

**Minutes of the Forest Research Executive Board meeting held at NRS on
18 November 2008**

Present: Peter Freer-Smith
Wilma Harper
Helen McKay
Andy Moffat
James Pendlebury (chair)
Chris Quine

In attendance: Helena Ladbury (minute secretary)

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

JP welcomed members of the interim board and advised that on this occasion there would be no formal agenda.

1. The minutes of the October meeting were agreed as a fair and accurate representation, with no amendments.

JP advised that the trawls for an Operations Director and for a Head of the new Forest Resource Management Centre had been sent to Jean Lindsay. Membership of the interview board for the Operations Director had been agreed, but a decision had yet to be made regarding the board for the new Head of Centre. It was suggested that an external member might be appropriate. JP to confirm membership of the interview board for the new Head of Centre in due course. **Action: JP**

2. Matters Arising and Action Points

Management Development Programme

JP has nominated 5 staff whose names have been passed to Janet Lacey. FR is now awaiting action from HR at Silvan House.

Chainsaw use

Assessment of users and real needs is ongoing and will be discussed at the FR Management Board December meeting.

Corporate Plan

To be discussed later in this meeting and at December FREB.

Authors' manual

It was felt that the publications process was lengthy; JP advised that currently the FC is one person short on the technical publications group and suggested that if possible FR staff could help them in the short term.

Horizon scanning

PF-S reported that this was a useful event and that he would circulate his notes to FREB. JP suggested that this event should be held annually for FREB members and selected invitees from FR staff. It provided a useful forum to promote awareness and debate within FR, and can also tie in to FR's Corporate Plan.

RIPSS

JP advised that no feedback had yet been received from DIUS.

Comms

Members of the Advisory Committee on Forestry Research (ACFR) raised at their recent meeting a concern that currently FR is not publishing enough peer-reviewed articles and a disproportionate number are being published by "Forestry". The ACFR member had expressed the view that journals should be selected on the basis of citation index. This matter needs to be given some consideration. WH pointed out that FC customers are not looking for peer-reviewed papers when commissioning research. It was felt that in order to increase numbers of articles submitted for publication internal procedures needed to improve. It was agreed that effort should be made to submit publications to a wider variety of journals.

Lease of land at NRS

JP and CQ will discuss this.

Action: JP/CQ

Chargeout rates

Sandra Smith (SS) is working on new rates based on comments which she has received and benchmarking with other parts of the FC.

3. Divisional Reports

Staffing

- It was noted that staff numbers are decreasing.
- Research Promotions were discussed and it was agreed that it was a useful process which sends a positive message to staff and would take place again before the end of the financial year. It was agreed that PF-S and CQ would be board members; JP would like to involve Jean Lindsay and would like suggestions for an external board member to be sent to him within 3 weeks. It was also agreed that the promotion board should be held at Silvan House.

Action: FREB

BD

- AKM has requested an additional member of staff, to be based at NRS and funded by the PSRE contract, to help with bid writing and innovation support.
- CCure – a decision on this matter needs to be made soon, more clarity is needed, the risks need to be identified and a proposed route forward, including management, needs to be agreed. FREB agreed that a Paper

should be submitted to their December meeting and that if needed Tony Hutchings can attend that part of the meeting.

- RRSP – It was agreed that a corporate view was needed and that maybe more buy-in from FR staff is required.
- Bid writing – It was agreed that at this stage it would be more useful to the emerging Centres to have a business development services review rather than a bid-writing course.

FMD

- Concerns about amalgamation of programmes and TRS downtime were expressed and it was agreed that these would be discussed later in the meeting.

TSU

- The possible implications for survey work in Scotland as a result of the proposal to lease some of the public forest estate were discussed and the question of whether FR has any research plots in areas under discussion for sale of cutting rights needs to be answered.
- In regard to partnership working with CEH it was suggested that similar opportunities may exist with NIAB and SAC. JP will discuss with Janet Dutch. **Action: JP**

THD

- The interest in horse chestnut bleeding canker of both Defra SoS Hilary Benn, and the media, was noted.

Comms

- Hugh Williams (HW) is currently checking with Treasury on the statutory aspects of the FR Annual Report. FREB were given an update on Xanthe Christophers. HW to discuss with HoDs his concerns about non-delivery of deliverables later in year. **Action: HM**

RD

- The future role and membership of the ACFR needs discussion and it was agreed that this would be an agenda item for the December FREB meeting. PF-S also reported that in view of FR's change to a 3-centre structure the ACFR had decided not to appoint a Visiting Group to Forest Management division next year. However, the first Centre to undergo the Visiting Group process will be FRM. PF-S will write to advise staff. **Action: PF-S**
- The lack of transparency surrounding cuts to research programmes by the RSMB was raised – it was felt that it did not lie easily with move to more careful scoping and project management, for example as recommended in the PRINCE2 training. It was suggested that perhaps if the RSMB set budgets for PAGs and then the PAGs decided on allocation of budgets to programmes this may be a way forward; or that if the cuts are applied after the PAG round, that the HOD and Specialist Adviser decide on which programmes (and milestones) bear the cuts.

- From the recent Senior Staff Group meeting PF-S reported that in response to Climate Change guidelines the Climate Change Steering Group would be going ahead and was due to meet in mid-January. [check this with WH] WH agreed to check whether James Morison was involved in this group. **Action: WH**

EHS

- Streamlining of the process of recruiting casual staff was requested. JP agreed that he and Ken Charles would come up with a more expeditious process if possible. **Action: JP**
- It was agreed that CQ needs to be involved in the process of the Social & Economic Research Group's identification of new workstreams, as some of the group's staff will be transferring to the new Ecology & Human Sciences Centre.

Ecology

- CQ reported that most staff who attended the recent PRINCE 2 training were very positive about the process and felt it provided a valuable opportunity to structure discussions. How PRINCE2 methodology can be taken up and used across FR now needs investigating. As programme managers realise the scope of their tasks PRINCE 2 will help underpin the process.
- A possible contract with Defra was discussed, as it had considerable profile but an ambitious deadline. The relevant staff are already fully allocated. It was agreed that CQ would seek an extension of the deadline and also consider opportunities for subcontracting.

Biometrics

- A meeting will be held at Alice Holt on 24 November between BEC and DECC. This will be a good opportunity for FR and FC England to explain woodfuel and biomass to their visitors, who are tasked with developing the renewable heat incentive.
- Signature of the SRF contract is imminent. Clarity of links between FR and FC E, DECC and BERR is required. AM advised he will be attending the FCE EB tomorrow and will communicate FR's line. A team effort and better communication and co-ordination with FC E is needed, FR has a different remit from FCE.

Finance

- Problems are still being encountered with TRS so no WIP figures are available. The HR SLA spend was queried – CQ advised it included staff welfare; safety, health and environment; payroll and pensions administration; recruitment; legal advice; learning and development (incl. MDP); policy development (incl. diversity). The question of which parts of the SLA are non-negotiable was raised.
- Further explanation of WIP was requested. JP will discuss with SS.
- HM requested the FREB spreadsheet format to be available at divisional level as well, and that divisional spreadsheets sum into the FREB version.

4. Centres

Discussion then turned to the future direction of FR, namely its core vision, the roles of Centres and allocation of programmes to Centres.

Following much discussion, programmes were allocated and details will be sent to FREB members under separate cover.

During discussion the following points were raised.

- Should the centres be discipline- or theme-based?
- It would be important to keep a watch on financial implications.
- A corporate view and middle management buy-in were needed.
- System requirements would need some consideration.
- It was likely that team building and change coaching for FREB members would be arranged.
- More FREB visibility to staff was considered to be important.
- An improvement in corporate culture and constructive honesty were needed.
- Programme leaders/managers will control budgets and be responsible for delivery. They will need to be clear about their role which will be to manage, facilitate and buy in to the corporate vision, but not necessarily to lead the science.
- Staff line management will be through centres.
- It was important not to stifle new ideas and it was felt to be of benefit to have a structure which will facilitate discussion – some external contracts may not fit easily into one Centre for example, so cross-Centre working would be required.
- A wish to identify the science relevant to each centre was expressed.

JP agreed to devise a corporate vision and circulate to FREB. **Action: JP**

Centre heads agreed to look at budgets and allocating staff to programmes and bring their suggestions to the December FREB, preferably in the form of organograms. They would also give some thought to the aims and core, key themes for the Centres. **Action: CHs**

The following future timetable was agreed.

For discussion at the December FREB

- The recommendations of the Efficiency and Delivery Review.
- How the TSU and TD would fit with the new Centre structure.
- KT resource.
- A timetable for corporate and business plans. **Action: PF-S**
- Business Development Plan, to be produced by Alison Melvin.
- C-Cure paper from Tony Hutchings.

Since the meeting it has been agreed to defer the defining of a dissemination strategy to the January meeting.

It was agreed that Ken Charles should attend the December meeting.

There followed some discussion around the subject of administrative support with regard to the split between sites, booking of travel and absence cover. The respective roles of divisional office managers were mentioned as was the fact that in future programme managers may well need support. JP advised that he would give consideration to corporate services, covering administrative support, Finance, HR, Business Development and Communications.

Action: JP

An email will be issued to all FR Staff with the proposed December agenda. Ideas and comments from staff will be welcome.

Action: HL

For discussion in the New Year

It was agreed that management information systems need to be investigated to ascertain what is currently available, what is not and what would be helpful to have. This may be something which those who have been wait-listed for the MDP could do.

Amalgamation of programmes and the management of that process.

C&FS input to programmes.

Next meeting: 9.15 am 17 December 2008, at Alice Holt