

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 98TH MEETING
Conference Room, National Office, Bristol
16 December 2019**

Attendees:

Ian Gambles - Chair
Richard Greenhous
Tristram Hilborn
Meirion Nelson
James Pendlebury
Steph Rhodes
Mike Seddon

Julia Lovell - minute secretary

Leadership Development Manager – for item 4, New Learning Platform for Government

Offer 2020 programme manager – for item 5, Offer 2020

Head of Mechanical Engineering Services – for item 6, Vehicle Policies

Apologies:

Steve Meeks, Jo Ridgway

1. Welcome

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

2. Minutes and actions

The minutes of the meeting of the Forestry Commission England Executive Board (EB) of the 3 September 2019 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Action 5 was recorded as still outstanding at the time of meeting: Steve Meeks to clarify with Data Protection Officer the position on FOI requests relating to Offer 2020 papers. This action has since been confirmed as complete.

All other actions were confirmed as having been discharged.

3. Update

Tax

The EB was updated on the Tax Committee. This is a newly formed group across the Forestry Commission (FC) that includes representatives from across the three federated organisations and individuals with a range of tax expertise. The Committee will formulate a strategic tax risk register. It was agreed that Steve Meeks would present this to the EB.

The Board welcomed this activity. Ian Gambles thanked the Tax Committee for their efforts in this area. There was then a brief discussion around accountabilities and whether staff had the right knowledge and tools to raise concerns with the Tax Committee, and by extension to escalate these to the EB. All agreed that there is a need for training and guidance to be initiated at the relevant level.

Action 1: Steve Meeks to collate and present the tax risk register to the EB.

Action 2: Steve Meeks as Chair of the Tax Committee to provide assurance to the EB that appropriate tax guidance and training is being considered.

4. New Learning Platform for Government

The Chair welcomed the Leadership Development Manager to the meeting. She updated the EB on the progress of the new learning platform for government:

- The new platform has gone live
- A note has gone out and news items published on the intranet on 21 November 2019 telling staff to register on the new platform
- Due to the low registration rates there was a need to push back the deadline for mandatory training to 31 January 2020
- There were still functionality issues with the new platform, these were civil-service wide and were not unique to the Forestry Commission
- The management information available to the Forestry Commission through this platform was still being explored but due to the technical issues this area was still unclear.

All agreed to push back the deadline for mandatory training to 31 January 2020 and to cascade the message for staff to register on the new platform via the respective boards.

There was then a discussion around how to best encourage staff to register and complete mandatory training, and failing that how best to follow up on inaction. The Executive Board recognised the tension between how to best encourage staff to register on the new platform and lack of clarity around management information on which to base that decision. The Leadership Development Manager agreed to communicate the level of detail that the new platform offers as a part of this action. All agreed that if there were specific issues or areas that the Leadership

Development Manager needs support on then to escalate these with the EB members.

Action 3: Leadership Development Manager to put an item on the intranet about extension to the deadline for mandatory training in the first week of new year.

Action 4: Leadership Development Manager to confirm the level of detail that the new platform can provide for management information via email.

5. Offer 2020

The Chair welcomed the Offer 2020 Project Manager to the meeting. The Project Manager presented paper 13/19 Offer 2020 and asked for the Board to agree the recommendations focused on communications for the project, what the next steps in relation to the FCTU should be, whether the costing assumptions were correct, to agree with the decision tree and communications plan, and whether there were any comments on the draft business case.

The Executive Board then discussed the item. The most salient points of the discussion were:

- Whether the FC Offer 2020 project team can learn from Scotland's experience.
- That it may be too early to discuss which workforce reforms should be included in the final business case as the project has not yet been costed.
- The need for further discussion around schedule including the order of communication, and also taking account of wider civil service workforce reforms, and the effect that the budget statement may have on this project.
- The need for having an overall package that can be tweaked, with a variety of options for reforms to overtime rates, and so having a clearer understanding of the limits of these for negotiation.
- To have a clearer understanding on which workforce reforms are likely to be popular with the Cabinet Office.
- The EB needs to have a better understanding around what the proposal actually means to the individual.

The Executive Board agreed:

- To keep communications high level, to inform staff but not to offer too many details as this is not appropriate at this early stage.
- That it is too early to discuss or make communication decisions, this should be agreed in May.
- That the FCTU should have a clear understanding of their role and timescale for negotiation, including decision points to ensure appropriate engagement without delay to the project.

- That all of current workforce reforms should still be included in the business case.
- The EB was positive about the idea of using a comms company to provide specialist advice
- The assumptions for the costings were accepted.

Action 5: Offer 2020 Project Manager to provide an update on which workforce reforms are likely to be popular with the Cabinet Office.

Action 6: EB to provide Offer 2020 Project Manager with comments on the business case via email.

Action 7: Offer 2020 Project Manager to present the Decision Tree and communications plan at the January EB meeting.

Action 8: Offer 2020 Project Manager to provide suggested changes to the relocation policy.

6. Vehicle Policies

The Chair welcomed the Head of Mechanical Engineering Services (MES) to the meeting. Head of MES presented paper 14/19 on Vehicle Policies. The paper seeks approval for revisions to the FC travel policies and guidance. The discussion outlined the areas of change: FC official cars, CAPES leasing cars, hire cars, and grey fleet (personal cars used for business), vehicle charging and HR travel policy.

Head of MES updated the EB on that there is now a working group to address the policies for these areas. The working group covers a range of expertise and interests, including HR and finance, which will consider the challenge from many angles. The rest of the meeting addressed the challenges to meeting government targets for reducing emissions.

The actions of Cost Centre using official fleet of cars is on target to reducing FC emissions and meet the OLEV (Office of Low Emission Vehicles) targets. The EB asked for additional information on whole life cost to understand the long term financial implications.

Head of MES proposed changes needed to the CAPES lease car agreement (included in the government targets) so the policy on these needs to balance the incentives between the initial capital cost (high) and the ongoing running costs (low). For this reason it was advised that supporting staff moving to zero emission vehicles is recommended. The FC should look to the market to provide the solution longer term: more variety of suppliers and lower initial outlay costs. The EB asked for confirmation regarding any HMRC tax for encouraging CAPES lease of zero emission vehicles before fully signing off this part of the proposal.

Head of MES voiced the recognised concern about hire cars as the industry does not currently have the correct business model to provide ultra-low emission vehicles, such as for example full fuel on return policies. Electric vehicles are also significantly more expensive to hire. It was also acknowledged that booking electric vehicles for overnight stays requires a culture shift in terms of travel planning, such as hotel bookings with charging points. The EB therefore agreed that the FC are more likely to meet targets for hire vehicles after 2022 and that this should be done progressively through contracting with clear policy advice setting out the expectations for staff.

The EB discussed the rationale for and possibilities of affecting staff decisions on grey fleet. The discussion recognised that imposing rules on private vehicles is outside of the scope of the FC but what can be authorised for official business is. All agreed that it is important that these vehicles also contribute towards reducing our carbon from travel and that the reduction information should be provided for individuals to make more informed choices when travelling for business. It was agreed that part of this should be information on the diversifying nature of the electric vehicle market, as well as making sure the information provided is balanced to encourage other more sustainable modes of transport.

Head of MES also asked for agreement that the plan for the use of provided electric vehicle charging points at Forestry England sites from January 2020 is acceptable for implementation. These points will be usable (site conditions allowing) by visitors and staff for a fee to encourage staff to use electric vehicles by offering facilities for charging. The EB agreed with these proposals.

Discussion on the HR travel policy review and the need to have the Board papers recommendations incorporated as early as possible was led by Mike Seddon and agreed by the EB

Action 9: Head of Mechanical Engineering Services to provide comparative costs for EV's and tax implications of the CAPES incentives and changes to the EB.

Action 10: Head of Mechanical Engineering Services to provide further information on communication and guidance issued to staff before revising policies in the new year.

7. Key Actions Arising from the General Election

The Chair introduced this item. It was noted that the biggest change since the election is the commitment of planting trees at a rate of 75,000 acres a year by the end of parliament. The EB agreed that the FC is not starting anew on this commitment but that there is a need to develop a plan. The EB acknowledged that doing so prior to the budget being released would be challenging but necessary to make sure the FC can deliver. However, it was recognised that the details are likely

to be guided by the budget and that there is a risk of restructuring delivery to meet these ambitious targets. It was stated that a cross-FC group is meeting in the new year to clarify structures and plans for the FC going forward, a part of this meeting will be dedicated to understanding how the woodland creation commitments could be achieved. Ian Gambles requested to be a part of this group.

Action 11: Steph Rhodes to invite Ian Gambles to the Woodland Creation Action Plan meeting.

8. FC Strategic Risk Register

Meirion Nelson introduced the FC Strategic Risk Register. All agreed that this risk register is now owned by the EB rather than by individual boards of the FC. It was agreed that risk management is more collaborative and collective this way. Meirion updated the EB on that an FC wide risk register practitioner group has also been set up to manage the strategic risk register.

The EB agreed to have the strategic risk register as a standing agenda item. With this in mind, the EB asked that the strategic risk register is reviewed and updated to reflect the result of the general election and any other pertinent updates.

Action 12: Steve Meeks to present the Strategic Risk Register to the EB at the next meeting.

9. AOB

Richard Greenhous apologised to the EB for the delay on the discussion item on FC carbon targets. This work is nearly complete and will be ready for the next iteration of the Executive Board.

Action 13: Richard Greenhous to present the item on FC carbon and net zero targets to the EB at the next meeting.