

**FORESTRY COMMISSION ENGLAND EXECUTIVE BOARD**  
**MINUTES OF THE 114<sup>TH</sup> MEETING**  
**Conference Room, National Office, Bristol**  
**4 February 2019**

These minutes record the first meeting of the Forestry Commission shadow Executive Board (EB). The Forestry Commission Executive Board will continue to sit until 31 March 2019. From the 1 April 2019 this meeting will take decisions on issues which affect the Forestry Commission as a whole.

**Attendees:**

Ian Gambles  
Richard Greenhous  
Steve Meeks  
Meirion Nelson  
James Pendlebury  
Steph Rhodes  
Jo Ridgway  
Mike Seddon

Jenny King - minute secretary

Karen Moore – for item 4, Offer 2020

**Apologies:**

**1. Welcome**

Ian Gambles opened the meeting. James Pendlebury was attending the meeting via teleconference call. Ian reported that the agenda for this and future EB meetings would follow the decision made at the EB workshop of the 15 January to spend a greater proportion of time discussing substantive items over routine update items.

**2. Minutes and actions**

The minutes of the meeting of the FC England Executive Board (EEB) of the 16 October 2018 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Updates on the following action points were given:

Action point 2: Richard Greenhous confirmed he was due to meet with Paul Johnson the following day to discuss staff accessing information regarding their taxable benefits.

Action point 3: Steve Meeks confirmed that now FE's tax advisor was in post he would establish a tax committee.

### **3. Update items**

#### EU exit

The Forestry Commission continued to work with Defra to prepare for EU exit with particular focus on Plant Health, where the FC would be most affected. The Plant Health Statutory Instruments had been laid in Parliament, and provision was being made for additional contractors to carry out additional inspections if needed. The FC was in touch with the Environment Agency who had been asked to prepare an Incident Management Team for a no deal scenario. Richard Greenhous reported that in the longer term, FC continues to contribute to the development of the Agriculture Bill and the Environment Bill.

#### Finance

Steve Meeks confirmed that the FC was on target to meet the quarter three approved budget position for 2018/19 following approval by Defra of all pending changes. Although there remained a number of areas of uncertainty Steve stated that the overall situation was positive and he expected the FC to be in a managed underspend position at year end.

In respect to 2019/20 business planning, RAM baselines had been agreed and an 8% savings target had been applied by Defra to all non-protected budgets across the Department. Steve reported that the £5.09 million Main Estimate change to the baseline from April 2019 in respect of the trisection of the FC's cross-border functions had not been discounted by Defra before they applied the 8% reduction. The Board agreed with Steve's approach of pushing back on the associated £0.47m cut. The Board discussed the risks associated and agreed that FC's business planning return needed to demonstrate the efficiency and hard work needed to realise any reductions.

#### Future Forestry Commission

Steve updated the Board on the 5 work streams within the Future Forestry Commission project. Work was ongoing to appoint new non-executive Forestry Commissioners, draft induction plans, finalise board governance arrangements and establish a central corporate function. Jo Ridgway confirmed that FC workforce policies would be updated and in place by 1 April 2019. Communications had been planned for staff to highlight the changes that had been made to policy documents.

The Board discussed FR's framework agreement and agreed that consideration of any changes should be undertaken after the Memorandum of Understanding on the trisection of funding for FR had been signed.

#### Tree Strategy

Richard Greenhous reported that progress on the Tree Strategy had slowed as a result of Defra focus on EU exit preparations. The Forestry Commission had drafted plans for the Strategy and started work on evidence summaries. Next steps required

to get development of the Strategy off to a good start included either the Defra Forestry Policy team to commence working on the Strategy or their allowing the FC to commence work on their behalf.

### Spending review

Work towards the spending review (SR) had been halted because of Defra focus on EU exit and Ian Gambles reported that it was not yet clear when the SR would be initiated by HM Treasury or over what period the SR would run. Ian circulated a draft paper of areas of Forestry Commission opportunities as part of the spending review. The Board discussed the areas of opportunity and Ian confirmed he would incorporate the discussion points into the draft to then begin engagement with Defra.

### **4. Offer 2020**

Karen Moore was welcomed to the meeting. Karen summarised the scope of the Offer 2020 project and the findings from the staff workshops to date. The Board agreed that next steps should be for the findings from the staff workshops to date to be taken to Unions and communications should be sent to staff. The Board agreed staff would need to be presented with the way forward and plan for Offer 2020 by April 2020. Karen reported specific timings would depend on the final decision of the composition of the Offer.

The Board discussed the feedback from staff on the importance of pay, Karen confirmed that work on Offer 2020 would inform this year's pay award.

The Board discussed bringing Offer 2020 to management Boards across FE, FS and FR to help shape the project, but agreed that decision making would sit with the EB, with business cases presented to Cabinet Office as necessary. The Board agreed Offer 2020 planning should tie into the review of variable Terms and Conditions for the organisation and complement benefits already available to staff.

**Action 1:** Karen Moore to present Offer 2020 to FE, FS, FR Boards.

### **5. Future Forests**

Steph Rhodes presented a proposed way forward for increasing the leading role of the FC to improve the resilience of England's future forests. Forestry Commissioners had agreed at the Board of Commissioners 13 December 2018 that the Executive Board should make resilience a priority in its strategic planning.

The Board had a wide ranging discussion of the proposal and its scope. The Board agreed that FC should lead the sector in increasing resilience of England's future forests and that any outputs should focus on addressing resilience in response to climate change. Synergies should be maximised, as well as demonstrating where the FC differs from others and what they offer, to demonstrate why the FC should lead the sector in increasing resilience.

The Board discussed the importance of including forest infrastructure, accessibility and staffing in plans to increase resilience and agreed that the FC should be

convincing; use the Public Forest Estate as a catalyst; improve the evidence base; and operate on behalf of the public.

The Board agreed that FC needed to strengthen resilience to climate change in discussions on SR19 and that work should dovetail development of the Tree Strategy.

**Action 2:** Steph Rhodes to bring a proposed statement on resilience of future forests to the next Executive Board meeting.

**Action 3:** Steph Rhodes to bring a proposed 'FC position statement' and focused actions plan on resilience of future forests to the Executive Board meeting in May.

## 6. Values

Jo Ridgway introduced the paper and progress towards developing new sets of values by FE, FR and FS. The Board agreed that the new sets of values for each area of the organisation should exist alongside and have clear links back to the existing FC values.

**Action 4:** Jo Ridgway to work with Alice Cheyne to develop communications explaining the new sets of values for FE, FS and FR their link to the existing FC values.

## 7. Purpose of the EB

Ian Gambles asked for feedback on his draft definition of the purpose of the EB.

"To champion forests and forestry in England and beyond, bringing Forestry England, Forest Services and Forest Research together to make an impact greater than the sum of our parts."

The Board discussed the phrasing of the definition, and suggested a number of amendments to consider. Ian agreed to revise the draft purpose for further consideration at the 5 March workshop.

**Action 5:** Ian Gambles to revise the definition of the purpose of the EB by 5 March.

## 8. Review of meeting pattern and future meetings

The Board agreed:

- A forward planner should be developed to ensure EB meeting dates align with timetables for decision making.
- Keep in Touch meetings should take place on a monthly basis, for 1hr 15 minutes.

The Board discussed whether the purpose of the Board would be advisory to FC CEO as additional accounting officer. Ian Gambles confirmed this would depend on the issues being discussed.

## **9. AOB**

Ian Gambles closed the meeting.