

FOOD & FARMING FORUM YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER REGION

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held at the Yorkshire Agricultural Society, Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate

On Tuesday, 16th Nov 2010

Executive Committee

Steve Willis (Chair)
Peter Bainbridge (Government Office, Yorkshire & The Humber)
Pauline Teale (Yorkshire Forward)
Alan Hayes (Yorkshire Forward)
Dorothy Fairburn (Country Land & Business Association)
Helen Wright (East Riding of Yorkshire Council)
Dean Cook (Food and Environment Research Agency)
Nigel Pulling (Yorkshire Agricultural Society)
George Hamilton (Growing Routes, Yorkshire Agricultural Society)
Richard Ellison (National Farmers Union)
Tony Pexton (Rural Affairs Forum)
Chloe Palmer (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group)
Alan Wolinski (Animal Health)
David Shaw (Natural England)
Rachael Moore (Yorkshire Federation of Young Farmers Clubs)
Jonathan Knight (Regional Food Group)

Secretariat

Deborah Hare (Project Manager)
Elizabeth Hudson

Apologies for absence

Andy Tordoff, (Yorkshire Forward)
Peter Nottage (Natural England)
David Fraser (Government Office, Yorkshire & The Humber)

1. Welcome and Introduction

Steve Willis welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave the apologies for absence. Steve welcomed Liz back from maternity leave and offered Debs sincere thanks for her hard work this year.

2. Update on current Food and Farming Forum activity

- **Careers Conference 4th November – Askham Bryan College**
- Debs Hare gave feedback on the Careers Conference.
- The rationale behind the event was that quite often agriculture is seen as only offering technical career options, and there is a need to build awareness of the many highly skilled opportunities that are available.
- There were 60 attendees, made up of mostly Careers Advisers from Connexions and iGen and representatives from both state schools and private schools from across the region.

- There were 34 industry representatives from food and land based sectors.
- Feedback from attendees was excellent; many commented that they hadn't appreciated the diversity of opportunities in the sector. The speakers were interesting and passionate about their careers.
- There were requests to repeat the event and to include more businesses.
- There have been examples of collaboration between businesses who met at the event.
- Since the event, Steve, Liz and Debs have met with representatives from the Open College Network who had seen publicity around the event. FFF will be supporting them to link with colleges.
- The steering group will meet on 23rd November for a full debrief.
- **Launch event 24th November (new group)**
- The launch of the Farming into the Future group will take place at Pavilions of Harrogate. The group offers younger farmers and interested supporters in the region the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences, develop networks, organise events with key speakers and importantly a social get together.
- This group is an amalgamation of the proposed Young Vets and Farmers Forum promoted at the Great Yorkshire Show and the Yorkshire Agricultural Society's vision for a focus group for the region. These concepts have been combined to strengthen the establishment and support for the group.
- Bishopton Vets and YFYFC have been involved in promoting the event. Members of the Executive were asked to promote through their own networks. Richard Ellison offered to include plug in the NFU weekly email and David Shaw offered to promote the event to Natural England's younger advisers.
- The launch event has been sponsored by BOCM Pauls and the Yorkshire Agricultural Society
- Rachael Moore commented that while the social aspect of the group was vital and that many YFC members really wanted to be more informed. This group links well with the Farming and Rural Matters group set up by YFC.
- There was some discussion about the age of attendees. It was agreed that we should focus on working farmers, perhaps sons and daughters rather than their parents.
- There are no geographical boundaries to the group.
- **Farmer Group**
- Steve gave feedback on the recent trip to Tony Marmont's farm at Loughborough where a range of renewable enterprises had been set up.
- It was suggested that rather than this group being run in parallel to the Young Vets and Farmers Group, it should be amalgamated with the new 'Farming into the Future' group. The Executive agreed that there should still be science links with this group to maintain the focus on knowledge transfer.

3. Current Regional Position

- Defra consider the CSR settlement as "reasonable and allowing us to do the key things we need to do to achieve Minister's priorities".
- The resource and programme spending settlement, is broadly in line with OGD's scale of cuts. In terms of admin spend there was a 33% reduction and no Department got a smaller cut. This equates to 8% less each year, compared with 5% less each year in SR 2007. To put this into context, current estimates are for a 5000-8000 job reduction over the spending review period, from the current Defra total of 30,000. However the message was that this cannot be done by salami slicing. A big push on savings from estates and IT means the more that can be made here, the fewer jobs will go. Capital cuts were lower than most Departments, mainly driven by the need to fund flood and coastal defence measures and Defra will still have £2.2bn to spend each year.
- Defra's priorities are as per it's Structural Reform Plan and Business Plan, with other, numerous areas of activity listed below:

- Natural Environment white paper
 - CAP reform
 - Bovine TB
 - Million trees
 - Green economy road map
 - Farming regulation task force
 - Waste review
 - British Waterways mutualisation
 - Water white paper
 - Greenest ever Govt action plan
- Programme spend on RDPE and Animal Health has largely been agreed and is now being finalised. The allocation of the admin spend (how Defra organises it's people to deliver) is currently under discussion in teams. Budgets for 11/12 will be known by Xmas.
 - The vision for the future:

The Department will be smaller (but not that much smaller)

- Still have over £2.2bn to spend each year
- Focus on doing things ONLY Defra can do
- Rigorous focus on priorities
- More influencing, partnership working and facilitating
- Emphasis on evidence
- Relationships with Non Departmental Public Bodies and Arms Length Bodies would be closer and better defined

4. New Regional Structures – LEPs

- Leeds and Sheffield LEPs have been given the green light, the North and North Yorkshire LEP is still being developed. The Humber LEPs are still in an early stage of development.
- Groups have access to a £1.4bn 4 year Regional Growth Fund (being part of a LEP is not a pre-requisite to accessing funding). The first round of funding closes on 21 January 2011.
- There was discussion around the table regarding how to ensure rural representation going forward and influencing the LEPs. There was also a suggestion that the rural community can form a LEP.
- Dorothy Fairburn reported that she and George Hamilton had attended a rural group meeting of the Leeds City region and that she was pleased with their approach to date. The contact there is Sally Hinton.
- There were concerns regarding the lack of communication between Jonathan French (York and North Yorkshire LEP) and the industry.
- Tony Pexton raised concerns regarding the weight of the rural voice and suggested that we will have to be on our toes to ensure that 'rural' gets the focus it deserves.
- Dorothy suggested that perhaps each LEP should have a rural champion, perhaps a farmer or industry supporter.
- Richard Ellison raised concerns that a huge time commitment would be needed to engage with all of the LEPs in the region. There was an agreement around the table that we have no option but to be engaged to have any influence.

5. Effect of the spending review on partner bodies

- **RFG**
- Jonathan reported that the RFG funding ends in April 2011 (a year earlier than expected) and as such the RFG are bidding into the Regional Growth Fund to provide business support to small producers.
- **Yorkshire Forward**

- Alan stated that the CSR didn't affect the plans to close down Yorkshire Forward. The budget from April 2011 is unknown. 33 organisations are affected including the Regional Food Group and Farexchange.
- Pauline is managing out existing programmers. The RDPE budget is on track for spending targets, the reduced RDPE team is under pressure. 103 YF staff left on 22 October.
- **FERA**
- Dean informed the group that a review of the science agencies has been undertaken. For FERA, increased commercial activity should cover the budget cuts and there are no planned redundancies.
- **YFC**
- Rachael reported that it may be more challenging to obtain grants and as such spending will be focused on member retention and training.
- **YAS**
- Nigel stated that the Yorkshire Event Centre is watching future public sector bookings with interest, otherwise it is 'business as usual'. The Society is unsure how best to engage with the LEPs.
- **CLA**
- Dorothy envisaged an increased workload trying to work out the 'new geography'. Membership has increased but some members are upset about the recent changes to Environmental Stewardship Schemes.
- **Growing Routes**
- George informed us that the current contract expires at the end of March 2011 and that the team are exploring opportunities post March.
- **Local Authorities**
- Helen informed us that the Local Authorities, too, are facing cuts but that ERYCC had planned ahead and is focusing on the delivery of front line services.
- **RAF**
- The RAF is in 'no man's land' and is awaiting further information regarding future funding.
- **FWAG**
- Chloe reported that the competition for grants has increased and changes to the HLS agreements are affecting work from farmer clients.
- **Animal Health**
- Alan informed the group that, following discussions with Defra, the implementation of a new IT system (leading to savings) will be honoured. Administrative staff are expected to be affected by cuts, a voluntary redundancy package is expected in December. Details of the merger with VLA are as yet unknown. Dairy hygiene inspections are likely to be more risk based with the industry taking a greater role.
- **Natural England**
- David Shaw informed us that Natural England have been planning for these cuts since March 2010. A regional approach is likely to be replaced by a more focused model with frontline delivery taking priority. 400 redundancies are envisaged – it is hoped that these will be voluntary. It is likely that the current 32 offices will be reduced to 20. The offices in Northallerton and Leeds are likely to remain open and Foss House is likely to become a 'drop-in' centre.
- New HLS agreements have now been postponed until April 2011.
- Peter Nottage is now covering what were the East of England and Yorkshire and Humber regions, focusing on Organisational Development.
- An amended Public Bodies Bill will enable Natural England to charge for some services e.g. consents and land use planning for developers.
- **NFU**
- Richard feels that there is some satisfaction from farmers regarding the reduction in quangos but there is concern that costs will be transferred to the industry – particularly to the livestock sector. The NFU has limited resources to engage with every LEP.

6. Future of the Food and Farming Forum

- Funding from March 2011 is uncertain and Defra has not made a decision. As such it is business as usual, working towards completion of the business plan, until the end of the financial year.
- There is some indication that Defra may prefer Food, Farming and Rural Affairs to be covered by a virtual network. Pauline raised reservations that a virtual network would not allow for the informal discussions which are also important. Tony also reported that Richard Benyon had raised the possibility of a virtual network.
- There was some encouragement that the current Government Ministers do, at least, have knowledge of the industry.
- Helen Wright pointed out that there would be no barrier to us doing something locally if that is what we feel that we, as a group, need.

7. Business Plan Going Forward

- Steve reported that the successful Careers Conference completes another section of the business plan and that work against business plan targets will continue until March 2011.
- Steve raised concerns that a virtual network depends upon fast, reliable broadband which does not exist in all rural areas.
- Alan Hayes felt that there is still a role for this group and as such it should be on the agenda of the new political structure. He believed that this is a job for members of the Executive as well as the group as a whole. The collective voice is valuable in getting important issues on the agenda of decision makers.

8. Any Other Business

- Steve thanked Debs for her hard work and organized manner over the last year and wished her well. His comments were echoed by other member of the Executive.