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**THE FORESTRY COMMISSION ENGLAND EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 105TH MEETING
Conference Room, National Office, Bristol
25 April 2016**

Attendees:

Ian Gambles
Richard Greenhous
Simon Hodgson
PK Khaira-Creswell
Steve Meeks (by telephone)
Colin Morton (by telephone)
Mike Seddon
Joe Watts

Josh Roberts – Minute Secretary

Dorothy Russell (on behalf of Jo Ridgway)

Apologies were received from Jo Ridgway.

1. Welcome

Ian Gambles opened the meeting at 11:05.

2. Minutes and Actions

The minutes of the meeting on 24 February 2016 were reviewed and agreed as a true record.

Action 1: PK Khaira-Creswell reported that her action to investigate legislative options for PFEMO was not yet complete and that she would carry forward her action.

Josh Roberts reported his action as being completed.

Mike Seddon reported his action to recirculate Paper 02/16 was complete.

PK Khaira-Creswell reported that her action to work with Forestry Commission Chair Sir Harry Studholme to arrange a meeting with Lord Inglewood about grey squirrel control was complete. The need had been met through conversations with Lord Kinnoul.

Mike Seddon reported that his action to engage with the Forest Management Directors (FMDs) on exploring emerging grey squirrel partnerships was underway but that he was still awaiting some feedback from FMDs. He also reported that a meeting with the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC) would be taking place shortly.

Mike Seddon and Colin Morton reported that their action to develop a communication pack on grey squirrel control on the Public Forest Estate was complete.

3. Round Table Discussion

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The Board each provided a brief verbal update on their area of responsibility.

Simon Hodgson provided an update on the current position and projections for the Grown in Britain initiative, further to his update at the meeting in February. The Board thanked Simon and asked him to provide another update at the meeting on 1 June.

Action 2: Simon Hodgson to provide a verbal update to the Board on the Grown in Britain initiative at the next meeting.

4. Finance Report

Steve Meeks introduced Paper 08 and highlighted the major points for the Board to consider.

Steve provided additional information on progress to complete the 2015-16 Annual Report. He reported that the Annual Report would be circulated for Management Review later that week but was still awaiting some of the financial figures, such as Pension data from MyCSP.

Steve also flagged for the Board's attention an underspend that had occurred with a Defra grant to purchase IT equipment for Forest Enterprise England.

The Board thanked Steve for his update.

5. Diversity and Inclusion

Dorothy Russell gave a presentation to the Board on the Forestry Commission's diversity culture.

The presentation was based on the initial impressions of the recently appointed Diversity Manager. The theme of the presentation was to emphasise a need to move away from an 'Equality and Diversity (E&D)' culture towards 'Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)'. The difference between these two concepts was that E&D was based on recognising protected characteristics and aiming to provide equal opportunities for all, whereas D&I was about going further to recognise a broader range of differences and taking more active steps to understand and value those differences to ensure that everyone feels engaged & motivated to perform at their best.

Dorothy recommended that the first action to help improve the situation should be to hold focus groups with Forestry Commission staff.

Richard Greenhous supported the overall proposed approach and focus groups, but wished to see further emphasis on potential future employees as well as current employees. He also suggested that focus group discussions were likely to raise a wide range of issues e.g. pay, for which those running the focus groups would need to be prepared.

Dorothy gave assurances that the groups would remain focused on specific topics and that the Diversity Manager had experience in running similar groups. She also agreed that the Focus Groups were only a starting point in the process of change and that more would need to be done to embed the change in mind-set.

The Board thanked Dorothy for her presentation and endorsed the proposed approach.

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6. Internal Audit

Steve Meeks introduced his item on Internal Audit, adding additional context to each of the numbered points in Paper 10.

The Board endorsed the main recommendations of the Paper, subject to some amendments, most importantly to make clear that the Board considered the indicative costs in the draft paper for the new GIAA service to be unacceptably high. The target range for projected costs should be lower than the existing arrangements, not higher; one of the benefits of moving from a small shared service arrangement to a much larger government-wide shared service arrangement should be cost efficiency. It was recognised that the proposals were at an early stage and the Board asked Steve Meeks to negotiate further with DSAS/GIAA before asking Ian Gambles to intervene with Defra senior leadership.

The Board asked for some minor rephrasing in the Paper to desensitise references to staff working in remote locations.

Simon Hodgson questioned how the cost allocation should be split, commenting that the current proposals were based on a subdivision of embedded costs rather than being linked to meet specific business needs. He recommended that the Paper should make reference to what the appropriate level of auditing should be for each part of the organisation.

The Board recommended that the Paper went to the Business Strategy Group as per the existing timetable, but amended to reflect the concerns of the EEB.

7. AOB

No other business was raised.

Ian Gambles closed the meeting at 13:00

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