

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 96TH MEETING
Conference Room, National Office, Bristol
21 May 2019**

Attendees:

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

Jenny King - minute secretary

Karen Moore and Richard Maddock – for item 4, Offer 2020

Apologies:

Jo Ridgway

1. Welcome

Ian Gambles opened the meeting. Apologies had been received from Jo Ridgway.

2. Minutes and actions

The minutes of the meeting of the FC England Executive Board (EB) of the 4 February 2019 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. Updates

EU Exit

Delaying exiting the EU had impacted the progress of the Agriculture Bill and Environment Bill, and also increased uncertainty in relation to the new agriculture policy, Dame Glenys Stacey review and new EU plant health regime. Forest Services was prepared for no deal should that be the way in which Britain exits the EU on the 31 October 2019.

Forest Services had felt the impact of landowners not applying for or implementing existing CAP grants in anticipation of the new land management scheme. Momentum was needed to ensure that there was not a gap between current and new grants scheme applications, and therefore a threat to woodland creation targets.

Finance

The 2018-19 FC Annual Report and Accounts were nearing completion and would be cleared by the final FCE+ ARAC in June 2019. The 2019-20 business plan had been agreed with Letters of Delegation issued to James Pendlebury and Richard Greenhous. A further Letter of Delegation will be prepared for the new Forestry England CEO.

Work had begun on Spending Review (SR) 19 however it was unclear whether the review would be a one year or a three year review for resource expenditure. It will, however, be a four year zero-based review for Capital. The board discussed the opportunities surrounding collaborating with other outcome system groups in the FC bid to Treasury and the new HMT focus on 'human capital'. The board agreed that the FC should submit its pitch to HMT centred around woodland creation capital and tie into the carbon agenda. The board noted the potential to incorporate the Forestry England acquisitions strategy, and to use the driver of carbon to address FC objectives of woodland creation and net woodland cover to maximise the opportunities from the spending review. The board discussed the urban tree agenda and its impact on the spending review.

Future Forestry Commission

New governance frameworks were in place for the Forestry Commission following the completion of devolution. New Forestry Commissioner induction was planned for July, and a decision on the number of ARACs for the organisation was pending. Work had begun to plan future non-executive appointments and reappointments.

Tree strategy

Development of the Tree Strategy had begun with the Tree Champion planned to play a significant role. FC was engaging with the Defra forestry policy team, and it was hoped that recruitment of a new post to the Defra Forestry Policy team would give momentum to the Strategy.

4. Offer 2020

The Chair welcomed Karen Moore and Richard Maddock to the meeting. The board discussed Offer 2020 plans A and B outlined in the paper. The board had a wide ranging discussion about the objectives of the project. The board supported the proposal to submit a business case to Treasury to secure funding for Offer 2020.

The range of options for efficiencies which could be included in a Plan A business case was discussed, and feedback provided to the Offer 2020 team to assist in working up business case options.

Action 1: Karen Moore to commission group to review operational pay, to bring findings to EB in September.

Action 2: Karen Moore to bring a selection of options of benefits and allowances packages to the EB for discussion in September as part of a proposed business case.

5. Future Forests

The board discussed forest resilience and the action plan at annex 2. The board agreed that the FC needed to communicate its top line messages to the sector. The context of the spending review, Tree Strategy and climate change movement needed to be considered when communicating resilience.

The board supported the action plan at annex 2 in principle but agreed further work was needed to confirm the scope and develop the position statement. Steph agreed to speak with Comms team to develop the position statement. Messaging on resilience should be shared with Forestry Commissioners in July.

Action 3: Steph Rhodes to revise the position statement with Comms teams and circulate to the EB to clear via correspondence.

6. Expenses

Communications to all Forestry England and Forest Services staff, and a subsequent review of existing expenses and GPC policies and guidance was due to commence, as a result of a recent investigation and HR inheriting these policies from Scotland. Meirion Nelson confirmed FR would communicate these messages to staff and the board supported the review. The board agreed the need to support line managers when monitoring expenses and GPCs and ensuring wider questions of culture and leadership were addressed within this review. Steve Meeks agreed to progress with this area or work, liaising with Jo Ridgway.

7. IT security framework

The board supported the proposed Security Risk Management Forum in the paper and agreed the importance of the group to address, cyber, information, physical and personnel security. It was noted that resource may be required to meet the FC's security requirements. It was emphasised that the group needed to ensure that the issues were communicated effectively to staff by way of live examples and updates.

A revised FC Data Protection Policy would be circulated to the EB to clear by correspondence once the final draft had been approved by the Data Protection Officer.

8. Meeting schedule

The next EB meeting would be scheduled for September. It was agreed that subject to developments on the spending review and the Tree Strategy, an additional meeting at short notice may be required.

9. AOB

Steph Rhodes would speak to Ian Gambles outside of the meeting regarding research commissioning.

A staff member had raised the issue of FC vehicles, fuel strategy and the need to move more quickly to fleet carbon neutrality. The board agreed the need to formalise current work on energy and to clearly outline fleet policy and aims. Ian Gambles agreed to commission a group to review this area of work.

Action 4: Ian Gambles to write to EB colleagues confirming the commission of a task and finish group to review the FC fleet policy.