

**Forest Research Executive Board Meeting – 9 June 2008
by video conference**

Present:	NRS Janet Dutch Bill Mason Chris Quine	Alice Holt Ken Charles Xanthe Christophers Hugh Evans Peter Freer-Smith (Chair) Wilma Harper Helen McKay Alison Melvin (AKM) Andy Moffat (AM) Sandra Smith
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In attendance: Helena Ladbury, minute secretary
Tony Hutchings, Head of the Urban Regeneration and Greenspace
Centre, attended for Agenda Item 4

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 April.
 - Item 18 should read ...Roger Trout and Robin Gill... (not Graham Gill).
 - Item 19 should read ...Congratulations to Rona Pitman on being awarded the 2007 Silviculture Prize from “Forestry” journal for her paper ‘Wood Ash use in Forestry’...Otherwise the minutes were accepted.
2. Item 1
BM would like James Morison’s Review of FR Climate Change-Related Research paper to be discussed by FREB. James Pendlebury’s paper had not been circulated as had been overtaken by events.
Item 2
WH reported no progress, date to be decided. [Now set for 3/4 September.]
Item 3
JD reported no progress to date on a combined approach to determining requests from the TSU and Biometrics Professional Services. Will revisit later in the year.
Item 4
XC reported that Pat Snowdon and James Morison had asked to defer presentation of their paper on the FC’s Centre for Forestry and Climate Change. It was noted that FR staff have seen the FC DVD “Forestry & Climate Change, A Convenient Truth”.
Item 5
SS stated that training on the new time reporting system should be able to start next week; an email was sent out to staff on Friday last week. Carole Martin will sort out

training needs in conjunction with Shirley Spencer; SS to speak to her later in the week.

PF-S agreed that further staff resource may be available for training at NRS to allow Shirley to continue to provide financial support to FMD, ED and TSU. **Action: SS**

Item 6

AM to present paper on QA at agenda item 7.

Item 7

Discharged – AM has emailed HoDs regarding SOPs.

Item 11

A form of words relating to GreenerWays targets will be emailed to FREB members for use in 08/09 FJPs. **Action: PF-S/HL**

Item 12

Tony Hutchings to present his paper at agenda item 4.

Item 13

PF-S has spoken to James Pendlebury (JP) about recruitment to the PB2 Wales post and this will be factored into further discussions.

Item 14

Some comments received from HoDs on the TUS Workload Survey paper, paper 12/08 also refers.

Item 15

SS stated that she will be looking at how future contracts and external bids are recorded and handled in due course. **Action: SS**

Item 28

PRINCE 2 training - KC stated that he had had a meeting at NRS last week, that the training would start in September and that he would issue a descriptor of the courses. A half-day training session for FREB and CFS was suggested. KC to speak to JP re meeting at AH. It was also suggested that the 2 September FREB meeting be extended. **Action: KC**

Item 30

BM stated that Steve Penny had been nominated as our representative on the committee developing the Management Development Programme. Steve has already attended one meeting of the group.

Items 32 & 33

SS reported that Keith Gliddon is still finalising the 07/08 accounts and that there had been no action yet on SLA budgets.

Item 36

JD reported that this is an ongoing process throughout the year. SS sent a reminder to HoDs last week, there is quite a lot of mismatch. All HoDs need to help JD by making her aware of their 08/09 requirements for the TSU. JD pointed out that FR was not the only customer of TSU. **Action: HoDs/JD**

Item 39

The Risk Register will go to the Audit Committee during 08/09, a comprehensive review of requirements is needed. SS suggested that Divisions should have individual registers as well in order that less is presented to FREB and to align with FC practice where appropriate. SS will discuss with JP. The revised register with HoDs' comments will go to Audit Committee. **Action: SS**

Item 41

PF-S thanked XC for volunteering to represent FR on the Information Security Management Forum.

Agenda Item 2 – (i) Feedback from FC EB

3. PF-S presented the first of his two papers to FREB.

Matters Arising

- Two errors were pointed out - the first bullet point should read four of five (not forty) and the climate change submission had gone to all three Defra ministers last week, (not prior to the EB meeting). It included a request for a meeting between Ministers and the DG & Chairman before the summer recess.
- WH stated that a submission on the GB Corporate Plan had also gone to Defra Ministers.

Finance and Accounting update

- The date in the first line should be 07/08 (not 06/07).
- Accounts will be laid before parliament before the summer recess.

Pay & Reward review

- The TUS have had guidelines.

Inventory & Forecasting review

- Peter Weston (PW) will draw up new Terms of Reference for the I&F Service Board which will need to work at a higher level than the OSU Service Board and will not be focused specifically on FE delivery. There would be two representatives per country and it was suggested that HMCK should be the FR rep. This was agreed BM would therefore stand down. It was noted that a mechanism would be needed for FR to have a link to sub-groups; HMOs are a group in their own right. There were still funding issues to be resolved between WH, Peter Weston, James Pendlebury and Jim Dewar. PW to agree with HMCK timing of staff transfer from BSSD to I&F. **Action: PW**
- BM & HMCK to send commentary to PW on where extra FR representation would be desirable on subgroups. **Action: BM/HMCK**

4. To clarify a point in the final paragraph of page 2, PF-S stated that he had given a progress report to FC EB on FP7 bids and receipt of non-FC income for the 07/08 financial year.
5. There followed some discussion on the refocusing of FR as a Climate Change Centre and how this related to the Development Strategy. In some quarters, staff morale was felt to be an issue which needed to be addressed through the provision of clearer messages on the intention, scope and timetable.

Agenda Item 2 – (ii) Efficiency and Delivery Review

6. PF-S then presented his second paper.
7. Discussion centred on the Terms of Reference and timescale for the review. It was clear that there is an immediate problem which needs to be addressed and that there is an urgent need to make progress. It was agreed that there would be one overarching review group with an initial subgroup to review the TSU. In view of the tight timescale, PF-S would merge the ToRs of both groups into a single set by the end of this week, they will then have to be agreed by email. **Action: PF-S/HoDs**

8. HMck reported that BSSD spend with TSU had increased, largely as a result of more field work for climate change-related topics. Conversely, some other divisions had been using their own surplus staff to do field work and cut their spend with TSU.
9. The 09/10 budget needs to be planned by the Autumn PAG round so the timetable is very tight.
10. The membership of the overarching review group was agreed as PF-S (Chair), AM, KC, JD, SS, CQ, HE and Jim Dewar.
11. Initial outputs would be produced for the Autumn PAG round and final outputs would be delivered in time for 09/10 budgeting. **Action: Review Group**

Agenda Item 3 – Divisional Reports

12. CEO & RD

- The importance of bringing staff on board for the new Forestry and Climate Change Centre was stressed, as was improving staff morale.
- FREB members were reminded that travel time must be taken into account when staff are asked to work long days rather than take an overnight stay. However, staff must not be encouraged, or pressured, to do so. The health and safety of our staff is paramount and each case should be considered on its merits. Driving at work risk assessments should be borne in mind in this regard.

13. Ecology

- The recent visit to the division of the Advisory Committee on Forestry Research went very well.
- Staff workloads are a concern with the level of unfilled posts at present.

14. Biometrics

- HMck echoed the concerns of several other Divisions over difficulties in delivering internal and external contracts due to the current restrictions on recruitment.
- The new woodland map for Wales to be completed in the last 2 weeks of June. HMck to discuss dissemination with XC. The Royal Welsh Show was suggested as a possibility. **Action: HMck/XC**

15. FMD

- Staffing levels are a concern.
- The Division appears to have had good success rate with projects submitted to EU. The first meeting of ForStClim will be at the beginning of September.

16. EHS

- The stump harvesting and forest carbon-related cross-divisional integrated work programmes were highlighted.
- It was reported that good links have been made with the Health Protection Agency.
- Linkage with the DCLG website to be publicised. **Action: AM**

17. THD

- Biosecurity work was highlighted – there may be policy implications. Additional

funding would continue to be sought.

18. TSU

- Proof of concept is funding TSU staff working for Roger Moore in Sweden.
- FCS has increased funding from original draft SLA to TSU for the NWSS.
- There is concern over time recording backlog whilst awaiting the new system.

19. Business Development and IP

- Concern was expressed over reaching 2008/09 non-CFS income targets, however, there was much progress in some specific bids.
- HoDs' input to the RRSP climate change event workshop in early November would be welcome. **Action: HoDs**
- SS reported £2.4m is estimated to have been secured so far this financial year on external income.
- It was agreed that there would have to be some strategic recruitment to plug gaps, particularly with non-FC contract commitments. With CFS, can discuss non-delivery, however countries also have a say and this should not be ignored.
- AKM was asked for a support site for those preparing bids to EU/Interreg.
- AKM delayed her discussion paper on strengthening FR external contract management and will send to JP next week. **Action: AKM**

20. Communications

- The 07/08 Annual Report is now in final stages of preparation.
- Possible attendance at the Royal Welsh Show was mentioned.
- The PAG summary will be sent to AKM. **Action: XC**
- XC was asked whether there was any progress on online purchasing of publications. Currently there are compatibility problems with BSD and external supplier and no timeline could be given. XC to continue to progress this. **Action: XC**

21. Wilma Harper

- FREB was reminded that Commissioners would be visiting AH in September. Professor Bob Watson (Defra Chief Scientific Advisor) had been invited to speak.
- Meeting arranged for 25 June with CFS, FC England and FR to co-ordinate climate change work and relations with Defra.
- WH and PF-S will be attending Living with Environmental Change launch on 18 June. FC engaged through ERFF membership.
- WH speaking to David Read about chairing the steering group for the climate change assessment.

Agenda Item 4 – Report on the Urban Regeneration and Greenspace Centre

22. Tony Hutchings (TH) introduced his paper and gave a short précis. The financial options, funding possibilities and excellent progress to date were discussed and noted. There are clear links between the work and the vision for the Forestry and Climate Change Centre.

23. The scope and remit of the Centre depends on what partners can get in and what they will provide financially and will include collating services and their better provision. TH will circulate a scope and remit document to FREB. Each division to provide a nominee to work with the Centre. **Action: TH/HoDs**

24. An internal communication will then be sent to staff from the CEO /or Research Director setting out the remit of the Centre. **Action: JP / or PF-S**
25. Management structures need to be decided and the decision on the make-up of the executive committee was deferred. One option is FREB, given that funding has been provided from the CE's Special Projects and Innovation Fund. It was felt that an executive external board would not be the best way forward since there should not be a governance role for external parties. However a steering group which includes external stakeholders and funders, such as that which operates for the BEC, may be suitable. The group's views could be taken on unallocated income. There also needs to be some CFS involvement via the PAGs and the FC Urban Regeneration Steering Committee. The latter would provide a strategy of the FC's priorities for urban regeneration within 18 months. TH is looking at the governance structure and will circulate a first draft services list. **Action: TH**
26. There was discussion of the ownership and funding of urban and amenity trees and whether there was a market opportunity to pursue. Tony Hutchings reported that all discussions with external agencies had so far been positive. The role of the AAIS needs to be borne in mind. London is currently putting a lot of money into street trees and it may be possible to tap into this. Involvement in remediation of the London Olympic site is being co-ordinated by Ron Melville (London Regional Director). There would be no problem taking this forward in the climate change agenda.
27. It was felt that it would be beneficial to get the Chairman's and ministerial involvement in the official launch of the URGC in October. **Action: WH**
28. It was noted that in respect of professional liability insurance, FC employees are covered but further work is needed to ensure that the risks to FC are fully captured.
29. For the URGC website, project leaders have been asked to write a few lines on what FR can offer to the external market in terms of UK research. The possibility of the website showing service provision was mentioned.
30. The paper's recommendations were accepted subject to the comments noted above.

Agenda Item 5 – Finance

31. SS reported the following:
- A £900k cash deficit for 07/08 was reported.
 - The draft accounts would be sent to Audit this week.
 - A proof-checked copy must be submitted to auditors, once they have given a clean audit certificate for 07/08, then can go forward to 08/09.
 - XC advised that the Annual Report must go to Minister (Joan Ruddock) and will have to go before it has been signed off by auditors.
 - There is currently a deficit against target for 08/09 budgets. There is also still some uncertainty over income from the countries which is not yet definite.
 - There will be some capital spend available for orders placed before April 08.
 - Cash figures will be advised when available. **Action: SS**

- A Paypal account has been set up for FR to take bookings for the IEA conference being organised by Andy Hall.
- The importance of reporting actuals as well as forecasts was stressed. Project reporting must also be improved in order to reclaim income from clients and all must understand the impact of work in progress. In addition to improvements in central monitoring, it was important to understand what is in divisional budgets, and make accurate forecasts. HoDs must be careful to understand and watch work in progress – more checking is needed. Further guidance was required from Finance as to how this be undertaken and reported.
Action: HoDs/SS
- SS advised that a debit balance would show on accounts until work had been invoiced. A worked example will be circulated.
Action: SS

Agenda Item 6 – Staffing

32. KC reported the following:

- KC was asked how potential retirements are monitored. He advised that staff names are only be added to the leavers list when definite dates have been given, but that potential retirements are regularly reviewed.
- There was considerable discussion around the current ban on new recruits. It was pointed out that many FTAs are cost neutral because they are working on external contracts.
- Managers should be advised that this ban was a temporary expediency and that they must cut any costs which they can, including agreeing with CFS any changes to programmes. It was noted that this latter tactic, whilst understandable, risked conflict with requirements agreed with the PAGs.
Action: HoDs
- KC advised that Diversity level 3 training was due to take place at NRS on 11 June and AH on 13 June.
- KC would be undertaking a skills audit and workforce plan and would meet HoDs individually.
Action: KC

Agenda Item 7 – Update on FR QA

33. AM pointed out that this item related to the KPI in the 2008/09 FR Corporate Plan 'In order to improve customer satisfaction we will extend FR's Quality Assurance scheme to cover customer care, advisory services and the delivery of final outputs', and that therefore the agenda title was inaccurate.

34. The scope of QA required and the staff to take this work forward need to be identified. In this respect, the following points were raised. **Action: AM**

- Currently written reports already have a system in place, but there is no control over web pages.
- Customer satisfaction needs to be measured – from baseline to improved.
- Currently final project reports do not get checked.
- The QA process should cover advisory work, both that which is free at the point of delivery and paid for advice.

35. In conclusion, FREB were broadly supportive of AM's paper.

Agenda Item 8– AOB

36. Dates and locations for future FREB meetings were agreed. FREB members to be emailed with details. **Action: HL**
37. XC reported on the two recently held Recent Developments/Customer Care seminars and wished to pass on her thanks to those staff who attended and apologies to those who did not. She reported that the meeting at AH had been better structured than that at NRS and that it had been helpful to have WH at both. An email to all FR staff would be sent out tomorrow with links to WH's presentation and a Q&A paper. **Action: XC**
38. KC reminded FREB that he needed TP marks and supporting documents by tomorrow. **Action: FREB**
39. BM asked whether any FREB member would be able to attend the FP7 meeting in Munich on 19 June. **Action: FREB**
40. WH spoke on behalf of the FC EB and thanked both Peter Freer-Smith and Andy Moffat for stepping into the acting roles of Chief Executive and Research Director – some real achievements have been made during their time in these posts.
41. PF-S thanked Andy Moffat and all FREB members for their support.

Next meeting: 9 July, NRS