

Minutes of the PCS Assembly Cross-Party Group AGM and business meeting held in Ty Hŷwel on Tuesday 12 January 2016

Present: Julie Morgan AM (chair); Bethan Jenkins AM (vice-chair); Helen West, Office of Julie Morgan AM; Ioan Bellin, Office of Simon Thomas AM; Marianne Owens (PCS); Shavanah Taj (PCS); Darren Williams (PCS).

1. AGM Business

(a) Election of Chair & Vice-Chair: Julie Morgan was re-elected as chair and Bethan Jenkins elected as vice-chair, replacing Rhodri Glyn Thomas.

(b) Annual report: Since the previous AGM in September 2014, the Group had met twice, in April and November 2015 and there had been a one-off meeting with the chair regarding the IPCC. In addition, Group members had supported PCS members in various campaigns and disputes – most notably the pay dispute in National Museum Wales. There had been a rally at the Senedd on 20 October in support of the Museum dispute, at which Julie Morgan, Bethan Jenkins and Lynn Neagle had all spoken.

(c) Re-registration of Group: Those members present signed the registration for provided by the Table Office and Julie's office agreed to obtain the additional signatures necessary for the Group to be re-registered.

(d) Plans for 2016/17: It was noted that PCS was facing a challenging year, with further job cuts on a large scale expected after the Comprehensive Spending Review and legislation like the Trade Union Bill, should it become law, likely to make the union's job more difficult. The assistance of the Group was therefore likely to be needed more than ever.

2. HM Revenue & Customs – proposals for further office closures in Wales

PCS reported that, on 12 November, HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) had published a document entitled *Building Our Future*, containing plans for the reduction of its network of 160 offices to 13 large 'Regional Centres' and 4 'specialist sites', accompanied by a 25% reduction in staffing levels. In Wales, the current Wrexham, Swansea, Porthmadog and Cardiff (Llanishen) offices would close, and a new office open in Cardiff city centre. The department's plans suggested a net increase in jobs within Wales but the union was concerned about the location of the jobs and the implications for existing staff and the communities in which they live. Swansea staff wishing to continue working for the department would be expected to transfer to Cardiff and Wrexham staff to transfer to Liverpool.

PCS believes that this is not driven by the priority of maximising the collection of taxes, but by the need to meet spending cuts targets from the 2015 Spending Review and issues which arise from the non-renewal of the 2001 PFI contract with a private company called Mapeley, whereby the latter purchased 147 freehold and 454 leasehold properties from HMRC on a 20-year sale and leaseback agreement. PCS believes that the *Building Our Future* proposals need to be placed on hold, to allow for full parliamentary and public scrutiny, for an assessment by the national audit office of the full costs of the proposals, and the impact of the effectiveness of HMRC ability to collect tax and enforce tax compliance.

In Wales, the proposals also seemed likely to have implications for the establishment of the Welsh Revenue Authority and the union had a meeting with Jane Hutt scheduled for 10 February. The Group found it difficult to see how the construction of a new office in Cardiff city centre could represent a financial saving and was also concerned about the additional pressure on traffic and parking in Cardiff that would result.

The closure of the Porthmadog office, housing the Welsh Language Unit, also seemed likely to mean negative consequences for HMRC's Welsh language provision.

Actions: PCS to draft Assembly questions for Group members to ask on implications of the closures for the Welsh Revenue Authority, the Welsh language and other matters; letters to the UK Minister responsible for HMRC, David Gauke, and to Jane Hutt, as Welsh Minister responsible for taxation.

3. Update on pay dispute in National Museum Wales

PCS reported that, following protracted negotiations with ACAS, PCS had agreed on 18 December to ballot members in Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum Wales on an offer from management, which included a payment to compensate members for the removal of the premium payments – the cause of the long-running dispute. In a last-minute development, however, management had indicated before the commencement of the ballot, that, in the event of a 'no' vote they would return to 'individual consultation' of staff on the basis of their previous offer; the union considered this a breach of the agreement reached in December and had made a formal protest about the move.

Action: Watching brief

4. The implications of the Welsh Budget for devolved bodies

The draft Welsh Budget in December included budget cuts of at least 5% for Sponsored Bodies and substantially higher in a couple of cases. It is too early to be clear about the industrial consequences but we will be monitoring the impact on staffing and the provision of the services for which these bodies are responsible and seeking support where necessary.

Actions: Watching brief

5. Update on the dispute over road safety in the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency

PCS members working as driving examiners in the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) had taken four days' strike action in November and December, in opposition to management plans to extend the working day and increase the number of driving tests examiners would be expected to carry out. The union believed that the move could breach legislation on conducting elements of the test in "good daylight", as it would be impossible to conduct all tests in daylight hours during the winter. Negotiations with ACAS about the issues at stake had begun on 16 December.

Actions: None

6. Land Registry: renewed threat of privatisation

PCS reported that, as part of CSR, the UK government was seeking to "move operations of the Land Registry to the private sector from 2017" as part of plans for "a further £5 billion of corporate and financial asset sales by March 2020." This was a major blow, given that the coalition government had shelved plans to privatise the Land Registry in July 2014, after a long campaign led by PCS, which had won overwhelming

support from the public, professionals and service-users. Any privatisation plan would threaten the future of the 400 staff in Swansea, as well as their colleagues elsewhere.

Action: Group to write to the UK minister responsible for the Land Registry, Anna Soubry, expressing concern about the proposed privatisation and reminding her of the lack of support for the previous privatisation plan.

7. Proposed Court Closures in Wales

The UK government had recently conducted a public consultation over plans to close 91 courts in England and Wales, including twelve in Wales, of which Bridgend, Carmarthen and Pontypridd posed particular problems in relation to access to justice and potential problems for staff. A response to the consultation was expected soon.

Action: Group to write to the Justice Secretary, expressing concern about the more problematic of the proposed closures.

8. ONS job cuts

Following an announcement in the CSR that it would be required to make 19% real-terms savings by 2019-20, the Office for National Statistics had announced to staff that it plans to make 500 (net) job cuts, the majority of which would fall on the Newport site. Although management was expecting that the majority of affected staff would leave through natural wastage, it had also been acknowledged that severance schemes were likely, especially for lower grade staff.

Action: Group to write to the Chief Statistician, expressing concern about the scale and potential impact of the proposed job cuts and asking for further details about how they would be carried out.