

## AGM MINUTES 2015

### FCTU ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2015, SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH.

#### Attending:

Mick Hoban, FCTU Chair  
Allan MacKenzie, FCTU Secretary  
Jim O'Neill, PCS  
Joanne McAuley, PCS (18<sup>th</sup>)  
Alan Brown, PCS full time officer  
Jim Henderson, Prospect  
Glenn Brearley, Prospect  
Ian Perth, Prospect full time officer  
Alan Denney, Prospect full time officer (17<sup>th</sup>)  
Neil Grieve, Unite  
Sandy Smart, Unite full time officer  
Alistair Gillies, GMB  
Paul Grieve, GMB full time officer  
Steve Holdsworth, FCTU England  
Helen Daniels, FCTU England  
Malcolm Crosby, FCTU Scotland (17<sup>th</sup>)  
Peter Fullarton, FCTU Scotland  
Alan Donald, FCTU Silvan House  
Graham McLaughlin, FCTU Silvan House

#### **17 November, 13:00 – 17:00**

##### **1. Welcome & Domestics**

The Chair introduced the AGM and welcomed all attending.

##### **2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Joanne McAuley (17<sup>th</sup>) and Malcolm Crosby (18<sup>th</sup>).

##### **3. Minutes of FCTU AGM November 2014**

The minutes were accepted as an accurate and thorough recording of the meeting.

#### **4. Action Points from those Minutes**

*4.1 regular audit of FJPs should be carried out across the FC with the results being shared with FCTU.*

Allan said this issue was taken to the Departmental Staff Council in December 2014 and then deferred to Area Committees for taking forward. It was noted that some audits had been carried out but results were yet to be seen, and that it would be pursued further by the four committees.

*4.2 information on JEGS cases and number of those placed on Recruitment & Retention allowance since the beginning of the pay freeze.*

Allan said that for R&R allowance information, although an approach was made requesting this information, HR were in the process of implementing a new pay system and a process for compiling such reports had not yet been established but would be soon. Specific JEGS cases were discussed but lists of posts which had been reviewed had only been provided for Scotland so far.

#### **5. FCTU Chair's Introduction**

Mick said that the year had been a predictably turbulent one, with the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme moving further on and seeing the continued decentralisation of Central Services and Reshaping of Forest Services, to the recently announced Organisational Development Programme in Scotland. Mick said that the AGM was the best opportunity to bring reps from all areas together to share experiences and issues, and looked forward to hearing from the Secretary with the Departmental Committee report and particularly from the Constituent Unions and Area Committees, to get the broad picture of an organisation which was under a great deal of pressure and showing no signs of lessening. He added that it was important for FCTU to maintain its strength and continue its fight to protect members' interests through further (and often dispiriting at times) change with reviews upon reviews and workstreams upon workstreams mounting up, but felt it was important to keep invigorating the FCTU's own sense of purpose and carry the fight forward.

#### **6. Departmental Committee Report**

Allan took the AGM through a comprehensive [Departmental Committee Report](#) for 2015. He concluded by stating *"as will be my last FCTU AGM I would like to thank all those who have supported me in this role and that whoever becomes the new FCTU Secretary has an equally enjoyable term of office as I have been privileged to have. The issues that we have all faced over the past six years have been extraordinary and those same issues and many new ones look set to continue for some time yet. It is vital that we continue to have a strong union presence right through the FC and whatever successor organisations may emerge from the*

*continued programme of change.*

*I would like to say that I leave the FC in a better place than when I first joined some 40 years ago but that may be stretching the truth just a little far. One thing I can be sure of is the dedication and willingness of all union representatives right across the FC and from all the forestry unions, in that they will not stop in their fight to ensure that their fellow members get the best benefits from their employment, whilst exploring every avenue to keep them in employment and to maintain and if possible enhance their terms and conditions.*

*I would like to dedicate my time spent as FCTU Secretary to all those reps past and present and to say to them and the members they represent, that being in the union is always the right place to be."*

On the subject of the future of the FCTU Secretary post which was under some question with the Trade Union Bill and the FC's Executive Board's planned discussion on the preservation of this post, Alan Denney said it was essential that FCTU make strong representations to the EB prior to this—and before a decision was made—to maintain this post. Alan said that the four unions working together in the organisation needed this post in place for the very necessary coordination of the FCTU. He added that if taken away, the FC would be going against partnership working. The AGM strongly agreed with this strategy and it was noted that a Departmental Staff Council paper would be produced to make the case that the FCTU Secretary post was highly valued and had to remain in place.

#### **Action Required: Allan MacKenzie**

### **7. 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 on the union's Forestry Group activities, largely in conjunction with the other unions through FCTU as highlighted in the earlier Departmental Committee report, and said that their Group Executive Committee remained very much on-message and effective. PCS had continued to be concerned with the Westminster Government's desire to remove check-off facilities, reinvigorated by the Trade Union Bill, with action to move members over to direct debit still ongoing. Jim explained that Alan Brown would be moving into a different role within PCS and therefore would be stepping down from full time officer duties for the FC, with Danny Williamson stepping back in.

Jim Henderson for **Prospect** echoed the concerns of PCS with the many reviews ongoing, and also regarding check-off and reported that around 90% of members had successfully been moved across to direct debit. Ian Perth was introduced as Prospect's new full time official for members in the FC and was welcomed to the AGM. The pressure on Facility Time was said to be a particular issue of concern

for reps attending meetings and conferences throughout the FC, as was the continued pay constraint and new voluntary exit payment caps. Jim referred to the wider campaigns which Prospect were involved in, particularly the public services campaign 'Your World Our Work', looking at the types of work done in the public sector, aimed at dispelling myths around the portrayal of Civil Servants by government and the media. Campaigns on the EU referendum and employment rights throughout the UK were reported to be ongoing also.

Neil Grieve reported on **Unite** activity, reflecting some of the same issues as those dealt with by PCS and Prospect. Neil said that some Unite members had been badly affected by the review of core/key housing and the heavily increased rent prices, and was being fought currently by FCTU England. Neil referred to the recent talks on holiday pay and overtime payments, which had been a major issue over the past year, resulting in the offer and its recent implementation by the FC.

Alistair Gillies for **GMB** reported on the main issues affecting members, particularly the Organisational Development Programme in Scotland and its implications for jobs and the loss of machines, with the already existing poor staffing levels in workshops. Alistair highlighted his surprise at a statement in a commissioners' meeting report from June with FC management informing commissioners that following a series of communications events, staff were on the whole welcoming the prospect of change. This was recognised by the AGM to be false. Alistair also said that there was draconian management and targeting of wildlife rangers currently resulting in personal cases over punitive action on cull failed cull targets.

## **8. Area Committee Reports**

**FCTU England** Chair Steve Holdsworth referred to the [written report](#) provided at the meeting, with updates on the core issues in Forest Services and Forest Enterprise, and also H&S, the integration of Civil Engineering into the countries and housing stock on the Public Forest Estate.

Malcolm Crosby gave an overview of **FCTU Scotland** issues over the past year, referring to the previous year's report as relatively quiet but that seemingly since the retirement of Bob McIntosh, the pace of change had increase dramatically, with one key difference being that in terms of reporting structures to the Scottish Government, FC Scotland and FE Scotland appeared to have become two distinctly separately organisations without much notice from staff. Malcolm said that the rather catastrophic shortfall in income had brought the pace of change to a head, leading to the Organisational Development Programme being escalated and redefined to identify significant cuts. He said that a series of FCTU meetings was being planned to meet face to face with members across Scotland to discuss this programme and its implications. Malcolm also reminded the AGM of the announcement from the Scottish Government on aiming to achieve total devolution of forestry in Scotland by 2019.

This led to the AGM discussing potential scenarios for the setup and future of FC

and FE Scotland it was agreed that pressure would need to be put on the Scottish Government sooner rather than later to ensure that the views of FCTU were considered and influenced such decisions, while others may be “putting pen to paper”, lobbying the government on how they believe FE should deliver locally and how FC Scotland should administer its grants etc. It was felt that the joint unions needed to form a strategic approach and determine exactly what they needed to be asking and what they wanted to achieve from the questions that they may ask. Writing to MPs was noted to be an option, however Allan advised that another avenue open to the unions was to take concerns to the Environmental Rural Affairs Committee (a cross-party committee) outlining the issues with them. It was agreed that the Departmental Committee would take forward this action to form a strategic plan.

### **Action Required: Departmental Committee**

For **FCTU Silvan House**, Graham McLaughlin reported on the ongoing decentralisation of Shared Services, including the recent Forest Research Refresh resulting in many staff in Corporate & Forestry Support moving across to FR. Graham said that the reality of the scale of change appeared to sink in more with staff in Silvan House after the all-staff meeting in June, particularly with the clarity on the lease for the Silvan House building not being extended beyond 2022. Graham referred to the Civil Service HR Expert Services introduced to the FC in April 2015, reporting a reduction in middle-management posts in Silvan House and said that it was announced before the formal consultation took place which had been a problem. It was said that increasing awareness of H&S in the building continued to be a focus for the unions, with some success.

Glenn Brearley from **FCTU Research** also reported on the Forest Research Refresh and the effects on members in FR, but also more broadly the future of the agency and what organisation it would be a part of, and Glenn shared a scenario on the CEO's preferred choice of a 'company limited by guarantee', seen as the way forward among some other options. On the FR Refresh consultation, he said union meetings in Alice Holt and NRS had been well attended with a good amount of input given from members into the consultation response. Glenn added that the FR Promotion Procedures had been refreshed and provided details on the changes.

**18 November, 09:30 – 12:30**

### **9. Health & Safety Action Plan: 1 Year On**

Mick introduced the subject of Health & Safety, reflecting on the previous year's AGM at which safety culture change was discussed at length with the Departmental Committee being tasked with forming an action plan around increasing rep cover and encouraging H&S training, the integration of rep duties into FJPs, accident reporting, lone working, management buy-in of union H&S representation, and mental health (discussed under item 10). The AGM was taken through the latest version of the action plan and the status and next steps of each issue being dealt with by the DC.

Regarding obtaining new H&S reps, it was recognised that the issues and barriers to increasing rep numbers and cover remained, noted to be in part due to the

length of the training. It was agreed, however, that in some cases establishing new reps and identifying them as such without having yet gone through the full training would be better than continuing with the very low rep cover currently. An introductory course was felt to be sufficient to at least establish reps initially, and it was noted that Prospect offered such a course (two days) and that the other unions would check if they had equivalents in place.

**Action Required: PCS, Unite, GMB**

On the subject of achieving buy-in from middle management and ensuring that they understood the duties required by H&S reps, Allan and Sam took the AGM through a draft of a booklet designed for line managers for this purpose. The content of this booklet was endorsed and it was noted that the FCTU Office would finalise the booklet and begin issuing it.

**Action Required: FCTU Office**

## **10. Wellbeing**

A paper on mental wellbeing prepared by the FCTU Office was distributed. It was said that representatives present at the previous meeting recognised that there was a tendency for the focus to be weighted more toward the safety-oriented aspects of this subject, and perhaps less so on health—including mental health. The AGM acknowledged that with the recent implementation of the FC's Health and Safety Strategy, driven by a need to make public forests safer places to visit, prevent accidents and fulfil legal duties, this emphasis on safety was understandable, with improving safety culture being extremely important; however, the unions felt that with an increasing pressure on staff to deliver more with less, the impacts on their health and wellbeing could be detrimental, as was demonstrated in the Workloads & Work-life Balance Survey in 2013. The results of this at the time were said to have provided substantial evidence of serious impacts on wellbeing, largely linked to unrealistic and unsustainable workloads (both imposed and self-imposed) and long working hours.

The AGM also recognised that in society today, there were still many stigmas attached to mental health problems such as stress, depression and anxiety; with many choosing not to inform their employer of the problem. Despite the fact that it was very common, with one in four suffering mental health problems during their lives, people found it very difficult to talk about. The reasons for this appeared to range from concerns about losing one's job or damaging career prospects, to not feeling that it would be taken seriously or be properly understood.

The paper highlighted that while many may have these concerns, it was important for the unions to be in a position to support members through these issues in the workplace, ensuring that any reasonable adjustments were made and that the issue was treated as seriously as any physical impairment; and that they should also be aware that members may have legal protection if they were battling mental health issues at work, as a mental illness could amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010. The AGM agreed that they needed to be equally aware of the stigmas and attitudes that members suffering these problems may be faced with, and be prepared to challenge these.

The paper was endorsed and it was agreed that the content would be used to further raise awareness and understanding of the issues, and form action.

### **Action Required: FCTU Office**

#### **11. Pay**

Mick referred to the upcoming pay talks with the FC on 20<sup>th</sup> November, following the submission of the 2015 FCTU Pay Claim and a delay in the FC having their pay remit approved. Allan said that the fundamental issue was that with the continued 1% cap, it would still be an imposed and non-negotiated settlement. Despite this, the AGM agreed that continuing to submit pay claims striving to achieve what members expected and reflecting the unions' pay policies was crucial in maintaining a strong future negotiating position on pay.

#### **12. Union Subscriptions (Check-off)**

The Westminster Government's plan to cease union subscriptions check-off, enabled by the legislation contained within the Trade Union Bill, was discussed further with concerns already having been raised under item 7. Allan said that a recent amendment put forward increased the notice period from 3 months to 12 months for employers, which was felt to be a very small victory, but that it would be rolled out to all government departments including the Forestry Commission sometime in the near future. This was recognised by the unions and AGM to be an ideological attack on trade unionism and purely dogma, with administrative costs to run check-off within the payroll system to be zero. Nevertheless, the unions agreed that ensuring they were ready to move members across to direct debit and not risk losing members in the process.

#### **13. Staff Survey**

Allan referred to the recent Staff Survey undertaken by the FC and said that the survey had been running for a considerable number of years and FCTU had been supportive of the survey in the past, particularly as they could access the data and explore certain topics more thoroughly to examine members' issues. He said FCTU was again asked to support the 2015 survey and did so; however, he added that some members questioned the reasons for their support as they considered the survey to be only interested in getting the answers that the FC wanted to hear and see. The constituent unions also expressed this lack of confidence as they were also obtaining similar feedback with a resistance to take part was becoming more and more vocal. The lack of opportunity to express and explain views through free-text was a major factor in this discouragement, and pressure to take part was being applied by managers to ensure there was a sufficient participation.

A question was raised on the costs of the survey and if it was truly an efficient use of public money; or if it was simply something that as a Government Department the FC have to do regardless of the cost.

The AGM agreed that unless the points raised by members could be addressed and that costs of future surveys could demonstrate value for money, the FCTU would be unable to actively encourage union members to complete any future staff surveys. It was noted that this issue would be raised with management at the upcoming Departmental Staff Council (item 14).

#### **14. Departmental Staff Council**

With the FC Departmental Staff Council being held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, the group discussed putting forward agenda items to be raised with management. Items agreed for taking forward were the preservation of the FCTU Secretary role, the Staff Survey, Mental Wellbeing and Health & Safety.

**Action Required: FCTU Office**

#### **15. AOB**

##### **15.1 Wildlife Ranger Management**

Neil referred to an ongoing issue and grievance with the management of Wildlife Rangers in Galloway and periods of unreasonable working hours (“dawn ‘til dusk” from November until February) being imposed. Neil said it was falsely stated in the district to reflect a national agreement, therefore Unite had been continuing to challenge this breach of terms and conditions.