

Minutes of the NRS Staff Council Meeting – 6 October 2005

Present: Chris Quine
Glenn Brearley
Martin Abrahams
Evelyn Hall (minutes)

Apologies: Nelson Innes
Steve Osborne

The chair acknowledged Nelson's absence and the Committee asked their best wishes for his improved health be passed on to him.

Agenda

1. Minutes of meeting of 17 March 2005

Minutes of the meeting of 17 March 2005 were accepted as a true record.

2. Matters arising:

- a. Educational Outing

The Royal Botanic Gardens and the Scottish Parliament building are this year's venue for the Educational Outing on the 7 October. There are 34 members of staff attending. This is a considerable improvement over the last few years. The Committee was pleased with numbers attending. Chris Quine thanked Martin Abrahams and Evelyn Hall for their input in organising the outing.

Action: Dismissed

- b. Pratt's Bottom

Pratt's Bottom has been considerably improved since the last meeting. Glenn Brearley said members of staff had commented on the vast improvement and that this is now a very pleasant walk. Martin Abrahams said there were some health and safety issues to be addressed which were discussed at the recent NRS Management Committee meeting. We are also trying to obtain information on various walks in and around the Bush Estate. These will be publicised during the 'Healthy Living Week', planned for 24 October.

Action: Chris Quine

c. Workshop Review

It was agreed that the review had apparently been left in abeyance pending the outcome of the TSU review.

Action: Deferred

d. Smoking policy

The Committee agreed that the current Smoking Policy has been well received and an adequate compromise had been reached. Chris Quine thanked the staff for their co-operation.

Action: Dismissed

e. Status of FR Staff Council

Glenn Brearley had been in contact with Ed Sheppard regarding the status of the FR Staff Council and will shortly inform Ken Charles of their views.

Glenn Brearley also made the Committee aware that Tracy Houston (current TUS Chair at Alice Holt) will be resigning this post as she is going on secondment to Italy for 2 years. A replacement Chair had not yet been agreed.

Action: Deferred.

3. TSU Review and Its Implications

Glenn Brearley said staff had expressed their concerns regarding the impact that a large reduction in TSU staff at NRS would have on field experimentation. Chris Quine confirmed that changing requirements for this work had been considered during the review. He said that it was likely that if an additional need for field work support was identified, resources would be available.

Glenn Brearley raised staff concerns about the potential loss of turnover in the canteen and the effect this would have on our caterers. Martin Abrahams is aware and has had preliminary talks with the caterers and the situation would be monitored.

Glenn Brearley also raised concerns about the general up-keep of the grounds around NRS once TSU numbers have been reduced. Martin Abrahams said he was aware of the likely effect.

Chris Quine agreed that this is an unsettling period and said that efforts were being made to reach an early resolution to the uncertainty.

It was in everyone's interest to ensure that the high standard is maintained in both catering and grounds maintenance.

Action: Discharged

4. Booking and use of FR vehicles

Glenn Brearley highlighted recent problems with the misuse of the booking system vehicles. Concerns have been expressed in the past about staff taking vehicles without booking them out on the diary or not returning log books to the drawer. Martin Abrahams agreed that this did happen on very rare occasions but he could not see an easy solution to the problem. The only alternative was to restrict access to the vehicle logs, which in turn would cause more problems.

Chris Quine supported the concerns raised that the actions of a few can lead to considerable inconvenience and loss of time. He suggested management action should be taken where individuals deliberately ignore the agreed system.

Chris Quine proposed writing to staff to remind them of current arrangements and emphasise the need to cooperate with colleagues in operating this system.

The Committee agreed that use of the booking system should be monitored and the need for further action discussed at the next meeting.

Action: Chris Quine

5. LPG powered FR vehicles.

Glenn Brearley said that Steve Lee, the "Greening Officer" had brought this item to his attention asking if FR were doing enough to be seen as being "green" and in particular should LPG powered vehicles be used. Martin Abrahams confirmed that there are LPG vehicles being used with the FC, and that there is one in use in FR at Talybont.

However, he had discussed the use of LPG powered vehicles with Bruce Cochrane of MES, and provided the following update. There are problems assessing fuel usage and mechanical reliability. With the uncertainty of availability of supplies of LPG it was felt that vehicles were consuming a greater amount of petrol, this produced a negative effect on the environment. Ford stopped manufacturing LPG Focus 2 years ago. Vauxhall had also withdrawn LPG vehicles and the Government 'Powershift' grant for LPG vehicles had been withdrawn. Use of LPG fuel was discussed with FR some time ago and it was agreed that FR would 'cautiously' wait progress.

Drivers of diesel vehicles are encouraged to use 5% bio diesel where available. This is being increasingly stocked at MES derv tanks. The use of this fuel further reduces exhaust emissions as well as using less fossil fuel without any modification to vehicles. Drivers are encouraged to notify Welshpool of garages stocking bio diesel. They will forward this information to other FC users.

MES have recommended the 1.4 Ford Fusion a lighter and more economical vehicle than the Ford Focus or Astra. The Fusion has more ground clearance which could be useful in forest road conditions. They have also recommended the 1.6 TDCI Berlingo to replace the 1.9 TD and 2.0 HDCI Berlingos.

Glen Brearley suggested another alternative is to look into the new hybrid vehicles, although commenting that these were very expensive.

Chris Quine said that ‘greening policy’ had been discussed at the recent NRS Management Committee Meeting. He is considering the merit of forming a “greening committee” to identify the breadth of areas that could be addressed. The Committee agreed this would be a good idea and Chris Quine agreed to discuss further with Steve Lee.

Action: Chris Quine

6. Any other business.

- a. The Committee asked that the staff’s appreciation of the high level of satisfaction provided by our caterers be minuted.
- b. Martin Abrahams informed the Committee that plans are in place to hold a “Healthy Living” week here NRS. This will take place during the week commencing 24 October. Display boards will be set up in the canteen area with leaflets covering various aspects of healthy living including walking etc. Fruit will also be made available free of charge to all staff that week.

6. Date of next meeting.

The date of the next meeting will be Thursday 16 March at 1030 hrs.