

Thu 02/07/2020 17:12

Dear Colleagues

This is my first message to you all as incoming Chair of the FSC Board of Trustees, having been a Trustee for the past five years. It is just over four months since I was appointed, and at the time we were in blissful ignorance of the impact Coronavirus would have globally, and of course on the FSC. In the coming months, and as soon as possible I hope to get to know you and the organisation better than I do currently, but at present the over-riding concern is charting a course for the future. So for now, and as a preface to the message below, I simply wish to state my strong belief in the importance of and commitment to the FSC, and my intention to support you.

The Board of Trustees meeting has just finished. As you might expect, our focus was on ensuring that FSC remains a going concern and continues to operate successfully. The Board has agreed to a set of recommendations that we believe is the best possible way to achieve that aim.

The Board have agreed to adopt a roadmap for 2021/22 which will guide our actions. That roadmap has pulled together the facts that we do know, and modelled several assumptions to the best of our ability given that we are all dealing with so much uncertainty. A number of staff have worked very hard to do all the necessary work in a rapidly changing environment.

The Board remain convinced that the essence of what FSC offers remains relevant, perhaps more than ever before. Climate change and biodiversity loss remain as big a threat as ever and there is a growing need for green jobs. Despite a strong cashflow, the FSC has had to borrow additional money to help sustain us whilst we have no customers in our centres, and will need to borrow more in the coming months.

We have to change because FSC has borrowed a lot of money, and will need to borrow more, because our customers need us to do things differently and because we have to create a significant surplus to repay our debt.

There are no plans to mothball centres, but our models suggest that there will be little business this autumn term. There will have to be some staffing changes to better match the expected demand for our services and the new ways in which we expect to deliver them, as well as changes that are likely to impact all staff.

This inevitably does mean that we will need to have a formal staff consultation, but part of that process will involve exploring all possible options including taking sabbaticals for further study so that staff can return as business picks up, job sharing, voluntary redundancies, early retirement and even taking unpaid leave.

What's Next?

- Before the start of any formal consultation process, Mark will be holding a meeting with managers early next week so that they can be fully briefed and able to then effectively talk with their own staff during the days following. Time will be needed for this to be done well.
- We will set up an all staff zoom early in the following week.
- The papers from the Board meeting will be available from next week as well as the minutes as soon as possible thereafter. Alongside those documents we will produce a shorter summary of the road map, the reasons behind it and way forward. This short version is simply because the original is over 70 pages long.
- An extra board meeting will be held on 16th September to review progress.

Early on in this pandemic, Mark wrote to all staff that in light of the likely impact of Covid-19 he could not promise that absolutely everything will be fine for everyone, and that he knew that staff would not expect him to. He also reiterated then that everyone was working really hard to ensure that FSC gets through this pandemic and emerges in the best shape possible, whenever that will be. I echo his words. We cannot promise that some staff will not be personally and significantly impacted, but I hope that you can get behind the plans that will help us get through the next few difficult months.

Pete Higgins