

**OFFICIAL SENSITIVE**

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD  
MINUTES OF THE 99<sup>TH</sup> MEETING  
Conference Room, National Office, Bristol  
29 January 2020**

**Attendees:**

Ian Gambles (Chair)  
Richard Greenhous  
Tristram Hilborn  
Steve Meeks  
Meirion Nelson  
James Pendlebury  
Steph Rhodes  
Jo Ridgway  
Mike Seddon

Julia Lovell - minute secretary

Julia Grant via telephone – for item 2 Updates for Offer 2020

Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager – for item 3 Staff Engagement Survey results and driving forward future improvements

Research Consultant and Director of Surveys & Research (Capita) – for item 3 Staff Engagement Survey Results

Reward and Pensions Manager – for item 2 Updates for Offer 2020

HR Project Manager – for item 2 Updates for Offer 2020

Knowledge and Information Management Lead – for item 5 Knowledge and Information Management

Mari Sibley – for item 4 Future Accommodation and Smarter Ways of Working

**Apologies:**

None

**1. Welcome, Minutes and Actions**

Ian Gambles welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies had been received.

The minutes of the meeting of the Forestry Commission Executive Board (EB) of the 16 December 2019 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Action 4 was recorded as still outstanding at the time of meeting. The Chair asked Jo Ridgway to follow up:

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

Actions 6 and 7 were noted as still outstanding, the EB were reminded to provide comments via email. Offer 2020 communications will be discussed at the EB meeting in March.

EB to provide HR Project Manager with comments on the business case via email.

HR Project Manager to present the Decision Tree and communications plan at the January EB meeting.

Action 9 was noted as not yet complete. The Chair asked Mike Seddon to clarify with Head of Mechanical Engineering on progress of this action.

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

Mike Seddon updated the EB on Action 10: HR Business Partner and Head of Mechanical Engineering are working on revised policies and the communication strategy for these to staff.

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

Action 13 was noted as postponed until next meeting.

Richard Greenhouse to present the item on FC carbon and net zero targets to the EB at the next meeting.

All other actions were confirmed as complete.

**Action 1:** Jo Ridgway to check with Leadership and Development Manager what level of compliance the new learning system affords line managers for mandatory training.

**Action 2:** EB to provide comments to HR Project Manager on business case via email by 12 February. Offer 2020 communications to be included on March EB agenda.

**Action 3:** Mike Seddon to ask Head of Mechanical Engineering to provide comparative costs for electric vehicles, including tax implications of the CAPES incentives and changes.

**Action 4:** Richard Greenhouse to present an item on FC Carbon and net zero targets to the EB at the March meeting.

## **2. Update**

### 2020-21 Business Planning

Ian Gambles updated the EB that the Forestry Commission (FC) is still expected to make a 5% saving in next year's budget. As this sits uneasily alongside government commitments around increasing rates of tree planting, Ian suggested to the Defra Executive Committee (ExCo) that the FC should be exempt from the funding cut this year. We have yet to receive feedback on this proposal. Meirion Nelson noted that early engagement is preferred if the proposal is rejected. Steve Meeks would coordinate budget reductions across the FC if this proposal is rejected.

**Action 5:** Steve Meeks to coordinate a contingency plan for 5% reduction in funding across the Forestry Commission, including Forestry England, Forest Research and Forest Services.

### The Budget

Ian confirmed that FC requested extra resource to meet the government's ambitious tree planting targets. The way the FC can deliver these targets will be clearer following the government's Budget announcement on 11 March.

### Spending Review 2020

Ian updated the EB that the FC is expecting a letter from the Chancellor to find 5% savings as a starting-point for the Spending Review. The Spending Review is likely to be completed by the summer recess; however there is still no indication of how it will be run.

### Tax and FC Strategic Risk Registers

Steve Meeks confirmed that the tax risk register is currently being drafted and that he expects to present it to the EB at the next meeting.

Steve updated the EB that he is discussing the level and mode of delivery of training and guidance for staff with HR and Finance colleagues. He indicated that the Forestry England tax advisor would oversee the delivery of this programme, with support from HR colleagues.

Steve briefly updated the EB on the FC Strategic Risk Register, including the identification of three new risks. Steve also updated the EB that the FC is providing 50 staff with risk management training. He confirmed that Defra receive this document every quarter and that no risks have yet been escalated.

The EB provided comments on the Strategic Risk Register, including that business continuity should potentially be added as a risk. Richard Greenhous noted that the Forest Services (FS) risk register was being updated. For this reason it was necessary to think about how risks identified by FS interact with the strategic level

register and how risks were escalated to the EB. For example, if England would start trading as a third country after EU exit – this would have significant resource implications for the FC.

The EB identified other risks that could also feed into the Strategic Risk Register, such as resource constraints to meet government ambitions. The EB agreed that the Strategic Risk Register should be more accessible; for example, it should be shorter and clearer about where residual risk needs to be escalated to the EB for consideration, action, or to be reassured that these are being managed. Jo Ridgway also raised that there are sensitivities around language used to describe risk FC16 and that this should be reviewed.

**Action 6:** Steve Meeks to present the tax risk register at the March EB meeting.

**Action 7:** Richard Greenhous to consider how the FS risk register interacts with the Strategic Risk Register.

**Action 8:** Jo Ridgway and Steve Meeks to update risk FC16 on the Strategic Risk Register.

#### Offer 2020

The Chair welcomed Julia Grant, HR Project Manager and Reward and Pensions Manager to the meeting. They introduced item 1/20 on Offer 2020. Julia Grant is the forestry commissioner providing non-executive sponsorship for this project and so also joined the meeting via telephone. The purpose of this item was to update the EB on the project's progress; the EB agreed that decision making will be postponed until spring.

HR Project Manager confirmed that Beamens have been appointed to carry out indicative job evaluation to estimate the costs of aligning FC grades to the Civil Service pay scales.

The Chair asked the EB for their provisional view of the 5 options on relocation policy. There was a wide ranging discussion about the options proposed. There was no final decision on a proposed new relocation policy, but the emerging consensus was to retain some flexibility to meet expenses for staff moving voluntarily within the organisation, subject to tighter rules and limits than at present, with the limit possibly aligned to the HMRC £8,000 limit for tax-free expenses

The EB asked HR Project Manager to provide clarity on any savings from capping expenses and a comparison of the FC relocation policy and the Defra offer. The EB recognised that aligning policies with Defra was preferable as it underpins the

rationale of the business case to harmonise the reward package with the Civil Service.

The EB discussed TRAs and RRAs but there was no final decision on these allowances. The emerging consensus was for retaining flexibility with both, subject to some greater restrictions. The EB asked HR Project Manager to review in light of the Beamens work and advise EB as to whether the combination of regrading of posts currently in receipt of allowances and a tightening of the policies would be likely to deliver the reduction envisaged in RRA/TRA costs.

The EB briefly discussed the draft business case. The EB agreed that they need to be reassured that the assumptions behind the figures in the business case are robust to evidence the workforce reform. The EB re-stated that part of the overall aim of the Offer 2020 project was to make staff better off rather than worse off. While the EB recognised that workforce reforms are important, the decision should be postponed until the indicative job evaluation has been carried out and figures have been verified. HR Project Manager requested that any written comments on draft business case should be sent to her via email by 12 February 2020.

The EB had a wide ranging discussion about how to bring the operational roles in line with other roles within FC and the Civil Service more widely. The EB rejected option 2 and said that option 1 needs refining. A part of this is making sure that individuals, overall, will not lose out as a result of change, but similarly that the focus should not be only on salary but the whole reward package. The EB agreed that resolving the leapfrogging issue was fundamental. HR Project Manager agreed to meet with Tristram Hilborn to refine option 1 so that it had the best chance of maximising the numbers of operational staff opting for the new terms without being or being seen to be excessively generous given that operational staff would almost certainly be doing paid overtime in future.

HR Project Manager updated the EB that Beamens will be carrying out job evaluation work and that the Director of Finance will have the results from this work by end of February. Director of Finance will then provide robust costings and savings data at the EB on April 15<sup>th</sup>.

HR Project Manager also updated the EB that there is a meeting mid-February to discuss the communications strategy for Offer 2020. The project will start to produce communications for two scenarios: business case approved and business case rejected. The EB agreed that the Offer 2020 project should have well thought communications strategy as this project is highly sensitive.

Julia Grant thanked HR Project Manager for the paper and confirmed she will provide comments via email.

**Action 9:** HR Project Manager to provide a comparison of Defra relocation policy with FC's.

**Action 10:** HR Project Manager to provide data on whether there would be any savings by capping relocation expenses.

**Action 11:** HR Project Manager to advise EB in light of the Beamens work as to whether the combination of regrading of posts currently in receipt of allowances and a tightening of the policies would be likely to deliver the reduction envisaged in RRA/TRA costs.

**Action 12:** Tristram Hilborn and HR Project Manager to meet to confirm proposed changes to the operations role.

### **3. Staff Engagement Survey Results & driving forward future improvements – presentation and discussion.**

The Chair welcomed Research Consultant and Director of Surveys & Research at Capita, and the Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager to the meeting. The Research Consultant presented the staff engagement survey results to the EB; salient points are covered below:

- The results are very positive overall and are statistically significant, the focus of the presentation is to look at things that need improving;
- Comments on where improvements can be made are dominated by pay (total benefits package, pay fairness, feeling valued at work, and managing work demands), IT, and communications with staff more broadly and specifically feedback from and engagement with senior staff;
- Using the survey responses the three things to focus on should be: line manager communications/engagement with staff, looking at ways to support the organisation to provide long-term solutions to resolve underlying issues rather than focusing on remedial actions or short-term firefighting, and ensuring a good work-life balance for staff as the results for this section have gone down since previous survey;
- Research Consultant suggested that the results should be viewed in the context of comments that staff provided as there are suggestions for quick wins in there;
- From the general results it was also clear that the whistleblowing policy needs clarifying to staff;
- Demographic analysis of staff responses showed that there were no issues specific to certain groups of people;
- Capita also raised other less representative results that would need addressing: 3% of staff have reported being bullied or harassed, 7% of staff felt that they had been discriminated against, and that the most negative comments came from those who have reported having a disability.

The EB thanked the Research Consultant for providing the results and some suggestions for actions to the group. The EB then discussed what actions can be prioritised following the survey to have immediate positive impact and what projects could be taken on a longer term basis.

The EB agreed that a reminder of the whistleblowing policy should be issued to staff. The EB briefly discussed the pay and reward issue and agreed that this should be addressed via the Offer 2020 project as this already covers staff engagement and is the most appropriate route for furthering this agenda. The EB agreed that performance management will need to be addressed consistently and collectively across the FC, potentially through a management programme. The EB asked Jo Ridgway to put together options for a management programme.

The EB further agreed that reading comments pertinent to their business unit may reveal further actions to address staff concerns and improve the working environment.

**Action 13:** Provide staff wide communication on FC's whistleblowing policy.

**Action 14:** Jo Ridgway to put together options for an FC wide management programme.

**Action 15:** EB to read the comments to glean further actions to address concerns raised in the staff engagement survey results.

#### **4. Future Accommodation and Smarter Ways of Working**

The Chair welcomed Mari Sibley to the meeting to present item 3/20 on Future Accommodation and Smarter Ways of Working.

Mari updated the EB on FC's progress to meet a directive from the Cabinet Office on finding Smarter Ways of Working, which is a government wide accreditation exercise. The purpose of the accreditation is to ensure that use of the government estate is optimised.

Mari updated the EB that as the Forestry Commission is unusual in that not all of its staff work in an office, there would be some exemptions applied for operational staff and sites. As an organisation, however, the FC was already actively practising flexible and smart working through hot-desking, working from home and flexi policies. As such, Mari updated the EB that the FC should be fully accredited by the end of 2020.

Mari also updated the EB that staff engagement and consultation is a part of the project more broadly. The EB suggested that Mari and the project team should engage with Forest Research.

Mari presented the item on Future Accommodation. The FC's lease on 620 Coldharbour Lane has a break-point upcoming in 2023 and Mari has had preliminary discussions with the landlord. Mari presented several options to the EB for future accommodation.

The EB agreed that staying would be the best option. Mari also updated the EB that the landlord would be willing to work together with the FC in a flagship partnership to upgrade the accommodation to make it greener. The EB had a brief discussion about how best to upgrade the building and all agreed that to reflect the investment in staff at 620 the FC should take the opportunity to improve the building for staff as well as improving the green credentials of the accommodation.

A part of this will be not to renew the sub-lease of the building to Lockheed Martin when it expires in October 2020 and allow FC to use the entire ground floor. The EB approved this recommendation. Mike Seddon asked Mari to provide indicative costings for the purchase of the building as comparison. The EB agreed that communications to staff should be positive with messaging around improvements to the work environment. The EB thanked Mari for her update.

**Action 16:** Mari Sibley to engage with Forest Research on SWoW project.

**Action 17:** Mari Sibley to provide costings for the purchase of the building.

**Action 18:** Mari Sibley to take forward appropriate notification of Lockheed Martin and initiate planning for us of the recovered space.

## **5. Knowledge and Information Management**

The Chair welcomed the Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) Lead to present item 4/20 on Knowledge and Information Management.

KIM lead updated the EB on the foundations for the Knowledge and Information Management framework as set out in the paper. The framework encompasses policy, culture and technology while recognising FC's federal nature. The framework is based on best practice, ideals of governance, internal discussions and the FC's current position on information management.

The rationale for change is to achieve regulatory compliance across the organisation, not just have pockets of good practice. This can be enabled by embedding good practice in culture and by using appropriate technology. The proposal to drive this project was to set up a forum which will set direction, policies, targets and will own actions attributed to these as well as sharing good practice and lessons learned wider across the FC. The forum would carry out an annual effectiveness review. The forum would report directly to the EB, but operational matters would be raised with respective executive boards.



The EB thanked KIM Lead for outlining the KIM framework and agreed that this is an important issue for the FC as a whole. However the EB thought that the scale and ambition of the work required a formal project approach with an appropriate level of governance. It therefore asked KIM Lead to outline a formal programme of work, over a number of years, with an estimated resource requirement. The EB fully recognised the need for investment in this area and agreed that the work should not be absorbed by existing resource. The EB also requested KIM Lead to widen the remit to think about how information is managed across boundaries with other organisations.

The EB offered their support for this project and agreed that an inaugural meeting of the forum would help identify these gaps and help to plan the programme appropriately.

**Action 19:** KIM Lead to consult with EB members about who they think should be involved in the kick-off KIM forum to support this programme.

**Action 20:** KIM Lead to organise the first meeting of the forum.

**Action 21:** Steve Meeks to meet with KIM Lead to ensure this programme is appropriately resourced.

**Action 22:** KIM Lead to put together a defined programme for EB with a clear governance structure, programme documentation and dedicated resource to support the outlined KIM framework and how this relates to existing capacity. This is to include the initial actions to shift culture, governance and technology leading on to steady-state KIM management.

## **6. AOB**

### Coronavirus

Jo Ridgway updated the EB that Civil Service wide guidance had gone out in relation to this outbreak.

### EU Exit

Steph Rhodes updated the EB that as the UK was leaving the EU on 31 January 2020, there would be an EU Exit blog post on the intranet.

As a result of this the budget bid will not be reviewed until later and so the final draft for the budget bid will not be circulated until the following week.

### FC Chair

Ian Gambles updated the EB that the new FC Chair appointment will be announced on Monday and that staff will be informed via a blog on the intranet. There had been a lot of ongoing work to welcome the new Chair with a proposed programme of visits and meetings.