

MINUTES OF THE 905TH MEETING OF
THE FORESTRY COMMISSIONERS
SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH
20TH MARCH 2014

Present

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

Also Attending

Fiona Alexander (Minutes)

1. Introduction and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies were received.

2. Minutes of 5 December 2014

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

3. Matters Arising

i) Forest Holidays

Work is in hand on the Internal Audit report on the review of FC processes and procedures for working with Forest Holidays and Camping in the Forest. Commissioners will be given an update at their next meeting on 19 June 2014.

ii) Cross Border Plan Health

The Plant Health Biosecurity Strategy has been circulated to Westminster Ministers and is due for publication in April 2014.

iii) Appointments

The Chair's post has now been filled. The process to recruit a Non-executive Forestry Commissioner for England has commenced with interview dates set for 7 May.

iv) Woodland Policy Enabling Programme

The meeting heard that work is continuing with the policy instructions which would be used to draft the Bill to set up the new Public Forest Estate Management Organisation. Work is also continuing on the business case and this will be presented to Defra for agreement.

Work is progressing on the transition plan to develop a more independent FEE organisation. This is likely to take the form of a revised Framework Document, refreshed governance arrangements, adjusted management structures, and

greater operational autonomy for Forest Enterprise England within the existing legal structures.

Forestry Functions – a stakeholder forum was held at the end of January 2014 with a 'one year on' update given. The review of forestry functions has concluded: forestry functions will continue to be discharged by the FC. Forest Services England and Defra are working more closely and have a joint policy programme.

EU payments – work is on-going to implement the new grants processing system to be managed by the Rural Payments Agency, which will encompass the transactional elements of the New Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS). Significant issues remain to be resolved, including the management of legacy schemes such as EWGS. The proposed changes will potentially affect about 30-40 staff in six Forestry Commission locations. Discussions are on-going with Natural England regarding how NE and the Forestry Commission will work together to deliver NELMS technical functions.

v) Cross-Border Project

The meeting heard that Phase 2 has now started and this phase will examine the organisational model(s) for delivering the functions into the future. The main outputs from Phase 2 will be the development of high-level options. In a separate, FC-led project the Business Strategy Working Group is also developing a road-map for shared services going forward and is initially focusing on areas of the business where further devolution may be desirable.

4. **Forest Holidays**

The meeting was given a presentation on the background and current status of Forest Holidays. The meeting discussed the potential for expanding new sites and the challenges of securing planning consents. The meeting noted the high customer satisfaction with Forest Holidays. The meeting agreed that an update on Forest Holidays in a year's time would be useful.

Action: Bob McIntosh

5. **Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services**

The meeting was given an overview of natural capital and ecosystem services. The meeting discussed the work going on at a European level and the difficulty in monetising social benefits. The meeting recognised some of the difficulties with carbon-offsetting and the need to reach the targets set at the Kyoto agreement.

6. **International Forestry**

The meeting heard that the International Forestry team in FC is a cross-border function and provides technical forestry advice and support to Defra in international negotiations where the UK is recognised. Defra lead on policy however, if a more technical forestry component is required then the FC will take the lead. The FC has gained benefits from working with Defra, and now has better connections to international processes within Whitehall departments. There are also links to the UK

Forestry Standard through which the UK meets its commitments, obligations, and standards of sustainable forest management. The meeting heard that international forestry impacts on other parts of the FC business e.g. the work of FR, guidance produced for practitioners.

The meeting noted that in Europe the main work on plant health focussed on restrictions whilst at the international level, the focus is more on trade. Other areas such as deforestation are not areas that the FC generally gets involved in given available resources and level of contribution. Defra have provided support in discussions on biomass and sustainability.

The work by Corporate and Forestry Support on EU horizon-scanning links into the competence for forestry. The meeting recognised that on occasion, impacts on forestry are not recognised or clearly understood and the challenge is to ensure that forestry influences are more widely broadcast and better joined-up.

7. Director Central Services Report

The meeting considered the report noting:

- i) The Science and Innovation Strategy was formally launched;
- ii) Positive feedback was received on the visit to FR by the Expert Committee on Forest Science;
- iii) The OPAL Tree Health Survey scooped the Civil Service Reform Award;
- vi) The revised FC Values will be launched in April and the Forestry Commissioners were thanked for their input to the review exercise;
- vii) The FC has achieved connection to the Public Services Network (PSN).

8. Director England Report

The meeting considered the report noting:

- i) Defra 'One Business' has made a major announcement regarding the Agency Futures Review which will look at options for science agencies i.e. Fera, CEFAS and AHVLA. Agency Futures will look at options for these agencies but FR is not in the scope of the review. FR is a cross-border body and with potential changes to the science agencies in England, and the current review of science in government, the meeting agreed to keep sight of this;
- ii) HRH the Prince of Wales will be hosting a meeting to discuss red squirrel conservation and grey squirrel control. The Secretary of State and the Scottish Minister for the Environment are expected to attend. The Secretary of State is currently considering options for strategic initiatives to promote greater squirrel control.

9. Director Scotland Report

The meeting considered the report noting:

- i) Forestry Commission Scotland is preparing a transition plan should there be 'Yes' vote in the Scottish Referendum. The plan will be discussed at the next meeting of National Committee Scotland on 26 March;

- ii) The EU Timber Regulation came into force on 3 March 2013. The Regulation makes it an offence to place illegal timber or timber products on the EU market, and places obligations on those who first place such products on the market, as well as those trading further down the supply chain. The National Measurement Office (NMO) is the competent authority responsible for enforcing the EU Timber Regulation within the United Kingdom. There is particular interest in one current illegal felling and the potential that both cutter and buyer can be criminally prosecuted, with significant penalties.

10. Any Other Business

The meeting heard that a previous action to review the GB Board of Forestry Commissioners Terms of Reference was overdue. The majority of Commissioners' business has been delegated to the two National Committees however the GB Board still has a role and appropriate Terms of Reference need to be set. The meeting agreed to review the Terms of Reference with the exercise completed by correspondence.

Action: Secretary

11. Date of Next Meeting

18 and 19 June 2014 to incorporate a Tour in England.