

Forest Research Executive Board Meeting – 12/13 July 2007
Alice Holt Lodge

Present: Prof J M Lynch (Chair) Dr H F Evans
Mr W L Mason Dr X Christophers
Dr A J Moffat (AJM) Prof. P Freer-Smith
Dr Helen McKay Mr K N Charles
Dr C Quine Mr T Cornwell

Apologies: Prof S Evans

In attendance: Mr Paul Hill-Tout, Director England
Mr Rod Leslie, Head of Programmes, FCE
Mrs Alison Melvin (AKM), FR
Dr David Shannon, FR Change Management Consultant

Copies to: Mrs Liz Holmes, Head of Internal Audit
Mrs Wilma Harper, Director of Corporate & Forestry Support
Mrs Ros Bull, Secretary to the Chairman

Note: The formal FREB meeting was preceded on 12 July by FREB members attending a “Who We Are” branding workshop led by Dragon Consulting. The Director General, Mr Tim Rollinson also attended.

Agenda Item 1 – Introduction to purpose of meeting

1. JL introduced this item and commented upon a very useful interaction between FR, Paul Hill-Tout, and Rod Leslie the preceding evening. The first part of the meeting today would cover an FC(E) update with Rod Leslie introducing this item. **Noted**

Agenda Item 2 – FC England Update

2. In introducing this item Rod Leslie (RL) covered ‘FC England priorities and desires – what did FC(E) want from FR?’ and ‘Research and Policy Direction in England’.
3. RL started by emphasising that FC(E) wishes to rebuild a properly functioning relationship with FR where hard evidence provides the key to good policy making. In doing so FC(E) will communicate current policy direction and will develop research drivers for FC. It is not FC(E)’s intention to write detailed research proposals, FC(E) will ask the questions, FR will develop how the research will be carried out.

4. A 'Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests' was launched by the then Minister, Barry Gardiner, on 20 July. The strategy is evolutionary and is split into three main sections;

Communities and Places, which includes

- new social agendas
- health and welfare
- diversity and inequality
- rural tourism

Land and Natural Environment

- clearer definition of roles – SSSI targets
- Keepers of Time, Woodland, Bird Index
- the 'Big' environment issues, soil, water, air
- climate change (new as a policy priority)

Working Woodlands

- timber production supported but not subsidised by Government
- increasing accent on capacity and support for business exemplified by woodfuel

- 5.
- What next? Delivering the policy is FC's responsibility in conjunction with Natural England. The 'how' will be expressed in the 'Delivery Plan' which will encompass the whole of the Government's forestry policy, not just the FC element.
 - Woodfuel. A transformational policy area which is developing fast and which raises old and new challenges. The Biomass Energy Centre is a good start. RL emphasised that communication is a key issue from technical to social issues.
6. FR's Strategic Approach. RL noted that the strategy to 'sunset' 20% of existing research projects with a similar percentage 'sunrising' gives a scale to the rate of change projected. From FC(E)'s viewpoint, it was looking for more flexibility for urgent priorities and small changes of direction in the short term. It was accepted by FC(E) that major changes take time, must be handled in partnership and that new programmes may use existing skills.
7. Working together.
- Essential to develop an evidence base to support the English Forestry Strategy.
 - FR needs to be more aware of the policy environment and policy orientated evidence.
 - A knowledge service, we have the facts but can customers find them?

- It is important that working relationships are developed between FC(E) and FR. There needs to be a degree of formality through the PAG and RSMB systems. For example, RL was critical of the practice where different members of staff attended meetings each time and expressed personal rather than country priorities and committed to ensuring this would change.
 - Robust but transparent management systems are needed.
8. Opportunities include;
- Team approach to funding
 - Casework consultancies, eg woodfuel installations
 - Strategic Environmental assessment consultancies
9. Suggested next steps
- FC(E) are willing to run policy seminars for FR staff and to offer assistance in finding FR staff appropriate short secondments to allow them to gain policy experience.
 - Noted that some FR staff are already involved in the English Forestry Strategy delivery plan process.
 - A 'match and gap' analysis needs to be done to establish the level of support provided by current FR activities to the English Forestry Strategy.
 - The ways that FR will communicate its knowledge in the future.
10. The discussion following RL's presentation included;
- FR's future depended upon our research/advice being policy orientated
 - A commitment to embedding formal processes for FR and FC(E) staff to interact together (PHT). There will be a specific requirement for FR to help with technical as well as policy matters. There will be a formal opportunity for FR and FC(E) staff to determine how they will interact and how, when appropriate, policy can be challenged in a constructive way and what is meant exactly by policy 'evidence'.

Agenda Item 3 – English Forestry Strategy – How can FR contribute to achieving it?

11. Andy Moffat in responding to RL's presentation accented how FR can contribute to the achievement of the English Forestry Strategy. AM addressed those parts of the Strategy where we are doing some of the work already but there are 'Big Ticket' items where FR will have to produce an appropriate response in helping to provided an evidence based approach. We must think about the longitudinal nature of our work in certain areas where not only is the evidence provided but where we must go back to check the actual impact and success of the advice given. The point made by FC(E) about alignment is an important one and our response to the 'Big Ticket' items will transverse Divisional boundaries. 'Partnership' appears frequently in the Strategy and AM confirmed what PH-T had said about forming an understanding about due processes when working together. Advice is welcome from FC(E) about increasing our awareness of what

is meant by working to a policy directive. XC will organise 'policy seminars' in conjunction with FC(E) at NRS and Alice Holt. **Action: XC**

12. FR should be able, reasonably quickly, to go through the Strategy and pick out those areas which are directly relevant to FR (largely been done already through the PAWG exercise), pick this up with FC(E) and to come up with appropriate responses to individual themes. In doing this, FR should be mindful of the strategy documents of the other two countries it serves as well as CFS.
13. RL suggested the following action points;
 - Project management contact, Paul Johnson (FC(E)) to continue to engage with FR (PF-S, AJM, HM).
 - Leaders of FC(E)'s three main streams identified in the Strategy to engage with us through Paul Johnson. FR to notify FC(E) of the names of FR's project leader in each of the three areas. **Action: PFS**
 - FR will assist in ensuring that communications between FR and FC(E) is appropriate where the three themes cut across Divisional boundaries.
 - RL will take responsibility for briefing at a broader level and for enabling FR's policy expertise to grow. **Action: RL**

Agenda Item 4 – Minutes of previous meeting

14. Accepted subject to some comments received from Wilma Harper being incorporated and re-issued.
15. FREB wished to record its congratulations to JL on the honour of being awarded an OBE.

Agenda Item 5 – Matters arising

16. Thanks are recorded to Ian Willoughby in taking on the leadership of the Biomass PAWG in the absence of Sam Evans. **Noted**
17. ICT Service Board, agreed that the ICT Service Board will be reconvened within the next 6 – 8 weeks, BM offered to chair this meeting. **Action: BM**
18. A tabular diary has been produced by XC detailing FR's progress towards its Corporate Plan Objectives for 07/08. It was decided to add columns looking forward for two years and the table will be reviewed at each FREB meeting. **Action: XC**

Agenda Item 6 – Update on other components of the Development Strategy

19. The Finance Review Group has had its scheduled meetings, TC is preparing a draft final report. **Action: TC**

- 20. Site Development – KC reported that terms of reference for the examination of the options were being refined and would be issued in line with FR's procurement processes. **Noted**
- 21. PAWG Reports (see agenda item 8).
- 22. Customer satisfaction – DS has met with James Pendlebury (CFS) to discuss how this can be measured as part of the contract assessment.
- 23. Reward and promotion, DS has met with Kim Lardge (FC HR Director) who will nominate someone from Silvan House to advise on this. FR should also be looking at the needs of FR in this respect.
- 24. Efficiency scrutinies, DS said there was a need to examine certain areas to establish whether certain things need to be done at all and, if so, whether they are being done in the most cost effective way. If no extra money is available then resources will have to be diverted. XC has started a review of the library already and will discuss this at the next FREB. **Action: XC**
- 25. AJM endorsed the importance of significant activity in efficiency scrutiny and CQ suggested that responsibility might be given to younger members of staff to critically examine. DS will produce a paper in the Autumn suggesting due process. **Action: DS**

Agenda Item 7 – Review of Inventory and Forecasting Systems update

- 26. James Ogilvie has taken up post and has started the review. A Working Board has been set up and a scoping mandate circulated. FR will prepare a position paper to feed into James' group. PF-S will take the lead on this with support from AKM and CQ. **Action: PF-S**

Agenda Item 8 – PAWG Reports

- 27. In recognising the importance of discussing these reports in detail, FREB will hold an EGM on 6 August with a follow-up meeting on 14 August. In the meantime, all FR staff will be allowed access to the reports on a 'confidential' basis.
- 28. The Chair of each PAWG was invited to make brief comments.
- 29. Climate Change, PF-S said that there were opportunities for us to expand FR and FR/FC work on climate change. The report tends towards some form of centre or inter-divisional group to take it forward. The second point the group identified was how we manage the availability of staff, support and integration/team working in the Agency.

30. Biomass, HM reported on behalf of Group Chair, Ian Willoughby. BEC and Woodfuel Centre could be in a good position to put forward strong bids for external funding. The hybrid BEC organisational structure makes working difficult.
31. Biosecurity, HE reported that his group concentrated on main policy drivers – topics to take forward, our capacity (headroom and training) to construct contract bids. It is encouraging that CFS is indicating that a contingency element can be included. A Biosecurity Research Group could be considered to take forward concepts and opportunities.
32. Well-being, CQ identified the link between well-being and the environment. His group recommended that within the first 6 months a mapping exercise be conducted of relevant academic departments and public sector research units, that FR's potential strengths/opportunities be defined in this area and that a workshop be held for key stakeholders.
33. Urban Greening, AJM's group recommends that a FR Urban Greenspace Centre should be established with appropriate membership from across FR. The group considers that urban greening is an area ripe for business development in FR with commercialisation opportunities.
34. Sustainable Management of the Forest Industry Woodchain (SMFIWC), BM reported that his group recommends a multi-disciplinary research programme on SMFIWC. Current research is fragmented and insufficient attention has been paid to the possibilities provided by a more explicit focus on whole-chain analysis.
35. Email to be sent to all staff thanking those who participated in groups (including Finance), explaining to staff that FREB is holding specific meetings to discuss reports in detail and detailing how staff can gain access to the reports (on a confidential basis). **Action: JL**

Agenda Item 9 – Finance

36. TC reported that the 06/07 accounts have been approved by the Audit Committee.
37. A forecast for 07/08 was given which indicated a small surplus. TC asked HoDs to update their forecasts in time for the next FREB. **Action: HoDs**
38. External income has increased to £2.3m which suggests that the strategic target of £2.7m is achievable. **Noted**

Agenda Item 10 – Staffing

39. KC reported that current staffing stands at 272 (FTE) against a planned figure of 270. The increase is due to additional staff being taken on to service survey contracts.
40. A disappointing response to extensive advertising for two PB2 posts with only 8 applicants for the Environmental post and 4 applicants for the Social Science post. CQ will raise this at next HR Service Board to try and establish whether this is a trend across the FC and, if so, what action can be taken to remedy it.
Action: CQ
41. KC reported on his recent attendance at a Case Management Hearing at the Birmingham Employment Tribunal. There is a Personal Injury claim being heard at the High Court on 10 December.
Noted
42. Dates for the first of the series of training courses for the more junior scientific staff have been set for Alice Holt from 23 to 25 October and NRS in November. The first course will be 'Essential Skills for Managers'. HoDs were asked to make nominations and to ensure that, once nominated, staff would be able to attend. KC is meeting with a PRINCE2 training provider and the 'Foundation' course will be made available. Ewan Mackie is researching the provision of an embedded FR system for staff to use post project management training. Financial systems training is being discussed with TC. While the initial accent will be on the training of junior science staff, there will be opportunities for this training to be extended to other staff.
Action: HoDs
43. KC agreed to let HoDs have the course content for the 'Essential Skills for Managers' course.
Action: KC
44. AKM expressed disappointment that FR had failed to get access to any of the time available through the Graduate Recruitment exercise. CQ offered to pursue this at the HR Service Board.
Action: CQ

Agenda Item 11 – Divisional Reports

45. Reports will be published on the Intranet.

Agenda Item 12 – AOB

46. CQ mentioned that those responsible for visiting scientists, casuals etc. Should make this known so proper arrangements can be made for the preparation of the administrative side of their arrival.
47. PF-S will circulate RSMB minutes to HoDs.
Action: PF-S

48. It is intended that Research Promotion boards will take place in October.

Action: KC

49. A note of thanks was recorded to staff involved in organising the recent visit of Defra Industrial Crop Division, involving Andrew Perrins, Sue Popple and FC(E).

Noted

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 11 September, at NRS