

Local Partnership Board Meeting
2:00pm Monday 28 September 2009
Lord Clerk Registers' Room, General Register House

Attendees: George Mackenzie (Chair); Dave Brownlee (NAS); Cheryl Gedling (Group Secretary PCS); Jim Grady (NAS); Jimmy Gilmour (PCS); James McCormack (Prospect); Maureen Morris (PCS); John Nichols (PCS); Jenny Cutts (secretary).

Apologies: John Mitchell (Health and Safety); Scott Murray (Assistant Secretary PCS).

1. Minutes of the last meeting

1.1 The minutes of the last meeting were signed following correction of a typing error.

2. Matters Arising

2.1 No matters were arising.

3. Staffing and Finance Issues

3.1 George Mackenzie reported on the financial pressures currently being placed on NAS by Scottish Government. He noted that financial provision beyond the current Spending Review period is uncertain, but NAS is working on the assumption that next year's settlement will remain as expected, which is a 'flat cash' settlement. This is being used as a basis for planning, but it is acknowledged that this could still change, particularly as a General Election must be held no later than early June next year.

3.2 Dave Brownlee explained that NAS has been asked for 1.5% efficiency saving for the current year, but with NAS having to fund the pay settlement from its own resources this equates to a saving of approximately 4% both for the current and next financial year.

3.3 Senior management described the strategic review process that is now underway. A workshop event was held on 16 September 2009 to which all branch and section heads were invited. The Keeper emphasised that this was to investigate options and generate ideas rather than produce a specific blue-print for changes to be implemented. NAS activities were considered under 6 categories, rather than looking at the organisation in terms of structures and branches. It was explained that after the current spending review period ends in 2010/2011, we do not yet know what funding will be available. It is almost certain that there will be reductions in government spending however, and senior management are planning for the worst case scenario, which they consider to be 10% reduction in our operating budget, equating to around £760,000 annually.

3.4 John Nicols enquired about the overall tenor of the options investigated. George Mackenzie stated that the biggest costs to NAS are accommodation and staff. It was added that many accommodation costs, rent, rates, etc., are not easy to adjust and must be borne. Ways to increase revenue are also being looked at, with particular regard to compensating for the inexorable drop in legal search income. The Keeper further explained that the production of copies of records to facilitate public access is expensive and we are looking at cheaper and more routine procedures which may be adopted in order to save money. Adding NAS records to the ScotlandsPeople service will increase revenue although the impact will not be huge. Commercial venue hire of the Adam Dome and Lord Clerk Register's room, and the ScotlandsPeople cafe and shop are other, albeit relatively small, revenue earners.

3.5 John Nicols requested that union representatives are provided with relevant strategy documents in order to inform local partnership discussions on these matters. George Mackenzie agreed.

3.6 George Mackenzie observed that it would be very difficult to reach 10% savings within one year and reiterated that as the Scottish Ministers are bound by the block grant settlement from Westminster, Scottish public bodies are planning for likely eventualities but without full certainty at this stage.

3.7 James McCormack asked about replacing members of staff who had recently or were about to retire. The Keeper confirmed that at present the default policy is not to fill vacancies. He added that this does not mean that the vacant posts are 'deleted' from the NAS complement.

3.8 It was acknowledged that the Scottish Government's no compulsory redundancy policy means that any posts identified as 'surplus' will not immediately result in savings as the post holders must continue to be paid from NAS budget until alternative posts are found within the Scottish Government.

3.9 John Nicols asked for information about the staffing structure and filled posts. Dave Brownlee agreed to provide this information including an organisation chart.

3.10 Cheryl Gedling noted that the actions taken by NAS are commensurate with all Scottish Government bodies and similar exercises are being held by other organisations. She agreed that sharing information with the unions as early as possible was a good approach. She added that negotiation meetings should be called as necessary rather than waiting for the regular Local Partnership Board meetings to discuss issues.

3.11 James McCormack asked if NAS is on target to stay within its expenditure limits this year. Jim Grady explained that the approach of capitalising staff salaries where they can be attributed to the production of digital assets and confirmed that this has been approved by audit. This was helping with staff costs, but at present projections indicate that we will be spending right up to our budget limit.

3.12 Maureen Morris asked for clarification about this. It was explained that these staff members whose salary costs are capitalised retain the same terms and conditions as other permanent members of staff.

3.13 James McCormack noted the ongoing reviews into public services and digital preservation. The Keeper noted that the outcomes of these studies will inform the larger strategic review process. A review of fees and charges has also been undertaken though not yet implemented.

3.14 James McCormack asked about future commitments to projects. George Mackenzie explained that he does not make a distinction between core work and projects because the 'projects' are termed so because they are identifiable discrete pieces of work rather than additional activities. He noted that any expansion of the ScotlandsPlaces project will require a strategic business case to be made following the results of the current pilot project. He emphasised the strategic importance of this type of work, encompassing as it does joint working with other organisations to increase the number and range of records being made available more readily to customers. He also noted that consideration of activities which could be stopped must include a balanced view. For instance, stopping digitisation programmes could save capital expenditure in the short term, but continuation would lead to savings of increased revenue in the longer term.

4. Progress on major projects

4.1 ScotlandsPeople

4.1.1 It was reported that the ScotlandsPeople Centre has been busy over the summer months and numbers using the cafe have also increased. The Gathering events in July and the current favourable sterling exchange rate are thought to have assisted in this respect. Jim Grady noted that income is shared between NAS, GROS and CLL after NAS running costs for the Centre have been deducted. Income from the ScotlandsPeople website are steady.

4.1.2 George Mackenzie explained that on 6 October 2009 there will be a launch event for the addition of the Scottish Catholic Registers data to ScotlandsPeople.gov.uk, at which the First Minister and Cardinal O'Brien will be present. This represents the addition of 2 million names and will effectively boost interest in the existing service.

4.1.3 Jim Grady noted that shop sales are also steady and *Tracing Your Scottish Ancestors* remains the biggest selling item. It is acknowledged that shop sales will not cover staffing costs, but that both reception and security guard personnel are required regardless.

4.2 Registers Archive Conversion

4.2.1 Dave Brownlee explained that the Register Archive Conversion project is ongoing and that Registers Direct will take over the service of producing copies from the sasine register next financial year.

4.3 Register of Tartans

4.3.1 There have been over 80 new tartans registered so far and this is the level of activity anticipated. The design competition for a Homecoming tartan will be judged on 30 September. Ten finalists were invited to make up their designs and a panel of fashion and textile experts will choose the winning entry. The result will be announced at a catwalk event in Harvey Nicholls Edinburgh store on 6 October 2009.

4.3.2 Jim Grady noted that the Scottish Government continue to fund the running costs of the Tartan Register and the same approach would be extended to any new activities that Scottish Ministers decided NAS should undertake.

4.3.3 James McCormack enquired about the staff working on the Tartan Register. George Mackenzie explained that this will be reconsidered and noted that the project officer also works on education activities. Administration of the registration applications may be achieved routinely, but there is also a need to build and retain expertise.

4.4 ScotlandsPlaces

4.4.1 It was reported that a lot of work by archivist and ICT staff has gone into the ScotlandsPlaces project. An outline working version of the website has been produced and a demo of this is due to be held soon.

4.5 Famous Scots

4.5.1 The latest famous Scot is Tilda Swinton and her exhibition has opened in the New Register House Dome. It was noted that some funding had been supplied by EventScotland for the Famous Scots project.

5. Health and Safety issues

5.1 Dave Brownlee explained that the next meeting of the Health and Safety Committee is due to be held on 29 September 2009. DSE assessments are underway and fire marshall training took place last week. No serious accidents have been reported and the Health and Safety section of theOracle has been updated.

5.2 Maureen Morris reported that first aiders have agreed to hold joint NAS-GROS-ScotlandsPeople meetings and to share training.

6. Public and Privilege Holidays

6.1 An issue had arisen over the Whitsun weekend at the end of May, concerning how we deal with sickness absence on the 3.5 days 'moveable' holidays which NAS staff take when SG buildings are closed. There is an anomaly in that if a member of staff in core SG is on sick leave at the Whitsun weekend at the end of May, the September Friday half day or on St Andrews Day, then they effectively lose the holiday. In NAS, however, in this situation it would be treated as a day's sick leave and the member of staff would just take a day's annual leave at some other time.

6.2 While it was acknowledged that an anomaly existed, management in NAS (and GROS) have agreed that these 'moveable' holidays should continue for now to be treated as normal working days, so that if a member of staff happened to fall sick on one of them they would not lose a day's annual leave as a consequence. James McCormack noted that an earlier round of emails had led to some staff being unclear on the matter. George MacKenzie agreed to issue a communication in order to clarify this.

Action: George MacKenzie to clarify the Public and Privilege Holidays policy.

7. Any other competent business

7.1 Jimmy Gilmour conveyed a complaint that a *Pertemps* worker had been appointed to fill a B1 search room post rather than the position being offered to existing permanent staff members. Union representatives felt that this would have been an ideal Temporary Responsibility Supplement (TRS) opportunity for permanent staff. Dave Brownlee was unaware of the full facts of this case but explained that this was a temporary appointment to cover for existing search room staff. The Branch Head clearly felt that the appointed *Pertemps* staff member possessed the necessary search room skills and knowledge of the NAS. Cheryl Gedling said that his action gave out a bad message and suggested that NAS staff should be first in line to take advantage of such opportunities. George MacKenzie clarified that the very short term nature of this appointment made moving existing staff in accordance with a TRS arrangement impractical, but that the point made by the TUS would definitely be borne in mind should a similar situation arise in future.

7.2 Jim Grady enquired about a salary sacrifice scheme for Lothian bus passes. Cheryl Gedling asked for further details.

Action: Jim Grady to supply further details about the scheme.

8. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is due to take place in January 2010. Jenny Cutts will canvass for dates.

Jenny Cutts
6 October 2009