

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 101ST MEETING
Via telephone
1 July 2020**

Attendees:

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

Corporate Governance Manager – minute secretary

Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager – for item 6 Tackling Discrimination and Inequality

Apologies:

None

1. Welcome and introductions

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

2. Minutes of the Executive Board 26 March 2020

The minutes of the meeting of the Forestry Commission Executive Board (EB) of the 26 March 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The EB agreed to defer Action 2 to the next meeting of EB.

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

The EB agreed to defer Action 3 to the next meeting of EB.

Jo Ridgway to put together options for an FC wide management programme.

The EB agreed to defer Action 4 to the next meeting of EB.

Knowledge and Information Management Lead to put together proposals for a knowledge and information management programme to present at a future EB meeting.

The EB agreed to defer Action 5 to the next meeting of EB.

Meirion Nelson to contribute to the tax risk register with Steve Meeks

The EB were updated that action 14 was ongoing. It had been agreed that additional homeworking equipment would be purchased for health and safety reasons. Jo is to present a paper to the EB on homeworking equipment and allowance for staff to cover the next few months of working from home.

All other actions were confirmed as complete with action 16 to be discussed under agenda item 3.

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.

Action 5: Jo Ridgway to update the FAQs in relation to homeworking equipment and present a paper regarding homeworking equipment and allowance for staff at the next EB.

3. Update items

Offer 2020

Steve Meeks provided an update on Offer 2020. The EB had previously agreed in April that the business case was not to go to the Cabinet in May owing to the impact of Covid-19. The draft business case is to be discussed again at the meeting on 30th September to see if it should be submitted in the Autumn. Ian Gambles has appointed Steve and Jo Ridgway as joint project directors and the work programme had commenced. The list of critical success factors had been agreed, the project plan reviewed by the Project Board and 50 posts are to be evaluated to support the project. Jo added that on the 17th July a blog will go live regarding the progress of the project. The names of the staff whose roles are to be evaluated will be sent to

their managers between 7th-13th July. The staff role evaluations are selected at random and are voluntary so staff can decline to take part. The evaluations are to commence from 14th July. The results of this will be shared with the EB on 30th September.

Covid-19 update

Jo Ridgway provided an update to the EB on Covid-19. Staff had been returning to offices and a pulse survey had been launched on Roots to review the impact of this. Staff remaining on furlough or shielding for health and safety reasons are to continue to do so until the start of August. Alternatives are being reviewed to the health kiosks and the FC continues to advise against all but essential travel with staff to keep a 2-metre distance at all times when working where possible.

England Tree Strategy & England Tree Planting Programme

The Chair introduced this item. Ian Gambles confirmed that the strategy consultation document had gone out in June and was open until the autumn. The consultation would result in a single response from the FC and will engage comment on the planting programme as well.

The programme board is chaired by Director, Natural Environment, Trees & Landscapes at Defra. Currently recruitment is for 12 posts within the FC with director interviews to be held in early August. It was noted that the Secretary of State recognised the significant role of commercial forestry to reach the manifesto target, although as there was less support for the expansion of the forest estate there was not currently a large scale acquisition program planned. Ian highlighted that there had been an increased level of interest in the evidence element of the programme and this was expected to progress over the summer. The EB noted that this was all to be brought together as a business case intended to be cleared in the autumn by the Treasury.

4. Finance Update

Steve Meeks provided an update to the EB on finance. The annual report and accounts had been submitted by FR, however this was delayed for FC and FE owing to the impact of Covid-19 on the ARA's. A new date for the FEFS ARAC had been provisionally set for August in line with the amended Treasury deadline but is dependent on EY/NAO being able to complete the audit by mid-August which was unlikely. If the audit work could not be completed the admission deadline would be missed, the statutory deadline for laying is 31 January 2021.

Currently the FC was awaiting a response from Defra regarding a bid for £20million for FE and FR to cover the impact of Covid-19. Additionally, we are also awaiting confirmation that the 2.5% uncommitted funding will be repatriated by Defra, it was thought this would be approved.

There is currently a shortfall against our bids for Europe & Trade Delivery (ex-EU Exit) funding 2020-21 with a risk to our ELM pilot and plant health actions. Andrew White, EU Exit Lead, is looking to secure the necessary funding.

A spending review is anticipated for the Autumn, which was likely to be a one-year rollover budget rather than a multiyear settlement.

5. FC Strategic Risk Registers

Steve Meeks confirmed the registers had been updated to reflect the current risk position and FC01 references the impact of Covid-19. It was noted that the KIM work on FC14 was delayed whilst the Knowledge and Information Management Lead is on furlough. The risk registers are to be presented to the Board of Commissioners tomorrow before sharing with Defra. Ian commented that the registers had improved, included the appropriate risks and requested any comments on the risks be sent to Steve and FC Head of Governance and the risk owner if it was thought actions were not sufficient to manage the risks described.

6. Tackling Discrimination and Inequality

The Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager joined the meeting and presented the current updates on tackling discrimination and inequality. It was noted that the work was going through the BAME inclusion group and had been launched in April. Covid-19 meant focus groups were delayed but some were being undertaken online and attendance for such groups had increased following the Black Lives Matter movement. The initial feedback highlighted a culture of indifference, white privilege and racial prejudice. A final focus group is to be held after which a report will be completed. Several actions were suggested currently for improvement which would be included in the report which would be presented to the Executive Board.

The Chair thanked the Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager for her presentation, noting that no decisions on actions were to be taken until the report is received and presented but was keen for discussions to be held on practical steps that could be taken to improve.

Action 6: Wellbeing and Inclusion Manager to present the final report on tackling discrimination and inequality when completed to the EB.

7. AOB

Steve Meeks highlighted that the annual opinion report was to be issued which was looking very robust and positive.

Tristram Hilborn informed the members that guidance on local lockdowns was to be published on Roots. Overnight stays are to be allowed in limited numbers as some

visits must still take place but will need careful coordination. Ian requested Jo review the revised guidance before it is uploaded after the changes likely to be brought in from the 4th July announcements. It was confirmed that staff can travel and stay overnight if necessary and appropriate with line manager's approval, any accommodation must be Covid safe.

Jo Ridgway highlighted that she had spoken to a member of FE staff who did not understand the strategic direction of the FC and it would be beneficial to have something to go out in summer and inform/update staff on this. Richard Greenhous confirmed FS were already acting on this for their staff. The Chair agreed to review this suggestion outside of the meeting.

Action 7: Jo Ridgway to review the local lockdown guidance for publication on Roots following the announcements on 4th July.

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