

Local Partnership Board Meeting
Tuesday 29 November 2007, 10:00am
Lord Clerk Registers' Room, General Register House

Attendees: George Mackenzie (Chair); Dave Brownlee (NAS); Jim Grady (NAS); Jimmy Gilmour (PCS); James McCormack (Prospect); Maureen Morris (PCS); Scott Murray (Assistant Secretary PCS); Jenny Cutts (secretary).

Apologies: Alex Cochrane (PCS); John Mitchell (Health and Safety); Louise Wilson (SG HR Business Partner); Philip Jackson (SG Employee Relations and Reward Team).

Minutes of last meeting

1. The minutes of the last meeting were approved and signed.

Matters arising

2.1 [2.1] Louise Wilson, HR Business Partner, and Philip Jackson, Employee Relations and Reward Team, had both been invited to attend. Neither was able to attend this meeting but both expressed an interest in attending future meetings.

Action: Jenny Cutts to invite Louise Wilson and Philip Jackson to the next meeting to be held in February/March 2008.

2.2 [2.3] NAS guidance on claiming flexi credit for medical appointments had been provided for Scott Murray's consideration. He pointed out that staff being credited for the appointment time plus travel time is consistent with SG policy. Maureen Morris added that GROS rules on flexi credit for medical appointments are identical to main SG guidance. Scott Murray agreed that having measures to prevent staff gaining unwarranted additional flexi credit through attending appointments is sensible. George Mackenzie reiterated the objective of achieving fairness in this respect and suggested that both NAS senior management and local union partners monitor the situation and discuss any difficulties arising. Jim Grady emphasised that staff do get the full flexi credit for their period of absence when appointments are attended during rather than at the beginning or end of the day. The provision of guidance on these rules enables staff members to understand their flexi credit eligibility in advance. Maureen Morris expressed the view that any union members feeling unfairly treated in respect of these rules would contact their union and the matter may be discussed as a consequence. Jim Grady added that any flexi disputes will be resolved in a fair and consistent manner for all union members or non-union members alike.

3. Staffing

3.1 Dave Brownlee reported that recruitment exercises are in process for an A4 archive attendant post, a B1 post in DIU, a B2 Conservator in CSB and that since the last meeting, permanent Archive Attendants have been recruited to replace Pertemps staff occupying those posts. The problem with formal educational qualifications being an obstacle to the recruitment of cleaners and archive attendants has been successfully resolved and it was generally supported as a sensible solution. Maureen Morris explained that one cleaner at GROS had directly benefited from this arrangement and had been able to continue working there as a consequence.

3.2 Scott Murray asked whether money would be available for the replacement of staff moving post or retiring or whether natural wastage was anticipated. George Mackenzie explained that in general NAS aims to replace staff and that there is no intention of reducing the operating costs by rationalising staffing levels, although running costs will be tight for the next three years. It was noted however that staffing levels and structures are expected to change as a consequence of service delivery changes and the changing nature of NAS business and that Management Board will consider and direct strategy in this respect. James McCormack noted that certain areas of NAS would be particularly affected by natural wastage. The importance of replacing 'backroom' staff as well as those involved with front line customer service was added. George Mackenzie said that senior management accepts this and reiterated the objective of maintaining recognised staff levels. Dave Brownlee added that an A3 post soon to be vacated due to an agreed career break will be filled. Maureen Morris expressed the view that inadequate staffing levels can lead to pressures causing procedures not to be followed correctly.

3.3 Questions were then asked about the replacement of archive attendant staff upon retirement. It was noted that Head of Reader Services Branch is best placed to assess and determine the distribution of archive attendants between GRH and WRH and in alignment with decreasing levels of document productions. It was reported that Alison Horsburgh and Linda Ramsay are jointly evaluating the deployment of archive attendants across the range of archive attendant operations in CSB and RSB. The GRH Keeper's Open Forum held on 23 November featured questions about the number of cleaners. Senior management explained that they are committed to engaging additional cleaners for the ScotlandsPeople Centre. It was noted that GRH and GROS both directly employ cleaning staff and that in-house cleaners are presently supplemented by a contract cleaner for TTH.

3.4 On the wider issue of salary costs, management noted that NAS does not receive the standard payroll uplift as directorates in the core SG does, but that all pay costs must be found from current resources.

4. Comprehensive Spending Review 2007

George Mackenzie explained that the Comprehensive Spending Review had been undertaken in a different way to previous Reviews in terms of the new administration's policy and priority setting. He reported on the SR07 outcome for NAS: capital provision was reasonable but running costs would be very tight, as they were virtually unchanged at 2006-2007 levels. Annual 2% efficiency savings are also required. It was reiterated that efficiency savings must be achieved through economic supplier and procurement management and by maximising NAS service delivery, rather than through staff cuts. It was added that paying for building maintenance out of capital provision incurs impairment and capital charges and is not a preferable financial strategy. It was noted that additional work such as development of the Register of Tartan will bring additional resources, although other work such as developing our Digital Data Archive will not. It was further noted that some additional income will be derived from NAS share of revenues generated by the Scottish Family History Service. It was added that the planned decrease in Legal Search revenue had been flagged up in spending review submissions to SG, but that account had not been taken of this in the final settlement.

5. Progress on major projects

5.1 Scottish Family History Service

George Mackenzie provided an update on building works for the ScotlandsPeople Centre. Progress had been slowed by careful paint removal required in the Adam Dome. The Mathieson Dome will be completed before Christmas 2007 and shelves will be re-stocked soon. It was noted that the 'hard' landscaping for the garden at the rear of General Register House has already been completed and that an agreement has been reached with Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh for the 'soft' landscaping. Landscape architects will also be involved in developing the garden, under the direction of the garden designer, David Mitchell, RBGE. The planting will be done by Spring 2008 and the garden fully established by Summer 2009. Themes incorporated into the garden will be birth, death, marriage, heraldry, textile and dyeing plants relating to tartan and traditional Scottish gardens. The garden will last for approximately 20 years after which time a refresh will be necessary. Work is also underway in New Register House Dome and the Dundas Room in NRH has been completed. It is anticipated that the ScotlandsPeople Centre will be opened to the public in May 2008. Availability of appropriate VIPs will determine the date of the official Ministerial opening event.

5.2 Registers Archive Conversion

5.2.1 George Mackenzie reviewed the move of the Legal Search Room to the Robertson Wing. The success of this move has been contingent upon the efficacy of the RAC project and sasines search tool. Initial difficulties with the search tool were experienced but have now been resolved. Sasine digitisation continues to be performed by the second shift at TTH. All fiche sasines have now been converted.

5.2.2 The establishment of a second imaging backshift at GRH, paid for by Registers of Scotland as part of the RAC project, is planned to increase momentum toward achieving the 'critical mass' of sasine copies available online. A B1 supervisor post has been advertised. It was clarified that this GRH backshift will operate between 5:00pm and 9:30pm. Questions were asked about the impact upon DIU. It was clarified that the majority of DIU camera operators finish work at 4pm daily, but that there are enough cameras available to enable daytime members of staff to continue working beyond 5pm if necessary. It was noted that the B1 supervisor post will be opened up to A band staff if a suitable B band applicant can't be found. It was confirmed that the capital budget settlement will enable the Valuation Rolls digitisation programme to continue into 2008-2009 and, following the planned withdrawal of RoS resourcing of backshifts, should also enable this work to continue as it creates a capital asset.

5.3 Additional Accommodation for NAS

George Mackenzie reported that the business case for additional accommodation had been subject to Gateway Review (Gate 0). He explained that the outcome of the review was largely positive, though it had recommended further work to achieve greater engagement and support of stakeholders such as the Scottish Courts, as well as bringing out more clearly the efforts which NAS has already put in to achieve space savings. The business case is unlikely now to be submitted to Ministers before June 2008 as a result of this additional work. It was explained that the likelihood of

retaining WRH for a minimum of 5 years enabled senior management to approve immediate improvements such as tea room refurbishment, re-shelving the Dexion room and re-cabling.

5.4 Valuation Rolls Project

It was reported that the valuation rolls digitisation and indexing contracts have been awarded. The aim is to achieve the maximum possible spend within allocated budget within the current financial year, as although there is a reasonable chance of continuing the project into 2008-2009 this would have to be firmed up with SG. The health and safety benefits of this project were outlined, in that many valuation rolls are very large volumes which are difficult to lift. It is thought that the images will initially be made available via NAS search rooms and subsequently be incorporated into ScotlandsPeople. Jim Grady explained that there are approximately 9,000 volumes and that procurement conformed to the European Commission tendering rules. The combined indexing contract with GROS work also demonstrates NAS commitment to shared services and achieves economies of scale. It was explained that GROS are performing independent quality assurance for the NAS element of this contract and that the contractor will not be paid until output is quality assured. George Mackenzie added that an additional digitisation project will be undertaken for Catholic registers by agreement of the Catholic Church and Scottish Catholic Archives.

6. Health and Safety Issues

Jimmy Gilmour reported no outstanding major health and safety issues. Dave Brownlee confirmed that the quarterly cycle of health and safety committee meetings continues. Scott Murray noted that it was encouraging that there were no major health and safety issues arising despite major building work being undertaken. Issues relating to record trolleys at the side door were noted as the only related cause for concern. It was suggested that Rok Building Ltd workmen be discouraged from congregating at the path outside Register House complex gates, as they can block the route for staff and customers to NAS and GROS.

7. Any other business

7.1 Plans to open the Lord Clerk Register's Room to external event bookings were outlined. NAS are awaiting proposals from National Museums of Scotland Enterprise to market and manage an events service. All being well, we would aim for a one-year pilot with the first bookings taken in Autumn 2008. Publicity shots relating to its marketing will be arranged for February/March 2008. It was confirmed that external bookings will be out-of-hours and the room will continue to be used as a meeting room for NAS and GROS staff during office hours. George Mackenzie explained that commercial bookings will not take priority over official use. Arrangements to facilitate external event hire were discussed. It was acknowledged that higher levels of security must be provided for such events. This would be on a voluntary overtime basis and associated costs would also be included in hire fees. It was noted that the marketing company Heritage Partnerships would assist in determining commercial charges. In addition to raising some money for NAS, the benefits of this scheme also lie in opening up GRH to members of the public and bringing the existence of NAS to the attention of diverse organisations.

7.2 A request was made that senior management issue a staff notice clarifying early closure of the search rooms and WRH on Christmas and New Year's Eve including arrangements for WRH staff to work on at GRH or TTH as convenient.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is due to be held at the end of February/beginning of March 2008. Jenny Cutts will canvass for dates nearer the time.

Jenny Cutts
5 December 2007