

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 110th MEETING
via MS Teams
30 September 2021**

Attendees:

Richard Stanford (Chair)
Tristram Hilborn
David Hodson
Richard Greenhous
Meirion Nelson
Steph Rhodes
Jo Ridgway
Mike Seddon

Julia Lovell – minute secretary
Head of FC Communications – for Forestry Communications item
Corporate Governance Manager – for Risk item
Head of Health and Safety and Technical Training – for Health and Safety item
Director Corporate Affairs – for Knowledge and Information Management item
Pay and Reward Manager – for Workforce Management Information item
Knowledge and Information Management Lead – for Knowledge and Information Management item
Senior Relationship Manager (Defra) – for Forestry Commission Status review item

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair opened the meeting.

2. Minutes of the Executive Board 20 July 2021 and matters arising

The minutes for the meeting of the Forestry Commission (FC) Executive Board (EB) of the 20 July 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Actions 1 and 6 were identified as still outstanding and will be resolved by being brought to the EB at a future meeting.

Action 1: Jo Ridgway to provide a recommendation to the EB on the future of the recruitment system by the end of March 2022.

Action 2: HR Business Partners to provide advice to EB as to how to ensure commonality of decision making when issues are escalated to a member of the EB.

All other actions were agreed as discharged.

3. Workforce Management Information

Pay and Reward Manager recommended the EB consider what information they would need, when this information would be needed, and the format to present this information in to inform workforce decisions.

The EB had a wide-ranging discussion on this topic. The following were identified as useful and actionable information:

- Workforce demographics, and whether leavers are of a certain age group
- Whether leavers are from competition with other nations
- Number of vacancies, comparison of Full-Time Equivalent to plan, time to hire
- Engagement, retention and turnover rates by grade
- Absence rates
- Training and development per person
- Staff engagement
- Quantifying and providing lessons learned of bullying, harassment, grievance and whistleblowing cases
- Workforce diversity
- Staff performance
- A helpful measure of tracking productivity
- More qualitative indicators, such as what attracted someone new or what pushed or pulled someone leaving, and also the lived-in experience of the first year of someone – which can be collated from probationary review meetings
- An initial benchmark, or a benchmark from other civil service departments would also be useful for comparison.

The EB agreed that this needs to be presented for each part and across the FC to drive action at EB level. There are areas of good practice already within the FC to mitigate workforce risks, which should be shared and acted on more widely. The EB endorsed this collation of information to identify further action at the next meeting.

Action 3: EB members to identify workforce issues and areas of good practice so HR can track these and EB can make decisions on how to move these forward.

Action 4: Pay and Reward Manager and Jo Ridgway to provide EB members with a report at the next meeting of which areas of the Forestry Commission are not having review meetings to allow EB to have sight of areas that may need further support.

4. Knowledge and Information Management update

Director Corporate Affairs and Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) Lead joined the meeting to update the EB on this programme. Director Corporate Affairs was introduced as the new Senior Responsible Officer for this programme.

KIM Lead updated the EB on the work delivered so far in this programme, both the technical and cultural shift in FC. The foundations have been laid, the next stage is more proactive engagement with staff for the programme to enter delivery phase.

The EB was asked to accept the highlight report showing progress, support the initiatives of the programme, and to recognise the shift towards delivery when engaging with staff. The EB endorsed the report and offered KIM Lead support, both in terms of engagement with specific teams and to celebrate achievement of the changes. The EB asked for the next update to be more clearly aligned with the project plan milestones.

The EB endorsed to explore how information can be shared more seamlessly across parts of the FC. James Pendlebury noted that this will need further engagement by FC IT teams as Forest Research is on a different tenancy.

Action 5: Next EB update on the KIM programme to be more clearly aligned with the original project plan milestones.

Action 6: James Pendlebury to explore how Forest Research can accommodate Plant Health team, and potentially others in Forest Services, to connect, access and share information seamlessly.

5. Forestry Commission Status Review

Senior Relationship Manager from Defra Arm's Length Body (ALB) Relationship Management team joined them meeting to present this item.

HM Treasury required a status review of the FC as a condition of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2021 Framework Agreement. This review is to resolve some of HMT's concerns about accountability and the need for FC independence as an ALB. Senior Relationship Manager is undertaking this review and aims to complete it in November. The review will provide recommendations and not actions.

The EB noted that recommendations will need to take account of the impacts on the Memorandum of Understanding between the devolved nations for Forest Research and Plant Health. James Pendlebury offered to put Defra in touch with devolved administration contacts to understand any impacts for the review.

6. Forestry Commission Communications

Head of FC Communications joined the meeting. He updated the EB on what the communications team is doing to support FC work with an aim of making the FC brand more recognisable. The Chair noted that it is important to establish the FC brand to attract talent and engage and educate the public in what the FC does and why it is important.

The EB recognised that while it is important to have a voice for the FC and to build a recognisable brand, it should complement and amplify the communications of all parts as well as the whole. The EB asked Adam to think about three key messages to celebrate and promote the Forestry Commission.

James Pendlebury asked for a meeting on how to best incorporate Forest Research in communications on strategic issues, including evidence for right tree, right place, right reason.

Action 7: Head of FC Communications to put together a proposal to the EB at its next meeting for a Forestry Commission brand, to raise the profile of forestry and the Forestry Commission, including its constituent parts.

Action 8: Head of FC Communications to engage with James Pendlebury and others on how best to engage Forest Research in communications on strategic issues.

7. Comprehensive Spending Review

The EB were updated on progress of the multi-year Comprehensive Spending Review. Defra submitted the Spending Review bid on 13 September. At the time of the meeting, Defra had not yet shared what has been put forward in that bid. David Hodson wished to record his thanks to all those who have been involved in progressing this work across the FC.

8. Risk

Corporate Governance Manager presented a new way of recording strategic risks with the aim of being easier to digest by FC respective boards and the audit committee. The EB endorsed this proposal.

The recommendation was to change the way risks are defined and so recorded. This will result in risks to be escalated to a third party as appropriate where the accountability, responsibility and authority to mitigate are outside of FC scope. This proposal reinforces that resource within FC should not be allocated to risks and issues that it does not have the authority to manage or treat. Transferred risks would still need to be reported on by the owner, they would not be erased from FC register.

The definition of a risk is something that may happen that will have a negative impact, whereas an issue is a realised risk that is being treated.

Action 9: Corporate Governance Manager to provide the risk register template to members of EB to continue the conversation on how to simplify risk recording to make it more manageable and reportable.

9. Senior Managers' Meeting

The Chair introduced this item. The Forestry Commission has been through many changes since the last Senior Managers' Meeting. This meeting will be an opportunity to clarify the FC's direction as a whole and invigorate senior leaders to better support staff. The EB endorsed this focus for the Senior Managers' Meeting.

10. Health & Safety update

Head of Health and Safety and Technical Training provided an update on health and safety to the EB. The EB noted that it is important to understand trends and share good practice across the organisations; this will be a standing item going forward.

11. AOB

The EB discussed what guidance to provide staff for Christmas meals with colleagues. It was noted that staff are keen to reconnect following Covid-19 restrictions. The EB endorsed providing short guidance to ensure consistency of message across FC, and to ensure that the additional half a day allowance is not misused.

Meirion Nelson noted that he is leaving his post at the end of October and there needs to be an interim security Senior Responsibility Owner. Having met with Defra Meirion also updated that there will be mandatory requests for information training, and there will be communications on cyber security risks to reduce the threat to government.

Action 10: Mike and Tris to draft proposed guidance for EB's endorsement about staff Christmas meal arrangements this year.

Action 11: EB to decide via correspondence who will take over as interim Senior Responsibility Owner for security.

There was no other business and the meeting closed.