

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD
MINUTES OF THE 117th MEETING
via MS Teams and in Bristol Conference Room
12 September 2022**

Attendees:

Richard Stanford (Chair)
Anna Brown
Amanda Grist
Derrick Osgood
James Pendlebury
Steph Rhodes
Jo Ridgway
Mike Seddon
Chief of staff (observer)

Julia Lovell – minute secretary

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

1. Welcome, updates and introductions

The Chair opened the meeting. Apologies have been received from Deputy head of FC communications.

The Chair confirmed that Trudy Harrison MP has been appointed as a new Defra minister. Other appointments will take place after the official mourning period is complete.

2. Minutes of the Executive Board 2 August 2022 and matters arising

The minutes for the meeting of the Forestry Commission (FC) Executive Board (EB) of 2 August 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The actions points were updated as follows:

Action 1: Jo Ridgway and Derrick Osgood to review civil service corporate entertainment rates and recommend a change in policy to the EB in November 2022 via correspondence to start in 2023.

Action 2: EB to support conversation with Civil Service Learning to ensure Forestry Commission training needs can be met, tracked and reported on, which the Leadership and development manager is pursuing.

Action 3: EB to review the table that summarises a suite of programmes where the Forestry Commission works together at November meeting. Senior leaders to discuss how to bring this to life at the dinner ahead of the senior managers meeting in October.

All other actions were discharged.

3. Health and Safety update

Head of health and safety and training provided an update on Health and Safety statistics for the FC for July and August. One RIDDOR incident has been reported – an operator walking across hard terrain, tripped and slipped. Considered a RIDDOR because the individual could not operate for over 7 days. The team is working with business units to ensure investigations are detailed for us to learn lessons. No injury incidents were reported for volunteers in June. In August most were slip and trip falls due to poor light levels, findings and lessons learned will be shared. A contractor had a tree winching incident on a hill, we will share the findings and good practice with the rest of the industry where appropriate.

Action 4: The EB requested that the slides for this update are shared ahead of the meeting in the future.

4. FC Communications strategy

Catherine Burbage did not attend this session so there was update on this item. The Chair noted that the FC as a whole is now in a better position to engage

5. Sponsorship code

In 2021 the public accounts committee recommended that all arms length bodies' (ALBs) should be managed in a standardised way by the sponsoring department. A tool has since been developed by the Cabinet Office to help ALBs work with their sponsoring departments to provide assurance to ministers. The FC need to report to Defra who report back to the Cabinet Office on our behalf.

The tool identifies six areas of a relationship, graded on a scale of three for maturity level of activity. We have worked with Defra to grade our relationship management as 'emerging' overall. This return will be signed off by Defra before submitting to the Cabinet Office. As a result of this exercise, there will be actions for both Defra and FC to take forward to reach a more mature level of relationship management.

The EB endorsed the progress made so far and will support actions to ensure better synergy between Defra and FC in the future.

6. Continuing professional development in FC

The FC EB has requested that the Organisational Development team examine how the Forestry Commission identifies and assists its leaders to advance in their career and to propose a way forward to ensure that this is consistent, fair and supports staff appropriately. Currently there is a lot of good practice out there and staff are well supported in their progression. However this is not consistent across the organisation and there is no collection of information to identify and so help meet training gaps.

The EB endorsed this programme and requested that further thought is given on how to empower areas to identify and select staff against centralisation to ensure consistency, fairness, and value for money. A good set of criteria for eligibility will be key to manage expectations, as well as monitoring and tracking to ensure value for money. The EB also wanted a clawback clause to ensure return on investment for the business.

The EB endorsed recommendations 2.1.1, favoured the Forest research in recommendation 2.1.2, asked for some further work on the numbers in recommendation 2.1.3, asked for more work on the terms and conditions, including a clawback clause in recommendation 2.1.4. The EB did not endorse recommendation 2.1.5 in favour of a balance bottom up and top down approach, with more work on recommendation 2.1.6 to identify the resource required to deliver this including for time off for study.

Action 5: Leadership and development manager to provide further information on recommendations 2.1.3, 2.1.4 and 2.1.6 ahead of full endorsement of the strategy via correspondence.

7. Festive leave

Jo Ridgway introduced this item. The Forestry Commission has previously had some ad hoc arrangements on festive leave. Since Covid-19, the EB agreed to formalise these arrangements for consistency across the organisation. The EB endorsed option B of an extra half a day of leave for religious festivals – flexed to another appropriate day in the year if it is not over the Christmas break.

8. International representation

The Forestry Commissioners raised that the Forestry Commission does not do enough to be represented internationally. James Pendlebury provided a summary on what Forest Research is doing for international representation. After devolution, there were various funding streams to be found and channelled for this activity. It is a line in the budget for Defra in Spending Review 2021 but will be administered by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Action 6: James Pendlebury to update the paper as an information note with additions from Anna Brown and Mike Seddon on IPCC and APHA and connections in Europe, respectively.

Action 7: Richard Stanford to circulate the updated paper to commissioners as an information note on international representation activity.

Action 8: Richard Stanford to circulate the information note on to Defra colleagues.

9. Helping staff with the cost of living crisis

This item was previously discussed at an Executive Board keeping in touch meeting and so was agreed to be put forward to the EB formally to agree what the FC can and cannot do to help staff with the cost of living crisis. Forest Research have drafted some informal ideas for this item.

The EB were disappointed that there were few genuine options within its remit to help staff. Most options presented either had serious implications or were not feasible to deliver, or both. The EB endorsed that services and support already available can be better signposted, including external services such as Citizens' Advice Bureau, as well as internal resources for finance and wellbeing. The EB also endorsed the option of looking at how to provide advances expenses for those who frequently travel to help with personal cashflow.

Action 9: OD to look at how to better signpost resources already available to help financial and personal wellbeing.

Action 10: HR to look into how staff who travel frequently could have a monthly expense advance to help with personal cashflow.

Action 11: for all to be aware that while support exists, managers are there to facilitate wellbeing discussions and signpost to support available, not to provide financial advice.

10. Purpose of Forestry Commission Executive Board

Historically the Forestry Commission Executive Board focused on strategic issues around finance and human resources, that applied across the commission. The Chair asked the EB on what it can do for the Forestry Commission to be better together, to leverage the collective knowledge, experience and expertise.

The EB agreed that it would be helpful to have an away day to discuss more strategic issues, scanning a 3 year horizon on big things for the forestry industry and how to articulate these. It would also be useful to have a discussion on how to hold the business to account, and measure performance against the various funding streams, such as the Nature for Climate Fund.

Action 12: Julia Lovell to organise an away day for the FC EB to facilitate a discussion around forward look for the forestry industry over the next several years and what FC's lead role is in these. This will need to take place a month before the commissioners' board.

11. Your Offer

The FC EB discussed the proposed options for Your Offer before submitting a business case to Defra. The main concern of discussion was around the issue of leapfrogging and whether the proposed staggered approach went to address this significantly.

[redacted]

Action 13: [redacted]

Action 14: [redacted]

Action 15: Steph Rhodes and Anna Brown to share the resourcing plan for 2024-25 with Derrick Osgood to firm up the understanding of future affordability of options.

12. AOB

- Conservation covenants

Steph Rhodes noted that the FC EB needs to make a decision on whether the FC should be a responsible body for conservation covenants. Steph will circulate the paper to the FC EB for endorsement once the questions around resourcing, legal implications and timing have been resolved.

- EB Terms of Reference

The EB agreed to the updated Terms of Reference subject to an update on roles and individuals, and an update on quorum of a minimum of 2 of the 4 organisations being represented.