

**OFFICIAL SENSITIVE**

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD  
MINUTES OF THE 102<sup>ND</sup> MEETING  
Via telephone  
27 August 2020**

**Attendees:**

Ian Gambles (Chair)  
Tristram Hilborn  
Steve Meeks  
James Pendlebury  
Jo Ridgway  
Mike Seddon

Julia Lovell - minute secretary

Head of Plant Health Forestry and Contingency – to represent Forest Services  
Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager – for item 3 BAME report

**Apologies:**

Richard Greenhous, Meirion Nelson, Steph Rhodes

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Ian Gambles (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies have been received from Richard Greenhous, Meirion Nelson and Steph Rhodes.

**2. Minutes of the Executive Board 26 March 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of the Forestry Commission Executive Board (EB) of the 1 July 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Actions 1, 2, 3, and 4 were carried forward.

All other actions were confirmed as complete with Action 6 to be discussed under agenda item 3 and Action 5 to be discussed under AOB.

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

**Action 2:** Jo Ridgway to put together options for an FC wide management programme.

**Action 3:** Knowledge and Information Management Lead to put together proposals for a knowledge and information management programme to present at a future EB meeting. This is to include the initial actions to shift culture, governance and technology leading on to steady-state KIM management.

**Action 4:** Meirion Nelson to contribute to the tax risk register with Steve Meeks

### **3. FC BAME Inclusion Groups – report and recommendations**

Results of the staff survey 2019 revealed that there was disparity of experience between BAME and White British staff in the Forestry Commission workplace. A series of focus groups were held to explore this disparity. Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager joined the meeting to present the findings from these staff focus groups as a report.

The staff focus groups identified three ways in which, in the opinion of some participants, racism persists within the Forestry Commission: personal racism, systemic or institutional racism, and privilege.

There was a wide-ranging discussion about the report and its findings. The EB raised the issue that the focus groups were self-selecting and that any work going forward should be representative. This is both a way of engaging more staff and so getting wider buy-in and ensuring a wider selection of views to reduce the risk of creating an echo chamber.

To help tackle these complex issues it was agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to take this work forward.

The EB agreed to set up a BAME Task and Finish Group on the following basis:

1. For the Group to be representative of different parts of the organisation, including a representative from the BAME Inclusion Group. We should keep the size of the Group to 8 people to ensure it is effective.
2. The Group to review recommendations within the report and decide which actions to take forward, and which need further exploration and potentially resource.
3. The Group to provide a draft of aims to the EB that are actionable and not reductive or tokenistic.
4. The Group to identify areas of localised good practice and suggest ways of expanding these to the wider organisation.
5. The Group to commission further research, including getting expert internal (such as FR social scientists) and external advice, on engaging and exploring ways to resolve ongoing issues.
6. The Group to engage staff on specific actions.

7. The Group to consider and advise on long-term ongoing activity, such as programmes that reach out to communities.
8. The Group, its activities and recommendations are to be reviewed by the EB.

It was agreed that these points would be expressed in a formal remit for the task and finish group.

The EB noted that the issues and actions are likely to mirror those in other organisations as the issues are systemic, and agreed that doing nothing was not an option. Taking relevant action and achieving results was more important than words and gestures. The EB agreed on three longer term outcomes that should be measured in this work:

1. Higher proportion of BAME staff working in Forestry Commission
2. Higher numbers of BAME visitors to Forestry England forests
3. Significant reduction in the disparity of results in the staff survey between BAME and White British colleagues.

The EB thanked Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager and the staff who have participated in the focus groups for bringing attention to this issue.

**Action 5:** Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager to collect the EB's views on membership and leadership of the BAME Task and Finish Group. The final membership is to be approved by EB via correspondence.

**Action 6:** Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager to engage Head of Social and Economic Research Group in Forest Research on taking this work forward.

**Action 7:** Julia Lovell to draft the Group mandate as a summary of this meeting to be reviewed and agreed by the EB.

#### **4. Comprehensive Spending Review 2020**

The Spending Review was launched on 24 July, with deadline for submission by Defra on 24 September 2020. Steve Meeks confirmed that the FC bid will be submitted as a part of Defra's overall submission. From 2021- 22 the CSR20 will cover RDEL for 3 years and CDEL for 4 years. After the first phase Defra had received £3bn unfiltered proposals against a flat-cash baseline of £2bn. Defra Executive Committee will need to prioritise bids and Steve confirmed that we are working closely with the relevant teams on this.

Steve confirmed we are collaborating with DTTS for IT bids as we have thus far been relying on annual underspend to fund these activities. There is also support from within Defra and No10 on a bid to improve visitor facilities for people with disabilities.

Steve stated that the FC have been asked to provide options for 5% reduction and confirmed that we will push back robustly on this given the increase in commitments such as the England Tree Planting Programme. Steve noted that the biggest challenge is likely to come in the rationale for maintaining business as usual (BAU) activities, such regulatory work, given that Treasury's priority is to those programmes that are manifesto commitments.

Steve noted that it is a challenge to keep track and align all the bids which have been allocated to Defra Strategic Outcomes (SO) as these do not align easily with the FC's work streams. The EB noted the importance of understanding both at an outcome and an organisational level what flat cash or something much closer to it than our bids, would actually mean. The EB agreed to provide support in clearing communication channels and providing information for the final bid. As part of this bid, the EB agreed to provide Sir William Worsley with briefs for the meeting with Secretary of State that would highlight the outcomes.

The EB thanked Steve for putting together the Baseline Mapping document that tracks the FC outcomes based bids in putting together the final bid.

**Action 8:** Steve Meeks to cross reference the FC Baseline Mapping document with the Defra Tiered document to make sure Defra are sighted on all FC bids, including activity on Tree Health and improving facilities for visitors with disabilities.

## **5. FC Strategic Risk Register**

Steve Meeks provided an update on the Strategic Risk Register. An abridged version of the register has been produced to make it easier to read and so identify and manage strategic risk. This abridged version will be presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on 17 September.

The EB briefly discussed whether it would be useful to have the development of ELM as a specific strategic risk on the register. The EB asked Steve to update the risk register to reflect changes and uncertainty for Forest Services. Head of Plant Health Forestry and Contingency – also proposed that FC09 and FC10 be merged as a top line strategic risk.

The EB thanked Steve and colleagues for simplifying the strategic risk register and working to make it more legible to identify and action key strategic risks.

**Action 9:** Steve Meeks, Richard Greenhous and Forest Services Management Accountant to update the strategic risk register as a result of changes for Forest Services, such as the ELM programme.

## 7. AOB

### Home working and equipment

As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions Forestry Commission HR and IT departments received a substantial number of queries relating to allowance for buying equipment to help staff work from home in more comfort. Jo Ridgway confirmed that a policy is being drafted to guide staff on what is allowed and how to request equipment to facilitate working from home on a temporary basis.

The EB welcomed the clarity around what staff can and cannot claim for, how to request and source equipment and to make sure that it is fair and balanced for all as a response to the current working situation. The EB agreed that communication on this policy should stress that this is not new funding and is in response to the current temporary working situation as a result of government's advice on social distancing. The EB approved that the allowance should be a maximum of £150 per person, at same level as in Defra, subject to checking tax implications. The EB noted anything that is already on the intranet should be updated to align with any new overarching policy.

**Action 10:** Jo Ridgway to check with Meirion Nelson on tax implications of staff purchasing equipment for the temporary working at home policy.

**Action 11:** Jo Ridgway to draft communication for this policy update in a way that ensures existing information aligns with the new.

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