

## **Annual General Meeting – PCS Cross Party Group Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025**

**And**

### **Minutes of the PCS Cross-Party Group meeting held on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025 in Dining Room 1, 12.30-1.30pm**

Present: Mike Hedges MS (Chair), Heledd Fychan MS (Vice-Chair), Julie Morgan MS, Ryland Doyle (MS Support Staff, Mike Hedges), Helen West (MS Support Staff, Julie Morgan)

Sian Boyles (PCS National Officer), Marianne Owens (PCS), Doug Jones (PCS) Matt Cunningham (PCS), Grant Williams (PCS).

#### **Welcome and apologies**

Mike Hedges began the meeting and welcomed the attendees. Mike expressed the Group's thanks to Darren Williams for his contribution to the Group over the years. No apologies had been received.

#### **AGM Business**

Sian Boyles (PCS National officer) took the chair to begin the AGM and requested nominations for the Chair and Vice-Chair. Nominations were received for Mike Hedges as Chair and Heledd Fychan as Vice-Chair, both were duly elected. Mike resumed the Chair.

#### **PCS National Dispute over Pay, Pensions, Jobs and Redundancy Rights – Update**

PCS mandates for industrial action related to the national campaign have now expired, the campaign is currently paused with a number of issues and demands still outstanding.

Meetings had been held with the Cabinet Office on December 12/13 covering trade union relations and legislation, national bargaining, and pay and reward. On trade union legislation the Cabinet Office said that they were waiting for the outcome of the ongoing consultation on creating a modern framework of industrial relations before making changes. On trade union relations the Cabinet Office were reviewing its guidance on facility time in a limited number of areas.

On pay and reward, PCS reiterated our demand for national sectoral bargaining, with the current set-up leading to staff on the same banding grade in different government departments being paid different salaries. The Cabinet Office stated that they did not think an agreement was currently possible due to differences of opinion among the trade unions, which PCS noted was a matter for the unions rather than the employer and that the issue must remain on the table. PCS also noted that there was room for a more coherent approach within the existing framework and that all possibilities should be explored.

Low-pay, recruitment and retention remain major issues. PCS are aware of statements made by Ministers indicating a suggested 2.8% pay cap for 2025/26. This would fall well below the union's demands and go nowhere near addressing the long-standing systemic issues of poverty pay, National Living Wage, recruitment and retention or the pay inequality issues inherent within civil service pay structures.

Office attendance directives have not been popular and are being implemented in a heavy-handed manner, with PCS members being threatened with loss of pay by some employers. The union had hoped that the new Labour government would take a different approach to this issue, but that has not been the case.

Mike noted that it was hard to understand the Cabinet Office's approach to office attendance, considering the increase in production linked to home working. Julie Morgan expressed her dismay in relation to the heavy-handed manner that office attendance directives were being implemented. PCS requested that MS's work with their UK parliamentary colleagues to apply pressure on this issue.

**Action:** Watching brief on the national campaign.

**Action:** Cross-party Group MS's to work with UK parliamentary colleagues on the issue of office attendance directives.

### **Concerns Arising from the Culture Sector Cuts**

The Amgueddfa Cymru and Llyfrgell Genedlaethol branches have continued their campaign against cuts to their organisations, organising demonstrations in Cardiff and at the National Eisteddfod and lobbying Government Ministers and MS's. The branches have developed four key demands: 1. Fully funded pay increases, so that threats of redundancies and reduction in staffing levels to meet pay rise costs don't happen every year; 2. Grant-in-aid to be resorted to its previous real-terms level and increased annually to allow for rising costs in running our institutions; 3. A sustainable 5-year funding plan, to allow both institutions to rebuild from the devastating loss of skills and resources that has taken place over the last decade or more; 4. A Fair pension for all workers at arms-length bodies that is on par with those offered to other branches of Welsh Government.

#### *Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Pensions*

A consultation on the Llyfrgell's pension scheme is imminent, with PCS opposed to the changes being proposed by the employer. Unions are currently engaging with the employer on the wording of the consultation document and are pushing for changes to the proposed reforms prior to that consultation going out to staff.

#### *Amgueddfa Cymru – Changes to Front of House hours.*

The introduction of annualised and banked hours for front-of-house staff at the Amgueddfa is a major issue for our members, with affected members now starting the year owing the Amgueddfa hours, outside of their normal working hours, which they will have to work as required by the employer. This places a significant extra burden on the front-of-house staff in terms of their ability to fulfil caring or other outside-of-work responsibilities and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. The new system also disproportionately impacts women workers at the Amgueddfa who are employed in these lower paid roles. Our front-of-house members at the Amgueddfa

are also facing an increase in weekend working, a reduction in the number of breaks, and the introduction of new working rotas.

The recently released Senedd Culture Committee report on the impact of the cuts to the culture sector over the past decade was welcomed.

Heledd noted her concern at the issue of the introduction of payment for elements of the Visitor Experience at different Museum sites and its potential impact on visitor numbers. Mike requested an update on the issues in the Culture Sector before Easter.

**Action:** PCS to update the Group on the issues in the Culture Sector in April.

### **Natural Resources Wales – Impact of Proposed Cuts**

The consultation on the NRW 'Case for Change' has now concluded. As a result of feedback from trade union members the number of occupied roles to be reduced has fallen from 162 to 120, when combined with the 113 unoccupied roles which will not be filled, the total number of roles in scope for reduction is 233, down from 275. While no voluntary redundancy process has yet been implemented, an estimated 20 post holders are expected to leave via redundancy. Jobs are currently being matched.

This level of staff reduction will clearly have a significant impact on NRW, with some teams, such as the Education and Health team, made up predominantly of PCS member, disappearing altogether. There will also be closures of visitor centres and cafes while those services are contracted out of the public sector. Branch representatives have been working with affected members who have concerns related to their jobs, while a survey has gone out to all PCS members at NRW collecting responses in relation to their main concerns with the Case for Change and what they want to do about the proposed cuts.

Heledd noted that there was a Senedd debate on the situation at NRW taking place the following day. Mike requested an update on the situation prior to Easter.

**Action:** PCS to provide an update to the Group on the situation at NRW in April.

### **Office of National Statistics – Return to Office Dispute**

Having agreed a fully flexible hybrid working policy with no set requirement for staff to attend the office with the trade unions, ONS announced in November 2023 that from April 2024 staff would be required to spend 40% of their time in the office. No evidence-based business case for this U-turn has been provided by the employer, while attempts at meaningful engagement with ONS to work towards a negotiated agreement on office working expectations have been rebuffed by the employer.

The U-turn by management was extremely unpopular amongst PCS members with 900 members attending an online meeting on the issue. Since April 2024 the branch has held two successful statutory ballots for strike action and action short of a strike, and have since taken industrial action in the form of non-cooperation with the office

attendance directive, and since August 2024 have escalated this to include work-to-rule actions. No strike action has yet been taken.

The industrial action taken by the branch has shown that where staff works does not impact their productivity and has restored the autonomy for members to decide when attending the office works best for them. Members feel that they have been forced into the office just to tick a box, with members reporting that they often spend a significant proportion of their days in the office in online meetings, which they could attend from home. The dispute is about implementing the hybrid working model that works best at ONS.

PCS continues to seek a negotiated settlement with ONS. The dispute has now widened, with Prospect having also balloted members on industrial action. PCS, Prospect and ONS are currently in the process of setting up meetings with ACAS.

Mike requested that PCS keep the Group informed on the dispute. Heledd noted that the lack of consistency from ONS was disappointing.

**Action:** PCS to keep the Cross-Party Group informed on the ONS dispute.

### **TUC Cymru Welsh Language Charter**

Sian noted that the final draft of the Charter was awaiting approval.

### **AOB**

Sian raised the issue of the closing of the National Academy of Education Leadership. This closure had been announced on October 17, 2024, with the changes to staff roles due to be implemented by April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. Since then, no meetings have been held with PCS, the recognised trade union within the NAEL, despite repeated requests, no information on what's happening to NAEL roles has been forthcoming, and no consultation has begun. PCS seeks support from the Group to push for meaningful engagement on the changes to NAEL.

Mike and Heledd agreed to chase this up with the Minister and relevant parties.

**Action:** Cross-Party Group MS's to raise the issues related to the closure of the NAEL and the lack of engagement or consultation with the Minister and relevant parties.