

AGM MINUTES 2014

FCTU ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 18th & 19th NOVEMBER 2014, SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH.

Attending:

Mick Hoban, FCTU Chair
Allan MacKenzie, FCTU Secretary
Jim O'Neill, PCS
Jim Henderson, Prospect
Neil Grieve, Unite
Alistair Gillies, GMB
Paul Grieve, GMB full time officer
Steve Holdsworth, FCTU England
Helen Daniels, FCTU England
Malcolm Crosby, FCTU Scotland
Peter Fullarton, FCTU Scotland
Alan Donald, FCTU Silvan House (19th)
Graham McLaughlin, FCTU Silvan House
Bruce Hamilton, PCS H&S
Ian Kirkham, PCS H&S (19th)
George Whitcher, Unite H&S (19th)
Clive Solesbury, Unite H&S (19th)
Joanne McAuley, PCS (19th)
Alan Denney, Prospect full time officer (19th)

18 November, 13:00 – 15:30

1. FCTU Chair's Introduction

The Chair introduced the AGM and welcomed all attending. Mick opened the meeting touching on the recent members' meetings across the organisation and the shared desire through the FCTU mandate to see a continued retention and unity of the Forestry Commission. He reported an overwhelming affirmation of this position from members' at all the meetings with a sense of togetherness and oneness being expressed throughout, no matter where in the organisation.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Joanne McAuley (18th), Alan Denney (18th), Alan Donald (18th), Glenn Brearley, Christine Brown (19th), Martin Johnston (19th), and Sandy Smart.

3. Departmental Committee Report

Allan referred to the [DC Report](#) to the AGM provided prior to the meeting, giving an overview of the work of the DC over the past year and main issues being dealt with and action taken. He added that there was a great deal of depth to many of the issues, particularly with the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme (WPEP) and its various projects related to Forest Enterprise and the Public Forest Estate in England, Forest Services and Central Services; and referred to the updates on each strand of the programme.

Allan summarised the report adding that union activity across the FC from the DC down to reps is healthy and that this should be applauded, particularly given the strictures reps have been placed under with the new facility time arrangements and continued heavy workloads.

4. Constituent Unions Activity Update

Mick invited the lead reps present from each of the unions to report to the AGM on activity over the past year. For **PCS**, Jim O'Neill provided an update around WPEP issues and action in conjunction with the other unions to retain the FC, with continued endorsement of the alternative to WPEP and support being expressed from members. Increasing the number of H&S reps was reported to be a current priority, with difficulties in doing so reported. Pay and pensions issues had also been a continued issue for members in line with the national campaign and members across government. Also on a national level, PCS had been concerned with the Government's desire to remove check-off facilities, with action to move members over to direct debit currently underway.

Jim Henderson for **Prospect** reported that the union in the FC was currently trying to bring on more active reps, particularly in England and encourage more activism generally. Health and Safety training for reps had also been a focus, with some barriers including travel distances being experienced. Jim said that there had been a number of recruitment exercises in various offices and locations, including Silvan House, Northern Research Station and Inverness with a handful of new members being gained from these. Prospect had also begun developing a communications strategy to refine the methods of communication and make the sharing of information more relevant and targeted. Performance Management was reported to be a serious concern for Prospect nationally in relation to the relative assessment and forced distribution element of the Civil Service system, where the lower performing 10% have progression frozen and can ultimately be forced out of their job more easily. Although this did not apply to the FC currently the AGM agreed its use in other areas should be monitored and kept out of the FC system.

Neil reported on **Unite** activity, echoing the same issues as those dealt with by PCS and Prospect. Recruitment and repairing lines of communication with the more remote members were said to have been priorities, particularly during the members' meetings across the FC at which Neil was able to attend many, with improved communication resulting. The issue of shift allowance and holiday pay

as currently being dealt with nationally by the union at Cabinet Office level following a grievance being raised was reported to be ongoing.

Alistair and Paul for **GMB** advised that the union had joined Unite on the holiday pay issue and that some of their members in the FC would be affected. The new Alpha Civil Service pension scheme and communication around its agreement with the unions had also been a concern for members in GMB.

The Performance Management System (PMS) and the use of Forward Job Plans (FJP) were reported to be issues for GMB members also. This led to a discussion on the new system and Allan said that the very foundation of PMS was the FJP as it reflects the role and the tasks that any individual has agreed to undertake with their performance measured against it. He said the unions should anticipate that every one of their members in the FC would have the opportunity to sit down with their line manager at the start of every working year and agree what the individual needs to do, how they need to do it and when they need to do it by. Several reps at the AGM reported instances where staff were not working to an agreed and up-to-date FJP, with some never having one at all throughout the year. Allan added that when a member approaches a trade union rep seeking support, the first thing that the rep will usually ask for where appropriate is the member's FJP to gain an insight into how good or bad the FJP is in reflecting the member's job. Standardised FJPs in some areas for some posts was also reported to be a concern.

The AGM agreed that a regular audit of FJPs should be carried out across the FC with the results being shared with FCTU. It was also agreed that a more proactive role for Confirming Officers, tasking them with ensuring that all aspects of PMS were carried out by line managers in accordance with the policy and procedures would also improve the process.

Action Required: Departmental Committee to take forward

5. Area Committee Reports

FCTU England Chair Steve Holdsworth referred to the [written report](#) provided at the meeting, with updates on the core issues including H&S and WPEP, along with Recreation & Public Affairs contracts, out of hours callouts, political matters and Facility Time arrangements.

FCTU England expressed thanks to the FCTU officers for their support to colleagues in England and the efforts put in to get around the whole organisation to meet with members face to face and it was said that those efforts were crucial in getting to the position where consultation was taking place and members were engaging with their unions. Whilst the AGM concurred, Allan MacKenzie stated that the FCTU have to react to the will of the members through the constituent union members and that to get action on the ground it is local reps that are key

to that process, adding his thanks to all those involved and everyone at the AGM for their continued support.

Malcolm Crosby gave an overview of **FCTU Scotland** issues over the past year, giving updates following recent Forest Enterprise (FE) Scotland and conservancies staff councils. Malcolm said there were ongoing concerns with excessive workloads which had been raised with management on numerous occasions without any real progress or commitment to addressing the issue and the 'top down' approach, however was still being pursued. Emergency cover was reported to be an issue in FE following an approach by Police Scotland due to a loss of contacts within the FC since merging police forces; leading to the FC looking to introduce an emergency cover policy across FE, however it had been iterated that any rollout of such a policy would need to be fully consulted on with FCTU, and Malcolm confirmed that the FCTU Scotland position was that this was an unnecessary policy due to the FC not being an emergency service in any way, and that a cover system was impractical with the district boundaries.

Mick referred to the [written report](#) from **FCTU Research**, in the absence of a representative from the committee. Allan however confirmed that the Forest Research Staff Council had been reinstated following a long period of inaction.

For **FCTU Silvan House**, Graham McLaughlin reported that the use of contractors in Information Services was still an issue with the department continually being under complement in their staff numbers and permanent positions not being filled. This had been raised with the Silvan House Staff Council and would continue to be discussed at this level. Graham added that issues had been reported with the standard of advice received from HR dropping in recent months.

In Silvan House and Forest Research, WPEP deliberations were reported to be being dealt with via the temporary Central Services Staff Council and consultation on the Roadmap for Shared Services had begun.

6. Pay

Allan referred to the prior DC update stating *"the Treasury Remit Guidance was published at the end of March and it again capped Civil Service pay at 1%. FCTU submitted a pay claim in July and once the FC had their remit cleared; pay talks took place on 28th October. Many of the important aspects of our claim were left unfulfilled by the FC pay offer in which the FC stated that they must adhere to the Westminster Government's pay policy. The constituent unions considered the offer and asked FCTU to immediately write to the FC expressing their disappointment and to formally reject the offer. It is anticipated that the FC will impose the pay offer through administrative action subject to approval by the FC Executive Board."* Allan added that the reference of pay "talks" was used due to the complete lack of negotiation at these meetings with the FC who continued to be tied to government pay policy. He said however that Alan Denney, Prospect full time officer had firmly made the point at the recent pay talks that the pay constraints absolutely had to stop immediately and that members could not sustain further years of the same pitiful settlements.

The discussion opened up to grading and the use of Job Evaluation Grading Support (JEGS) and Recruitment & Retention Allowance in the FC. With increased workloads and pay constraints in recent years, it was agreed that it would be useful to have information on the number of JEGS cases and number of those placed on Recruitment & Retention allowance since the beginning of the pay freeze. Allan said that the latter had been received and shared previously with the constituent unions; however he said that he would request an update. It was noted that the FCTU Office would take this forward.

Action Required: FCTU Office

7. Departmental Staff Council

With the Forestry Commission Staff Council being held on 3rd December, the group discussed putting forward agenda items to be raised with management. Staff turnover was considered as a potential agenda item due to the high turnover particularly in HR (although not exclusive to) throughout the organisation which appeared to be having an effect on the quality of advice in some cases. Statistics on the rate of turnovers were thought to be potentially of benefit.

19 November Health & Safety, 09:30 – 11:30

1. Departmental Committee Discussion Paper

Mick welcomed the H&S reps present for the 2nd day of the AGM exclusively focussing on health and safety. Allan referred to the '[Fully Functional Health & Safety Representatives](#)' paper provided prior to the meeting, outlining the background of H&S in the FC currently with the strategy and action to improve safety culture; the FCTU objectives; providing information on the required training for reps; H&S facility time and a number of considerations to be taken forward.

Allan said the paper intended to scope out the role of H&S reps; the number and location of reps currently; the associated risks to the FC by having insufficient H&S reps to carry out the functions which under law they can perform; and what barriers exist in not being able to attract more H&S reps and to existing reps from carrying out their duties.

Allan took the AGM through a PowerPoint chart breaking down the structure of health and safety in the FC and its various levels and connections throughout the organisation (including how the FCTU and reps fit into the equation) and the external relationship with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA).

2. Case Studies & Reports from H&S Reps

Mick invited each of the H&S present to report on experiences holding H&S rep roles, in particular on any difficulties faced or barriers in carrying out rep functions.

A number of both positive and negative aspects were identified during the reports from reps and following discussion. Since the introduction and rollout of the new strategy, in some areas a sea change in management attitude toward H&S had

occurred, and this was reported to be having a very positive impact and some reps thought credit should largely be given to management for this. Trade union input and recognition however were still said to be lacking even in the more H&S aware areas. In other areas, culture change issues were apparent with getting staff to realise that it was not all about penalising people still proving to be a challenge and a much needed shift. H&S awareness in offices was also thought to be lacking with some staff considering any push on health and safety to be more forestry oriented, however this was reported to be improving with more regular building inspections and recording of trips, spills and burns which were the most common incidents in offices. The widely varying accounts heard from H&S reps were thought to indicate the inconsistency of health and safety culture across the FC at present.

The issue of high workloads was raised on several occasions throughout the reports as being a key barrier preventing reps from carrying out duties, as well as preventing others from undertaking the training and becoming reps. Similarly, the new Facility Time Arrangements in the FC and onerous mechanisms of recording and inputting was raised as another potential barrier to reps or potential reps from wanting to carry out duties on behalf of their union. SR10 (Spending Review 2010) cuts were cited as one of the main reasons for the increased workloads having an impact on the abilities of H&S reps.

Forest District boundaries, both in England and Scotland with the now fewer number of districts and increased size was raised as an issue for H&S rep cover, particularly with the distances a rep would be expected to cover in the larger districts where having many reps in place was necessary. This added to the issue of having a low number of trained H&S reps currently, with a number of gaps across the FC. Illustrating where reps were in place and where there were gaps was an issue and the AGM agreed that populating a map showing the locations of reps and the gaps would be useful to form a more targeted approach to increasing reps.

One rep reported significant issues with management interaction on recognising and supporting their role as a rep and allowing them to carry out duties. A great deal of resistance was said to be put up with a number of obstacles placed in the way, stemming from the manager not understanding the importance of having H&S reps and believing the FC can carry out inspections without union input. It was felt that this creates a sense of doing something wrong in management's eyes when acting as an H&S rep and adds a significant strain and burden to doing the task. This was agreed to be completely out of touch with the FC's policy and strategy, with senior management fully supporting the role and input of the unions in the safety culture change. It was further agreed that instances where this level of unacceptable resistance from managers occurred must be addressed and intervened case by case locally from FCTU. Further mechanisms for reps to report such management blockages or other general H&S issues were considered, with a text service or mailbox to the FCTU office being options which was agreed to be worth looking into. Having H&S rep duties written into FJPs and properly recognised by managers was agreed to be a key factor in reps having time to carry out tasks and sharpen the focus of the role, as well as having rep training included in ILPs. Having management prepare staff groups for union rep inspections was also suggested as a way of reducing any concern or surprise

among staff about reps visiting to carry out inspections.

Despite the clear support from the FC in principle for trade union involvement in all H&S aspects, it was reported that this was often overlooked with no mention of FCTU in the H&S Policy or at the mandatory H&S training course rolled out in Scotland. Allan advised that he would soon be observing one of these courses and would report back.

3. H&S Action Plan

The accounts from H&S reps and subsequent discussion provided the key issues for the FCTU H&S action plan to focus on and take forward. The action plan would be formed at Departmental Committee level, reporting back to the full FCTU network at the end of January and would be a live document.

The key elements that the action plan would focus were noted to be as follows:

- Increasing rep numbers across the FC
- H&S rep training
- Accident reporting
- Lone working
- Integration into FJPs (duties) and ILPs (training)
- Middle management attitude and FCTU intervention when required
- Greater awareness of health issues including stress, depression and mental health – challenging stigmas and finding solutions

Initial action points to include:

- Populate a map showing rep locations and gaps
- Consider developing reporting mechanisms/notification procedure for H&S reps to FCTU Office
- Strengthen managing reps guidance in relation to reporting and FJPs
- Ensure H&S is included in all Staff Council agendas with discussions minuted.
- Seek further written endorsement of FCTU H&S rep involvement from FC
- Seek inclusion of union input into H&S Policy
- Approach Learning & Development branch to request that union involvement is considered and included in any appropriate training course content
- Consider the use of and business rules around spot-trackers provided to Wildlife Rangers

4. Any Other Business

There were no further items of business.

5. FCTU Chair's Summation

The Chair gave a summation of both days of the AGM, thanking the group for an excellent meeting, in particular the H&S reps present who had attended at short notice and giving an excellent contribution to the session.

6. Date of AGM 2015

TBC