

# MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2006 AT THE TGWU LONDON.

## Present: Official Side

Paul Hill Tout, Chairman  
Simon Hodgson  
Richard Britton  
Ken Milsom  
Pauline Marchington, Secretary

## Trade Union side:

Tim Gill, Vice Chairman, TGWU  
Julie Saunders, PCS  
John Winterbourne, PCS  
John Broatch, TGWU  
Martin Johnston, PCS  
Tom Grimwood, TGWU  
Ed Shephard  
Sue Gillingwater  
Mick Hoban, PCS  
Crispin Thorn, Prospect  
Steve Holdsworth PCS

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Apologies have been received from Steve Smith, Ron Melville and Tim Medlock.

## 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true account.

## 3. MATTERS ARISING

In response to Ron Melville's question from the 12 July meeting, Ken Milsom tabled a paper on sick statistics levels for 2005. In 2003 just over 1,000 staff days were off sick with stress, in 2004 the figure had increased to over 2,000 and in 2005 the numbers had gone down to 830. It was agreed that figures and trends, on all sick statistics, would be produced annually for this meeting.

### **ACTION KEN MILSOM**

Ken Milsom said that Emily Ramsey was still working on the revised policy note on 'Smoking at Work' and it would be sent out as soon as it was completed.

### 3. DIRECTORS REPORT

Paul Hill-Tout said the formal launch of Natural England took place on 11 October at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. David Miliband attended. The new body is now up and running. The FC has a meeting in November with the senior staff from Natural England and we will report back to Staff Council on how this is progressing. Paul Hill-Tout took this opportunity to say that it is not the Government's policy to merge the FC with Natural England.

Graduate Recruitment – Paul Hill-Tout said no new staff had been selected from the recent Graduate Recruitment Exercise. Simon Hodgson said we have learnt from this exercise, we had a mismatch of expectations in that we wanted the graduates to have a certain amount of experience that graduates are unlikely to have. Crispin Thorn commented that the potential for developing our own staff has been overlooked through this development. We have staff who are graduates who could be considered with out going to an external recruitment exercise.

Paul Hill-Tout said the board for the HR Business Person takes place on 31 October. Once this person is in post they will be the line-manager to the 2 HR Officers already in post and they will report directly to Paul Hill-Tout with Kim Lardge the confirming officer. The main change this post will bring is in how we do business with Silvan House.

Crispin Thorn asked if the post of Business & Skills Programme Manager had been trawled. Paul Hill-Tout said that the post had not been trawled but had been filled through a secondment from Defra. FC would continue to develop secondment and interchange arrangements with other departments as part of our commitment to diversity and development. He also undertook to keep TUS informed of all such plans.

TRAs -Tim Gill referred to the TRA that has run for 2 years and 11 months saying it had gone on too long and asked if it would become a permanent role. Ken Milsom said this is a difficult case. The original TRA was put in place to support the then Head of Finance in Cambridge but this has been impacted by the restructuring of the Finance function in England and the transfer of some financial duties from Cambridge to Bristol. This can happen from time to time when restructuring impacts on existing teams. The role of Office Facilities Manager becoming vacant when Barry Sidaway transferred to Communications & Secretariat had brought about the need for a short-term continuation of the TRA. This post is linked to the paper tabled today on our National Office appraisal. From the timetable referred to in the paper, by the next Staff Council meeting we should have a much clearer picture on whether this post has a permanent future and can be trawled.

The TUS also expressed concern at the decision to give TRA to 3 FDMs before completing the formal full JEGS exercise. They felt the most appropriate way forward would be to undertake the JEGS process with the to option to backdate any outstanding TRA allowances depending on the outcome of the exercise. . Ken Milsom explained how this had come about and said that he wrote to the TUS about this, had not received any objections and he therefore went ahead. Crispin Thorn said the letter was a statement of fact and not an opportunity to express views. Paul

Hill-Tout said he noted TUS comments and he would reflect upon them.

## **ACTION KEN MILSOM**

Following on from the discussion about the FDM grading Crispin Thorn highlighted the need to be consistent in considering staff groups which contain individuals at different grades undertaking similar roles. In particular, he noted that the same issues equally apply to groups such as the Operations Manager's whose grades vary across the Conservancies.

Money Matters - Tim Gill asked where the £2million we needed came from?

Paul Hill-Tout replied from a range of measures but stressed such action can only be sustained for this financial year and not in future years and we need a new set of efficiency measures for the future and hence the CSR 07 efficiency plan.

Paying Agency – Crispin Thorn asked about the issue of inspections and the payment of cheques. Richard Britton said there had been a successful payment run on 6 October. The mandate for payments had been agreed but the business of inspection arrangements is not clear and this is not in the scope of the paying agency. The matter will be discussed with Alan Mitchell and the TUS will be informed of the outcome. There are also European dimensions to consider and the European Auditors will have their own views. There will be pressure from Europe and the RPA for the inspections to be linked

### **4. ITEM 5 NATIONAL OFFICE**

Tim Gill said this will have big implications for staff and asked for a time scale. Paul Hill-Tout said the office at Cambridge would be demolished at some point in time. We have a contract until May 2010 but we could move earlier if our landlords come up with an attractive offer. There are various options of relocation to consider and staff in Cambridge have been informed at a meeting in July. Simon Hodgson and Richard Britton will share this information with staff at Bristol and York. Crispin Thorn pointed out that the future of the Conservancy Office at Wheldrake should be considered alongside the future of the National Office at York and therefore be included as part of the review. Paul Hill-Tout promised to keep the Staff Council informed of any developments/proposals.

### **5. ITEM 6 REVIEW OF REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS**

Tim Gill said he had received a good cross section of responses to the TUS email of 19 September, with option B as the preferred option. The questions being asked are about Public Perception, Boundary Changes and Financial Savings, amongst others. Paul Hill-Tout said a meeting was held on 3 Sept for Cost Centre Managers. He asked Staff Council if staff are being kept informed and had been given the opportunity to respond. Tim Gill replied staff are waiting to see how it will effect them rather than coming back with random questions. Some cost centres had not been cascading the information down but there has been a recent improvement and staff

are being kept informed. Paul Hill-Tout said that at the Senate meeting on 19 October there would be a discussion on the issues raised from the meeting on 3 September.

He continued, stakeholders, some 60 to 70 organisations, had been written to and we have had a 75% feedback. Amongst concerns raised was the need not to disrupt relationships and about resources in regions. With 30% opting for the status quo, 56 % opting for a true regionalised approach and 24% ambivalent.

Paul Hill-Tout continued the review was discussed at the National Committee on 19 September and will be further debated at the next meeting in November.

Tim Gill asked for a time scale for the implementation. Paul Hill-Tout replied that he expected that any changes would start to be introduced from 2007/08 but may take some time to conclude. Conclusions from the Review of Regional Arrangements would also be woven in with the other strands of the Efficiency Review to conclude the over all the best way forward for the next few years.

## **6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

25 January 2007