

**THE FORESTRY COMMISSION ENGLAND EXECUTIVE BOARD**  
**MINUTES OF THE 112<sup>TH</sup> MEETING**  
**Conference Room, National Office, Bristol**  
**25 April 2018**

**Attendees:**

Ian Gambles  
Richard Greenhous  
Simon Hodgson  
Steve Meeks  
Jo Ridgway  
Mike Seddon  
Joe Watts

Jenny King – Minute Secretary

**Apologies:**

James Pendlebury

**1. Welcome**

Ian Gambles opened the meeting. Apologies had been received from James Pendlebury.

**2. Minutes and actions**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Updates on the action point were given as follows:

Ian Gambles confirmed that he, Steve Meeks and Richard Barker had discussed GDPR resourcing. Steve confirmed that further work with FR was planned in preparation for GDPR. The operational risk register had been circulated to the Board for information.

Jo Ridgway confirmed that work on analysis of the staff survey had been delayed due to staff sickness but that analysis would be collated within the next month and that business areas were progressing with their action plans.

**3. Matters arising**

WIG membership

Ian Gambles confirmed FC membership to WIG had been extended for another year, after which a stocktake of FC use of the group would review ongoing membership.

Apprentices

Mike Seddon updated the Board on apprentices, noting that HR had been granted account access to be able to use the funds, and were drafting a paper outlining governance arrangements and the process for administering requests. Forestry operative apprenticeships were due to begin in September, with one national operations leadership apprenticeship already started, and two management apprenticeships getting underway in East FD. Next steps are further mapping to increase uptake of apprenticeships across the business.

Jo Ridgway noted the difficulty FC and other organisations have had in navigating the apprenticeship system. The Board agreed the importance of keeping momentum behind the programme, noting the role of the HRBPs, publicising success stories with Defra and across the FC to increase the profile of apprenticeships.

#### **4. Business area updates**

The England Executive Board provided business area updates to the meeting. The Board discussed:

- Work towards a forestry strategy.
- Alleged illegal felling by Sheffield City Council and the FC's role in the investigation.
- Potential tree planting opportunities on the Public Forest Estate (PFE).
- The impact of severe weather in March on revenue and planting rates on the Public Forest Estate and for private landowners.
- Staffing changes in the FE Executive Team and the recruitment of trainee foresters and a new graduate trainee for 2018.
- FC's preparation of a response to The Future for Food, Farming and the Environment consultation, and liaison with FWACs on their responses.
- Changes to guidance of felling of Ash.
- Work with Defra to develop the Environmental Land Management Scheme.
- PFE eligibility for the Woodland Carbon Fund (WCF). The Board agreed FC would send a note to ministers for information confirming that the public sector could apply to the WCF once amendments to the scheme rules had been made.
- Closer working with the Defra Estates team.

**Action 1:** Mike Seddon to report to Ian Gambles the impact of weather on planting rates for the end of the 2017-18 financial year.

#### **5. Future Forestry Commission**

Steve Meeks summarised the paper and the progress of the project. The Board discussed the project's success criteria and that refreshed governance structures leading to better decision making should be considered as a success. The Board discussed the Terms of References (TOR) attached as annexes to the paper and the need for the addition of a commercial focus to the TOR of the FE Board. Simon Hodgson noted the need to consider the role of the Head of Estates acting on behalf of the Secretary of State on non-forestry aspects of the Estate, which should be addressed as a responsibility of the new Forestry England Board on which it did not report to the Forestry Commissioners.

**Action 2:** Simon Hodgson and Mike Seddon to provide Steve Meeks with amendments to the FE TOR, regarding the responsibility of the Head of Estates and the commercial focus of FE.

Director's Office was developing a full project plan which would be sent to the EEB for comment. Ian Gambles stressed the need to ensure the other work streams of the project progressed adequately alongside the work on governance.

#### **5. Finance report**

Steve Meeks summarised the paper and discussed outturn from last year and business planning going forward. Steve reported the RDEL underspend and reduction in RDPE forecast in 2017-18. The Board discussed Defra underspend.

Steve confirmed that the FC could be asked to make further savings over the 2018-19 year. Steve confirmed he expected the approval of final business plans would happen in the next month. Richard Greenhous stated that engagement with Defra in the spending review should align with the planning of a new forestry strategy if ministers decided one should be prepared.

## **6. Reward**

The Board discussed reward options for staff engaged with the transition of finance, HR and IT corporate services in England. The Board noted that the FC had few tools available to it to reward staff for exceptional performance. In discussion it was agreed that fair treatment across the organisation was vital; there was a strong case for rewarding staff who had gone 'above and beyond' but this had to be managed in a way which avoided demotivating other staff groups. The Board noted that Defra were about to introduce a voucher reward scheme, which even though it was financially very modest could offer some opportunity to give staff some tangible reward to accompany recognition and praise. The Board agreed reward should be revisited in the summer, and we should remain open to a combination of reward options.

**Action 3:** EEB to discuss reward options at the July meeting.

## **7. Senior managers' meeting agenda**

The Board agreed the Senior Managers' meeting agenda should look to include sessions on the Future Forestry Commission, the centenary, forest resilience, environmental land management and an external speaker to lead a session on uplands forestry.

**Action 4:** Director's Office to draft senior managers' meeting agenda.

## **8. AOB**

Ian Gambles closed the meeting.