

**OFFICIAL SENSITIVE**

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD  
MINUTES OF EXTRA-ORDINARY COVID-19 RESPONSE MEETING  
Via telephone  
16 April 2020**

**Attendees:**

Ian Gambles (Chair)  
Richard Greenhous  
Meirion Nelson  
James Pendlebury  
Jo Ridgway  
Mike Seddon

Julia Lovell - minute secretary

**Apologies:**

Tristram Hilborn  
Steve Meeks  
Steph Rhodes

**1. Welcome, introductions and minutes**

Ian Gambles (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting and acknowledged receiving apologies from Tristram Hilborn, Steve Meeks and Steph Rhodes.

The minutes of the 7 April COVID-19 EB were agreed as a true and accurate accord of the meeting.

**2. Action points from previous COVID-19 EB meeting 7 April 2020**

The Chair confirmed that there are no updates on Action 1, on plans for redeployment of staff, and so this action should be carried forward.

The Chair updated the EB that a meeting has been set up between Ian Gambles, James Pendlebury and Meirion Nelson so the EB can be updated on Action 2, discussion on the financial impact of COVID-19 on FR, in the future.

Action 3, to set up an EB meeting on COVID-19 after Easter, was confirmed as completed.

Jo Ridgway confirmed that Action 4 is complete. The meeting between Jo Ridgway, Mike Seddon and FC trade unions was held and Jo confirmed that these conversations will continue.

Ian updated that the meeting with the Defra finance Director has been set up for 29 April 2020, and so Action 5 can be carried forward to update the EB on the outcome of that meeting.

James Pendlebury confirmed that he will meet with Mike Seddon at a later date to follow up on Action 6, to discuss financial implications of COVID-19 on Forest Research programmes for Forestry England. James also confirmed that Action 7 has been resolved.

The EB agreed to carry forward actions 1, 2, 5, and 6, these are set out below.

**Action 1:** EB to prepare plans for redeployment of staff if resource is requested by the Cabinet Office for other government departments.

**Action 2:** Ian Gambles, James Pendlebury and Meirion Nelson to discuss Forest Research finance in more detail – with specific focus on supply issues, and whether payment will be received for research that cannot be delivered as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Action 3:** Ian Gambles to update Defra Finance Director on the overall FC financial position following the impact of COVID-19.

**Action 4:** Mike Seddon to meet with James Pendlebury to discuss financial implications of COVID-19 on Forest Research programmes for Forestry England.

### **3. Workforce update**

The Chair introduced this item and asked Jo Ridgway to provide an update.

Jo Ridgway provided a brief workforce update. Jo updated the EB on the conversations and concerns raised by trade unions. Jo confirmed that information has been put up on the FC and FR intranet on domestic abuse. Jo will be sending out communication to leadership teams about what support they find helpful and whether they need other support as part of the leadership training.

Jo also updated that the Cabinet Office is starting recovery planning, and that we are included in these conversations. Jo confirmed that all civil service will be required to let the Cabinet Office know if they plan to re-open any offices. The EB agreed to talk about recovery planning at a future meeting to ensure the FC is fully prepared for the transition back to business as usual in line with government rules and expectations and consistent with the rest of the Defra group.

**Action 5:** Julia Lovell to set up a meeting next week with recovery item on the agenda.

#### **4. Financial impacts**

The Chair asked the EB for an update on financial planning.

Mike Seddon confirmed that Forestry England estimates are being refined with unit leads. The work is focused on changes that help to reduce current expenditure. Mike confirmed a robust financial plan should be firmed up by 20 April 2020.

James Pendlebury confirmed that FR are finalising end of year figures for the annual report and accounts. James confirmed that further planning is challenging and will depend on market situation. Meirion Nelson also raised that FR are considering the financial impact of potential delays to construction at Alice Holt. It was noted that construction at Delamere, also within the SCAPE framework, appeared to be less disrupted.

Richard Greenhous provided an update on the impact on the sector. It was noted that some other Defra sectors such as fisheries were now receiving particular attention and financial support from government. The case for government support to the forestry sector as a result of COVID-19 should also be considered. The main focus is on nurseries and seed supply. Richard also raised the wider issue of capital expenditure, as COVID-19 will mean that FS CDEL will have to be re-profiled. Richard will engage with Defra on the issue of support to the forestry and nursery sectors.

**Action 6:** Mike to check construction at Delamere and pass useful information on to Meirion and James.

**Action 7:** Richard Greenhous to engage with Defra on the sector impacts of COVID-19.

#### **5. Comms**

The Chair asked for an update from the EB on communicating decisions and support around COVID-19.

The EB agreed that the level and frequency of internal communications is about right. Staff welcome messages from leadership and appreciate issues such as well-being and IT support being tackled. Staff generally feel empowered to carry out their roles as needed, and issues raised are resolved through appropriate channels. All agreed to support line managers in carrying out well-being calls to staff. Jo Ridgway noted that the IT team has been instrumental to supporting the business through this

challenging time. Ian agreed that the IT team deserve recognition for doing a brilliant job at this time of crisis to help the organisation to continue working.

**Action 8:** Continue to support line managers in making well-being calls.

## **6. AOB**

The Chair noted that in order to provide the Non-Executive Directors with a more comprehensive update on Thursday, the COVID-19 EB the following week should be prior to this call.

The Chair thanked all for attending the meeting and closed the call.