

MINUTES OF NRS STAFF COUNCIL MEETING – 17 MARCH 2005

10.30 – MEETING ROOM

Present: Chris Quine (Chair)
Glenn Brearley (Vice-Chair (Prospect))
Steve Osborne (PCS)
Nelson Innes (TGWU)
Martin Abrahams
Evelyn Hall (Secretary)

Apologies: Colin Saunders, TDB

1. Minutes of meeting of 28 October 2004 were accepted as a true record.

2. Matters Arising:

a. Educational Outing

A venue for this years outing has yet to be agreed. The group agreed that the outing is a worthwhile exercise and although attendance has declined in recent years, outings should continue and staff encouraged to attend.

Staff will be asked for suggestions for an outing, keeping theme “educational”.

Action: M. Abrahams

b. Flexitime

Following the abolition of Operational Pay and the revision of the NRS flexi rules Martin Abrahams wanted to confirm that there was satisfaction with the flexi arrangements. Two additional members of staff have taken the opportunity to move to the revised flexi system. There were no other comments.

Action: Discharged

3. Utilisation/Improvement of ‘Pratt’s Bottom’

Glenn Brearley suggested a pathway similar to that recently constructed on the Bush Estate be created in the woodland area beyond the bottom Nursery with the possibility of opening it to the public for walking/leisure. Alternatively a stile could be inserted creating a “short-cut” for staff walking along Bush Loan.

Chris Quine commented that the Bush Estate paths had received EU funding. It was agreed the suggestion be put to the Grounds Committee.

David Anderson will mark the shelterbelt for thinning. It is hoped a contractor will undertake the work during the summer months. We may take the opportunity to discuss work required in the bottom woodland area with the first priority being to

ensure the area is safe. Martin Abrahams said that work on shelterbelt area would be regarded as higher priority.

Action: Grounds Committee

4. TOIL Restriction/Overtime

Steve Osborne said that his members were concerned about restrictions being placed on claiming overtime payments. Staff were being encouraged to take TOIL. With pressure on completing work schedules, this was not always convenient. He asked if there has been a provision made in 2005/06 budget for overtime.

Chris Quine said there is continuing pressures on our finances, and it is not clear at present whether overtime provision will be made. The option of overtime payment or TOIL should be agreed between members of staff and their line manager or HOD prior to the situation arising.

Action: Discharged

5. Foreign Travel T&S

Glenn Brearley said there were concerns over the lack of consistency when dealing with T&S claims, particularly for overseas visits. When funds are available, staff were allowed full T&S rates. However when funds were restricted, staff were encouraged to claim actual expenses only.

Chris Quine drew attention to a recent change to the staff handbook regarding travel and subsistence bringing arrangement more into line with the domestic travel. He said that senior staff have to be pragmatic over approving travel in order to maximise the opportunities for travel/trips, but agreed that staff should not be out of pocket. The basis of the recompense for travel should be agreed in advance.

6. T&S Payment

It was noted that a member of staff was asked by their Head of Division to meet the costs of T&S and submit their claim in the next financial year. Chris Quine said this had been an exceptional arrangement agreed to allow the member of staff to undertake a visit that was not regarded as essential. It would not become common practice.

7. Financial Awareness Seminars

Tony Cornwell has indicated that he intends holding this event in late April/early May. The seminars will be open for all to attend.

Members of staff questioned why this seminar had been postponed as it would be more advantageous if it had been held early in the financial year. Could other members of staff undertake the seminar in Tony Cornwell's absence? Chris Quine said that although there were others familiar with the system, he felt Tony Cornwell

was fully aware of all aspects of the finance system. Unfortunately due to end of year pressures Tony Cornwell could not undertake the seminars earlier. He also said that there staff with sufficient knowledge to assist should anyone require urgent assistance.

Action: Discharged

8. Workshop Review

9. The Future of the TSU

It was agreed that these 2 items be discussed together.

Steve Osborne asked if there had been any outcome to the workshop review carried out some months ago.

Chris Quine said that any recommendations would be considered as part of the overall TSU review.

Discussions on the future of the TSU are ongoing. Janet Dutch put proposals to the December meeting of the FREB. Further information was requested and further discussions are yet to take place. A letter to all TSU staff would be issued shortly by Peter Freer-Smith.

Action: Deferred

10. Tour System

Steve Osborne asked if any information could be provided on the recent paper to the GB Executive Board proposing the abolition of the tour system. Chris Quine said that the paper had been presented by FC Human Resources. He suggested that any comments should be presented via TUS.

11. NRS Smoking Policy

Martin Abrahams raised this item, saying that attitudes to smoking had changed over recent years. It was unusual to find smoking being tolerated within the work place, particularly government buildings. In anticipation of proposed Scottish Executive Legislation, it was planned to remove the smoking room facility from within the Station. There was general agreement from the Committee, Glenn Brearley was asked to invite comments from TUS members, and for suggestions on a possible alternative facility. Comments are invited by 1st June 2005.

Action: TUS

12. Status of FR Staff Councils

This subject had been raised with Ken Charles following re-organisation. The NRS Staff Council is currently recognised as a Regional Council. It is proposed that both the NRS and AH councils be recognised at local councils with the FR Council being

the Regional meeting. This proposal is currently with the respective TUS chairs for comment.

Action: Deferred

13. Any Other Business

a. Reorganisation Review

Steve Osborne said that following re-organisation it was agreed a review of the new structure would be carried out after approximately one year. He asked if there were any plans to carry out this review. Chris Quine commented that he had seen positive changes, however accepted there were areas where improvements were required. He suggested that it may still be too early to come to any conclusions. It was suggested this item be raised at the proposed FR Staff Council Meeting.

Action: Discharged

b. POPS

Glenn Brearley raised the issue of replacing B1 order books with POPS. This change was due to take place on 1 April 2005. Tony Cornwell has issued an instruction telling staff to continue using B1 order books until training in POPS had taken place.

Action: Discharged

c. Pooled Vehicles

Nelson Innes said there continue to be complaints about members of staff taking vehicles booked out to others, or not returning vehicles in time for another colleague to use. Martin Abrahams said staff had been reminded of this on several occasions and there was little else he could do. Chris Quine agreed that such situations were unacceptable and suggested that those inconvenienced take up the issue directly with the person causing the inconvenience.

Action: Discharged

14. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was agreed for Thursday 6th October 2005 at 1030 hrs.