

MINUTES – EMPLOYEE CONSULTATIVE GROUP (ECG) MEETING

Friday, 21 September 2018
Parliament House, Room 1S2

Present:

Mr Nathan Winn	Ms Nola Marino MP
Ms Alison Byrnes	The Hon Sharon Bird MP
Ms Debra Biggs	Mr Chris Hayes MP
Ms Maree Goodrick	Senator Kimberley Kitching
Ms Mia Mussett	Senator Janet Rice
Mr Tim Hurd	Mr Andrew Wilkie MP
Mr Josh Manuatu	Senator the Hon Eric Abetz
Ms Helen Lewis	The Hon Stuart Robert MP
Ms Cathy Heidrich	The Hon Mark Coulton MP
Ms Rosemary Little*	The Hon Peter Dutton MP
Ms Rosie Ryan*	Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU)
Mr Poni Ravula	Australian Services Union (ASU)
Mr Reg Chamberlain	The Hon Alex Hawke MP
Mr Tony Nairn	Department of Finance (Finance)
Mr Luke Kostava	Finance
Mr Matthew Fraser	Finance
Ms Belinda Henderson	Finance
Ms Christina Grant	Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA)
Mr Andrew House	IPEA
Mr Jon Freeman	Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS)

* via teleconference

Meeting Opened: 10:05 am
Meeting Chair: Mr Tony Nairn
Meeting Closed: 11.35 am

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and apologies

- Mr Nairn opened the meeting.

Agenda Item 2 – DPS update

- Mr Freeman gave an update on DPS' new digital strategy, given the current plan is due to finish at the end of 2018. Mr Freeman outlined the consultation that is occurring and invited employees to provide further comment. DPS' learnings from feedback received from parliamentarians and their staff include:
 - A need for flexibility on devices and services
 - Increases in network speed.
- The ECG welcomed and commended DPS' approach to developing the digital plan in consultation with parliamentarians and staff in an engaging and consultative manner. Ms Goodrick suggested that DPS observe the style adopted by the PEMS development team in terms of its engagement and consultation with stakeholders.
- Ms Goodrick asked for a Lynda update. Mr Freeman explained it is an online training tool being trialled by employees in each office. Mr Freeman undertook to provide the ECG with an detailed update at a future date.
- Mr Manuatu outlined some issues with ICT that had been expressed to him, including reliability and the cost of SIM cards through the Parliament ICT Store. Ms Goodrick advised the group that during her recent meeting with Antony Stinziani of DPS, Mr Stinziani indicated that the ICT catalogue was being reviewed as a part of the new digital strategy which would likely result in the availability of a larger range of products.
- In response to a query on allowing more devices to work on the network, Mr Freeman explained that a roll out of a new IT workplace environment is proceeding, which would facilitate the use of more devices by using cloud-based solutions like Office 365.
- Ms Byrnes also inquired about second monitors for staff. Mr Freeman and Mr House advised that these items could now be purchased through PEMS. Ms Byrnes asked if these new functions could be conveyed to staff in an email.

Agenda Item 3 – PEMS update

- Mr Fraser and Ms Grant gave an update on the Parliamentary Expenses Management System (PEMS), including:
 - the background to PEMS
 - current functionality
 - future functionality, the testing process and User Reference Group and release timeframes.
- Ms Byrnes asked about the timeframes between a claim being processed and payment being made. Mr Fraser noted that this was a broader issue for the Commonwealth and work was being done at a whole-of-government level.
- Mr Fraser and Ms Grant appreciated the feedback users have provided on PEMS and sought further comment, in particular ECG members were invited to participate in the User Reference Group. Mr Fraser highlighted this will be particularly important in developing a finished platform.
- Members of the ECG noted their appreciation of the responsiveness of the PEMS team and IPEA to issues and suggestions and generally the approach adopted by the PEMS team with respect to its engaging and consulting style.

Agenda Item 4 – Business arising from the previous meeting

- Mr Nairn noted that the then Special Minister of State (SMOS) had responded to a letter from the ECG about leave arrangements for reasons of family and domestic violence.
- Ms Byrnes advised she is still working with DPS on the trolley issues and will update the ECG in due course when the new entrance is completed and the lifts are functioning again.
- Ms Goodrick advised that she will come back to the ECG with proposals for future work in due course.
- Mr Nairn reported that a statutory declaration is not on the M&PS website as it is an Attorney-General's Department form easily accessible by a browser search for "statutory declaration" or "stat dec".

Agenda Item 5 – Maternity leave and the Electorate Support Budget (ESB)

- Ms Byrnes outlined a case of a non-ongoing employee employed for over 12 months against the ESB due to take maternity leave. She stated that the cost of this leave should not be debited from the ESB as this could result in Senators and Members choosing not to employ female staff against the ESB. She noted that it is a legislative requirement for staff to take maternity leave and staff and employers do not have the ability to choose the timing of maternity leave as they can with Annual Leave. Ms Byrnes also noted that the number of non-ongoing staff employed for longer than 12 months against the ESB who needed to access maternity leave would be very minimal.
- Mr Nairn noted:
 - that the issue has been considered recently by the previous SMOS who had concluded that the current arrangements for maternity leave costs to be debited are appropriate.
 - that there has been increased flexibility in relation to the employment of relief staff with the combining of the Relief Staff Budget and Electorate Staff Travel Budget into the ESB.
 - that the purpose of a budget for relief staff is to assist Senators and Members during temporary absences and peak workloads and not to provide for long-term employment.
- Ms Byrnes noted that there was a new SMOS and also that staff seeking maternity leave felt bad about taking maternity leave when they know that their employer's ESB will be debited for their maternity leave and also for their replacement.
- The ECG agreed that Ms Byrnes would draft a letter from the ECG employee and union representatives to the SMOS on this issue.

Agenda Item 6 – Enterprise Agreement (EA) bargaining

- Mr Nairn stated that the current EA will nominally expire on 19 April 2020. Accordingly, Mr Nairn anticipated that negotiations may commence in the second half of 2019, subject to Government decision.
- Mr Nairn noted bargaining will be conducted between the Government, relevant unions and employee bargaining representatives, and not with the ECG.

Agenda Item 7 – Communicating Guidelines accurately to staff (EAP)

- Ms Byrnes raised that employees had been confused over recent promotional material from the new employee assistance program (EAP) provider, JLT. The material did not state that an EAP counsellor may recommend that additional sessions be provided,

beyond the standard three sessions for an issue, with the approval of the Department of Finance.

- Mr Nairn stated that the promotional material was to make employees aware of the EAP and not intended to replicate all of the material in the EAP guideline. Additional sessions are at the discretion of the JLT counsellor, with Departmental agreement, and not at the request of the employee. Ms Goodrick agreed with Mr Nairn but stated of overall importance is that information being issued by the Department or any of its contractors and suppliers needs to ensure a consistent message to avoid misinterpretation and confusion. Ms Byrnes re-iterated that it was one additional sentence – not replicating all the material in the EAP guideline.
- Mr Nairn also stated that the EAP is not provided as a long-term counselling solution and noted the possibility of getting additional sessions may inappropriately raise employees' expectations. Ms Byrnes stated that it should be made clear that the EAP counsellor needs to recommend the additional counselling but information on this issue should be consistent so that staff who are most in need of help do not have to go searching for information unnecessarily.
- The ECG agreed that Ms Byrnes would draft a letter from the ECG employee and union representatives to the SMOS on this issue.

Agenda Item 8 – Other business

- Nil

Agenda Item 9 – Next meeting date

- Friday, 30 November 2018 – to follow the WHS Committee Meeting.
- The ECG requested that DPS and the relevant PEMS / IPEA staff be invited to provide a further update on their work.

Action Items

Mr Freeman (DPS) to provide the ECG with further information on Lynda
Mr Freeman (DPS) to provide further information on the costs of SIM cards under the Parliament ICT Store
Ms Grant (IPEA) to check how travelling allowance claims for sitting dates are handled in PEMS and whether they can default to parliamentary business
Ms Byrnes to draft a letter from the ECG employee and union representatives to the SMOS on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– The treatment of the costs of maternity leave under the ESB– Ensuring accurate and consistent information is provided to staff in EAP promotional materials