

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 112th MEETING
via MS Teams and in Bristol Conference Room
18 November 2021**

Attendees:

Richard Stanford (Chair)
Nick Clinton
Tristram Hilborn
Richard Greenhous
Steph Rhodes
Jo Ridgway
Mike Seddon

Julia Lovell – minute secretary
HR Business Partner – for Identifying and Setting Standards, Your Offer, and Performance Review Template items
FC Head of Comms – for Forestry Communications item
Chief of Staff – for Forestry Communications item
Head of Health, Safety and Technical Training – for Health and Safety item
Forestry England Head of HR – for Equal Pay Gap item
FC Financial Accountant – for Annual Report and Accounts item
Defra Deputy Director for Local Communications in Defra Group – for Forestry Communications item
HR Project Manager – for Identifying and Setting Standards, Your Offer, and Performance Review Template items

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair opened the meeting. Apologies had been received from David Hodson. The Chair welcomed Nick Clinton, interim Forest Research Finance Director, to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the Executive Board 30 September 2021 and matters arising

The minutes for the meeting of the Forestry Commission (FC) Executive Board (EB) of the 30 September 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Actions 6 was delayed due to Covid and was still outstanding.

Action 1: 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.

All other actions were agreed as discharged.

3. Update on mandatory training

Head of Health, Safety and Technical Training provided an update on health and safety figures for the Forestry Commission, including relevant lessons learned from incidents.

Mandatory training statistics were still of questionable accuracy because mandatory training spans different systems, one of which relies on user feedback to confirm whether training has been completed. There is work to make these accurate and reliable, subject to resource constraints.

The health and safety culture change programme is underway, having been through interviews with both senior staff and employees across the organisation. The next stage is developing an action and communications plan to engage with staff and develop the corporate vision. There will be workshops for all teams in spring 2022 to consult with teams and develop realistic deliverables.

Action 2: Head of Health, Safety and Technical Training to report back to the FC Executive Board on the culture change programme in May 2022.

4. Identifying and setting standards

HR Business Partner and HR Project Manager joined the meeting to facilitate a discussion within EB on how to identify and set consistent standards for staff conduct, behaviour, performance and attendance.

With the introduction of the new Discipline, Supporting Attendance and Managing Poor Performance policy, the EB agreed that it is a good time to ensure standards are set consistently across the FC. Examples of poor conduct, behaviour, performance and attendance (identified by the HR team) were presented to the EB. The EB also identified H&S as an area where they were concerned about standards. It was agreed that now is a good time to 'draw a line in the sand' and set good standards. Where appropriate, poor conduct, performance and attendance should be dealt with formally using the new workforce policies.

4.a Your Offer update

HR Project Manager thanked members for providing information on workforce efficiencies to include in the business case to Defra on Your Offer (formerly Offer 2020). Conversations are ongoing with Defra and the Cabinet Office on how to progress this project. HR Project Manager will remind EB members of what has been agreed so far via correspondence.

Action 3: Offer 2020 Project Manager to circulate a summary of where the FC package differs to the rest of the Civil Service and confirm the changes to T&Cs previously agreed by the EB.

5. Performance Review Template

HR Business Partner has previously received feedback staff are not carrying out performance reviews because the Performance Review Template is not of high enough standard. The recommendation is to update the template in-year for year ending 2022 reviews to take place, subject to consultation with the Forestry Commission Trade Unions.

The EB endorsed changing the template, and has requested to provide some further refining via correspondence before it goes to consultation to the trade unions. The EB noted that the Template is a guide for discussion and not a form to fill in.

Action 4: FR HR to provide feedback on the proposed Performance Review Template.

Action 5: FC EB members to provide comments via correspondence to HR Business Partner on the proposed Performance Review Template, including whether to ask for 360 feedback.

6. Equal Pay Gap

Forestry England Head of HR provided an update on the recent Forestry Commission Equal Pay Audit. The EB endorsed the proposed actions in the report.

7. Commissioners skills, duties and recruitment

Jo Ridgway introduced this topic, as the FC commissioners offer a wealth of skill and expertise which can help to further the FC voice. The EB agreed for the three accounting officers to meet with the Chair on how commissioners can help move forward the FC agenda.

Action 6: The FC accounting officers to discuss how the commissioners can amplify the voice of the Forestry Commission.

8. Communications and core script

Defra Deputy Director for Local Communications in Defra Group, Paul Leet, joined the meeting for this item. Paul noted that this work will be a collaborative effort with clear priorities.

FC Head of Communications presented a way forward for the Forestry Commission to speak in a unique voice to address business objectives. The EB noted that the

current draft will need more input from Forestry England and Forest Research communications and marketing teams.

Action 7: FC Head of Communications to engage with Forestry England and Forest Research communications and marketing teams to develop the FC Communications and Engagement strategy for submission to Commissioners' Board meeting on 9 December.

9. FC Status Review

The Chair provided an update on the FC Status Review. There are other reviews currently underway that may affect the path of the FC Status Review.

10. Comprehensive Spending Review update

The Chair provided an update on the Comprehensive Spending Review. At the time of meeting the expectation was that the Forestry Commission would receive allocations by end of November.

11. Annual Report and Accounts construction

FC Financial Accountant provided an overview of the Annual Report and Accounts timetable for 2021-22.

The timescale for the Forestry England and Forestry Commission accounts is aligned, as it is normally. Forest Research normally submit their accounts earlier. This year the accounts will go to audit in May, following this they will be circulated to the Board, and then the ARAC for review. This year the accounts will be laid two weeks later to provide more room for review and comment on the accounts than in previous years. This year the laying and publication is planned for 5 July 2021.

12. Functional standards

The Chair updated on FC Compliance with functional standards. The Forestry Commission is largely compliant with the Government set Functional Standards. Where this is not the case, there are actions in place that this happens and we will report against this in the Annual Report and Accounts.

13. AOB

13.a FC Travel Policy – Changing Government targets for transition to Zero Emission Vehicles

Tristram Hilborn set changes to Government targets for all fleet to be zero emissions at the tailpipe by 2027 and proposed that a project team be established to develop proposals for a revised travel policy. This would be presented for EB to consider in March 2022. The EB endorsed this proposal.

13.b Executive Board admin

EB members noted that they need to be fully prepared to make decisions at the meeting. For this reason all papers and presentations will need to be circulated one week before the meeting.

There was no other business and the meeting closed.