

Forest Research Executive Board Meeting - 11 October 2005

Present:

Prof. Jim Lynch
Prof. Peter Freer-Smith
Prof. Sam Evans
Prof. Barry Gardiner
Dr Andy Moffat
Dr Chris Quine
Mr Tony Cornwell
Dr Xanthe Christophers
Dr Hugh Evans

Apologies: Mr Bill Mason, Mr Ken Charles

Copies to: Head of Internal Audit
Director of Corporate and Forestry Services

Agenda Item 1 - Introduction to purpose/format of meeting.

1. Agreed that the sequence of alternate meeting being a half-day then two half days (afternoon/morning) with an evening session in between was working well and would continue.

Agenda item 2 - Minutes of last meeting

2. Item 44 should be for action by HE not XC, otherwise approved.

Agenda Item 3 - Matters arising

3. JL noted that the content and consistency of board papers was improving and were now of good quality.
4. Psychometric profiling - This will be carried out by Kim Lardge, date to be arranged. **Action: CH/SS**
5. TSU restructuring funding. Financial case cleared by Keith Gliddon, PF-S will be discussing operational issues at the RSMB on 14th October. When cleared, funding issues can be taken forward.
6. Review of TSU financial situation. A six-month summary of TSU forecast was tabled. The financial case papers in support of the restructuring proposals to be circulated to FREB. **Action: TC**
7. Review of promotion procedures. Repeated action - A group chaired by PF-S to consider KC's paper in detail and report back to FREB. **Action: PF-S, AM, KC**

Agenda Item 4 - Feedback from GBEB and Commissioners meetings, DG's visit to Alice Holt.

8. GB EB. Papers were presented on a future research strategy and the Status of FR. The FR Framework Document is due for review.
9. GB EB. Succession planning is to be introduced for senior staff once the FR direction of travel has been established. It was recognised that this has many positive aspects but must not be done lightly due to the consequences for staff. The FR approach needs more thought. JL to circulate a paper to FREB for consideration. **Action: JL**
10. Commissioners – The Board of Commissioners at their strategy meeting in Cardiff, addressed Research, Communications, Funding and Sustainable Development.
11. Agreed that the important issues that have emerged for immediate delivery are:
 - The business planning path (direction of travel)
 - The PSRE bid
 - Raising the profile of FR (more PR activity is needed)
12. Tim Rollinson's Visit to Alice Holt. The presentation was well received and perceived as positive and constructive. He announced that, whereas the status quo for research was not an option, the direction of travel outlined in Realising the Potential of Forest Research was endorsed by Commissioners, especially including the development of a new business basis.
13. The key message is that although Agency status is likely to continue the status quo, in terms of the types of research undertaken and the mix of internal and external customers, is not an option for the future.
14. Programmes need to be reviewed and FR must identify 'sunsetting' programmes in order to generate the capacity to facilitate movement into new and relevant areas of research.
15. With FR's funding from FC now agreed for the next three years FREB needs to produce a clear business plan showing sources of income over the period, both internal and external.

Agenda Item 5 - Finance

16. Latest forecasts from Divisions show a projected net surplus for the Agency of £16,000. This is satisfactory but offers no margin for error. A degree of prudence now leading to modest savings as they become apparent should enable FR to avoid any year-end freezes on spending.
17. TSU continues to forecast a significant deficit for the year - £ 559,000. HoDs were asked to consider TSU first when additional work is required. To assist in this Janet Dutch to prepare a list of staff, and their skills. **Action: JD**

18. The first tranche of backlog income from the EC Forest Focus programme has been received delivering a boost to cash flow of £509,000.
19. A finance awareness seminar will be held at Alice Holt on 27th October.
20. SE, AM and HE to discuss the option to co-locate their divisional office managers now that there is a window of opportunity with three adjacent offices being available from the end of the year. **Action: SE, AM, HE**

Agenda Item 6 - Staffing

21. KC's paper was noted.

Agenda Item 7 - Circulation of customer satisfaction scores

22. Agreed that scores will be released for information. **Action: XC**

Agenda Item 8 - "Drop-in" Clinics

23. Agreed that this concept should be taken forward and NRS and Alice Holt with participation by JL and PF-S. The organisation and structure must be optimised and the events well publicised. It was felt that visits to individual staff, as opposed to static clinics, might prove to be a more effective approach and this will be pursued. **Action: JL, PF-S, XC**

Agenda Item 9 - Division reports

24. The reports were discussed and will be placed on the Intranet for general consumption. **Action: XC**

Agenda Item 10 - Any other business

25. PF-S led a discussion on programme amalgamation and "sunsetting". Agreed that some strategic areas must be developed whilst other less critical activities need to be wound down.
26. With a key meeting with CFS due on 22 November PF-S to prepare a paper, which will review the current programme list and suggest possible areas where mergers were possible, for detailed consideration at the November FREB.
Action: PF-S (paper); XC/JL (arrange structure of meeting); HoDs (input to PF-S); TC (circulate latest programme list).
27. XC provided an update on the first meeting of the new Publications Group.
28. A timetable of meetings for 2006 to be compiled. **Action: CH/SS**

Date of next meeting

29. 7/8 November. Venue near Alice Holt - to be arranged. **Action: KC/CH**