

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 104th MEETING
via MS Teams
5 November 2020**

Attendees:

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

Julia Lovell - minute secretary

Knowledge and Information Management Lead
Offer 2020 Project Manager
Volunteer Manager

Apologies:

James Pendlebury

1. Welcome and introductions

Ian Gambles (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies have been received from James Pendlebury.

2. Minutes of the Executive Board 30 September 2020

The minutes of the meeting of the Forestry Commission Executive Board (EB) of the 30 September 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Actions 1, 4 and 9 were carried forward. Jo Ridgway provided an update on action points 6, 7, and 8.

Three additional roles are being evaluated by Beamans following a request from Forestry England. Results should be available by the end of November. Offer 2020 Project Manager, Tristram and Mike have met to discuss roles that appear to be undervalued by the JEGS process and are considering option to resolve this issue.

Steve Meeks confirmed that the modelling has been carried out on the 2019-20 price base and there is still work to be done around uncertainty of future pay remits.

All other actions were confirmed as complete.

Action 1: Richard Greenhous to present an item on FC Carbon and net zero targets to the EB at a later meeting.

Action 2: Meirion Nelson to contribute to the tax risk register with Steve Meeks.

Action 3: Offer 2020 Project Manager to circulate a draft of the Offer 2020 business case, including the new figures provided in Action 8, before submission to the Cabinet Office. The final draft will be circulated at the end of November for information.

3. Knowledge and Information Management Project Initiation Document

Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) Lead joined the meeting and introduced this item. Forestry Commission's level of information management maturity is currently low. The KIM Lead was asked to provide a step change in the way the FC manages information as this underpins all aspects of the work that any public authority carries out. The proposal presented has been drawn up in consultation with colleagues across the different parts of the FC. The Kim Lead asked the EB to approve the approach and timescale for delivery.

The EB thanked the KIM Lead and supporting colleagues for this complex work. There followed a discussion of the proposal and the group suggested some refinements to the Project Initiation Document (PID).

The EB asked that the project should be agile enough to take advantages of opportunities as they arise, for example exploiting value from information assets already held within the organisation through data mining. The PID also needs to take account of business-critical Forest Research information assets and not just personal information.

The EB agreed that the framework of the project is deliverable but that certain aspects, such as resourcing and costs, will need further attention to make sure that the FC is not over-burdened. One example is that the resource for managing paper records may be underestimated as previous attempts have proved to be costly and so the role of the FC Archivist needs to be well defined to manage competing priorities and cost. Similarly, the PID needs to take account of the longer-term information management operation to identify roles and responsibilities under business as usual, though the EB agreed that this is likely become clearer as the project progresses.

The EB approved the four-year timescale for delivery and the PID subject to refining. The PID does not need to come back to the EB after this approval but should be given an opportunity to be reviewed within its governance structure.

Action 4: KIM Lead to continue working with colleagues to scope out key to business information assets for Forest Research.

Action 5: KIM Lead to work with Steve Meeks to ensure the resourcing and costing of the project is proportionate across parts of the Forestry Commission.

4. Comprehensive spending review 20

Steve Meeks introduced this item. Steve provided a brief update on the FC's in-year position, namely that all of our budget changes have been approved or agreed by Defra at Quarter 2 including additional funding for the English Tree Planting Programme, Europe & Trade Delivery, and work on tree health outbreaks. Revised internal budgets and Letters of Delegation have been worked up. Steve flagged that we must now ensure that the additional funding is fully and effectively utilised, and that he will continue to press Defra for financial relief from the impact of Covid-19.

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) continued at pace prior to Defra submission's to HMT at the end of September. Steve flagged the recent announcement by the Chancellor that the Spending Review will now be for one year only (21-22) with multi-year bids only considered for a small number of capital projects, and with no discretionary or multi-year resource bids. It is expected that the Nature for Climate multi-year bid, which includes the ETPP, will continue to be bid for by Defra. Steve confirmed which FC bids we know have been excluded from Defra's submission and continues to press for the full FC wide position, including on IT where our bids had been consolidated. Steve flagged that the main concern remains obtaining sufficient resource to support capital delivery.

The EB recognised that the in-year position will have to be managed as the work still needs to be carried out, and that confirmation is needed on Spending Review IT funding across a range of critical work strands. If these IT components are lost then it would have a severe impact on ability of the FC to deliver the ETPP.

Action 6: Steph Rhodes to follow up with Bella, Naomi, Steve and Ian on critical funding submitted as part of the CSR bids for the England Tree Planting Programme.

5. Mandatory staff training

Mike Seddon introduced the mandatory staff training item as something the EB should consider collectively. Mike suggested to set up a Task and Finish Group for mandatory training that will meet to establish a mandatory training framework. The

group can be led by the Forestry England Head of Health Safety and Technical Training. Mike also asked the group to approve the mandatory training suggestions for the whole of the FC.

The EB thanked Mike for steering the group onto this topic. The EB approved the setting up of a Mandatory Training Task and Finish Group.

The EB agreed that the Task and Finish Group should provide the framework for mandatory training. This framework needs to take account of deliverability, practicality, the worth and genuine relevance across all parts of the organisation, have sufficient flexibility for roles, and have a QA element of the training itself. The Mandatory Training Task and Finish Group are invited to report back to the EB in February. The EB agreed to send their suggestions for membership of this small group.

Mike agreed to set up the brief for the Task and Finish Group.

Action 7: EB members to submit their nominations for membership of the Mandatory Training Task and Finish group to Forestry England Head of Health Safety and Technical Training and Julia Lovell by 11 November 2020.

Action 8: Mike Seddon to draft a brief for the Mandatory Training Task and Finish Group.

6. Safeguarding Policy, Practice and Guidance note

The Volunteer Manager joined the meeting for this item. Mike Seddon introduced Safeguarding as a critical issue that needs addressing following an internal audit. The proposed policy, practice and guidance (PPG) has been put together following consultation with external experts and internal colleagues, and has been reviewed by Jennie Price – Forestry Commissioner. The Volunteer Manager and Forestry England Head of Health Safety and Technical Training have taken this work forward in the form of the PPG. The team are seeking approval of the policy prior to engaging with staff through rolling out training and providing a toolkit for safeguarding.

The EB thanked the Volunteer Manager for this comprehensive set of papers, noting that the policy paper was missing. This will be circulated for approval via correspondence.

The consensus of the group was a concern around how best to engage all staff on this important topic. The EB asked the Volunteer Manager to ensure that training and awareness is simplified to ensure staff take the training seriously and understand the relevance of this topic to their work. The EB also noted that there are some

inconsistencies in the annexes and that simplification of the overall package may help with this.

Mike Seddon flagged that there will be a need to agree on governance and oversight of this activity to report annually. The EB agreed that this decision should be made by the Mandatory Training Task and Finish Group as a priority to pitch training at the right level and to suggest the most effective governance structure for this area.

The EB welcomed the work and provided general support for the work. The EB agreed to approve the PPG via correspondence following the meeting by exception. Following the discussion the EB also agreed that the rollout to staff of this work as part of training should go to the Mandatory Training Task and Finish Group to get the level of engagement right across the FC.

Action 9: Julia Lovell to circulate the Policy paper for approval via correspondence.

Action 10: Mandatory Training Task and Finish Group to prioritise Safeguarding training framework.

7. Offer 2020

Offer 2020 Project Manager joined the meeting and introduced this item. At the September meeting, the EB asked the project team to explore options that would reduce the proportion of staff who would be pay protected. The purpose of this item is to approve the business case to be submitted to the Cabinet Office in December.

The suggested options that were presented at the September EB meeting have been updated to reduce the proportion of staff who would be pay protected. There were two possible ways to achieve this: to increase the pay range of those pay protected, or to consolidate the bottom two pay bands into one. In any option, 73% of staff would already be positively affected by the changes and so the first option would be likely push the business case beyond the boundary of what the Cabinet Office could agree to. The second option was not palatable as there is a legitimate need for differentiation between the two lower grades in Forestry England.

The EB thanked the project team for exploring these options and conceded that the first option presented in September is fair and transparent and so the right option. The EB approved this option and requested to see a draft prior to submission to the Cabinet Office in December.

8. AOB

MPs backed a four-week lockdown in England to combat Covid-19 on 3 November 2020, following the Prime Minister's announcement of this on 31 October. England

went into second lockdown on 5 November for four weeks until 2 December 2020. Jo Ridgway confirmed that the Covid-19 FAQs have been updated on the intranet and a blog post has been published to support and inform staff of what this means for them at work.

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