

**Forest Research Executive Board Meeting – 9 July 2008
at NRS**

Present: Ken Charles
Xanthe Christophers
Peter Freer-Smith
Bill Mason
Helen McKay
Alison Melvin (AKM)
Andy Moffat (AM)
James Pendlebury (Chair)
Chris Quine
Sandra Smith

Apologies: Janet Dutch
Hugh Evans
Wilma Harper

In attendance: Helena Ladbury, minute secretary

Copies to: Liz Holmes, Head of Internal Audit
Ros Bull, Secretary to the Chairman

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

1. There were 2 corrections to the minutes of 9 June.
 - Item 25 – final sentence should be two sentences, to read ‘FREB will look at governance structure. TH will circulate a first draft services list by September.’
 - Item 35 – to be changed to read ‘Andy Moffat’s paper on extending FR’s QA scheme was endorsed and agreed by FREB.’

Otherwise the minutes were accepted.

Matters Arising

2. (From April 08 minutes)

Item 5

SS reported that Keith Gliddon will be meeting senior staff at Cedar to resolve issues with TRS. FR Finance are still hoping for an August go live date but this may be unattainable. There are also programming issues which still need to be resolved within FC. An All-FR email will be sent to remind staff that in the meantime manual records need to be kept and that this should have been done since E-track was withdrawn. The suggestion was made that the spreadsheet for recording time already in use in Ecology and FMD should become standard throughout FR. **Action: SS**

By discussing with divisional staff, Carole Martin can continue to invoice customers in the interim period. She has already advised divisional office managers of this.

Keith Gliddon, JP and SS to discuss Cedar/TRS at their meeting on 15 July.

Action: JP/SS

Item 11

It was pointed out that monitoring systems would be needed to ensure GreenerWays compliance. XC is the FREB GreenerWays champion. There would be no change to Steve Lee's role. **Action: XC**

Item 28

PRINCE2 training – Appropriate levels of training need to be decided for different staff groups. **Action: KC to follow up with FREB members**

Item 36

Ongoing.

Item 39

This is Agenda Item 5.

3. (From June 08 minutes)

Para 3

A response from Peter Weston is awaited regarding FR representation on subgroups of the I&F Service Board, once formed. JP has discussed this with HMckK.

Para 7

Efficiency and Delivery review – a meeting of the group will be held on the morning of Monday 14 July, followed by a research planning meeting in the afternoon. Baseline data from SS & TSU subgroup will be provided for the E&D review.

Para 11

C&FS have scored divisions, JP has 3 outstanding reviews on THD still to do.

Action: JP

HoDs to provide list of new proposals for the Autumn PAG round at the research planning meeting to be held on the afternoon of 14 July and flag any significant changes. **Action: HoDs**

The importance of accurate costings when specifying programme bids was stated. This may require revision of the basis on which FR produces costings. Helen Sellars of C&FS is currently producing a simple guide on how to fill in the PAG forms. It was stressed that accuracy now will simplify budgeting next year. **Action: HoDs**

Para 14

HMckK – has accelerated clarification of OS. No release date yet.

Para 16

AM has faxed DCLG website details to WH.

Para 19

Anja Ueberjahn-Tritta to take forward the RRSP climate change workshop in November. **Action: AU-T**

Second item discharged – AKM.

Para 20

JP advised that Jim Dewar has produced a new paper on PAGs.

Action: AM/PF-S

Para 21

WH to meet JP to follow up on climate change co-ordination meeting held on 25 June to improve clarity. **Action: JP/HL**

AM to circulate FCE and FCGB links to Defra contacts' list to FREB. **Action: AM**

FREB can then update as appropriate.

Action: FREB

Para 23

Four divisions still to submit nominees to work with the Urban Regeneration and Greening Centre. **Action: HE/BM/HMcK/AM**

Para 24

An internal communication setting out the remit of the Urban Regeneration and Greening Centre will be sent in due course by CEO /or Research Director.

Action: JP/PF-S/AM

Para 27

AM will follow up with WH the action required for the launch of the Urban Regeneration and Greening Centre.

Action: AM

Para 31

SS advised that she would update FREB under Finance agenda Item.

Para 32

The temporary recruitment ban would be revisited on a case by case basis. KC advised that he had started work on the Workforce Plan which would be modelled on FCE's plan and would include succession planning.

Para 36

Dates for next year's FREB meetings to be set. HL to consult SS and JP and circulate.

Action: HL

Para 37

Defer.

Agenda Item 2 – Initial thoughts

4. JP referred to his all-FR memo which was sent out by email on 4 July and reported that most of the feedback he had received from this had been positive. He will continue to meet staff over the coming months.
5. A timetable for the new Climate Change Centre was still to be addressed. JP to discuss with the DG & WH, but envisaged no major change in this regard for at least 9 months. **Action: JP**
6. JP considered that FR should have its own science strategy in the medium term. **Action: JP/PF-S**
7. JP pointed out that the current FREB is too big and he will be reorganising his executive team as a priority over the next few months. **Action: JP**
8. FREB needs to take on a corporate responsibility role in running FR and members must take a corporate line. Priority 1 is to sort out the budget deficit. **Action: FREB**
9. JP re-iterated that FR must be realistic in the costings it submits to C&FS.
10. Keith Gliddon is talking to country directors regarding their financial contribution to FR. HoDs to ensure that staff log work specific to countries. **Action: HoDs**
11. It was noted that external contracts don't usually pay for peer-reviewed papers to be written at the end of projects. JP felt that more could be made of PhD students as FR is not exploiting this with universities and research councils. AM to present paper to future FREB on this topic. **Action: AM**

Agenda Item 3 – Feedback from FC EB

12. JP updated FREB on the matters discussed at the recent FC EB, the minutes of which will shortly be posted on the internet.

Agenda Item 4 – First report from the Efficiency Review Group (TSU subgroup)

13. JD has received all C&FS proposals.
14. AM gave a verbal update to FREB on the progress made at the recent meeting of the Efficiency & Delivery Review – TSU subgroup meeting. He will give a further update to FREB in August. **Action: AM**
15. JP pointed out that in future PAG contract proposals to C&FS will contain a TSU budget line which project leaders will have to fill in. **Action: HoDs**

Agenda Item 5 – Risk Register - progress

16. A comprehensive review of the Risk Register (RR) is required. FC devised one FC-wide policy. FR has fallen behind and must recover position and have a RR in a similar format to the countries. It will need to satisfy both Finance and Accounting Services at Silvan House and FR's Audit & Risk Committee.
17. FC has developed a business continuity plan, KC to update this. **Action: KC**
18. The Risk Register will be brought to FREB in September or October of this year and presented to the Audit & Risk Committee in November. **Action: SS**
19. Initially a high-level corporate RR needs to be produced (as a guide the countries have between 10 and 20 risks). Currently there are nearly 50 risks on the register, they may be too narrow and this figure needs to be reviewed. It may be appropriate to address some risks at Programme level and it was pointed out that QA would be part of risk control. FREB must engage with this process and also review the register on a regular basis, Liz Holmes hopes to provide assistance in this matter. SS will discuss with JP. **Action: FREB, SS/JP**

Agenda Item 6 – Finance

20. JP advised he would be signing off the 07/08 accounts for the NAO today. The hope was that NAO would then sign off in time to instruct printers and get proofs to parliament to be laid before the summer recess.
21. It was remarked that FREB had acted in good faith on the basis of the financial information presented to the board. Although in retrospect it should have been much more rigorous in its examination of the information presented to it.
22. It was reported that the external income deficit for 07/08 was largely due to work in progress although some was the result of programme over-expenditure and this should be managed better in the future.
23. SS advised that it had been agreed at the recent Audit & Risk Committee meeting that the management commentary to the accounts would be changed in the future.

24. The DG has asked JP for an analysis of FR's financial situation and a more detailed assessment of FR's future external income projections. **Action: JP**
25. KC thanked SS and her team and Jo Davies for all their hard work on the annual accounts in particular.
26. It was felt it would be helpful to have previous years' figures for comparison in monthly agency and divisional reports.
27. A memo would be issued to all FR that a line was now drawn under the 07/08 accounts. **Action: JP/SS**
28. It was pointed out that some EU income, although it comes in to FR, goes straight out again to third parties. SS agreed this should be flagged up for future EU and other contracts. **Action: SS**
29. JP asked SS to devote one hour at the next FREB meeting to explain accounting procedures to FREB members. **Action: SS/HL**
30. It was noted that although there were 18 fewer permanent staff during 07/08 than during the 06/07 financial year, per capita costs were increasing at a quite substantial rate. The reasons for the increase in spend were discussed.
31. JP advised that future FREB meetings would have a reduced agenda in order to spend more time on financial, strategic and business issues and that he and SS were meeting Keith Gliddon next week to discuss budgets.
32. HoDs were asked to provide further explanation to SS and JP on their expenditure on Materials and Services and Contractors. **Action: HoDs**
33. The timing of budgetary expenditure was questioned and it was felt that a better understanding of this was needed. Computer and university research costs also need to be looked at. JP and SS will look at these budget lines in some detail. **Action: JP/SS**
34. HoDs were asked to quantify their income lines and indicate those which they are confident they can earn this year. They were also asked whether there were any budgetary cuts they could make in external expenditure (not internal cross-charging). Forecasts need to be produced by early August. It was noted that the new Time Recording System was unlikely to be operational in time for this. **Action: HoDs**
35. SS advised that by the next FREB meeting she will have issued end-July figures. **Action: SS**
36. FREB was reminded that non-essential expenditure should not take place.
37. It is important to identify work that FR is doing for the countries. SS advised that she needs to update the contracts register. BM stated he had some information for this. **Action: SS/BM**

38. A discussion about contracts to be an agenda item for the October FREB meeting.
Action: HL

Agenda Item 7 – Staffing

39. HoDs to come back to KC on requests for staff in order to update requested additional staff list.
Action: HoDs
40. JP requested a current list of casual staff showing the start and end dates of their contracts (and renewal date if applicable).
Action: KC
41. KC reported that the main impact of Equality Impact Assessments will be on our publications and will be dealt with by XC and Jo Davies.
Action: XC
42. HMckK volunteered to be the FR representative to the group being set up to look at revision of PMS.
Action: HMckK
43. JP and KC to discuss the proposal that a member of HR no longer attends interview boards.
Action: JP/KC

Agenda Item 8 – Division Reports

44. Divisional reports were presented and discussed. In future HL will number them so that all have their papers in the same order.
Action: HL
45. JP reminded all FREB members of the new 1-page format for presentation to FREB. XC and HoDs/JD to agree the future format of Division reports for communication purposes.
Action: XC/HoDs/JD
46. Communications
XC to prepare a paper on Visitors to FR Sites to be presented at the August FREB meeting.
Action: XC
47. EHS
(i) A meeting is to be set up to discuss governance and funding of urban and climate change research in EHS division and through the appropriate Centres.
Action: JP
- (ii) With regard to publishing in open access journals, XC advised that she had discussed this matter with Marcus Sangster and Elaine Dick and would meet HoDs in September.
Action: XC/HoDs
- (iii) AM and SS to discuss the appropriate financial treatment of subcontracting services.
Action: AM/SS
- (iv) AM and JP to follow up on the recent presentation to DCLG of the work and ambitions of the Urban Regeneration and Greenspace Centre. **Action: AM/JP**
48. NRS Head of Station Report
Planning for the 40th anniversary of NRS in May 2010 will be a future agenda item.
Action: HL/CQ

49. Research Director

JP advised that FC (represented by Jim Dewar) is a main board member of the Environmental Research Funders' Forum.

50. TSU

BM to follow up with JD on the fourth point of the highlights section of the TSU report regarding GIS. **Action: BM/JD**

It was agreed that Diversity would be a future agenda item.

Action: HL

Agenda Item 9 – AOB

51. XC gave a verbal report on Brand Management developments in relation to the FR website. FREB agreed that it wanted to maintain a separate but corporate identity and that keeping the www.forestresearch.gov.uk website would be part of this.

Action: XC

52. XC stated that she would send an email to FREB members giving an update on Information Security and a list of dos and don'ts which she will produce in conjunction with Allan Dungavel.

Action: XC

53. XC presented a paper on Proposals to Improve Customer Satisfaction. Three workstreams had been agreed at the June FREB meeting and Carl Foster's workstream (the Advisory Services Working Group) is up and running. However, JP felt that this process could be streamlined and will discuss with XC with the intention of both reducing the number of staff involved and the level of staff time commitment outlined in the paper.

Action: JP/XC

54. It was agreed that not every division needed to be represented on all three working groups and that it was more appropriate for the workgroups to report to the QA Implementation Team who would then compile one report to be submitted to the October FREB meeting. XC to consult Jim Dewar to ascertain exactly what C&FS customers want. Some of this work can be financed from the QA budget.

Action: XC

55. JP to ask Jim Dewar to provide a session to FREB on contract terms & conditions.

Action: JP

56. SS advised she would be meeting Eric Holmes, FC's new Head of Procurement, on Tuesday 15 July and would give feedback of the meeting to FREB. **Action: SS**

**Next meeting: 13 August, JP at Alice Holt (v/c facilities booked at NRS)
2 September meeting all at NRS.**