

**FORESTRY COMMISSION EXECUTIVE BOARD  
MINUTES OF THE 127<sup>TH</sup> MEETING  
via MS Teams and in Bristol Conference Room  
17 September 2024**

**Attendees:**

Richard Stanford (Chair)  
Anna Brown  
Amanda Grist  
Tristram Hilborn  
James Pendlebury  
Steph Rhodes  
Paula Rice  
Jay Skinner  
Interim Chief of Staff (Observer)

Governance Manager – GIAA Action Tracker and Strategic risk items  
Head of Health & Safety and Technical Training – Health and Safety items  
Head of Performance – Corporate plan  
Head of Finance – Finance update  
Julia Lovell – minute secretary

**1. Welcome, updates and introductions**

The Chair opened the meeting. Derrick Osgood, Jo Ridgway and Mike Seddon sent their apologies. Head of Organisational Development stood in for Jo.

The Chair thanked everyone for their work on the spending review. Defra have been appraised of the Forestry Commission's contribution.

SofS has agreed that Forestry England can explore the ability to generate and sell renewables green energy on the estate. Head of Estates is leading a piece of work to draft the necessary legislation to be included into an MHCLG piece of legislation.

The Chair has also met with the Minister for Nature. Although her title is nature Min Creagh emphasised that forestry is her second highest priority after the circular economy. She is also very interested in maximising impact of social forestry. This means we will need to look at how to impact deprived areas using our woodlands. Aware of plant health issues, very keen on land purchases for Forestry England, and the need for publishing the deer strategy.

**2. Minutes of the Executive Board 10 June 2024 and matters arising**

The minutes for the meeting of the Forestry Commission (FC) Executive Board (EB) of 10 June 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The following actions updated.

Head of Organisational Development provided an update on Action 4 from 23 April meeting:

Review Year 4 FC People Strategy Deliverables following the discussion on Corporate Plan.

The focus has been refined using year 4 plans. There will be a systematic review of the People Strategy at its end in March 2025 to focus energy on what can be delivered in full. EB will see a proposal shortly.

Paula Rice also asked that FR Head of Finance is copied into the work on wellbeing dashboard for **Action 1** from the 10 June meeting. This action point is to be carried over.

**Action 1:** Diversity and Wellbeing Manager and Jo Ridgway to discuss with the data team providing payroll costs of lost working days by unit and job type in FE.

All other action points were discharged.

### **3. Health and Safety update**

Head of Health & Safety and Technical Training presented the update on Health and Safety. There has been an increase in reporting of incidents, currently unclear whether there is a trend. Investigation of reports will show whether there is causation issue or if it was an improvement in reporting over a summer period when there is more activity in the forest.

The EB noted that this will feed into the Mandatory Training completion rates and have asked for a report at the next meeting.

**Action 2:** Head of Health & Safety and Technical Training to provide an update on Mandatory Training completion rates at next meeting.

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

The EB were updated on actions still outstanding following internal audits. The EB noted the delayed completion of actions which is a concern. The EB asked to receive an update from individuals named against overdue actions and these must be improved before the next EB as we are going backwards having made a good effort in this area before.

### **5. Strategic Risk Register**

The EB received an update on the Strategic Risk Register. The EB noted management activity of risk to Forest Research staffing due to uncertainty of the Nature for Climate Fund in the future.

### **6. Safeguarding report**

Forestry England now have a technical advisor for safeguarding. There has been an increase in enquiries and reports of safeguarding, but there is still work to do to embed working practices and policies across the organisation. The technical advisor will strengthen safeguarding processes and procedures.

### **7. Corporate plan and strategic enablers**

Most of the deliverables to report at end of financial year. There has been good progress with a few red items.

The Chair requested that KA075 and KA076 (Holt Phase II build) are rephrased to reflect that these deliverables were bid for based on the information we had at the time and that this has since changed. Forest Research bid for funds from an underspend and were successful but the requirement and scope of the project has since changed.

A paper on strategic opportunities will go out of committee to the Board of Commissioners. This will outline the possibilities of what the Forestry Commission could be doing. The Board also asked for EA006 (Enterprise Resourcing Programme) and EA007 (identify and validate additional technology opportunities) to be reviewed, and that the blocker identified in EA008 (review of FC functions to determine scope of activity) is a risk not an issue.

The Chair also asked to have clarity over activities achieving strategic objectives to see which services may need to be reneged if funding is cut in the spending review.

Next step is to present progress on the corporate plan to the Board of Commissioners at their next meeting.

**Action 3:** Head of Performance to work with respective teams to reword KA075, KA076, EA006, EA007, and EA008 to re-baseline according to what is being funded and articulate what has been done well.

## **8. Finance update and Spending review**

The Forestry Commission (FC) and Forest Research (FR) Annual Reports and Accounts (ARAs) have gone to Defra and Ministers. Due to the delay in publishing, and since signing off the FC and FR accounts NAO have since changed the way government funding needs to be accounted for which means further work on these ARAs. The aim for both ARAs is to be laid in Parliament mid-October. Forestry England ARA has been delayed due to the ongoing work regarding the valuation on the Nations Forests.

The EB discussed the process of Spending Review bids over the past year. The CDEL FC business case was returned by Defra for more information on a document produced at very short notice. This has resulted in another rush to resubmit the bid with more supporting information. The underlying funding request was not affected.

We are challenging the 2% administrative saving requirement for funded staff for the pay award. This will mainly affect Forest Services.

The Nature for Climate Fund bid went into the overall Defra ask to HMT as an almost a full bid. No more details on Phase 2 yet.

The cost mapping sprint being worked on by PWC is aiming to achieve cash savings but we have a concern about effectiveness. Derrick Osgood is closely linked in with this work and monitoring potential risks in this area. Currently no detail on what we will be looking at, though mindful of impact on any cross-organisational service level agreements.

## **9. AOB**

- Security and Risk Management Forum – Summary

The Chair provided an update on the Security and Risk Management Forum. It is working as intended though there is still more work to be done and the Chair asked that senior leaders make sure staff give security and risk their attention.

- Visit from Baroness Hayman

Forest Research have been contacted by Defra to organise a visit from Baroness Hayman, potentially in December.