



Guest Speakers

Janice Godrich, PCS National President

Janice welcomed the invitation and opportunity to talk to the PCS FC Group about the union and what progress was being made on the national campaign.

We recognise that the union is a diverse group in many ways. We represent many large government departments including DWP, HMRC, and also many thousands of people who work in smaller areas of the Civil Service and departmental public bodies. One of the aims of the union in times when we have to collectively act to defend our interests at work is to ensure that the interests and involvement of some of the smaller areas of the civil service and not overshadowed by the larger areas and the issues they face. This can be a challenge at times to ensure that everyone feels that their voice within the union is equal and that everyone feels that they form part of the collective decision making that leads to campaigning. In some ways this is similar to equality issues that we all have to address as union reps as we try to encourage people from under-represented groups such as woman, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities to get involved in union activity to ensure that everyone feels that their voice has an equal value.

The purpose of the National Campaign is not only to defend members from an onslaught of cuts in jobs and pay but also to raise the aspirations of our members. People should feel proud to be in the Civil Service and we need point out the value in society that they bring. Civil Servants deliver what is in effect the infrastructure of society.

It was announced in 2004 that there would be 100,000 compulsory redundancies across the Civil Service. At the time no department was safe from the potential impact of the efficiency agenda. Not only was the stress and anxiety from the announcement unforgivable itself, but also the response from other political parties at the time. We saw Labour backbenchers waving and cheering in response to that announcement and then a few days later we witnessed the other main political parties competing in a "bidding war" in terms of stating how many jobs they would cut. There did not appear to be any thought put into service delivery with these cuts, it was about trying to win votes prior to the General Election. The job of the union in those circumstances is to defend the interests of members and say that we are not going to stand by and let people be subject to compulsory redundancies. There was not any sort of business case or rationale behind the cuts. The campaign that was launched had both parliamentary and campaigning elements to it and we have now established one of the largest parliamentary groups in Westminster. MPs meet with us and try to influence the political agenda in terms of jobs in the public sector. This was replicated in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly and helps with putting pressure onto the Government and getting the message across. With some degree of success we started to transform the way in which members are perceived and the jobs that they do are perceived. Part of the reason this happened was that members in branches were contacting MPs in their constituencies, highlighting the effects that the cuts would have on the Civil Service. The value of meeting MPs along with other Government departments to put the case across should not be underestimated.

We took national industrial action in November and in January and May of last year and the result of this is that for the first time in 15 years, we now have a nationally negotiated

agreement that gives protection to people that face the threat of a compulsory redundancy. This agreement went out to all members recently and we are confident that this agreement will prevent anyone in the Civil Service from being made redundant without being offered a suitable alternative job offer in which they could carry on their career. This agreement and the protection it gives would not have been conceded to us if it hadn't been for the work that we have all done in terms of continuing to raise the profile of the union, the campaigning, the media work, the action that we took and the parliamentary pressure we put on.

Anyone who works in a local office will know that life can be difficult because of the stresses and pressures that are a fact of life for many thousands of people at work. This is largely due to the issues around public sector pay and the impact of the Government's restrictions. The PCS National Conference which will take place in 2 weeks will have to debate to take a decision to refocus the National Campaign on the issue of pay as the Government's pay restraints affect us all. We see areas where members are facing below inflationary pay rises and the pay campaign will have to be intensified over the next period now that we have protection of jobs and pensions. Whilst in areas such as health and education, progression is funded separately from annual pay awards, this is not the case in the civil service as our progression and pay rise comes from the same pocket. In many ways our case is not only about improving public sector pay for everyone but it is about highlighting the fact that this is unfair.

The 'Make Your Vote Count Campaign' is about questioning people who stand for public office in relation to where they stand on issues affecting public sector work. 87% of candidates standing for the London Assembly Elections last week supported the union's position on public sector pay, defending jobs and defending services in the Civil Service. Part of this campaign is not just to ask people questions before they are elected but it is to hold them to account when they are elected in relation to the commitments that they have given. In the run up to the next general election across the UK we will ask those questions and then follow up when people are elected in terms of what they do. At the moment, given the disastrous results for the Government there is an opportunity for unions to really start applying pressure politically. We can target candidates standing in margin of constituencies and we know that the amount of Civil Servants living in that constituency can make the difference between someone being elected or not. This is a fantastic tool for us because we can now go out and ask MPs what they are doing about putting pressure through the back benches and through the Parliamentary party about changing course on the issues on public sector pay.

Recently the Child Poverty Action Group had carried out a survey of parents, which revealed that that they are the first generation to believe that their children will be worse off than themselves. This is a real indictment of the way that policies have been made by successive Governments who have claimed to be targeting child poverty. We all have a responsibility in the trade union movement to change that.

Given that the union was able to defend jobs and pensions, if enough people believe that change is possible it will happen. This is achieved with having a sense of purpose and unity, ensuring that we have our tactics right and that we move forward in a united way.

Jean Lindsay, Director HR

Jean felt that it is extremely important the FC has a strong trade union side and stressed that the management side is very keen to negotiate with unions and seek views from members over what will be a challenging time ahead. Jean emphasised that increasing union membership was vital and urged the group to promote the relevance of union membership in the FC.

Jean gave an overview of the FC People Strategy and referred to the Director General's introduction in saying that we are facing many challenges ahead and ultimately what counts is delivery.

The People Strategy is here to help us identify what we can do to support staff and organisational delivery. We need this strategy to ensure that we have the right people in the right place at the right time. It is also there to ensure that we all have the ability to do our jobs, that we are motivated and that we are given the opportunity to develop our careers further. The strategy is needed because our role as an organisation has changed. There are different skills, different types of jobs and we have to ensure that we as individuals can change and adapt along with the rest of the organisation. It also gives management a sense of direction of what the organisation is willing to do to support its staff - which is actually a great deal. There are 4 high level strategic goals:

1) To demonstrate excellence in leadership and management of people. This is an area that we as an organisation need to improve on. This is key as poor leadership causes a multitude of problems that need not happen.

2) To support people in their professional and personal development and improve organisational performance. The staff survey indicated that we are good at supporting people in both aspects of development. We are however not so good as linking this to the strategic objectives and ensuring that the way we are developing is actually improving the organisation. This is being evaluated under a new Learning & Development strategy that will hopefully be launched later in the year.

3) To maintain a safe and healthy environment and develop a diverse workforce.

There is no doubt that the organisation is good with Health & Safety and has it under control. We need a diverse workforce as we are providing a service to a multi-cultural and diverse society and we have to reflect the people that we service.

4) To adopt people practices for the future, which support efficient and effective processes of delivery. A message from this, which is specifically for HR is that we must cut the bureaucracy, hassle and modernise policies i.e. slim them down and use plain English.

How will we know if this is successful?

- Staff will feel more engaged with the organisation and this will be tested through staff surveys.
- There will be a pool of applicants for key posts.

- There is effective workforce planning: the HR Business Partners are working on workforce plans closely with the trade unions.
- Overall skills, knowledge and behaviour of the FC is broadened and developed.
- Managers are recognised for providing confident leadership and demonstrating our values.
- Sickness absence rates are reduced. There is however evidence that people in the FC are generally happy in their job and generally do not stay off on sick absence for long periods of time.
- HR policies and processes are understood by all.
- People are clear about their responsibilities.
- We appeal to groups that we would not normally appeal to and attract new talent.
- Increased capability.
- The FC is an organisation that the whole of society can relate to. Part of this will come out of the equality impact assessment.

In summary the strategy is looking to build the capabilities of managers and staff, develop a diverse workforce, deliver modern HR policies and practices and improve health and wellbeing of staff. All of this should have impact on all staff. The strategy embraces a scale of change not previously experienced by the HR function.

It is unclear at the moment how quickly over the next 5 years elements of the People Strategy will be implemented, however great difficulties with funding the strategy are not anticipated.

Jean said that she hoped HR would continue to be and improve on being helpful, supportive, accessible and approachable. It is her personal vision that this is how HR as a division wanted to be.

The group thanked Jean for giving a good insight into HR's focus and Jean's personal commitment to staff over the next few years.

Simon Hodgson, Forest Enterprise CEO

Simon expressed thanks for the invitation to speak after dinner and said that it was a pleasure to meet the group. He added that he always endeavours to see and meet as many people in the FC as often as possible and values the opportunity to hear what staff feel about the organisation.

Having come from outside the organisation into senior level I thought I would tell you about my perspective on the organisation and how I see it developing. The most important thing that struck me straight away was the FC's commitment to staff and the motivation that staff have for their work and the professionalism. It continues to astonish me that the most modest of staff have such high levels of commitment to the job they do and the FC Values. Having worked in other organisations this is not as common as you might imagine but it is however more common in other organisations that they make a lot more of a lot less than the FC does. This is both one of our abiding strengths and one of our greatest weaknesses - we don't convey enough of the complexity and substance of what we do to the outside world and we have to get better at that. We can be too inward looking with a lack of outward focus but that has been changing over a number of years and is now rapidly making progress. People are really beginning to comment and value our integrity with which we deal with other organisations and the quality of the way in which we work with a whole range of partners i.e. Regional Development Agencies, Government offices, Environment Agency. The future for us is about making partnerships and alliances outside of the FC.

We have for good reason developed a lot of process across the organisation. This means that we're disciplined, we're accountable, we have good systems and we know what we are doing and why we are doing it. This can however hold us back and we often over process issues at times. We have to be careful to judge that properly as it can be a business strength but it can also become a business inefficiency and we cannot afford to allow this to happen with pressures on resources. A problem area that is self-evident is that with the outside world changing all the time, we have to be *more* responsive but I think as an organisation we do respond to changes quite well. I have learned that the FC has moved on in the past as people have done things without authority at corporate level but it is important that we learn to manage change quicker and more confidently at all levels in the organisation. We are very exposed now to market forces in all sorts of ways whether it is grants or commercialisation and we therefore have to be able to respond to what the market or partners want. The difference which is emerging is a challenge for all us such as regionalisation in England. This is going to be increasingly complex in the same way as it is complicated running an organisation with a devolved structure and single staff model. With regions now pulling in different directions we are going to have to continue to manage in a less monolithic way although I think it is perfectly achievable but we have to change our mindsets a little around the country. This will however not result in changes to terms and conditions but we have to be flexible so that we're responding to those local political and administrative requirements.

A few forward issues which are important for Forest Enterprise England and therefore will be big spending part of the FC, and will impact on the whole organisation are:

Commercialisation: I have to find ways of generating other revenues. We will be doing that through doing the right things that the public wants to buy; having the right goods and services; the right leisure opportunities and the right sort of sites that people want to visit. If we do not get commercial in our thinking then we will not be able to draw in visitors and we will lose revenue. Therefore, being commercially minded whilst sticking to the values is essential. People come because they like what we do but we have to do it professionally and we are learning a lot very quickly. The way in which staff have to work and think in a more business-like way is a challenge but it is also a challenge to keep the values that we endorse at the heart of that.

The breadth of the organisation: As we broaden the organisation more and more and the things we do such as the activities, creating more sophisticated visitor centres etc, we are stretching staff at all parts of the FC. Although this is a good thing, particularly in the public eye, in stretching staff more there is an obvious increase in stress levels with the pressure to deliver good quality design plans, services, health & safety and commercial opportunities. We have not quite learned how we are going to manage that without getting to the crisis point first.

Finance: We have a difficult 3 years ahead in England with the CSR settlement. More asset sales will need to be made and we are into difficult territory now. The Government is only committed to sales as needed and we are hovering very close to testing that political commitment but we have been pushed there. The unions have channels into the political scenery, particularly in England, which I think should be used to alert ministers of the issues from another perspective. In the difficult time ahead and we will struggle to solve the problems on our own.

I am optimistic on the staffing front; there are many opportunities and it is within our ability to take those opportunities and turn them into interesting roles. The only challenge is managing it properly and that is what I am employed to do. Taking advantage of those opportunities, keeping staff motivated, being able to change and respond to circumstances and taking advantage of money is all a very fine balance and a big challenge. Many other Government organisations cannot believe that the FC manages in the way that we do with a billion pound worth of assets and no capital, so we are running a very fine line all the time.

I appreciate and think it is important that the lines are open to me for unions to express the concerns of members. I personally, and from an organisational point of view, value the staff and value the relationship we have with unions. It makes a huge difference and makes the organisation work.