from Natural Resources Wales is progressing well;

- vii) A Draft Order to abolish the Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee has been laid before Parliament;
- viii) FR is trialling the role of 'Non-executive Director of Forest Research' and Shireen Chambers has accepted the role;
- ix) Chris Quine was awarded an Honorary Professorship by the University of Stirling;
- x) FR has secured funding for molecular analysis of Phytophthora in soil samples;
- xi) FR are negotiating with the water sector to agree the FC Practice Guide on Managing forests in acid sensitive water catchments;
- xii) Operational field trials to find possible alternative species are underway;
- xiii) The iTree Group has won two survey contracts;
- xiv) Pay negotiations have concluded with no agreement from the FCTU. Pay has been capped at 1%.

## **11. Director England Report**

The meeting considered the report noting:

- i) Funding for the Deer Initiative will continue in 2015/16, albeit at a reduced level, while FCE carry out work to establish the best value approach to achieving deer management objectives in the future;
- ii) Work continues on the Rural Development Programme in England (RDPE) with Defra confirming that all CAP payments will be administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). FS grant administration staff based in York will transfer to the RPA and other transactional services will also be reorganised;
- iii) The Gruffalo campaign has been extremely popular and successful. The campaign highlights the potential in FC England for this type of venture.

## **12. Director Scotland Report**

The meeting considered the report noting:

- i) Scottish Government has a new First Minister, Cabinet, and Forestry Minister;
- ii) New powers devolved under the Smith Commission are unlikely to directly impact on forestry;
- iii) Consultation on the Land Reform Bill has started;
- iv) The new forestry grant scheme is ready for launch in early 2015;
- v) Discussions on delivering plant health duties in Scotland are continuing;
- vi) A recent independent review of UK Forestry Standard compliance found little evidence that FC Scotland were demanding higher standards than necessary.

## **11. Any Other Business**

The Commissioners formally recorded their thanks to Bob McIntosh for his work as a Forestry Commissioner. This was his last meeting as a Forestry Commissioner and the

Chair and Commissioners noted his hard work, wisdom, and input and wished him all the best for his retirement.

**12. Date of Next Meeting**

18 and 19 March 2015 in Edinburgh.