

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 115th MEETING
via MS Teams and in Bristol Conference Room
19 May 2022**

Attendees:

Richard Stanford (Chair)
Anna Brown
Nick Clinton
Jac Davies
Tristram Hilborn
James Pendlebury
Steph Rhodes
Jo Ridgway
Mike Seddon
Chief of Staff (observer)

Julia Lovell – minute secretary

Deputy Head of FC Comms – to present FC Communications strategy item

Volunteer manager – to present the FC Annual safeguarding report

Governance Manager – to present Strategic Risk update item

Head of Health and safety, and training – to present Health and Safety update

Leadership and development manager – to present item on Staff Development

Project Manager – to invite discussion on the Big Conversation and update on your Offer items

Director of Operations – Commercial visitor development – to present item on Revised FC Travel Policy

Interim Head of Mechanical Engineering - to present item on Revised FC Travel Policy

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair opened the meeting. No apologies had been received. The Chair provided a brief update:

- Broadly positive meetings have taken place with ministers on reaching tree planting targets, but there will be more work
- Update on Forest Services and Forestry England Board meetings
- Reminder of Commissioners' meeting in June
- Annual Report and Accounts to be signed off, with thanks noted to the finance team for their work on this
- Development of managing the risk process in Defra.

2. Minutes of the Executive Board 23 March 2022 and matters arising

The minutes for the meeting of the Forestry Commission (FC) Executive Board (EB) of 23 March 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The EB agreed to make decision on travel rates outside of committee, with review of removal of rates for alcohol by January 2023 at the latest. All other actions points were discharged.

Action 1: Jo Ridgway and Jac Davies to provide a review of alcohol and entertainment rates to the EB in November 2022, to ensure consistency with other departments.

3. Health and Safety update

Head of health and safety, and training provided an update on Health and Safety statistics for the FC. Forest Research had a RIDDOR injury. Small accidents can result in serious injury so there is work to share learning from such incidents. The FC is getting better at reporting these so the focus is on learning and prevention.

Analysis of this information from the past year reveals that Forestry England has the highest number of injuries and the incidence is influenced by season. In the summer there is a higher interaction with members of the public, whereas in winter ice has an impact on injury rate. The rest of the business has no discernible pattern, though further analysis of injury rate per employee may provide further detail.

Action 2: Head of health and safety and training to provide injury rate per 100 employees.

4. Forestry Commission Communications Strategy

Deputy head of FC Comms presented slides that could be used as a one-stop pick and mix of messaging for anyone engaging with a targeted audience. The EB thanked her for providing a start on this and agreed to provide updates and revisions to these slides.

Action 3: Deputy head of FC communications to circulate slides for the EB to provide revisions to the FC narrative.

Action 4: Deputy head of FC communications to lead on work to provide a cross-Forestry Commission unifying message.

5. FC Annual Safeguarding report

The Forestry Commission has launched its Safeguarding Policy, Procedure and Guidance one year ago, this meeting was used to provide a report on first year. This first year has provided opportunity to take learning on board, with case studies in the report. One has been to procure a provider for enhanced DBS checks as government recruitment service cannot currently provide for this, nor training for volunteers. The EB supported opening a conversation with Civil Service Learning to ensure their provision meets our needs – including tracking of training completion.

The focus for next year will be to ensure enhanced checks are completed, and further rolling out of training including safeguarding in the digital environment.

Action 5: EB to support conversation with Civil Service Learning to ensure Forestry Commission training needs can be met, tracked and reported on.

6. The Big Conversation

The Big Conversation staff survey results have been shared with staff on the intranet following a news story. Any teams where more than 10 people responded to the survey have also received a report. FS, FR and FE have held Action planning meetings, which is impressive given the results were only released a month ago. Each department now has a list of key actions. Smaller teams will hold action planning meetings over the coming months.

There was a wide ranging discussion on what is actionable within the Forestry Commission on issues reported within the staff survey. The EB agreed that Your Offer should be an action held at the EB level. All other actions should be at departmental level.

Jo Ridgway suggested a news story should be written explaining the EB level actions from the Big Conversation.

Action 6: Jo Ridgway to write a news story to explain the EB actions as part of the Big Conversation.

7. Your Offer

Your Offer Project Manager re-explained the key Your Offer points already agreed by the EB [redacted]. The project's aim is to introduce a fair, consistent and transparent pay structure. The project manager reminded the EB of a number of items they need to be aware of with Your Offer, including: [redacted].

8. Organisational Development

Jo Ridgway introduced the new Organisational Development team to provide clarity to the business between the HR function and development of the organisation function.

9. Spending Review 2021 and forecasting process

Jac Davies confirmed that there is still funding outstanding which impacts Forest Research's contractually signed and agreed capital estates programme, plus small amounts of funding outstanding for Forest Services as well. However otherwise reasonably positive for the current year position, next two years will be more challenging. Letters of delegation have either been issued or are in preparation.

We have provided feedback to GIAA on Defra's business planning role, which was an opportunity to feedback on improving some of the processes.

Annual report and accounts are going through the process, with audit soon to be complete. Forest Research a few weeks ahead of Forestry England and Forestry Commission, as is normal process. Post meeting amendment – Forest Research accounts will now be laid at the same time as Forestry Commission's due to delays in the audit.

10. Security risk management forum and audit programme

The FC Security risk management forum (SRMF) was established in 2019 with a view to cover physical, security, cyber and personnel risks. The forum met in May 2022 for the first time since October 2021. This period of inactivity has presented an opportunity for refreshing the membership and terms of reference. The forum will set up an IT sub-committee to address cyber risks and issues. The departmental security and risk health check has framed much of the work being taken forward. The forum will meet every two months.

11. Revised FC Travel policy

All government departments have to make changes to the way they operate to meet the government's commitment to net zero, part of this is to have zero emissions by end of 2027. This is a challenging as meeting the target given the constraints, part of that is reviewing our hire car contract.

Given the challenge of the vehicle markets struggling to meet demand, the EB was broadly supportive of the proposal on an aspirations basis. Recommendations 1 and 3 were endorsed. The EB asked for FC to be benchmarked with other organisations to make a decision on recommendation 2 in the context of staff changes in Forest Services and Forest Research, aspiration to recommendation 4 through signalling in the policy, and for the team to come back with a more fleshed out proposal on recommendation 5.

Action 7: Head of MES and Director of Operations to look CAPES contracts in other departments, to benchmark recommendation 2 to make sure we are in line with the rest of government, and report back to EB in August.

Action 8: James Pendlebury to discuss with Forest Research operations before providing a formal response on overall proposal.

Action 9: Head of MES and Anna Brown to talk about Forest Services vehicle needs outside of committee.

Action 10: Head of MES and Director of Operations to bring a plan of charging infrastructure rollout at Forestry Commission offices and depots for EB endorsement.

12. Defra reform

There is a lot of work in Defra on how changes implemented in this parliament will affect legislative and administrative powers for forestry. There is at the moment good ministerial support for forestry and the Forestry Commission. There are many opportunity and significant threats so it is a time to keep pressure with our messaging.

13. FC working more collaboratively together

The recent senior managers meeting highlighted that there are many aspects where the FC can work better as a group. The EB agreed a more systematic approach to knowledge exchange would be beneficial. The senior managers meeting write up will make a start for examples of where FC have worked well together in the past, with

ideas of priority collaborative working for the future, such as biodiversity, with a forward look for years 2 and 3.

Action 11: Chief of Staff to provide write up for the senior managers meeting as a start for EB to put together a plan for knowledge exchange.

14. Staff development

The FC now offers a behavioural and leadership programme to all its middle managers. However it does not currently have a systematic approach to developing staff at all levels. The EB asked leadership and development manager to review current practice, staff and organisational needs to ensure FC has the right people and skills to help with recruitment, retention and recognition.

Action 12: Leadership and development manager to bring recommendations to the August on how to identify, select and provide coherent support to staff for development at all levels.

15. AOB

- Back to work statistics

Reporting back to work statistics takes a lot of time and resource without clarity on benefit or rationale for these numbers. The EB agreed that we should stop this reporting.

- Email etiquette

Many staff at the FC work together across England. Email is a key communication tool across the organisation. The EB requested that staff are reminded about email etiquette with a post on the intranet.

Action 13: Jo Ridgway to put up a post on the intranet about email etiquette.

- Comms around civil service announcement

The announcement on civil service cuts has worried many staff, and many have been grateful for this to be put in context via the post on the intranet. The FC, like most of the civil service, will not know anymore until later in the year when instructions are clarified.