

**THE SIXTY-NINTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD  
HELD IN THE SILVAN HOUSE BOARDROOMS  
ON WEDNESDAY 3 DECEMBER 2014**

**MINUTES**

**Members:** Ian Gambles (Chair), Wilma Harper, Jean Lindsay and James Pendlebury

**Guests:** Roger Coppock (agenda item 9 only) and David Felstead (agenda items 6 and 7 only)

**Secretary:** Stephen Bennett

Apologies were received from Bob McIntosh.

**1. Minutes of the previous meetings and matters arising**

The minutes of the meetings held on 9 September and 12 November 2014 were agreed.

Four matters arising were discussed:

- **Defra Funding**  
Ministerial decisions were awaited. Director England had ensured that Defra officials fully understood the FC position.
- **Natural Resources Wales – Costs**  
Senior NRW officials had raised the issue of Silvan House costs with the Welsh Government. Although NRW's service requests had not been clarified yet, it was expected that they would be off the majority of FC systems by April 2015.
- **HMRC VAT Audit**  
A cross-organisational working group had now been formed. An initial task was to capture all of the issues currently surfacing as a result of the audit. Director Central Services would brief Commissioners about the situation at their next meeting.
- **Appointments**  
Dr Mary Barkham had started her three-year appointment as a Forestry Commissioner for England on 1 November 2014. Interviews had been held for a Forestry Commissioner for Scotland, to replace Hamish Macleod, on 4 November. Two candidates had been deemed appointable by the Interview Panel and a submission had been prepared for Scottish Ministers accordingly.

### 2. WPEP - FC England Change Programme Update.

The EB was updated on progress with the FC England change programme.

With regard to the Public Forest Estate Management Organisation (PFEMO), progress had slowed and would not pick up again until after the 2015 General Election. In the meantime, Forest Enterprise England + was being developed to support the transition to the new PFEMO. Staff had been given briefings on the changes.

Consultation with staff had taken place during November on the plans to restructure Forest Services. Responses would be reviewed with a view to making decisions in the new year.

The transfer of EU payments to the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) was also progressing. The RPA had announced that they would base Countryside Stewardship transactional services in York. Admin staff from the FC office at York would transfer to the RPA. The impact on admin staff in other offices was under consideration.

Planning was in hand for changes to the England National Office team to reflect wider organisational changes. Service Level Agreements had been established with FEE and FS. The required National Office restructure was impossible to finalise until other structural changes to wider FC England had been finalised. Director England would consider functions such as communications, finance and secretariat services that were provided to the wider FC as plans were finalised.

### 3. WPEP – Cross Border Functions Phase 2 Stage 1 Report

EB members were pleased to note that the models outlined in the Report did not preclude making further changes in the future. EB members asked that delivery of services not included in the proposed refreshed agency, such as Research Commissioning, Plant Health and corporate governance functions should also be reviewed and co-ordinated with wider developments e.g. engagement with the Defra One Business Team.

The EB was advised that early discussions had taken place with the country reps about the purpose of a refreshed agency.

The EB endorsed the Cross Border Functions Phase 2 Stage 1 Report and approved the next steps, including submitting the Report to Commissioners.

## 4. FC Going Forward – Next Steps

EB members discussed the draft paper for Commissioners and expressed the following views:

- More official meetings/discussions were necessary between Director England and Director Scotland;
- Lines of engagement about the future of the FC needed to be agreed for officials and Ministers;
- Briefing should be prepared on this issue for new Ministers;
- Structured scenario planning was necessary. This would be a complex and time-consuming area of work going forward. Concern was raised about the capacity required to do this work – a cross-organisational team was suggested to move things forward.

The EB was content with the paper and agreed that it should be submitted to the Forestry Commissioners from the EB collectively and that Directors England and Scotland should take the lead on the discussion.

A paper was also being submitted to Commissioners that outlined the issues that had arisen as a result of the imminent retirement of Director Scotland.

## 5. Shared Services Update

EB members reviewed the update paper and discussed the following key issues:

- **Holiday Pay**  
The Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) decision on holiday pay and overtime had been announced. The case challenged the application of the Working Time Regulations 1998 in UK legislation and determined that non-contractual overtime could be included in the calculation of holiday pay. An appeal and cross appeal was possible and the Government had established a Task Force to limit the impact on businesses. If an appeal was made it must be lodged within 12 weeks and the appeal could take between five and nine months to be heard. Cabinet Office, BIS and Treasury Solicitors (TSol) would decide on the cross-civil service wide response to the EAT decision. TSol have advised that it was premature for any departments to start taking action such as resolving grievances and/or settling new or potential claims, changing policy or making voluntary back payments. The Government was considering proposals to introduce legislation that will place a

limitation period of two years for claims made by workers for unauthorised deduction of wages.

### 6. IS Update

The EB was briefed about current ICT issues and projects.

The new desktop/laptop operating environment was currently being rolled out across the business. This included the Windows 7 operating system and Office 2010 among other things. The roll-out was taking longer than anticipated but it was expected that 80% of the user population would be upgraded by April 2015.

Roll-out of the new telephony system continued. It was anticipated that all current users of the Ericson phone system would have migrated to the new Mitel system by July 2015. This project was complicated by the fact that there were over 300 FC sites in total to transfer. A potential second phase of the project could be a simplification process.

To meet the increased demand for improved mobile computing facilities, a Mobile Working Group (under the auspices of the Forest Planners Group), had developed a list of requirements. IS had selected a Windows 8.1 tablet for piloting. The Scottish Government and Defra were using the same device. EB members agreed that the Mobile Working Group would be reconvened to manage the pilot exercise and analyse the feedback. The group members and the respective IS Service Board members would ensure that the relevant Boards considered the outcome of the pilot to ensure the product was fit for purpose. If acceptable, the IS Service Board would then develop a delivery plan, including cost and roll-out, or seek an alternative solution.

As the Disaster Recovery facility at NRS was now fully operational, Director IS gave the Executive Board his full assurance that IS could restore all business critical systems within five working days should Silvan House suffer a disaster.

Work continued to withdraw FC infrastructure from Wales.

In the future, the Head of IS would bring costs escalation difficulties of projects to the relevant boards i.e. Service Board and Central Services Management Board.

The development of the IS Strategy 2015-2020 was underway. It was agreed that the Strategy would be endorsed by the ICT Service Board in February, Country Boards in March and EB at their meeting in early June. EB members made clear that the Strategy must take into account future proofing. For example, the new Public Forest Estate Management Organisation may decide to get ICT services from Defra or an external provider. Therefore, the Strategy must be drafted from the perspective that the

countries may decide to outsource their IT support and there should be no barriers to them deciding to do so.

**Actions: David Felstead**

## 7. Information Security Management Forum

EB members approved the updated terms of reference of the Information Security Management Forum (ISMF) and Information Security Policy.

Training for Information Asset Owners would be reviewed and the roles of cost centre managers and Information Asset Owners considered and discussed at the next meeting of the ISMF.

**Actions: Wilma Harper**

## 8. Update on Shared Service Roadmap

The EB was informed that the country senior teams would examine the resources necessary to support devolution of Shared Services and make appropriate provision e.g. FC England would hire a consultant to support the preparation of business cases and perhaps use resource available within the WPEP team. EB members agreed that the countries provided focus and pace into this project.

The FC England team was preparing a paper to advise Defra HR about the services that FC England may want them to provide.

The Defra Network Corporate Services team had been provided with a copy of the Roadmap and had advised that they were happy to work to the FC's timetable.

EB members noted the progress made since the publication of the Shared Service Roadmap and approved the next steps in the project.

## 9. Science and Innovation Strategy

EB members received a presentation about the progress being made with the Science and Innovation Strategy. EB members were content with progress made to date and the direction of travel.

It was acknowledged that a large number of people (30) were engaged in the development of the programmes to deliver the Science and Innovation Strategy.

In due course, the FR Programmes would be mapped across to Defra's Network Evidence Action Plans, to further demonstrate cross-government interdisciplinarity.

**Action: Roger Coppock**

## 10. Cross Border and FR Corporate Plans

EB members approved the outline structure and contents for the Cross Border and Forest Research Corporate Plans for 2015-16.

It was important to meet the dates outlined in the timetable provided, which had been set in line with the timetable to produce the Corporate Plan for FC England.

The Chair would be advised accordingly so that he could brief the Defra Minister at their regular meeting.

**Action: Ian Gambles**

## 11. EB Minutes

EB members were informed that after the minutes of their meetings were approved (approx. three weeks after the meeting), the full un-redacted minutes were copied for information to the wider FC Senior Staff Group, Head of Internal Audit and Head of Communications.

In addition, un-redacted HR only sections were shared with HR Business Partners and HR Service Board members for information.

A redacted version of the minutes, with all of the Official-Sensitive content removed, was published on the Intranet. This was requested by the FCTU some years ago.

A redacted version of the minutes, agenda and those papers not marked Official-Sensitive were also published on the Internet in line with Freedom of Information guidelines.

EB members agreed that the minutes would continue to be recorded utilising the current style and structure.

**Action: Stephen Bennett**

## 12. Any Other Business

Two items of other business were raised:

- **Tree Alert**

The decision not to launch a supporting app would be re-visited at a future point in the project's development, if appropriate, but not for the time-being.

- **Senior Staff Group 360 exercise**

EB members confirmed that they were content to continue with an annual exercise based on the same format as used last year. However, consideration would be given to reducing the number of raters and questions.

**Action: Jean Lindsay**

### 13. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the EB was scheduled for 9am, Wednesday 4 March 2015, in the Silvan House Boardrooms.