

**Local Partnership Board Meeting**  
**2:00pm Wednesday 18 March 2009**  
**Lord Clerk Registers' Room, General Register House**

**Attendees:** George Mackenzie (Chair); Dave Brownlee (NAS); Jim Grady (NAS); James McCormack (Prospect); Maureen Morris (PCS); Scott Murray (Assistant Secretary PCS); John Nichols (PCS); John Mitchell (Health and Safety); Jimmy Gilmour (PCS); Catherine Dowe (secretary).

**Apologies:** none

**1. Minutes of the last meeting**

1.1 The minutes of the last meeting will be signed following completion of the amendments.

**2. Matters Arising**

2.1 There were no matters arising.

**3. Staffing and Finance Issues**

3.1 The financial situation was discussed. George Mackenzie explained that global financial issues affect the public sector in Scotland and that the Scottish Government require stabilisation and budget savings to be made in 2010 in preparation for continuing resource constraints over subsequent years.

3.2 The Keeper's Strategic Perspectives document was discussed. This document was circulated at Management Board and Branch Heads meetings and identified a number of areas for change. Issues discussed were the increasing emphasis on public records, examination of the balance between online services and on-site services and scaling up work on digital records. George MacKenzie explained that Susan Corrigan, Government Records, is conducting a scoping study into this and will report in six months time.

3.3 George Mackenzie stated that he aims to provide stability over the coming years and expects difficult decisions will be required in order to achieve reductions in spending.

3.4 Imminent changes were discussed. This year Outreach Services Branch and Private Records Branch will be merged and Bob Phillips, Head of Accommodation Services Branch, will retire. Senior management took the view that it would be difficult to replace Bob's post at his level and that a facilities management contract will be put in place to cover these functions.

3.5 Scott Murray said that PCS understood that the economic situation meant that difficult decisions will have to be made and requested advance notice before such decisions are communicated to staff in order that they might get a chance to have some input or offer advice. George Mackenzie agreed to share the broad outlines of future decisions but felt that discussion of every detail would impede the process. Senior management expressed appreciation for this offer to work constructively with unions.

3.6 James McCormack commented that the proposed changes were radical and far reaching. He asked whether future decisions regarding strategic priorities will be made transparently. He said that many staff had been shocked at the short timescale of these changes. Dave Brownlee expressed the view that Senior Management have been very transparent about these decisions and will continue to be so. George Mackenzie explained that there could be no guarantee that the short timescale of necessary changes but stated that there were no additional radical changes planned for the foreseeable future.

3.7 James McCormack enquired if the proposed changes mean the loss of one Branch Head. George Mackenzie explained that in the short term the number of branches will be reduced by one, and in the longer term, if the Deputy Keeper (Records Services) post was to be filled, there would have to be a net loss of one C1 post. John Mitchell asked about the necessity of filling the Deputy Keeper post. George Mackenzie reiterated his long term aim to do so. James McCormack supported this position and reported that Prospect members feel this post is important for the representation of records issues. George Mackenzie noted the importance of scaling up work on electronic records. James McCormack recognised that greater emphasis on digital archives would mean a greater burden on ICT staff. Jimmy Gilmour expressed the view that ICT is currently under-resourced to address present problems without additional workload. Dave Brownlee pointed out that to increase resources in ICT would mean that savings have to be identified from elsewhere in the office.

3.8 Scott Murray expressed his concern that losing C1 posts would lead to fewer promotion opportunities for staff. George Mackenzie acknowledged this but re-emphasised the absolute necessity of making such changes in order to deal with future economic challenges.

3.9 Maureen Morris discussed concerns that efficiency savings and staff redeployment might lead to problems. She suggested that not filling vacancies will lead to qualified archivists being expected to undertake more administration work in consequence. James McCormack agreed with this and reported that many archivists at NAS are beginning to feel “de-professionalised”. Professional archival tasks such as cataloguing are being performed by administration staff and more curatorial time is taken up with managerial activities. George Mackenzie answered this by saying that there was no policy to replace administration staff with qualified archivists as to do so would be a waste of limited resources. He also pointed out the need for more “smart” working in future as staff develop ways to work as efficiently as possible. He noted that professional archivists occupy B2 grades and as such are expected to take on managerial duties. He added that it is a sensible use of staff resources to allow administration staff to undertake para-professional activities where possible.

3.10 Maureen Morris queried the definition of term “full complement” included at paragraph 3.3 of the previous meeting minutes. Dave Brownlee explained that this means that there are no outstanding vacancies at the moment. Jim Grady added that temporary staff have been recruited to cover maternity leave.

3.11 Dave Brownlee spoke about action being taken to ensure that NAS expenditure stayed within budget in this financial year. He explained that some staff costs (particularly DIU and ICT staff) where work has resulted in digital assets being created which will in turn generate revenue for NAS, will be paid out the capital rather than operating cost budget. This is in line with accounting rules and has been cleared with Audit. It means that spend can now be contained within the operating cost budget. He made it clear that this accounting measure in no way affects employees’ terms and conditions. George Mackenzie added that pay increases must be funded from the NAS budget in both 2009/10 and 2010/11, although we have no extra funding to cover this, and that he has been instructed to begin managing the budget to meet further reductions in future.

3.12 Jimmy Gilmour raised the issue of the possible closure of WRH. George Mackenzie stated that Senior Management are looking at various solutions to the storage problems faced by NAS and discussed consideration of ways to make better use of the Robertson Wing following the anticipated closure of the Legal Search Room in approximately 12 months. The West Search Room could become a specialised access point for maps, plans and photographs if all other record productions are made at GRH. Jimmy Gilmour pointed out that moving materials would be a mammoth task and could be very expensive. George Mackenzie agreed with this assessment and stated that there were no plans to close WRH at the present though changing the opening hours are being considered. He also expressed the desire to minimise the movement of records as much as possible and to look at optimal location of different series of records. These ideas will be examined as part of strategic planning study conducted by Alison Horsburgh. Scott Murray reiterated the Unions’ desire to be notified of proposed changes as these will impact on staff with implications for staff morale. Maureen Morris added that union representatives must be well informed in order for them to answer staff queries. Dave Brownlee recognised the point about staff morale and made reference to the general economic climate that demands difficult decisions. Jim Grady also highlighted the fact that staff had opportunities to find out about and discuss proposed changes when they attend Open Forums. At the most recent Open Forum, held in GRH on 27 February 2009, the Strategic Perspectives paper was the main topic of discussion and staff were encouraged to give their opinions on these issues. George Mackenzie stated that he hopes information is cascaded to those members of staff who are unable to attend Forums and noted that a summary is published on the intranet.

3.13 James McCormack commented on the assertion made by Senior Management that NAS needs to align itself as closely as possible with the Scottish Government’s Purpose. He said that changing administrations have different priorities and that close alignment could drastically affect our core activities if asked to change at very short notice. George Mackenzie answered this by explaining that Scottish Minister set the NAS core activities and the Agency must follow Ministerial direction. He added that demonstration of the worth of NAS to the Government may alleviate the risk of merger or even closure in future. He pointed out that projects such as the Tartan

Register, ScotlandsImages and ScotlandsPeople have helped raise the profile of NAS and show the Scottish Government that NAS is a valuable asset.

#### **4. Progress on major projects**

##### 4.1 Scottish Family History Service

4.1.1 George Mackenzie suggested that this item need not feature on future agendas because the ScotlandsPeople Centre has now been firmly established. The Centre is open to the public and the Reid Room has been full on a number of occasions. He mentioned that the shop and the café were also open for business and beginning to generate income.

##### 4.2 Registers Archive Conversion

4.2.1 George Mackenzie pointed out that 70% of requests were now satisfied by online services and discussed whether the Registers Archive Conversion project has reached “critical mass”. This is expected to be achieved by summer 2009. He recognised that there would still be residual numbers of people who will prefer to research the sashes on-site and must therefore be accommodated in the search room.

##### 4.3 Register of Tartans

4.3.1 The Scottish Register of Tartans was launched at the beginning of February 2009 and several registrations made subsequently. The system is working well and the Keeper wishes to encourage the use of the Register by the tartan industry. It was explained that Help Desk staff based in the ICT department deal with registrations and are coping well with the new demands this places upon them.

##### 4.4 Famous Scots

4.4.1 The Famous Scots exhibition opened in January 2009 with an exhibition on Billy Connolly. The second exhibition will feature Sir James W. Black, scientist and inventor of propranolol (beta blockers) and winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1988. Outreach Services Branch are working towards subsequent Famous Scots exhibitions and all but one of the participants have been arranged.

##### 4.5 ScotlandsImages

4.5.1 A Ministerial launch event was held in General Register House on 3 February 2009 to celebrate the launch of the online commercial picture library [www.scotlandsimages.com](http://www.scotlandsimages.com) and was considered a great success. This was attended by the then Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture Linda Fabiani and was jointly hosted by the partner organisations: NAS; Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS); National Library of Scotland; National Trust for Scotland and National Museums Scotland. Since the launch the website has been running smoothly and the continuing hard work of all involved was recognised.

4.6 James McCormack asked about the proposed ScotlandsPlaces project. George Mackenzie agreed to add this to subsequent agendas. At present this is a project to investigate the feasibility of a joint online service for access to maps and plans that are in the custody of NAS, and RCAHMS. The feasibility element of this project will be completed by October 2009. George MacKenzie anticipates that this would be another successful demonstration of joint working with other organisations.

4.7 Maureen Morris expressed concern at how many of these major projects were ICT dependent and the pressure this might then put on limited resources. Dave Brownlee pointed out that curatorial staff members within other branches have also been involved and noted that these projects fulfil the Scottish Government's core objective of economic expansion.

4.8 Scott Murray asked about the Scottish Government's Public Sector Landscape Simplification programme. He expressed concerns that mergers and organisational restructuring would lead to job losses. He stated that he felt all areas of government including Agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB's) will be affected. George Mackenzie and Dave Brownlee agreed that the simplification programme is likely to continue. Scott Murray asked whether it is considered likely that there NAS may be merged with the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS). George MacKenzie replied that as the Scottish Government had not mentioned this to date, he does not think this is under consideration.

## **5. Health and Safety issues**

5.1 Dave Brownlee reported that the Health and Safety micro-site was about to be launched on the NAS intranet. John Mitchell described an accident that had occurred on the back steps of GRH and stated that the outcome of the investigation into this is awaited. No other major incidents were reported and health and safety procedures are being followed.

## **6. Any other competent business**

6.1 Dave Brownlee asked Scott Murray about updates on the PCS dispute with Scottish Government. Scott Murray explained that a meeting was scheduled for 19 March 2009 for discussion of these issues.

6.2 Dave Brownlee stated that six applications for early retirement following the recent SG notice on the subject had been submitted from NAS staff.

6.3 The results of the Scottish Government Employee Survey have been made available to NAS senior management and will be published on theOracle soon. George Mackenzie noted that the survey revealed some positive results points and some negative. Confidence in Senior Management was not high and the Keeper intends to discuss ways to improve this with Branch Heads. There was an improved response rate of 59%.

6.4 Dave Brownlee discussed the grading review relating to the A2/A3 merger. He explained that 13 posts in NAS were put forward for consideration by HR. Scott Murray expects the review report will be made available in April 2009.

6.5 George MacKenzie considers that NAS has 3 to 5 years of space left for records storage but due to the current financial constraints there is no progress regarding a new building at Thomas Thomson House or Granton.

6.6 Dave Brownlee stated that NAS will continue to operate its own annual leave system rather than adopt the annual leave module on eHR. He added that although NAS staff are not able to access SCOTS they are able to access the eHR system. Plans were outlined that NAS will remain open on St Andrews Day again this year but that any staff who wish to take annual leave on that day will be able to do so, subject to the usual operational considerations.

6.7 It was asked if there would be any “Summer Madness” event this year. Maureen Morris considered that such a celebration would be particularly appreciated by staff because of the worries they face in consequence of the economic climate challenges. It was felt that such an event would benefit staff morale. George MacKenzie said he would discuss this with Duncan Macniven and Paul Parr but cautioned that any such event must be self-funding this year.

## **7. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is due to take place in June 2009. Catherine Dowe will canvass for dates.

Catherine Dowe  
26 March 2009