

**OFFICIAL SENSITIVE**

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD  
MINUTES OF THE 118<sup>th</sup> MEETING  
via MS Teams and in Bristol Rooms G4 and G5  
28 November 2022**

**Attendees:**

Richard Stanford (Chair)  
Anna Brown  
Amanda Grist  
Derrick Osgood  
James Pendlebury  
Jo Ridgway  
Mike Seddon  
Becky Rhodes (observer)

Julia Lovell – minute secretary  
Head of Group Environment Communications – FC Communications Strategy  
Health and Safety Manager – Health and Safety and Mandatory Training updates  
Head of Mechanical Engineering – Vehicle travel policy  
Wellbeing and Inclusion Advisor – Wellbeing dashboard  
KIM Lead – Knowledge and Information Management update  
Director of Operations – Vehicle travel policy

**1. Welcome, updates and introductions**

The Chair opened the meeting. Apologies have been received from Steph Rhodes, Paula Rice, and Deputy Head of FC communications.

The Chair provided an update on Defra's initial analysis of the Treasury's autumn statement. The trade shocks have resulted in Britain spending on energy nearly quadrupling in the last several years. Treasury plan to fund this half through greater taxation, half through cuts in spending but departmental budgets have yet to be confirmed.

Defra Secretary of State is focused on outcomes and progress through key performance indicators. She wants to understand assumptions behind the data to make sure these are relevant and attainable. Her current three priorities are to deliver environmental targets, meeting statutory deadlines of the environment improvement plan, and carbon budgets and net zero. Submissions for a decision need to have 10 days for consideration built in.

**2. Minutes of the Executive Board 12 September 2022 and matters arising**

Numbering of action points was asked to be corrected, otherwise the minutes for the meeting of the Forestry Commission (FC) Executive Board (EB) of 12 September 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The actions points were updated as follows:

**Action 1:** Leadership and Development Manager is on target to provide the approach to leadership development to the EB for endorsement by beginning of January 2023.

OD Director is recruiting Head of Organisational Change to implement a talent management strategy.

Actions on international representation were still outstanding.

**Action 2:** 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 3:** Richard Stanford to circulate the updated paper to commissioners as an information note on international representation activity.

**Action 4:** Richard Stanford to circulate the information note on Defra colleagues, including David Hill, Edward Barker, Nicola Spence, Simon James and Ceri Morgan at Defra.

The action of business planning in Forest Services is still ongoing but was discharged.

All other actions were discharged.

### **3. Wellbeing Dashboard**

The purpose of this item is to provide an update on wellbeing of staff at the Forestry Commission level and to inform action for improvement where appropriate.

Derrick Osgood requested that in the future the dashboard provides total figures, as well as proportions, and to benchmark to put the figures into context.

The EB agreed that the rate of volunteering is unlikely to be a good indicator of wellbeing. The committee were concerned and asked whether the Employee Assistance Programme can be better signposted so that staff access the programme before they reach crisis point.

The EB welcomed the introduction of the Wellbeing dashboard.

### **4. GIAA Action Tracker**

Derrick Osgood provided an update on this item following a review meeting with GIAA. Their current focus is on how governance is managed given an increased number of new staff, making sure accountabilities are established and colleagues are aware of their responsibilities. There was also concern around lack of institutional memory due to over-reliance on individual members of staff as well as an over reliance on off-line spreadsheets. The advice was to put in place better process and systems for better resilience.

The GIAA Action tracker has been updated with 13 actions cleared in the last quarter, and new 20 actions added. A further 3 will be cleared by December through review of governance. 13 old actions remain.

## **5. Tax and FC Risk Register**

The Head of Internal governance used Cabinet Office guidance to draft the Forestry Commission's risk appetite statement. This will need to feed into our relationship with Defra and their risk appetite statement when it is ready. The aim is to keep it high level to cover strategic issues, with more tailored risk appetite statements for each of the Forestry Commission bodies. The aim is to finalise this for submission to the ARAC in February and to the Commissioners' board for endorsement afterwards. The Committee endorsed this. Jo Ridgway asked to make sure that staff are engaged and understand their responsibilities in managing risk.

Derrick also confirmed that until recently there was a separate tax risk register. The three business unit Finance Directors meet regularly, this can be covered between them rather than providing an update to the EB by committee. The EB endorsed this proposal.

## **6. Knowledge and Information Management Programme Steer**

The programme was commissioned by the EB to improve FC's knowledge and information management, with particular focus on infrastructure and governance. The recommendation was to have a programme of culture change rather than top-down delivery to maximise benefits and minimise the risk of transferring poor practice to new systems. Two years on the delivery team have set the foundations and are starting to deliver the programme. The ask from the team is continued support from senior leaders for staff to continue to engage.

The EB requested to have a better understanding of the success criteria for this programme. Currently outcomes are set to be measured using surveys (perception). The EB would like to understand the value of improving the quality in the way knowledge and information is managed to the business.

## **7. FC Communications Strategy**

Defra's Head of Group, Environment Communications, joined the meeting to present the paper on FC communications strategy and the supporting role commissioners can play as advocates for the FC. The paper will go to the Board of Commissioners' meeting on 8 December 2022 for endorsement.

The EB requested some further thought on an engagement plan to enhance cohesiveness of the strategy to align issues with audiences, and commissioners' networks and strengths. A 'message house workshop' session run for the commissioners was suggested as a good way to do this, with a suite of top 3-5 messages that could be pitched at every event.

## **8. Business Continuity Planning**

The Forestry Commission is well placed to manage industrial action, largely due to the Covid-19 mitigation strategy. Trade unions confirmed they will advocate industrial action where it is likely to have maximum impact.

Jo Ridgway provided an update on strike action. DWP are looking for two sites to strike over the Christmas period. HMRC are balloting over Christmas. Defra are part

of the first wave, with a focus on the English borders in order to create the most disruption. Unison and Prospect will soon confirm action, though are aiming to proceed with strike action in the Environment Agency 12-22 December (this will exclude life and limb emergency services). At the time of reporting, notification of strike action had not yet been received. There needs to be a notice period of at least two weeks to employers before strike action is to take place.

Blackouts are low likelihood but would have a high impact. The EB have requested scenarios and protocols to follow to be worked up as blackouts can differ in severity (planned or unplanned), coverage (localised, regional or national), and length which affects other services such as mobile telephone reception. The aim is to ensure that people are safe onsite and offsite, and buildings are secure. Forestry England have commissioned a task and finish group to work on this scenario planning, scheduled to feedback before Christmas.

James Pendlebury noted that the government already has a document on where blackouts could potentially be and will circulate it to help scenario planning. The EB asked for confirmation of where FC servers are based to understand risk from blackouts and other emergencies to information.

Derrick confirmed that a BCP group has been re-established to ensure there is consistency of approach.

**Action 5:** BCP group to confirm where the servers are and whether there is scope for rerouting during localised blackouts to mitigate against loss of data.

## **9. Update to vehicle policy, CAPES contracts**

The purpose of this item is to provide recommendations to the EB on implementation of policy to reduce carbon emissions from fleet and to highlight how supply issues are being mitigated.

The EB endorsed recommendations provided, set against the challenge of helping staff meet the cost of living crisis. The committee acknowledged that the grey fleet policy should not be implemented at an unaffordable cost to staff and to explore other ways of reducing the cost of travel for staff, including for example identifying office hubs that could benefit from a pool of cars. The EB also requested to explore whether CAPES could be through a salary sacrifice scheme. Treasury rules currently do not allow civil servants to do this but this is acceptable practice in the private and public sector.

The EB agreed that staff can claim mileage for business travel if their cars are outside the travel policy in exceptional circumstances. There needs to be a record of hiring a car that failed to appear. The travel policy needs to reflect this decision.

**Action 6:** Mechanical Engineering Services team (MES) to look into whether Treasury rules can be relaxed to use a salary sacrifice scheme through CAPES.

**Action 7:** MES to explore whether ULEV can be the default choice when requesting a hire car and how this interacts with iTrent.

**Action 8:** MES to define the process of using a personal car when a hire car fails to be delivered and to update the travel policy to provide clarity to staff in such cases.

### **10. Health & Safety update**

Focus for the health and safety team is understanding the lessons learned and making sure that actions are implemented following these incidents.

### **11. Mandatory Training update**

There are 12 elements of mandatory training for all staff, of which 10 are provided by the FC and 2 are provided by Civil Service Learning – on data protection and on fraud and security.

There are still barriers to staff completing all the mandatory training every year. Part of the reason is that it is left to individuals to record what training they have completed, and that there is no annual reminder for refresh. The EB endorsed the recommendation that mandatory training should be built into personal objectives and enforced by business unit heads through line management responsibility.

The EB agreed to review the list of training that is mandatory in 2023.

### **12. AOB**

- Your Offer

Derrick Osgood circulated an update on the costing due to salary uplift and increase in the number of staff. The committee will agree via correspondence.

- Staff engagement Survey

Jo Ridgway requested to have success stories from action plans as a result of the staff engagement survey to be drafted for posting on the intranet. Deadline for drafts is 19 December.

- MIND Wellbeing Survey timing

James Pendlebury noted that the MIND wellbeing survey in June is not timed well due to pressures on staff at that time.

- Contractual base of newly recruited staff

James Pendlebury requested a conversation on this topic as some new starters have raised issues with confirming their preferred contractual place of work.