

**OFFICIAL SENSITIVE**

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD  
MINUTES OF THE 106<sup>th</sup> MEETING  
via MS Teams  
26 January 2021**

**Attendees:**

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

Julia Lovell – minute secretary

Strategic Development Team Manager – for item 3, Changing the Way We Work  
Forest Management Director – for item 3, Changing the Way We Work  
Principal Adviser - Social Forestry – for item 5, England Tree Strategy  
Head of Health, Safety and Technical Training – for item 6, Mandatory Staff Training  
Director of Estates and Legal – for item 3, Changing the Way We Work

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Ian Gambles (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**2. Minutes of the Executive Board 15 December 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of the Forestry Commission Executive Board (EB) of the 15 December 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The EB agreed to carry Actions 2, 4 and 9 forward.

All other actions were confirmed as complete.

**Action 1:** Leadership and Development Manager to bring back design of the management development programme with deliverables for approval to a spring meeting of the EB.

**Action 2:** Jo, Steve and Offer 2020 Project Manager to take forward Offer 2020 submission to Defra with Ian and EB sign-off.

**Action 3:** Julia Lovell to put festive period arrangements on agenda for the March EB meeting.

### **3. Changing the Way We Work**

The 'Changing the way we work' working group was set up following on from Forestry England's lessons learned exercise from the first lockdown. The Group includes staff from Forestry England and Forest Services, James Pendlebury has been included in the discussion but nothing has yet been taken to Forest Research Board. This item has been presented to the EB for approval of the key principles of the work and to support the development of a more detailed implementation plan.

The main benefits of this programme would be: improved organisational performance, improved working environment, and reduction in carbon emissions. Currently this programme of change has support from 95% of senior managers. The main risks of this programme have been identified as: staff not engaging to achieve cultural change, perceptions that this would benefit only certain groups of staff, and risk posed by lack of face to face contact resulting in a poorer working culture.

The EB approved the underlying principles of the work.

The EB raised a number of issues to be resolved before implementation, including expanding the list of risks and how to mitigate them. Other issues raised are recorded below:

#### Resource

- Governance of the implementation group needs further thought. It would help to have a connection between the working group and implementation group to avoid an abrupt handover
- More sustained engagement with trade unions is needed to make sure changes in HR policies, or working contracts, are implemented well
- For this work to be realised HR workforce policies will need to be updated; further thought must be given to resource implications on the HR team
- Wider resource implications should also be given thought for this work to be implemented quickly and successfully

#### Costs and benefits

- Further thought should be given to working out the costs and savings of this work
- Costs will need better definition in terms of for whom and how, for example what IT equipment should be counted as provided to staff and at what cost
- What would be the tax implications of these changes?

### Working environment implications

- Equality Impact Assessment for this work will need to address wellbeing, as well as social and economic diversity
- How to ensure cohesion – implications of reduction in face to face contact
- There may possibly be need for an update to staff charter, or meetings protocol, on how to conduct meetings remotely and blended meetings
- Explore potential for incorporating productivity gains into Offer 2020 submission

### Customers

- What is the impact on customers?

### Other departments and devolved nations

- This project is already led by Defra and Whitehall, so agenda aligned with rest of civil service – however this is less clear across devolved administrations so implementation group will need to explore how or if this work would affect staff in other nations.

The EB approved moving forward by appointing an implementation group to progress implementation planning and look into the areas identified. As part of the implementation plan the group should also consider a communication plan. The EB noted that as Covid-19 restrictions are lifted it is likely that staff will develop flexible working practices organically and so there is urgency to bring this phase to a successful conclusion and move into implementation.

The EB thanked the working group for the inception of this programme.

**Action 4:** Tristram Hilborn to lead on putting together a proposal for the implementation group, its remit, membership and governance.

## **4. Forestry Commission Carbon Targets**

Richard Greenhous presented this item to the EB. Richard asked the EB to agree that the Forestry Commission should implement an FC-wide carbon reduction target; this target be as ambitious as the FC realistically can be in what it can contribute to Government's overall net zero by 2050 target and building on Forestry England's to be carbon free by 2033; Forestry England, Forest Research, Forest Services and the Commissioners' Office should remain free to set their own targets, as long as together they at least equal any FC-wide target agreed; and to set up a working group to recommend a target and how it could be achieved, for Executive Board agreement.

The EB endorsed the paper's recommendations. The EB also gave consideration to some of the things the working group will need to resolve. The target will need to balance being simple but auditable. The EB expressed a preference for the process

to be less bureaucratic to ensure the targets are both equitable and the measures are not double counting, given the shared resources between Forestry England and Forest Services, for example. There was also a concern that a target may be imposed externally by government so there needs to be some flexibility in the scope of this work.

The working group should come back with recommendations to the EB.

Forestry England put forward Head of Estates and Legal and Forest Research put forward Research Forester for membership of the proposed working group.

**Action 5:** EB to nominate members of the FC-wide carbon reduction target working group by the end of January, and commission that group to make its initial recommendations to the FC Executive Board at its March meeting.

## **5. England Tree Strategy**

The England Tree Strategy (ETS) is currently being drafted following consultation by Defra. This Strategy will have an impact on the whole of the Forestry Commission. Principal Adviser - Social Forestry presented this item to the EB to summarise the main points of the Strategy, how the FC have engaged to improve the current draft, and to ask whether there is any further engagement the FC is missing so far.

The Forestry Commission will be held to account on delivering key aspects of the ETS once it is published. The FC have been pushing for better wording on climate change and resilience.

Mike Seddon noted that the public forest estate should be recognised as an inherent part of the ETS. A separate but linked point is the need for balance in the ETS between economic, environmental and social content so as not to alienate the forestry sector.

There was a brief discussion on how the ETS will interact with the Peat Strategy, Nature Strategy and the Flood Strategy, (all being published in 2021), (and with essentially county based Local Nature Recovery Strategies, which will start to be produced once the Environment Bill is passed). The EB noted that while they are related, they are separate so the FC will need to liaise with Defra to ensure the impact is cohesive.

The schedule for the ETS was noted. Conversation on second draft is to finish end of January. A Defra-FC workshop will be held on 10 February, with most of February dedicated to redrafting. The whole drafting group will finally meet again on 10 March.

There was also a brief discussion about more proactive engagement on how to encourage more broadleaf forests to be planted for the timber market. The EB agreed to put together a short information note to Lord Zac Goldsmith on this.

**Action 6:** Forest Research and Ian Tubby to draft an information note to the Forestry Minister on potential for growing quality broadleaf trees for the timber market.

## **6. Mandatory Staff Training**

The EB set up a task and finish group to explore how to define mandatory training for staff, how frequently this training should be held, and whether there were any other considerations. The task and finish group has now completed this work. Head of Health, Safety & Technical Training joined the meeting to present the findings and to propose next steps.

The task and finish group focused on the timebound and supervisory parts of staff duties to propose a list of criteria that would define 'mandatory'. The group identified three criteria that would make training mandatory.

The EB thanked the Group for their work. The EB raised the following concerns with the current proposal: cyber security training is still not picked up as being mandatory, despite it posing a serious threat for FC systems and to individuals at home. There is also more work to flesh out role specific mandatory training to help managers ensure their staff have the tools they need. The cadence of refresher training should also be reconsidered on a needs basis – either when something changes, or for those at higher risk, such as driver training for those above an annual mileage. The EB also raised the question of how easy it is to monitor uptake and compliance with training. It is also still not obvious why safeguarding is mandatory for all staff in their professional capacity in non-pastoral roles.

The EB approved the definition and criteria of mandatory training. However, there is further work on cross-FC alignment on mandatory training in the initial probationary period and a more flexible and tailored approach to refresher interval or trigger. The EB asked for the cyber security and safeguarding requirements to be reviewed. These discussions should involve Head of HR and Health & Safety Adviser in Forest Research on safeguarding, IT Security Manager in Forestry England on cyber security and HR colleagues from Forest Services and Forestry England more widely about refresher cadence.

**Action 7:** Mike Seddon to lead Head of Health, Safety & Technical Training and HR colleagues to finesse the mandatory training approach for FC.

## **7. Business planning update**

Business planning discussions continue at senior level at Defra. They have not indicated a change to end of January deadline but it is likely that these discussions will be prolonged into February. The expectation is that all arm's length bodies (ALBs) including the Forestry Commission will need to make further budget cuts, currently around 5.8%.

The Forestry Commission Chair has written to the Forestry Minister recording concerns on the lower-than-expected budget and the expectation of further savings. Defra Executive Committee are meeting next week where the financial position will be reported and discussed. The FC should receive feedback on this meeting prior to formal allocation letters.

## **8. Strategic Risk Register**

The EB talked through the strategic risk register, noting high risk areas, active mitigations and updates.

Due to the recent ransomware attack on the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, cyber security risk was discussed. The EB asked Steve to check with Head of Information Services and IT Security Manager what steps the FC have taken to assure this risk has been neutralised or mitigated.

There was a brief discussion around the risks posed by Covid-19. These are covered in the more operationally focused risk registers of the different parts of the Forestry Commission rather than the Strategic Risk Register and so the EB agreed not to note this as an FC risk.

**Action 8:** Steve to speak with Head of Information Services and IT Security Manager about the Scottish Environment Protection Agency ransomware attack to ensure that FC systems are as well protected as possible against risks of this nature.

## **9. AOB**

### 2021 Senior Managers' Meeting

As there are currently uncertainties about in person meetings, the Chair raised whether the EB would feel it prudent to organise the 2021 Senior Managers' Meeting online. The EB expressed a preference for a face-to-face meeting in October.

### Update on mass testing

Jo Ridgway has circulated a set of notes on mass testing. The EB raised the question of how this programme will be funded and which test sites will be open to staff. The EB agreed that communication must be clear to staff. This is a government programme, FC has little choice of where the sites are, how the programme is rolled out, and the choice of test.

No further business was raised, and the meeting was closed.