

## **Minutes of the meeting of the PCS Assembly Cross-Party Group held in Ty Hŷwel on Wednesday 11 November 2015**

Present: Julie Morgan AM (chair); Bethan Jenkins AM; John Griffiths AM; Helen West, Office of Julie Morgan AM; Ioan Bellin, Office of Simon Thomas AM; Darren Williams (PCS).

### **1. Update on direct debit campaign and concerns about Trade Union Bill**

PCS gave an update on the union's ongoing efforts to respond to the UK government's withdrawal of 'check-off' facilities for payment of membership subs directly from salaries. The vast majority of those affected so far had signed up to pay by direct debit instead but the union had nevertheless lost thousands of members during the process. The Welsh and Scottish Governments had said that they did not intend to withdraw 'check-off' but there is a question as to whether they will be able to maintain this position if and when the present Trade Union Bill, which extends the attack on check-off to the whole public sector, becomes law. PCS welcomed the statement by the First Minister that the Bill should not apply in Wales, as well as the overwhelming vote in the National Assembly opposing the Bill. The union is also concerned about the Bill's other provisions, which would place further significant restrictions on the right to strike and on unions' ability to run political campaigns and would add significant administrative and financial burdens.

Group members commented on the announcement by Scottish local authorities that they would not abode by the Bill's provisions to end 'check-off' and wondered about the extent to which this approach could be promoted in Wales.

**Action:** Group to: (1) write to the WLGA to see whether it might promote and co-ordinate opposition/non-cooperation to the Bill among Welsh local authorities; (2) write to the First Minister and/or Permanent Secretary, Welsh Government asking what position would be taken on 'check-off' vis-à-vis union members in the Welsh Government and Sponsored Bodies.

### **2. Update on pay dispute in National Museum Wales**

PCS reported that talks via ACAS between PCS and Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum Wales to seek a resolution of the pay premiums dispute were due to take place on Thursday, 12 November and Friday 13 November. Management had initially refused to consider further meetings but the combination of industrial action over the summer, lobbying by AMs and a meeting with the Economy Minister caused them to revisit this decision. PCS had presented the employer with two alternative options, which it believed could deliver the requisite level of savings while protecting the living standards of the front of-house staff affected by management's proposals. PCS thanked Group members for their support, including at the rally at the Senedd on 20 October.

**Actions:** PCS to update Group members on any progress achieved during the talks.

### **3. HM Revenue & Customs - threat of further office closures in Wales**

PCS alerted the Group to the fact that HM Revenue and Customs was due to make simultaneous announcements to staff at all of its offices on the following day – Thursday, 12 November – about plans to centralise its operations in a much smaller number of large 'Regional Centres' and that, in Wales, this was expected to mean the loss of the department's presence outside Cardiff, with the closure of the Swansea Wrexham and Porthmadog offices.

The threatened offices together employ more than 600 staff and, while it was understood that HMRC was going to announce a net increase in staffing across Wales, the expected location of all these jobs in Cardiff represented bad news for local economies and communities elsewhere in Wales. Within the last ten years, HMRC had progressively withdrawn its presence from around twenty locations around Wales, most recently Carmarthen, Colwyn Bay, Merthyr Tydfil and Pembroke Dock. PCS would be campaigning against any further office closures.

Group members expressed their concern about the expected announcement and asked about the future of the Welsh Language Service, currently located in Porthmadog but likely, in future, to be operated out of Cardiff.

**Action:** PCS to liaise further with the Group about the announcements and the union's detailed plans as to its response.

#### **4. ONS - possible transfer of jobs from Newport to London**

PCS relayed the concerns of its members at the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in Newport about the possible outcome of a review by Sir Charlie Bean, former deputy governor of the Bank of England, into the UK's provision of economic data. Sir Charlie had said that the relocation of the ONS from London to Newport in 2007 had most likely contributed to its "underperformance" in recent years. While he had not suggested that returning the ONS to London might be a viable option, the union felt it worthwhile to make representations as to the benefits of the organisation's current location.

**Actions:** Group to write to Sir Charlie setting out the benefits of the ONS' move to Newport and its potential to develop as a centre of excellence in statistics at its current location.

#### **5. Welsh Government issues**

PCS made the Group aware of two issues raised by its members in the Welsh Government:

- **Location of work:** Despite repeated assurances from senior management that consideration would be given to locating any functions at sites beyond South-East Wales, this had not come to fruition, as the sponsoring Division/Department tended to prefer to keep these new functions close to existing operations in Cardiff, Merthyr, Treforest and Bedwas. PCS asked that Group members bring pressure to bear on the Management Board to give real consideration to transferring work to the under-utilised offices in Aberystwyth, Llandudno Junction and Swansea, in order to the benefit the economies of Mid, North and/or South-West Wales.
- **Trade union representation on management board:** The Welsh Government Trade Union Side had requested 'engaged observer status' at monthly meetings of the Management Board, citing the commitment to partnership working that has frequently been voiced by Carwyn Jones, Edwina Hart and others. The unions feel that early sight of, and opportunity to comment on, management proposals would help to make them more robust and avoid many potential problems. Management had declined, offering instead representation at two meetings per year, which would be devoted entirely to staffing issues, and also a full voting seat on a formal 'sub-committee' known as Operations Committee; the unions did not feel that rather of these proposals would be sufficient and would welcome support from AMs.

**Actions:** Group to write to the First Minister and/or Permanent Secretary supporting PCS' position on these issues.

**5. A.O.B.**

PCS reported that the dispute over Saturday working at DVLA, covered at the previous meeting, had now been resolved.