

Draft Minutes of the PCS Assembly Cross-Party Group meeting held on Wednesday, 11th December 2013 in Dining Room 1, Ty Hywel.

Present: Julie Morgan AM (chair); Mike Hedges AM; Bethan Jenkins AM; Alun Ffred Jones AM; Joyce Watson AM; Annabelle Harle (representing Mark Drakeford AM); Margaret Davies (PCS); Marianne Owens (PCS); Caroline Richards (PCS); Darren Williams (PCS).

Apologies: Mick Antoniw AM, Paul Davies AM.

Due to the varying times at which Members were available, it was agreed to conduct the business in the form of a drop-in briefing, focussing principally on issues relating to HM Revenue & Customs.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm, with the arrival of the first Group members/representatives.

HM Revenue & Customs – threat of job cuts and office closures

PCS representatives set out their concerns about the impact on Wales of some recent decisions by HM Revenue & Customs:

- A voluntary exit scheme, announced on 20 November, targeted at staff in certain offices, whose long-term future is uncertain, which included Carmarthen (with 86 staff); Colwyn Bay (81 staff); Merthyr Tydfil (84 staff); and Pembroke Dock (8 staff).
- HMRC's intention, announced on 21st November, to terminate the contracts of around 3000 Fixed Term Contract employees, some 300 of whom work in the Cardiff (Llanishen) office, in the contact centre and dealing with post.
- The department's intention to close all 281 of its Face-to-Face Enquiry Centres - including twenty in Wales – by the end of 2014, subject to the successful completion of a pilot exercise; this would mean that members of the public would be able to contact HMRC only via telephone or the internet.

The cumulative impact of these three announcements would be the loss of around 600 jobs in Wales, potentially devastating communities, undermining valuable work on tax compliance and hindering the efforts of the National Assembly and Welsh Government policy to promote economic growth and regeneration throughout Wales. The union also reported that there had been no formal consultation about the likely closures and no equality impact assessment (EQIA).

Members echoed the union's concerns and undertook to take up these issues.

Action points

- Julie Morgan/Mike Hedges to table a statement of opinion (PCS to suggest text)
- All to sign and promote e-petition against enquiry centre closures:
<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/47400>
- AMs to write to David Gauke, Chief Secretary to the Treasury (PCS to provide short written summary of issues)
- AMs to raise in the Chamber

Other Issues

DVLA review: PCS reported that a wide-ranging review of the agency's functioning had been initiated and that the union had concerns that this might result in privatisation or job losses. The local branch had already written to AMs, as well as MPs and councillors, to express its concerns. Agreed to keep a watching brief.

MoD St Athan airfield posts – privatisation: PCS reported that the Welsh Government, which owns the airfield, had informed the MoD, which is responsible for staffing, that it requires it to be operated seven days a week instead of the current five, which has caused the MoD to seek to outsource the work, due to insufficient staffing in-house. The union's view was that the MoD should take on additional staff, if necessary, to keep the work in-house. Agreed to write to Jane Hutt, as the local AM, asking her to make representations to the Welsh Government.

MoJ Shared Service Centre – possible privatisation: Management at the MoJ Shared Service Centre (SSC) in Newport had just announced that consideration was being given to the transfer of the Centre to one of the two privatised SSCs, run, respectively by Arvato and Steria. PCS was concerned that this could lead to job cuts, detrimental changes to pay and conditions and the offshoring of the work. Agreed to raise this with the MoJ and ask Welsh ministers to make representations to keep the work in Newport and in the public sector.

The meeting concluded at 7.00 pm.