NOTE OF THE PARTNERSHIP GROUP MEETING HELD ON MONDAY
9 NOVEMBER 2009 at 14:00 IN Q1.03, HOLYROOD

Present: Colin Chisholm, Human Resources Office
Mary Nicol, Human Resources Office
Lisa Miller, Human Resources Office
Tracey White, PCS
Stephen Imrie, FDA
Alan Rehfisch, Prospect
Alan Hunter, Human Resources Office (Secretary)
Nikki Wilson, Human Resources Office (in attendance)

Item 1: Apologies/Attendance
1. Apologies were received from Susan Duffy

Item 2: Minutes of the meeting of 8 September
2. The minutes of the meeting on 8 September were formally agreed.

Item 3: Previous Matters Arising

Personal Assistant/Personal Secretary Support following Corporate Change Programme

3. As discussed at the last Partnership Group meeting, it had previously been noted that an evaluation of PA/PS support was scheduled to take place towards the end of the year and that the Head of the Strategy and Development Office had undertaken to inform the TUS of the proposed methodology for this evaluation closer to the time. The TUS confirmed that it would find it helpful to see the terms of reference before the evaluation commences. AP: Head of SDO to inform the TUS of the proposed methodology for the evaluation of PA/PS support in advance of its commencement.

Review of FM

4. The TUS had previously asked for an update with regard to the review of FM and for confirmation that staff within the business area had been kept informed of developments in relation to it. Colin assured the TUS that while the review was at an early stage, it would be kept informed of developments and would be fully involved in the review at the appropriate time in line with the approach laid out in the Guidance on Conducting Efficiency and Effectiveness Reviews that was produced by the Projects and Best Value Manager. The TUS welcomed this assurance and again, emphasised the fact that it should always be kept fully informed of any developments that may impact on its members.

Creation of Financial Scrutiny Unit

5. It was noted that a new Financial Scrutiny Unit comprising a number of staff from SPICe had recently been launched on a six month pilot basis. The TUS stated
that some of its members had expressed concerns about the extra pressure this would put on existing staff and sought information on how its success would be reviewed at the end of the pilot period. While the proposed method of review was not yet known to the Human Resources side, Colin undertook to make enquiries into this and respond to the TUS once he had established how and when the review would take place. AP: Colin to find out how and when the pilot of the Financial Scrutiny Unit would be reviewed to assess its efficacy and whether it would need to be staffed on a permanent basis and, if so, how and to inform the TUS of the results.

Voluntary Further Education Sponsorship Scheme

6. The TUS had previously sought assurances that the high proportion of training resources being targeted at senior staff would not impact adversely on accessibility of training to staff at lower grades. Colin explained that he had discussed the matter with the Capability Development Manager who had assured him that this would not be the case. The TUS thanked Colin for passing this assurance on and agreed that the item should now be formally closed. It did however, ask that it be recorded that if and when any cases were to arise when more junior staff feel that they may have missed out on access to training opportunities as a result of the high proportion of training being targeted at senior staff, it would raise them with Human Resources.

Proposed Changes to Civil Service Compensation Scheme

7. It was noted that the PCS had held a well attended meeting on 2 October at which its members raised serious concerns with regard to the proposed changes to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme. It was further noted that a notice had been issued by the Human Resources Office in advance of the meeting confirming that facility time would be granted to attendees. The TUS stated that its local PCS branch consulted members and fed back views to its national executive committee. It was currently awaiting feedback from the Union on a UK level before any further action could be taken.

8. Stephen asked whether the Corporate Body had taken the opportunity to feed its views into the consultation on the proposed changes and it was confirmed that it had not.

Creation of Shared Drive for Partnership Group Papers

9. The TUS had previously suggested that a shared drive should be set up in which Partnership Group papers could be saved in order to relieve pressures on individual H drives and Alan had agreed to take this forward in conjunction with BIT. It was confirmed that this drive had now been set up and that a link to it had been issued to both sides of the Partnership Group and that the new arrangements appeared to be working well. This item is now formally closed.
Item 4: Building/Accommodation issues

Humidity and Air Comfort in Offices (TUS)

10. The issue of low levels of humidity in certain parts of the building had previously been discussed by the Partnership Group on a number of occasions and Stephen noted that it was at this time of year that the problem tended to become more acute as external temperatures dropped and windows were less likely to be opened. The TUS wished to record that it appreciated the efforts the Health and Safety Adviser had made to explore possible ways of alleviating the problem for affected staff but that it had received significant feedback from staff in certain parts of the building including the Committee Offices, the Official Report, Human Resources and SPICE that low levels of humidity were felt to be contributing to problems including dry and irritated eyes, itching and coughs and colds.

11. Given that this issue had been ongoing for a number of years now and that no effective solution had yet been identified, the TUS intimated that, as the SPCB had a duty of care to its employees, it would now be seeking reasonable financial compensation for staff to cover the costs of remedial steps such as eye drops or changes to contact lens prescriptions to alleviate problems caused by low levels of humidity. Mary advised that the TUS should formally submit its request in writing so that it could then be duly considered by senior management and Stephen undertook to do so. AP: The TUS to submit in writing a formal request for management to consider putting in place measures to compensate staff for expenses incurred with regard to the alleviation of symptoms potentially caused by low levels of humidity in certain offices.

12. Stephen also requested that the Health and Safety Adviser provide the TUS with a fresh update outlining the steps that had been taken to alleviate the problem in addition to any proposed future actions and Colin agreed to ask him to do so. AP: the Health and Safety Adviser to be asked to provide the TUS with a fresh update outlining the steps that had been taken to alleviate the problem of low levels of humidity as well as a note of any future actions intended to do so.

Item 5: Policy Development Update

Realignment Update

13. It was noted that the revised policy and procedures on the Realignment of Unacceptable Attendance will be issued to the Reference Group (of which Stephen is a member) within the next few days to provide it with the opportunity to comment on them by correspondence before they are taken to OMG on 7 December. It was hoped that the agreed policy and procedures will then be launched in January, subject to OMG approval.

14. Lisa noted that the next realignment will be of the principles and rules on conduct expected to be followed by SPCB staff and she asked the TUS to begin consideration of whom its representative on the Reference Group should be for this strand. AP: TUS to consider who its representative would be on the Conduct Realignment Reference Group and to advise Lisa accordingly.
Review of Performance Management System

Mary informed the TUS that Sam Jones had taken a paper to SLT on 4 November outlining the proposed approach to amending the SPCB’s Performance Management System. Mary advised the TUS that she would let it see a copy of that paper. **AP: Mary to arrange for the SLT paper to be passed to the TUS.**

15. It was noted that SLT had generally agreed with the proposals outlined in the paper and that implementation of these had now commenced so that the revised System would be ready for the start of the 2010/11 reporting year. Mary informed the Group that it was proposed that there would be a “bank” of competencies (which would be renamed “skills and behaviours”) from which managers in consultation with staff would select the five or six core skills which were considered to be most relevant and important to the individual’s role. The review also intended to stress the importance of the developmental aspect of the process which seemed to have been lost over the years. It was further noted that significant changes would be made to the layout of the form itself to discourage staff from including large amounts of text next to their objectives as this had never been intended to be the purpose of this section of the form although in many business areas this was what had become the norm.

16. Tracey asked whether any changes would be made to the reporting year as it had been suggested at the Reference Groups that financial year-end was perhaps not the best time to go through the process given that it often led to increased pressures for some sections of the organisation. However, Mary replied that this suggestion had now been discounted as alternative options had been carefully considered but it had become clear that no time of year was ideal for every part of the organisation. Since, the current reporting year tied in with the Strategic Planning year, it had been decided after due consideration to leave it as was.

Update on Preparations for Pandemic Flu

17. It was noted that dispensers containing anti-bacterial handwash had been positioned at various points around the building, including at all entrances and Colin informed the TUS that levels of usage had been mixed thus far. Although not all building users had been using them, there had been a reasonable level of usage and it was agreed that while people should be encouraged to make use of them they clearly could not be forced to do so.

18. Tracey suggested that perhaps the notices that had been issued publicising the installation of the dispensers had not been worded in strong enough terms. Although she in no way advocated a heavy handed approach, she suggested that it may be worth issuing a further notice written in slightly stronger language to encourage more building users to make use of the dispensers.

19. Alan Rehfisch also pointed out that to his knowledge there was no dispenser at the entrance used by people coming from the car park or the bicycle locker room which he used on a daily basis. Colin replied that he was sure that a dispenser was in place at this entrance but he acknowledged that it was not particularly prominent or well sign posted and could easily be missed. Colin undertook to feed back both
Tracey and Alan’s points to the Flu Pandemic Planning Group and to suggest that
signage should be improved and that a slightly stronger message should be relayed
to building users. **AP: Colin to suggest to the Flu Pandemic Planning Group that
a stronger message should be relayed to building users and that more
prominent signage was displayed to encourage more people to make use of
the anti-bacterial handwash dispensers.**

**Item 11: Any Other Business**

**Overpayment of Education Officers**

20. The TUS wished to formally record its frustration and disappointment at
further errors in the administration of the SPCB’s payroll service, this time with
regard to recent overpayments made to a number of Education Officers. The TUS
expressed further disappointment as it had recently been assured that an exercise
had been undertaken to ensure that there were no further errors within the payroll
system and that improvements had been made to its processes in order to minimise
the risk of such errors occurring.

21. It was noted that Colin intended to meet with both Susan and Tracey on 12
November to discuss this matter. Tracey requested that the staff in question be
provided with written confirmation that they had in fact been overpaid along with an
assurance that all salary-related information held on the payroll system with regard
to them was now accurate. **AP: Education Officers who received overpayments
to be provided with written confirmation that they had indeed been overpaid
along with confirmation that all information held by payroll in relation to their
salaries had now been confirmed to be accurate.**

**OMG Paper on Possible Future Apprenticeship Scheme**

22. The TUS raised the issue of a paper that had been taken to OMG on 2
November which had given the impression that the TUS had been consulted during
its drafting and had suggested themes for inclusion in it. The TUS wished to make
clear that while it was not necessarily against the idea of an apprenticeship scheme
per se, it had not raised the suggestion.

23. Colin explained that the intention of the relevant section of the paper had not
been to imply that the TUS had made the suggestion but simply to state that this was
an issue that had been vaguely referred to at different points in the past and
apologised for the fact that the TUS felt the implication to be misleading. He assured
the TUS that no decisions had been made with regard to the content of the paper
and that it would be fully consulted at the appropriate stage if any of the suggestions
contained within it were to be taken forward.

**Review of SPICe**

24. The TUS asked about the plans for a review of SPICe and specifically, what
its role would be in any review. Colin replied that he was unsure at present as the
proposals were at such an early stage but undertook to make some enquiries before
responding to the TUS. **AP: Colin to check the proposals for a review of SPICe and to confirm to the TUS what its involvement would be.**

25. The TUS also asked for assurances that it would be kept informed of any other proposed reviews that may be in the offing and Colin and Mary confirmed that the TUS would certainly be made aware of any further proposed reviews of which it was not already aware.

**Item 12: Date of Next Meeting**

26. Nikki to arrange the next meeting of the Partnership Group to take place in January 2010.

27. It was noted that Nikki had now formally replaced Alan as secretariat to the Partnership Group and the TUS expressed its thanks to him for the support that he had provided to the Group over the last two years.