NOTE OF THE PARTNERSHIP GROUP MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 5th MAY 2009 at 10:30 IN Q1.04, HOLYROOD

Present: Ian Macnicol, Human Resources Office
         Mary Nicol, Human Resources Office
         Lisa Miller, Human Resources Office
         Susan Duffy, PCS
         Tracey White, PCS
         Stephen Imrie, FDA
         Alan Hunter, Human Resources Office (Secretary)

Item 1: Apologies/Attendance

1. No apologies were received.

Item 2: Minutes of the meeting of Thursday 10 March

2. The minutes of the meeting on 10 March were formally agreed.

Item 3: Previous Matters Arising

Review of Senior Management Team – Corporate Change Programme

3. It was confirmed that Mary was scheduled to meet with all Heads of Group over the next two weeks to discuss potential changes to their job evaluation and competence profiles. During these meetings, she also intended to discuss the new and revised areas of competence for all staff and once the meetings have been completed, they will be published in the Corporate Bulletin on Friday 15 May. AP: Notice drawing attention to new and revised competencies to be published in mid-May and passed to the TUS in advance of publication.

4. In response to the TUS, Mary confirmed that TUS’ comments on the new and revised areas of competence had been taken on board. Mary also confirmed that whilst there may be minor changes to the job evaluation scores for some roles, she did not foresee these resulting in any changes in grade.

Use of Managerial Discretion

The TUS had previously asked that options for clarifying the guidance on the granting of flexi-credits to cover attendance at language training classes be considered. It was confirmed that the guidance and application form had been amended to include a section explicitly clarifying where flexi-credits for attendance at such training are to be granted and where they should not. This revised guidance was published on 1 May and the TUS had received an advance copy. This item is now formally closed.
Building Issue

5. It was confirmed that the TUS had been kept informed of developments with regard to the recent building-related issue (in addition to other unconnected building-related matters) as had all building users through messages from the Clerk/Chief Executive.

Humidity and Air Comfort in Offices

6. It was noted that Stephen had issued an email to the Heads of those Offices particularly affected by low levels of humidity at times and had explained the steps that had been taken to attempt to resolve the matter, including trials of humidifiers. Unfortunately, these do not seem to have resulted in any great improvement and as the problem is likely to be alleviated in the warmer months because windows are more likely to be open, little progress is likely to be made on this matter until later in the year. It had been proposed that the room temperature in affected rooms could be reduced slightly come autumn in the hope that this would reduce the problems some staff had encountered. If this did not achieve satisfactory results, Ian assured the TUS that he would ask OMG to reconsider whether it would be possible to provide financial assistance to staff for the purchase of eye drops to relieve discomfort.

Review of External Liaison Office

7. Mary confirmed that a mapping panel, comprising herself, the Head of BIT and the Head of Public Affairs Group would be held on Wednesday 6 May. Susan also noted that she had been in correspondence with Bill Thomson with regard to the format of the final report and it was further noted that the minutes of the Review Group would be made available to interested parties.

8. On a related issue, Stephen asked whether there were any plans to issue a rebuttal of the article published in “The Sunday Telegraph” on 3 May. This article referred to the recruitment campaign for an External Relations Manager and a Senior Media Relations Officer and incorrectly stated that both of these were newly created posts. It was noted that neither of these posts were in fact newly created ones and that the organisation had not created new posts but was simply filling vacancies. Ian undertook to follow this up and both sides noted their disappointment at the tone and content of the article. AP: Ian to follow this up and check whether a rebuttal would be issued.

Review of Clerking

9. It was noted that this item was included on the agenda simply to flag up the fact that the review had commenced and that the TUS had received a full apology for not having been given an advance copy of the communication to staff following the first meeting of the Project Board. It was not proposed to cover any issues in relation to this review in this forum until the TUS was formally consulted on the outcome of the review.
10. It was noted that at present, there was nothing new to report with regard to this item.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy/Healthy Working Lives Report

11. It was noted that the TUS had received a copy of this report, along with the Clerk/Chief Executive’s response to it on 23 March and that it had been published in the Corporate Bulletin on 3 April. It was further noted that the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy would be taken forward as part of the realignment of Poor Attendance procedures.

Item 4: Building/Accommodation issues

12. There were no new building or accommodation issues.

Item 5: Review of Corporate Publications Team

13. It was noted that Ian had sent an advance copy of the memo to affected staff from the Head of Public Affairs Group to the TUS on 23 March. The memo was issued to affected staff on 24 March after it had been revised to take TUS’ comments on board. The Head of Public Affairs Group had discussed the matter with the two affected senior staff before issuing the memo. The Head of Public Affairs Group has started to put together her business case for change and will be seeking to involve staff and the TUS as part of that process.

14. Susan asked whether revised timescales for the review had been agreed and Ian undertook to check whether this was the case and confirm this to the TUS. AP: Ian to check timescales for review and confirm them to the TUS.

Item 6: Draft Guidance on Efficiency and Effectiveness Reviews

15. Ian expressed his gratitude to the TUS for providing comments on the draft guidance and confirmed that he had informed the Projects and Best Value Manager that he had no issues with any of the comments.

Item 7: 2009 Pay Claim

16. Ian formally acknowledged receipt of the 2009 Pay Claim and thanked the TUS for it. It was noted that Ian planned to take a paper to the Corporate Body at its meeting on 27 May in order to contextualise the claim and that formal negotiations with the TUS would commence soon after this meeting. AP: Ian to present paper on 2009 Pay Claim to SPCB and formal negotiations to commence thereafter.

Item 8: Policy Development Update
Realignment Update

17. It was noted that the Unacceptable Performance Reference Group was scheduled to meet that afternoon and that it was hoped that the papers would then be finalised before being presented to the Operational Management Group (OMG) on Friday 15 May. Mary confirmed that the TUS would be formally consulted on the Policy and Guidance once the papers had been to OMG. It was also noted that the realignment of Poor Attendance procedures was scheduled to commence shortly before the summer recess and that, as noted above, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy would be taken forward as part of this realignment.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

18. As noted above, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy would be taken forward as part of the realignment of Poor Attendance Procedures.

Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policy Statement

19. It was noted that development work in relation to the organisation’s position as a registered body with Disclosure Scotland, which includes the production of a policy statement on the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders, had proven to be more complicated than had initially been envisaged, particularly in light of changes to roles and responsibilities within the Human Resources Office. This development work had been put on hold due to other more urgent priorities but would now recommence. The TUS would be consulted as appropriate.

Review of Performance Management System

20. It was noted that the Head of Chamber Office would no longer be leading on this project and that the Clerk/Chief Executive was likely to replace him as the project lead. Mary and Lisa had recently attended a CIPD Performance Management conference and had found that the organisation appeared to be a model of exemplary practice as our Performance Management System already incorporated all of the best practice features recommended at the conference. Both sides agreed that the current procedure required streamlining and “tweaking” as opposed to fundamental change and it was confirmed that there was no intention of a return to performance related pay.

Item 11: Any Other Business

Statutory Right to Request Flexible Working

21. Lisa informed the TUS that the Staff Handbook entry on the statutory right to request flexible working would be amended to reflect the recent change in legislation. This change extended the right to request flexible working to parents of a child aged 16 or under. Previously, this right only applied to parents of children aged under 6 years. Stephen asked whether this would apply equally to all staff and it was confirmed that this was correct.
Item 12: Date of next meeting

22. Alan to arrange the next meeting of the Partnership Group to take place in late June 2009, shortly before the start of the summer recess.