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**THE FORESTRY COMMISSION ENGLAND EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 108TH MEETING
Conference Room, National Office, Bristol
24 April 2017**

Attendees:

Louisa Aveyard
Ian Gambles
Richard Greenhous
Simon Hodgson
Steve Meeks
Mike Seddon

Josh Roberts – Minute Secretary
Dorothy Russell (on behalf of Jo Ridgway)

Apologies:

Jo Ridgway
Stephanie Rhodes

1. Welcome

Ian Gambles opened the meeting.

2. Minutes and actions

The Board cleared the Minutes from the meeting on 08 February 2017 as a true and accurate record.

Ian briefly summarised the progress that had been made in developing the Future Operating Model for Forestry Commission England (FOM) since the February meeting. In light of the unexpectedly announced General Election the work was now aiming for a later date. The Board agreed that the assumptions the FOM was based on should be reviewed once the new government had been elected and ministers appointed. The Board considered whether the pace of change proposed by Ian was the right one and agreed that it was based on the information available. A key element of these discussions was about getting the level of detail contained in the plans right when engaging with Ministers and Forestry Commission staff.

The Board discussed Forest Enterprise (FE) and Forest Services (FS) branding and how this might be used to strike the right balance between continuity and change. The Board agreed that this issue should be handled carefully but it was important not to let this become the focus of discussions.

The Board also agreed that it was important to be able to engage appropriately with staff and Ministers on the plans for Forestry Commission England when Forestry Commission Scotland & the Scottish Government made announcements about the proposed Scottish Forestry Bill.

Action 1: Simon Hodgson and Richard Greenhous to consider what the FOM document should say about the brand and identity of FS and FE and propose wording – [by 14 June \(in time to support Ian's submission to the newly appointed Forestry Minister\)](#)

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Action 2: Ian Gambles to bring the FOM to the new minister once they were in post.

Action 3: Ian Gambles and Louisa Aveyard to prepare communication messages that could be used to engage with Forestry Commission staff in the event that the Scottish Government announced the detail of the Scottish Forestry bill before the general election.

Action 4: Steve Meeks to carry forward his action to model the financial, and staffing implications of the FOM **by the end of May**.

As part of his action from the previous meeting, Simon Hodgson gave a brief overview of the current status of Grown in Britain. He reported that the next Grown in Britain board meeting was scheduled for the end of April and therefore he would be able to provide a more comprehensive update after that.

Action 5: Simon Hodgson to provide an update at the next KiT meeting following the Grown in Britain board meeting

Action 6: Rebecca Binns and Louisa Aveyard to prepare another update paper for the Board on Defra Group Comms to be presented at a meeting later in the year, the date of which would be agreed as the situation developed. Action carried over from previous meeting.

3. Finance Report

Steve Meeks provided the Board with an update on the organisation's financial position as at the end of financial year, confirming he would provide a written report at a future KiT meeting.

Steve highlighted for the Board's attention a managed £350k underspend on RDEL to provide a 'buffer' for any late adjustments. He also summarised the current VAT compliance position with HMRC and the further £1 million funding that Defra had provided towards this. Ian Gambles confirmed that he was scheduled to meet the Defra Permanent Secretary in the coming weeks to discuss the HMRC tax compliance audits.

The Board discussed the Defra efficiency plans that had been due to be published that day. Due to the purdah period it was not clear if this publication was still going ahead. Steve Meeks agreed to check this and report back to Ian outside of the meeting, as this would have an influence on the FOM.

Steve also summarised for the Board the progress with GIAA (Government Internal Audit Agency), informing them that Amanda Smith, the new Head of Internal Audit for FC, would be visiting Bristol National Office later in the week as part of her phased induction prior to joining GIAA on 11th May.

Ian requested a report on the anticipated level of funds to be paid into the apprenticeship levy this FY, recognising that they would expire 18 months after they are paid unless used to pay for apprenticeship training.

Action 7: Steve Meeks to provide a report at a future EEB meeting outlining the projected contribution into the apprenticeship levy scheme, along with an update on FCE apprenticeship strategy development working with Dorothy Russell and Mike Seddon as necessary.

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Steve updated the Board on the progress with laying the Annual Report and Accounts in the House of Commons library, which had previously been scheduled for publication on 08 June 2017. This date was no longer possible because of the General Election and a new date was not yet known. Steve agreed to include an update on this during his usual update at the next KiT meeting.

4. Review Terms of Reference

Ian Gambles opened a discussion with the Board on its Terms of Reference (TOR) and whether any changes were needed to the Board's remit beyond basic administrative updates.

The Board considered their role in managing risk and whether to bring risk registers to the Board as specific agenda items. The Board agreed that they should consider risks of cross-FC England significance but that regular comprehensive risk registers were not appropriate.

The Board agreed that the TOR needed to make reference to other governance boards, especially the England National Committee, Forest Enterprise Strategy Board, Forest Services' Board and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. This would help ensure the extent of the Board's remit was explicitly clear.

Ian confirmed that he would make changes to the TOR, including ones that reflected other more detailed comments discussed by the board, and circulate an updated version for comment, review and clearance by correspondence.

ACTION 8: Ian Gambles to update and circulate draft revised EEB Terms of Reference for review and clearance.

5. Corporate Services Establishment Programme Update

Steve Meeks provided the Board with a high level overview of the programme, summarising recent discussions from the Business Strategy Group and the expected timeline that Scottish and Forest Research colleagues were working to.

Simon Hodgson updated the Board on the current status of the IT requirement scoping, providing an early indication that more dedicated resource would likely be needed. This was due to technical differences in the expected future needs of FE and FS. Richard Greenhous updated the Board on recent discussions between FS and Defra Group IS on whether they might provide FS any services that FEE might be unable to in the short term. The Board recognised the risks in this area and agreed that Andy Goodsir (Head of IS) should provide a targeted update to Ian Gambles ahead of his meeting with John Seglias on 25 April. The Board also agreed that Andy should attend the next Corporate Services Establishment Programme Board meeting on 22 May to provide an update item.

ACTION 9: Josh Roberts to contact **Andy Goodsir** and arrange for him to provide briefing accordingly.

ACTION 10: Andy Goodsir to provide an update report and risk assessment on the IT element of the Corporate Services Establishment Programme at the next CSEP Board meeting on 22 May.

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6. General Election update

Louisa Aveyard provided the Board with an overview of how communications were being handled during the purdah period ahead of the General Election. She also provided examples of communications that had been changed or delayed until after the election.

Richard Greenhous raised a question about how the process of responding to parliament, to Parliamentary Questions for example, was affected during purdah but before parliament was dissolved.

ACTION 11: Josh Roberts to ask **Richard Barker** (Head of Parliamentary Business) to send a note to the Board briefing them on how the parliamentary process was operating in the run up to the General Election.

The Board also discussed and agreed the importance of all staff withdrawing from public meetings where they may be asked to respond to questions about future government policy or on matters of public controversy, where withdrawing would not prevent essential business, in line with the published guidance on purdah.

7. Any other business

Ian Gambles raised a discussion about the recent steer from ministers on commercial afforestation and how best to communicate this.

The Board agreed that this message should be communicated to Natural England, via and subject to the views of Defra officials.

Action 12: Josh Roberts to circulate the email from the Minister's office giving her steer on commercial afforestation to the Board so that they can consider how this could be used most effectively, taking into account purdah rules.

Ian Gambles provided an update on the Whitehall and Industry Group and the recent invitation to their programme of events.

Mike Seddon updated the board on the safety climate tool and said he would send an update to the Board outside the meeting.

Action 13: Mike Seddon to send an information note to the Board on the results of the safety climate tool.

Ian Gambles closed the meeting.