

Thu 16/12/2021 14:26

Dear Colleagues,

This is the final catch up for 2021. The Board of Trustees meeting has just finished and Pete Higgins and I thought it would be good to update you on some of the key decisions. As with all the decisions made during these uncertain times, it's a fine balance between competing pressures and concerns. With increasingly detailed modelling and with increasing sales the Board remain cautiously confident in our roadmap towards recovery, but are mindful of the continuing levels of uncertainty. More details will be available when the minutes are published but the headline decisions of particular interest are on pay and leave.

Pay Award Agreed

I am pleased to report that the Board ratified the recommendation of the Finance and Administration Committee to award a 3% cost of living increase to all staff on scale point 16 and above. Higher rates will apply to the scales below including uplifting the rate paid to apprentices and to ensure that we comply with the national minimum wage. It was agreed that a rise is essential to help with both recruitment and retention. We need to be properly staffed by February to ensure that we can deliver our business and reduce the strain on those who have been severely stretched in recent months. The increase will be from April 2022.

Annual Leave

The Board felt unable to agree to the recommendation to raise the annual leave entitlement at today's meeting, and requested further details regarding financial costs etc. However, knowing the importance of our leave offer to help with both recruitment and retention, the Senior Leadership Team will prepare a more detailed impact statement for trustees to consider in January.

Covid Update

The speed of the spread of the Omicron variant means that this paragraph may rapidly become out of date. The focus of advice is on getting your booster (details here for [England](#), [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#)) and advice from across the UK is to reduce social contacts in the run up to Christmas. January seems a long way off and it's best to rule nothing in or nothing out. As far as education goes, currently the government in both England and Scotland are working towards minimising disruption next term thought lots of local authorities are preparing for it. There will be a further update from the Welsh Government tomorrow but already Welsh schools will be returning later and have been asked to prepare for some online learning in the new year and using staggered starts.

Trees for Cities

The Trees for Cities programme is using £1.2M funding from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to increase and improve tree cover in seven coastal towns and cities. These locations have low tree canopy cover and high levels of socio-economic deprivation. The project aims to enhance skills and knowledge about urban trees. FSC is producing the tree identification guides and this month press and media work is encouraging residents to [register online](#) by 10th January 2022 to receive their free guide to tree buds and bark in the post in the New Year. This will be followed by two more identification guides in summer and autumn about leaves and berries. These areas are in parts of the country where FSC hasn't got much of a physical presence and so we are particularly pleased that Philip has been enthusing on [Radio Norfolk](#) (from 3:49) and will be doing so again on Radio Hull on Saturday.

Jennifer Andrews, Flatford Mill

I have received the sad news of the death of Jennifer Andrews, a long standing member of the Flatford team. Jennifer was involved with Flatford since at least 1958, initially as a student on courses run by British landscape painter John Nash and Jim Bingley the Warden in the 60s and 70s. She then went on to run her own popular painting courses and also came in each week to tend to the borders at the front of the Mill, Willy Lott's and Valley Farm. That is where I met Jennifer on one of my visits to Flatford where we talked about her work in the garden. Despite being in her 80s and having to use a walking stick to get about, Jennifer was working in the gardens last month.

There's a link [here](#) to some photos taken of her at Flatford on the National Portrait Gallery website. Jennifer became ill quite quickly and died surrounded by her family. In a fitting tribute, Centre Manager John Blair said that "When walking up to the Mill from the car park, one of the main reasons the view of the building looks so special was the work that Jennifer put into the plants around the buildings every week".

John Barker's Additional Legacy

Earlier in the year, I was able to tell you about the extraordinarily generous gift of £666k left to us by the late John Barker. In finalising John's estate, a further donation has been made taking the total given to FSC to £1,090,000. Care and thought will be taken as to how to make the best possible use of this legacy.

Payroll staff and pay date

December's pay date has been brought forward to 23rd and it's good opportunity to thank the payroll team for their work this year. Few people will be aware that the complications of the Government's furlough and flexi furlough scheme meant that the team had to do individual bespoke calculations for each member of staff every month for many months.

Season's greetings, stay safe and keep well

Mark