

MINUTES OF THE 925th MEETING OF
THE FORESTRY COMMISSIONERS
THE WEST BOARDROOM, SILVAN HOUSE
14 MARCH 2019

Present

Sir Harry Studholme (Chair), Mary Barkham, Julia Grant, George McRobbie, Amanda Bryan
Ian Gambles, Jo O'Hara, Jean Lindsay

Also Attending

James Pendlebury (Item 6), Kate Debley (Minutes)

1. Introduction and Apologies

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone, noting that this was the final meeting of Scottish and English Forestry Commissioners. No apologies had been received.

2. Declaration of Interest

The Chair asked if there were any agenda items for which any board member would like to log a commercial conflict or any changes to the declarations of interest published on the Forestry Commission website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-of-interests-forestry-commissioners>. No commercial conflicts were logged, nor amendments to the declarations of interest noted.

3. Minutes of 13 December 2018

The Minutes of 13 December 2018 were agreed as a true record.

4. Matters Arising

There were two matters arising from the meeting of 13 December 2018.

i) Commissioner Recruitment

The Chair updated the meeting that the appointment process had nearly been finalised for three new Forestry Commissioners and one Non-Executive Member of the Forestry England Board. Formal announcements would be made as soon as Royal Warrants had been received.

ii) 100 Years of British Forestry

Ian Gambles updated the meeting on plans for the FC Centenary.

'Tributes to Trees' had been successfully launched with a specially commissioned poem by Carol Ann Duffy, the poet laureate. More than a thousand applications had been received for the Writers in the Forest residency project and two writers had been appointed – Zakiya Mckenzie and Tiffany Francis.

Ian further advised that each Forest District had plans for commemorative planting during the centenary year.

Jean Lindsay advised the meeting that plans were being confirmed for a tree planting outside Silvan House as well as a celebration day for past and present Central Services staff later in the month.

5. Governance Matters

Future Forestry Commission Board Structure – Terms of Reference

Ian Gambles presented Memo No 01/19 'Future Forestry Commission Board Structure – Terms of Reference' seeking the Board's approval to the amended Terms of Reference for the Forest Research Board and Expert Committee on Forest Science.

In relation to the Forest Research Board terms of reference, the following further amendments were agreed:

- That the main duty relating to reviewing information on financial and operational performance be amended to 'ensure information on the financial and operational performance of Forest Research against agreed objectives is regularly provided and reviewed'.
- That reference be made to safeguarding resources 'including by delegating audit and risk assurance functions to an appropriate committee'.
- That reference to specific Sub-Committees be removed.
- That a typographical error in the first sentence of the first paragraph after the list of main duties be corrected, by inserting the letter 'a' to read 'chaired by a non-executive Commissioner'.

It was agreed that Ian Gambles would arrange for the amendments to be made, but that the Terms of Reference were agreed on this basis and did not need to be put before the Commissioners again.

The Commissioners approved the Expert Committee on Forest Science terms of reference as drafted.

Action Point: Ian Gambles to arrange for amendments to be made to the Forest Research Board terms of reference as set out at item 5 in these Minutes.

Legal and Corporate Project Update

Jean Lindsay presented Memo No 02/19 'Legal and Corporate Project – Actions Completed'. Commissioners noted that actions allocated to Director Central Services had been completed as far as possible and that Nicol Sinclair would ensure that this project is closed when the final actions have been completed in April.

The Commissioners noted their thanks to Jean for all her hard work, effectiveness and dedication in getting matters to this point.

6. Corporate Services Establishment Costs Analysis

James Pendlebury was welcomed to the meeting.

Ian Gambles and James Pendlebury presented Memo No 03/19 'FC England Corporate Services Establishment Programme (CSEP) and Forest Research Transition Programme (FRTP) Update'.

Ian advised that this had been a large and challenging programme with corporate services capacity having been built from a low base in England. Disruption to business has been minimal and this was thanks to efforts from staff on both sides of the transition.

Jo O'Hara then provided a verbal update on the Scottish transition programme. Jo advised that the devolution of forestry and establishment of corporate services had come within budgeted and projected figures. The IT transition has gone well and most members of staff are now migrated.

Commissioners thanked Ian, James and Jo for the update, noting that it was a testament to the large amount of work completed that matters have reached this point without serious disruption to core business.

James Pendlebury left the meeting.

7. EU Exit Preparations

Ian Gambles presented Memo No 04/19 'Forestry Commission Preparations for EU Exit' providing Commissioners with information on the FC's preparations, with a particular focus on a 'No Deal' scenario.

Ian advised that since the paper had been drafted there had been an announcement on tariffs and he had requested some analysis on the potential impacts of this. It was agreed that Ian would share this analysis with colleagues in Scotland once available.

The Commissioners noted the FC's EU Exit preparations as well as their thanks to Nayana Cintra, EU Exit Lead, for an informative and well-expressed paper.

Action Point: Ian Gambles to share with colleagues in Scotland analysis on potential impacts of proposed tariffs.

8. Forest Holidays Update

Ian Gambles presented Memo No 05/19 'Forest Holidays Update'.

Commissioners noted the contents of the paper and confirmed their support for the actions as set out, including the approach to completing devolution arrangements and the negotiating strategy for revisions to the Framework Agreement.

9. Tree Health Update

Ian Gambles presented Memo No 06/19 providing an update on the status and management of *Ips typographus* and oak processionary moth.

George McRobbie raised a concern in relation to increased levels of bulk hardwood imports with bark on, and the potential plant health risks and inspection issues posed as a result. It was agreed that Ian Gambles should provide an update on this at the next Commissioners' meeting.

There was then a wide-ranging discussion about health and safety issues relating to the felling of diseased trees and the balance that needs to be struck between the risks of leaving a diseased tree standing compared to the risks attached to the process of removing it. There was some concern that focus currently tends to be on the safest way to fell a diseased tree and not necessarily whether the tree should actually be felled. It was agreed that no specific action was required for the time being but that Commissioners should be aware of the issue.

Action Point: Ian Gambles to provide at the next Commissioners' meeting an update on plant health risks and inspection issues posed by increased levels of imports both hardwood and softwood.

10. Reports:

a. Central Services

Jean Lindsay presented Memo No 07/19 'Director Central Services Report' and the Commissioners noted its contents.

b. England

Ian Gambles presented Memo No 08/19 'England Country Report' and the Commissioners noted its contents.

c. Forest Research

Ian Gambles presented Memo No 09/19 'Forest Research Report' and the Commissioners noted its contents.

d. Scotland

Jo O'Hara presented Memo No 10/19 'Scotland Report' and the Commissioners noted its contents.

11. Any Other Business/ Completion of Scottish Forestry Devolution and maintenance of ongoing Cross Border Relationships

The meeting discussed ways in which cross border relationships could be maintained post devolution of Scottish forestry. It was agreed that a key factor would be the development and maintenance of informal networks across all levels and specialisms within the various

organisations. In addition the cross border nature of Forest Research provides the opportunity for events allowing the sharing of experience between countries.

It was further agreed that Sir Harry Studholme should explore with Simon Hodgson the potential for Forestry and Land Scotland to join the biannual Forestry England Environment Conference which is next due to be held in 2020.

Presentations were then made to the outgoing Scottish Commissioners and Jean Lindsay and thanks were expressed by the Chair on behalf of the Forestry Commission for their service and commitment.

Action Point: Sir Harry Studholme to explore with Simon Hodgson the potential for Forestry and Land Scotland to join the biannual Forestry England Environment Conference, next due to be held in 2020.

13. Date of Next Meeting

17 July 2019 at Alice Holt.