



Minutes/Actes:

Meeting No: 46/50
Date: 02 July 2020
Time: 13:15 - 15:30
Venue: Virtual (MS Teams)
Quorum: 16/17 Units

46th Staff Council Meeting Minutes

The meeting was quorate at 13:20 with 15 Units present. Staff Council Chair Camille McKenzie chaired the meeting and Secretary Sherif Mohamed took notes. Units present were: 06, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33. All members of the leadership team were also present.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The 1st VP Aitor Arauz Chapman requested to rename item 9 to be “Internal Justice Advisor”. The Treasurer Jaime Garreta requested to move the UNSU Finances from item 6 to item 4. The agenda was adopted as amended with 12 items.

2. Adoption of previous minutes

Minutes for the 49th meeting of the 46th Staff Council remain pending.

3. Reports by Units

Mita Sen (Unit 26) reported to the Council 4 questions raised by her constituents. The 1st question was whether long-term telecommuting would be governed under COVID-19 guidelines or under the flexible working arrangements policy. The 2nd question was about working from home countries and whether the 6-month rule - which introduces changes to the post adjustment related to the location of the home country - would be applied, and especially in the context of COVID-19. The 3rd question was about the proper equipment for telecommuting and whether management was willing to provide equipment or financial support to address the staffs’ reported needs in this regard. The final and fourth question was regarding the fate of the leases of the annex building, including the DC-2 building.

On the 1st question, the 1st VP confirmed that until COVID-19 is completely over, all the telecommuting arrangements would be governed under COVID-19 guideline in lieu of the regular flexible working arrangements guidelines.

On the 2nd question, the 1st VP stated that he heard all different kinds of conflicting instructions and views in this regard, however, he thought that the 6-month rule seems to be in effect even if the work from home country is within the COVID-19 context.

On the 3rd question, the President Patricia Nemeth stated that the equipment matter is still being considered by management, including the possibility of financial support in lieu of certain types of equipment.

On the 4th question about the annex buildings' leases, the President promised to follow-up with the Department of Operational Support (DOS) in this regard. However, she highlighted her previous statement that management were apparently looking into the possibility of discontinuing some of these leases.

On a note related to the phased return, Michelle Rockcliffe (Unit 06) requested a copy of the memo which was sent to the focal points of the phased return to offices, which detailed the procedures of moving office equipment to staff members' homes.

On a different note, the Rapporteur Coralie Tripier reported to the Council some of her constituents' concerns regarding the return to the offices and also raised concerns regarding the guidelines that govern working from home countries, as well as from outside of the duty station. She also inquired about the ceiling of the accumulated annual leaves over 60 days which was recently permitted to address some of the COVID-19 adverse effects.

The President reminded the Council members that the policy that identify the commuting distance from the Headquarters was recently sent to all staff by management via a broadcast. She explained that the policy clearly indicated that staff members on G4 visas working serve in the UNHQ in New York should reside within the tri-state area (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut). The President confirmed that the limit of the accumulated annual leave days has been temporarily suspended, and that staff can accumulate annual leave days over 60 days, however, they would have to use any balance over 60 days before end of March 2021.

Sergio Pires Vieira (Unit 24) described how different managers have shown different approaches in handling work from home countries' requests and that the response to such requests mainly depends on how flexible the managers of different areas are.

Simona Chindea (Unit 24) inquired about the possibility of establishing some kind of tele-medical service that staff can use to report signs of physical or mental health issues before they proceed to medical facilities given the associated risks.

The President thought that staff should contact the Staff Counsellor's Office or the mental health focal points for such services, as well as to the relevant contact points in the Medical Service.

The 1st VP thought that even though it sounded like a good idea to have a Union's dedicated body to answer staff members immediate health questions, however, from the lessons learned from the experience with the Union's Social Support Network, he found that the establishment of such bodies would require a strictly dedicated team that would be committed to provide continuous support to staff through this service. The 1st VP suggested – as an alternative – the initiation of a relevant MS Teams channel within the Social Support Network. Simona Chindea and Sindhoora Lehuri (Unit 33) supported the idea of initiating an MS Teams channel. Michelle Rockcliffe also supported the idea and suggested that this group examine the wealth of information available on the COVID-19 pages on iSeek to be able to provide direct and quick guidance to staff.

Sebastian Cervantes (Unit 22) praised the good work of the DESA and DGC staff representatives and congratulated them for successful townhall meetings. He also praised the overall performance of the Union which was appreciated by several constituents and pointed out the fact that new dues paying members that he personally knew made the decision to pay Union dues simply because of the Union's excellent work overall, and in particular over the past few months. He finally joined the voices calling for clear guidance regarding the telecommuting from home countries, as well as the equipment needed for telecommuting.

4. UNSU Finances

The Treasurer Jaime Garreta informed the Council members that from the data he received from Emmanuella Rene that 176 new dues paying members joined the Union during the period from 1 May 2019 until now. He shared his screen and presented some of the financial statements that he earlier shared with the Council members.

The Deputy Chair Ramona Kohrs requested that Treasurers present the original budgeted amounts next to the actual budget activities in the balance sheets to allow the Council members make comparisons and make sound judgements regarding the performance of the budget.

Michelle Rockcliffe shared her screen and drew the attention of the Council members to some data that she thought was missing and suggested that completing the missing data would address the Deputy Chair's concern raised above. She also pointed out a mistake in some amounts related to the Staff Day and asked to correct them. She eventually inquired about the total number of applicants for the MetLaw legal plan until now.

The Assistant Treasurer Yogesh Sakhardande praised Emmanuella Rene's efforts in facilitating the production of the financial statements. He also clarified that the financial statements were shared with the Council to be reviewed and called for the Council members to report any errors to be corrected. He explained how cumbersome the process

of producing the financial statements was in light of the limitations of movement and highlighted the efforts that the Treasurer and himself spent in this regard.

The Treasurer explained that the application period for MetLaw Legal Plans has been extended for two more weeks, and that the final number of participants would be reported to the Council right after the application period is over.

After a heated discussion, the Chair decided to suspend the meeting for two minutes.

The meeting was suspended at 02:18

The meeting resumed at 02:20.

The Chair reminded the Council of the importance of adhering strictly to the rules and procedures that govern the Council meetings, and to respect the directions made by the Chair to maintain order during these meetings.

The Council members exchanged views regarding the proper presentation of data in the financial statements with the Treasurer and the Assistant Treasurer who answered a few questions raised by the staff representatives.

The Deputy Chair inquired about the status of the auditing report and inquired about the possibility to organize a meeting between the Council members and the auditors to learn more about their findings and how to ensure proper management of the Union's finances.

The 1st VP informed the Council members that the EB members conducted a meeting with the auditing company this week and that the discrepancies identified in the auditors' management letter have been discussed and addressed. He also stated that the auditors explained that their management letter contained no major findings, and that the findings reported were very minor and that they were highlighted along with suggested best practices that would ensure proper management of the Union's finances moving forward. He also stated that during the meeting, the EB members requested a new engagement letter from the auditing company for the auditing of the first year of the 46th Staff Council mandate (1 May 2019 – 31 April 2020) and highlighted the importance of adhering to annual audits.

5. President's Report and Summary of Communications

The 1st VP thanked Emmanuella Rene for her excellent work on the preparation of the President's report.

The Deputy Chair inquired about the items on the agenda of the ad-hoc Staff Management Committee (SMC) meeting planned for 8 July 2020 and requested a copy of the Downsizing WG's report to be aware of where we stand in this regard.

The 1st VP explained that the WG tried to craft the policy in a way that it provides the flexibility necessary for safeguarding the rights of the staff to the most extent possible in the case of any downsizing exercise. He promised to share the final version of the WG's report once it was ready.

The Secretary Sherif Mohamed inquired about the face-to-face plenary meeting of the SMC and whether the meeting planned for 8 July 2020 was a plenary or an ad-hoc meeting of the SMC.

The 1st VP stated that the annual face-to-face plenary was currently suspended, and that the meeting of July 8 even though was in fact an ad-hoc VTC meeting, yet it would address matters that was originally on the agenda of the suspended plenary meeting. He also mentioned that invitations to this meeting have been sent to The Secretary and to Patel Noble (Unit 14) to attend as associate members of the Committee.

Michelle Rockcliffe and the Deputy Chair welcomed the invitation that was sent to the associate members and urged the Leadership team to ensure the participation of all members of other working groups and their alternates in all the meetings of the relevant working groups.

6. Executive Board Report

Nothing was raised.

7. General Meeting

Michelle Rockcliffe informed the Council that she was approached by constituents with concerns related to COVID-19, and that she asked them to prepare a strong resolution that address these concerns to avail the golden opportunity of the General Meeting and raise the staff's voice by adopting this resolution. She also reminded the EB members of the time limits to send the necessary documents to the staff at-large prior to the General Meeting.

The 1st VP stated that he was aware of the documentation deadlines, and confirmed that an Annual Report of the activities of the Union was being prepared by the EB members who were requested to provide their content by Monday 6 July to be able to present the semi-final version of the Annual Report to the Council members during the Council meeting on Thursday 9 July for their final comments.

8. Training for Staff Representatives

Sergio Pires Vieira updated the Council on the budget training, which was being organized, and informed the members of the composition of the moderators and lecturers during the training. The idea of the training and the efforts towards organizing it was appreciated by several Council members.

9. Internal Justice Advisor

The 1st VP presented a draft resolution to retain the services of the Union's OIOS advisor, as agreed in the Council's 49th meeting.

The Deputy Chair raised concerns regarding the idea of contracting an advisor to help staff members who are basically being investigated by an internal oversight buddy for potential wrongdoings, and thought it was not the best approach.

Michelle Rockcliffe informed the Council that the Legal Committee have met and discussed this matter, and gave the floor to Simona Chindea who suggested that the OIOS advisor organize a paid training for the Union's legal advisor on the process of an OIOS investigation so the legal advisor start providing these services to consolidate the expenses of two advisors in only one. The members of the Legal Committee also found that the cost of the OIOS advisor was high enough to re-consider the need for this contract.

The 1st VP explained to the Union why confidentiality was important in this regard as well as the importance of the services offered by the OIOS advisor.

Answering the Deputy Chair's question, the 1st VP explained that the use of the OIOS advisor services was intended to provide necessary knowledge to staff members about their rights during an investigation process, regardless of their capacity in these investigations (witnesses or otherwise). He also rejected the training idea which he found to be unrealistic given the completely different areas of expertise, in addition to the fact that the OIOS advisor wouldn't simply train someone else to do the work that makes their living.

Winryck Ford (Unit 22) and the Assistant Treasurer supported the 1st VP's rationale in this regard and supported the retention of the OIOS advisor services.

Michelle Rockcliffe requested some details regarding the OIOS cases that compelled the Union to start such a contractual relationship without having to compromise the confidentiality of the involved staff members. Simona Chindea explained that the Legal Committee's concerns were raised to ensure transparency and adherence to the proper recruitment rules to avoid any future auditing flags.

The 2nd VP Francisco Brito reiterated his appeal to the Council members to consider the value of this contractual relationship to the staff-at-large, and explained the circumstances in which staff found themselves totally lost during investigations which are normally conducted by professional investigators, who, according to the investigations' rules, would allow a friend or a representative to attend these investigations, but would prevent them from speaking or making any views or directions to the staff member involved, which he found to be unfair for the involved staff members.

Patel Noble informed the Council that - based on his previous experience as an investigator - he found it a matter of concern not to provide legal (or even personal) help to staff members while under investigations. He thought that having the services of the OIOS advisor would be therefore in the best interests of the staff and that such service does not necessarily contradict the pursuit for facts and realities. The Rapporteur supported this rationale and therefore supported the retention of the OIOS advisor.

In order to highlight the importance of these services to the Council members, the 1st VP gave a short summary of one of the cases in which the services of the OIOS advisor were used and what difference did these services make.

The Chair Camille McKenzie shared her own experience with OIOS investigation and explained that she could handle such an intense investigation only by counting on her previous experience as a police officer. However, she thought that would not be the case when regular staff members experience such investigations. She also recalled that she found it very challenging to go through such investigations without a prior professional guidance. She also raised concerns regarding the current OIOS rules and regulations that does not allow the help of a friend or a representative during an OIOS investigation and called for an urgent reform of these rules and regulations.

The Council eventually moved to vote on the draft resolution.

The draft resolution was adopted as RES/STC/46/26, with 09 votes in favour, 0 against, and 2 abstentions.

10. WG on Return to Office

Item was deferred.

11. AOB

Michelle Rockcliffe called for strengthening the Union by raising the staff awareness of unrealistic rules and regulations like those governing OIOS investigations, so we don't eventually have to pay for services that should have been provided in-house by the Organization in the first place.

The meeting adjourned at 15:30.