

AGM MINUTES 2017

FCTU ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 14th & 15th NOVEMBER 2017, SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH.

Attending:

Mick Hoban, FCTU Chair
Sam Telford, FCTU Secretary
Joanne McAuley, PCS (15th)
Cheryl Gedling, PCS
Jim Henderson, Prospect
Ian Perth, Prospect full time officer (14th)
Neil Grieve, Unite
Sandy Smart, Unite full time officer (14th)
Martin Webber, Unite (14th)
Alistair Gillies, GMB
Calne Waterson, GMB full time officer (14th)
Richard Pow, FCTU England (15th)
Malcolm Crosby, FCTU Scotland (14th)
Peter Fullarton, FCTU Scotland
Alan Donald, FCTU Silvan House (15th)

14 November, 13:00 – 17:00

1. FCTU Chair's Introduction

The Chair introduced the AGM and welcomed all attending, setting out the agenda for the two days and touching on the key issues being faced by the trade unions in England, Scotland and Central Services/Forest Research.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Glenn Brearley, Helen Daniels, Graham McLaughlin, Joanne McAuley (14th), Richard Pow (14th), Sandy Smart (15th), Ian Perth (15th), Malcolm Crosby (15th), Calne Waterson (15th) and Martin Webber (15th).

3. Minutes of FCTU AGM November 2016 & Action Points

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

3.1. Cross-Border Forestry Unions Group

2016 AGM Item 8: *"As part of a wider discussion on devolution, Ian referred to a Prospect motion regarding the split of the organisation (firstly with FC Wales moving into Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and now with FCS going into Scottish Government in the coming years), seeking that some consideration was given to setting up a UK forestry unions group to review common forestry related union issues across the borders. Sam said that while this would not be in the remit of the FCTU function to set up and would not attract facility time for any FC reps involved, some early discussion on how this could be taken forward in future would be opened up at the Departmental Committee."*

This action point remained to be work in progress, with the DC taking forward the discussion following the 2016 AGM. Sam said that Unite already had such a body in place, the FWNOC (Forest Workers National Organising Committee), and that he and Mick Hoban would be attending the next meeting on 22nd November to look at how cross-border forestry union issues were addressed at this forum.

3.2 Departmental Staff Council

Action points noted for papers to be taken to the Departmental Staff Council in 2016 were discharged.

4. Departmental Committee (DC) Report

On behalf of the DC, Sam provided an update on the work of the committee and FCTU centrally over the previous 12 months.

Sam said the DC consisted of the FCTU Chair and Secretary, one senior lay representative and full time officers of each the constituent unions, providing strategic direction to the FCTU's duties and leading on overarching Forestry Commission single staff group issues and consultations, meeting once per month. Despite more and more functions being devolved into the countries and FR, Sam said the DC agenda has remained very full in dealing with a number of important issues, over and above the usual pay, terms and conditions, HR policy and Staff Handbook changes.

In terms of **devolution**, Sam said the AGM would cover the many aspects of this extensively in the discussions over the two days, reflecting on how that has progressed over the past year and where it was going, both in terms of the move of forestry in Scotland to the Scottish Government and changes in England, but also the continued programme of establishing corporate services in the countries and Forest Research in place of the many services previously provided centrally.

Pay as ever was a pressing item of business for the DC and Pay Committee for the past 12 months. This was covered under agenda item 11.

Sam said that **Health, Safety and Wellbeing** remained a key item on the DC agenda and reflecting on the discussion at the 2016 AGM, it had not been long since FCTU signed off a revised Partnership Agreement with the FC, with a revision to build in the importance of wellbeing as part of health and safety, and acknowledging the potential impact that work has on an individual's physical and mental wellbeing. At the senior level, there remained a commitment that this would be placed centre stage with a leadership culture, working environment and management practices that focus on the wellbeing of staff. Sam said the unions had seen HR and management in England and FR in particular (with Scotland beginning to make progress) take forward wellbeing programmes and mental health training courses, whether general awareness or more intensive mental health first aid training or training for managers. The impact of stress and other mental health issues on individuals and the organisation was felt to be taken more seriously than it had been before in the FC. The DC was concerned that the level and pace of change in the organisation in 2017 was truly testing staff's ability to cope, with continued uncertainty on both sides of the border and a great deal of pressure to deliver more with less. While FCTU continued to challenge this at various levels whether through consultation on business cases or personal cases with individuals, there was been strong support from the unions on some of the mental health and wellbeing work being rolled out. In terms of the FC's H&S Strategy, Sam said that the DC continued to review issues across the FC, whether it was something to feed into the overarching H&S Strategy Group at or for referring to country and FR discussions to resolve, but for the past 18 months it said to largely have been about establishing and running the new services in the countries since decentralisation of H&S and some of the issues and challenges that has brought. However, reference was made to the Safety Climate Tool Survey rolled out earlier in the year, which had been repeated following the initial survey in 2015.

On **HR policies and procedures**, Sam said FCTU was still frequently consulted on changes to these and had gone through further reviews and consultations with HR on various policies in the past 12 months including introducing a Temporary Promotions Policy (instead of using TRA for fixed term appointments), which had been a longstanding issue; the Redundancy Procedure, given the changes to the Civil Service protocols in 2016; the Dog & Ferret Expenses Policy earlier in the year; new FC email, internet and social media policies and procedures, and more recently FC looking to extensively review their relocation expenses package, policy and various components, launching an initial consultation on the scope of the review. This had caused concern for FCTU and many members who became aware of this. Sam said FCTU responded to this firmly laying down some markers

as to what level of change the unions would wish to consider if there were some procedural improvements to be made, but seriously questioned what was really behind the review and the timing of it, given that the organisation was about to complete devolution. The result of this was that the HR management board reconsidered and called off the review, and in fact went even further to say they would not be entering any new policy reviews before April 2019 unless there were legislative changes requiring them revise any elements of the Staff Handbook.

Sam referred to the recent **Staff Survey**, which ran in September and October. He said FCTU participated in a Staff Survey Working Group for a year leading up to the launch, as well as the survey pilot, to ensure that members' views about previous surveys were taken into account and to give feedback on the survey questions. In particular, this involved challenging the very limited opportunity for leaving free-text comments in previous surveys, concerns about anonymity, and a lack of evidence of real action being taken as a result of staff surveys. Sam explained that he attended the working group meetings on behalf of FCTU and said that engagement with the group had been positive, with HR representatives from across the organisation being very receptive and responsive to these views, along with the wide-ranging views taken from the pilot. He highlighted some key differences and improvements since the 2015 survey, including:

- Increased opportunity for free-text responses, from only one box to now three on what staff liked about the organisation and what they would want to see improve.
- More focused questions with better clarity on the levels of management that the questions were aimed at.
- Separate 'local' questions for each division included.
- Absolute assurance on anonymity and confidentiality.
- Evidence of actions taken following previous survey given.

Sam said that most crucially, it was about ensuring that FC listened to the views of staff and took action. He added that FCTU had requested that the Staff Councils maintained a standing item on the survey results in future, in order to review progress on the results at each meeting and ensure that views had been taken seriously and acted on. Sam concluded in saying that while FCTU had concerns about the validity of the whole staff survey exercise in this past; given some of the changes made, the DC felt there was an opportunity to try and make the most of the final all-FC staff survey ahead of complete devolution; ensure that it was of value and that the FC took action as a result.

5. 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. Jim and Ian reported on **Prospect's** work over the year, with an overall increase in personal case representation being called upon. One of the focuses had been on FC reviews and the impacts on jobs and grading, with members looking to Prospect and FCTU for some clarity and more certainty along the way, which had brought various challenges. Prospect had given considerable input into the many consultations across the organisation, as well as the pay negotiations and comms process. Nationally, it was reported that the main issues were currently a pay campaign, the Civil Service Compensation Scheme and re-launched Government consultation, and possible Brexit impacts such as workers' rights and H&S law.

For **PCS**, Cheryl provided an update on the union's Forestry Group activities, largely working through the 2016 Group Conference Motions and working in conjunction with the other unions through FCTU in much of what had been outlined in the DC report and by Prospect. Pay and the impacts of devolution were reported as being some of the main issues focused on, with continued frustrations about the lack of pay and uncertainty about members' futures being felt throughout the membership. Cheryl said that PCS in the FC had similar challenges with an increase in personal cases and ensuring rep coverage in the branches in England and Scotland.

Alistair and Calne for **GMB** reported on the main issues for GMB members. Alistair echoed the views from the other unions on pay and many other issues, particularly with the proposed restructuring in FE Scotland and concerns over future terms and conditions for members transferring into Scottish Government in 2019. A disproportionate number of issues were reported to have been felt among Wildlife Ranger members, ranging from staff numbers reducing significantly without consultation on posts vacant posts not being filled, to a myriad of issues relating to the new working dog policy and reimbursing expenses.

Neil Grieve reported on **Unite** activity, again reflecting many of the same issues as those dealt with in the other unions. In addition, Unite was reported to be dealing with ongoing issues regarding the FC housing rent increases in England, mainly in the New Forest area and this was causing serious worry among affected members including retired staff who too would not be able to keep up with the unreasonable increases. Discussions were underway around launching a further campaign against this policy to place pressure on the FC to rethink the rental increases. Also in England, issues around changes to members' reporting points and travel patterns seemingly without proper consultation were causing problems and this was being escalated to the England Staff Council for review. In Scotland,

Neil explained that Unite members' jobs had recently been affected by the FES Signs Unit Review and a surplus staff situation in Lybster. Forthcoming changes to Deer Management being taken forward by a review group with TU input was also an area of concern for Unite requiring careful consideration and involvement.

6. Area Committee Reports

Mick asked representatives from the Scotland, England, Forest Research and Silvan House Area Committees to report on key issues dealt with at Staff Council level.

Malcolm as **FCTU Scotland** Chair reported that the two main issues continued to be the transfer of Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) and Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) into the Scottish Government, and the ongoing FES restructure and consultation. Regarding the devolution of forestry (item 7), Malcolm said that there had been a series of FCTU meetings with the Cabinet Secretary since the 2016 and more recently, FCTU had experienced some frustration in establishing how the unions would engage with SG in the devolution programme and on the negotiation arrangements for the transfer. Malcolm said that a response to the FES restructuring consultation was being drafted with input from FCTU Scotland reps and members across the organisation, particularly following a number of members' meetings where those attending gave their views on the proposals.

Jim reported on **FCTU Research** activity, largely dominated by decentralisation in the latter part of the year in establishing new corporate services (transferring HR, IT and Finance functions from Shared Services into FR) and the consultation on this, with input from many members across FR with some concerns around long-term funding for the agency having brought these services and posts in, significantly increasing costs for FR. He added that the Future of the Forestry Commission paper (agenda item 9) recently published in England also had implications for FR in how the agency would remain part of the FC after April 2019.

Mick said that main FC England discussion would be taken under agenda item 9; however, he and Sam provided an update on **FCTU England** issues taken forward through the Staff Council, including implementation of new HR systems as part of decentralisation. In addition, an issue was the impacts of a proposal to establish a new Web Team in FE England on the existing team in Silvan House currently working for FEE. Sam reported that the Woodland Officer Forum continued to work through issues faced by staff in FS, including tackling the administrative burden placed on WO in recent times. He added that the implementation of the 're-shaped' FS was concluding with the final admin hub closure underway at Santon Downham, leaving Exeter and Bucks Horn Oak as the remaining hubs.

Jim and Sam briefed the AGM on **FCTU Silvan House** activities, outlining the impacts of the decentralisation programme on all Shared Services staff in particular but also Scotland and Research staff in SH. Other key issues addressed through the Silvan House Staff Council were noted to be FC floor moves, changes in external tenants, a central admin review bringing Shared Services admin posts into one team, and security within the building. Jim added that a welcome assurance had been given through the Staff Council that there would be a Silvan House maintenance programme, in order to keep the accommodation and conditions at the same standard going forward, despite the ongoing decommissioning of Shared Services and loss of many posts.

7. Forestry Devolution (Scotland)

Mick introduced the subject of the ongoing devolution of forestry in Scotland, for the AGM to review progress with the devolution programme and associated projects in Scottish Government, as well as the transfer of FCS/FES staff in April 2019.

Malcolm gave a summary of events since the public consultation on the Future of Forestry in Scotland launched the FCTU response. He said that the forestry unions had met with the Cabinet Secretary on four occasions, primarily discussing the future arrangements for the agency and division, taking forward the mandate from members on a preferred single forestry agency arrangement in SG, but also seeking guarantees on jobs, as well as full and meaningful trade union input into the devolution programme and staff transfer process. Malcolm stated that the Minister had not moved from the proposed split despite these meetings, but that TU engagement had been acknowledged as vital and highly valued going forward. Despite this assurance, the AGM heard that subsequent discussions with SG about the transfer and establishing TU engagement in the programme had not been forthcoming, leading to formal approach from FCTU to request meetings and proposing setting up a Partnership Forum. Sam said that a response had been received from the Director of Environment & Forestry in SG, agreeing to this approach but that the details and timings would need to be worked through, with FCTU pressing for this as soon as possible. He added that formal dialogue was beginning with FC on the employer's obligations as the 'transferor' in the staff transfer process, governed by COSoP (Cabinet Office Statement of Practice), as would all Terms & Conditions aspects be in negotiations with SG, which was seen by FCTU as an absolute priority, to establish the right arrangements going forward up until the transfer date.

15 November, 09:30 – 12:00

8. Decentralisation of Shared Services

The AGM was provided with an update on the process of establishing new corporate services in England, Scotland and Forest Research and decommissioning Shared Services. Sam said that in 2017, FCTU was consulted on business cases for Finance Services and Digital Services in Scotland, as well as new corporate services (HR, IT and Finance) for Forest Research as covered under agenda item 6. He said this meant continuing to transfer staff from Shared Services into Scotland and FR, whether through assimilation or competition, but with some opting for Voluntary Redundancy where there was no match or interest in any other opportunities, and fully adhering to the agreed Staffing Protocol. It was noted that the assimilation process was still ongoing in these areas, but Sam emphasised the huge amount of consultation work undertaken throughout the decentralisation process, covering Health & Safety, Learning & Development, Equality & Diversity, HR Services, Procurement, Internal Audit and more recently Finance and Digital Services. It was recognised that this represented most of the Shared Service functions and that there was now little left to move into the countries in FR, excluding Corporate & Forestry Support/Cross-Border functions.

9. Future of FC & FCTU (England/FR)

Mick referred to the recent publication of the Future of the Forestry Commission document and Minister's statement about the future of the organisation within government and management of the Public Forest Estate. Mick opened up the AGM for discussion on what the messages contained within the document meant for the remaining Forestry Commission after the Scotland transfer, as well as the FC Trade Unions setup in 2019. The views expressed, while some positive around potential opportunities, included concern about staffing and the approach on potentially developing separate terms and conditions in the three separate parts of the FC (Forest Enterprise, Forest Services & Forest Research agency) after 2019, and what was behind this aim. Another issue of concern was the reference to increasing the number and value of volunteering opportunities, which was felt to have potential implications for jobs and H&S. Mick said that further discussions on these issues and concerns would take place at the England Staff Council.

It was proposed that FCTU set up a forum consisting of DC, FCTU England and FCTU Research reps to work through future joint union structures and deal with the transition from Central Services to England/FR. It was agreed that collective bargaining must continue to work effectively in the future organisation post-devolution, in establishing the right arrangements for the trade unions and their members in future.

Action Required: Departmental Committee

10. Health, Safety & Wellbeing

The issues around mental health and wellbeing were noted to have been robustly covered in the DC and Area Committee reports; however, Cheryl referred to the Westminster Government's recent report [Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers](#), enquiring if the FC would be taking this into account in the ongoing wellbeing programmes and training being rolled out. It was agreed this would be referred to by FCTU to in the further country and FR discussions.

Sam reported that he remained on the H&S strategy group as the FCTU rep, and that this group was in place primarily to give assurance to the Executive Board that the Health & Safety strategy was still being delivered across FC, as well as looking at any opportunities for synergy or collaboration on health and safety and the various action plans across the FC. It was noted that there would be a full report from management at the Departmental Staff Council on 24th January.

11. Pay

Reflecting on 2017 pay talks and the recent imposition of the pay award, significant concern was expressed at the continuing pay caps and Westminster Government pay policy. The restraints applied to FC was seen as wholly unacceptable by the trade unions and the effects of a real decline in pay over several years were felt even more so by members in 2017 with the hikes in inflation. The AGM recognised the firm rejection of the offer, with the constituent unions opting not to hold a ballot of their memberships, agreeing they would not be able to accept any offer within the restrictions of the government's current pay policy and caps. In rejecting the offer, FCTU had referred back to the 2017 Pay Claim, which sought to address both the decline in pay and the unfairness of the current pay system including the gender pay gap, as well as to ensure that the hardworking and dedicated members were adequately rewarded for the work they do, at the proper rate. It was recognised that despite a series of pay talks, both formal and informal and a revision to the initial offer, the imposed offer failed to address any of these demands.

The AGM acknowledged the recent Staff Survey results for Pay and Benefits, with a further deterioration in perceptions of pay being fair for the work members do and reasonable when compared with other organisations. Mick said it was clear that the impact of continued pay caps on our members and their living standards was severe and that pay was significantly contributing to worsening morale, motivation and wellbeing for many.

Without a mention of the public sector pay crisis in the Chancellor's autumn budget statement, FCTU maintained that the unions must keep the pressure on the FC and Westminster Government to put a stop to Civil Service pay caps, and the AGM touched on the various pay campaigns being run nationally by the

unions.

12. AOB

12.1 Brexit

Cheryl said that the forestry unions must look at assessing potential impacts of Brexit on members and the FC on an ongoing basis in addition to the major and extension changes currently going on internally. While the implications were still very unclear, it was recognised that FC was beginning to take forward programmes related to exiting the EU, particularly in Forest Services where addition posts were being introduced solely for this work. The AGM concurred that this matter must firmly remain on FCTU's radar going forward.