



Minutes/Actes:

Meeting No: 46/66
Date: 19 November 2020
Time: 13:15 - 14:30
Venue: Virtual
Quorum: 16/17 Units

46th Staff Council Meeting Minutes

The meeting was quorate at 13:25 with 12 Units present. The Deputy Chair Ramona Kohrs 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. The leadership team was in attendance.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes with 08 items.

2. Adoption of previous minutes

Minutes for the 63rd and 64th meetings of the 46th Staff Council were adopted. Minutes for the 65th meeting remain pending.

3. Reports by Units

Karina Loktionova asked for updates regarding the accumulating annual leave balances as well as the renewal of G4 visas, which were matters of concern to her constituents.

On the accumulating annual leave balances, the President Patricia Nemeth informed the Council that she has been discussing this matter with senior managers and that a decision should be circulated to staff at the earliest to allow staff to properly use their accumulating balances. On the G4 visas, the President explained that the issue has been escalated.

Regarding the accumulating annual leave balances, the 1st VP Aitor Arauz Chapman that management's delay in issuing their decision might affect staff who wish to plan their leaves. Accordingly, he advised staff members to use their annual leave days in excess of 60 days before the threshold of end of March to avoid losing these balances.

Michelle Rockcliffe (Unit 06) thought that staff should be encouraged to use their annual leave balances before the threshold of end of March 2021 to avoid losing the days beyond

60 days. On a different note, Michelle Rockcliffe informed the Council that she received comments from her constituents regarding the Union's most recent townhall meeting. The comments varied from comments on the lack of masks, the dissatisfaction of staff regarding the leadership's comments regarding the requirement to prove "dire need" when requesting flexible working arrangements (FWA).

The Deputy Chair Ramona Kohrs updated the Council on the progress of the DGC working groups which have analysed the results of the staff Engagement Survey, and that recommendations were made by the working groups to the USG, including ways to address issues like bullying, discrimination, harassment, and retaliation, among other issues.

On FWA, given the discretionary nature of the decisions to approve or reject FWA requests, the 1st VP advised staff to be logical in their FWA requests to ensure they get approved. On the DGC update he asked whether the Deputy Chair can share the WGs' recommendations with the Council.

Regarding the lack of masks during the townhall meeting, the President explained the difficulties they faced to book a room big enough to achieve social distancing which was the reason they had to move back to the Union's meeting room.

On Mobility, the 2nd VP Francisco Brito reminded the Council that the Union's position in this regard is clear and never changed. The Union is in favour of voluntary mobility and against any sort of forced mobility. He explained that management tried to sell the idea by claiming that the policy won't affect current staff, yet he thought the proposal for rotational posts, for instance, would eventually force current staff to move within the mobility framework to comply with such rotation rules. He eventually explained that the leadership team were waiting for the SG's report in this regard to decide how to move forward.

On FWA, Michelle Rockcliffe thought that the wording of the policy did not clearly state that a compelling reason was needed to telecommute from outside the duty station, although issues arising from the pandemic itself was reason enough at this point.

The 1st VP explained that his opinion regarding the FWA, which was supported by the President, was built on experiences with some of the worst cases in this regard, and that the policy was vague enough to allow space for misuse and subsequent disagreements. He stated that he understands the manager's responsibility in making sound decisions in these situations, however it was the staff members' responsibility to use this privilege reasonably and responsibly to avoid undermining the options for other staff.

On the rotational and non-rotational posts, the Deputy Chair reminded the Council that this system was previously studied and proved to be ineffective and called for the Union to stand against it.

4. President's Report and Summary of Communications

The Deputy Chair asked for a brief update on the CCISUA mid-term meetings.

Michelle Rockcliffe reported complains about the length of the new racism survey (close to 80 questions). She also inquired about the Leadership's meeting regarding a restructuring exercise.

The 2nd VP explained that the survey was not subject to discussion and modifications through the Task Force. He thought that even though the concerns raised by members of the Task Force covered the confusing nature of the questions, these concerns were not taken seriously by management.

Regarding the "Future of Work", Sergio Pires Vieira (Unit 24) thought that the experience with the phased plan to return to the HQ has shown that future of work would definitely offer more flexible working arrangements. On Mobility, he thought that incentivized mobility would be much better than forced mobility. On the racial justice Task Force, he thought that the work of the Task Force wouldn't make a difference unless management take its recommendations seriously.

The 1st VP updated the Council on the meetings of the CCISUA mid-term and stated that there was a long debate regarding when the next post adjustment survey should be conducted, which was initially suggested to be held in June 2021, given the consumption patterns - housing in particular - that are currently affected by COVID-19 which might eventually lead to negative outputs on the salaries of the staff for years to come. Eventually it was agreed that CCISUA would call for the survey to be postponed.

He also explained that CCISUA discussed the "future of work" at length and referred to his remarks in this regard during the Townhall meeting and that CCISUA participants thought that the proposed new contractual modalities were not the best way to move forward.

He also updated the Council on a meeting with Catherine Pollard, USG/DMSPC, in the context of the CCISUA mid-term, who defended the new contractual modalities saying that millennials prefer agility and flexibility over bureaucracy and routine, and how this concept was challenged by members of CCISUA. He also mentioned the discussions regarding the need for very good candidates for the membership of the local salary survey committee to ensure correct inputs and just results.

He finally mentioned that an update to the restructuring exercise in the Office of Special Advisor for Africa (OSAA) was added to the President's report and that he reported the details of that case in the past few Council meetings. In this regard, he recalled the rulings of the UNDT, as well as the relevant rules and regulations, in addition to the continuous

calls from the Unions for the SG to place victims of restructuring or downsizing exercises in other posts rather than letting them just go if they cannot find a placement for themselves. These rulings were not honoured by management, who still insist that placement can only be done through a competitive hiring process, and that this specific point is subject to a big conflict and ongoing discussions with management.

Regarding the FWA policy, the 1st VP thought it was vague and misguided, as it was built on the assumption that all direct managers are fully sensible, reasonable, and responsible, which – in reality - is not the case. However, he supported the direction towards more flexible and agile working arrangements.

5. Executive Board Report

Nothing was raised.

6. UNSU Finances

Michelle Rockcliffe reminded the Council that the requested compiled financial statements were not yet received. She also asked the EB to plan a meeting with the Audi Committee.

The Treasurer explained that the financial statements up to September 2020 were provided, and that October 2020 financial statements were being prepared. He also asked the Council to agree on a specific date to present the financial statements.

Michelle Rockcliffe thought it normally takes 10-20 days after the end of each month to have the statements ready. She also asked the 2nd VP to help the Treasurers find a way to provide compiled statements, as requested in accordance with generally accepted principles. The Treasurer explained that the statements were presented in the way the Treasurers thought was appropriate, and that a change to this practice requires a Council decision.

7. New Medical Prescription Procedure (BCBS co-pay policy)

Questions regarding changes that have been introduced by Empire BCBS regarding the amounts of co-pays when using brand medications rather than generic ones, as well as forcing the use of specific pharmacies in unclear ways.

Michelle Rockcliffe explained that UN staff are self-insured, which means that the UN Insurance Fund pays every single claim. She explained the rule of the Health and Life Insurance Committee (HLIC), and explained the rationale behind the presented changes, which was the sustainability of our benefits with affordable premiums, and that every cent we save contributes to this goal.

The 1st VP explained that a meeting was requested with the members of the HLIC to shed more light on these changes. Michelle Rockcliffe, who is a member of the HLIM, promised that the members will address the Council soon on this matter.

The Treasurer explained that sometimes changes to the Host Country laws carries changes to our claims, and that staff members should fight back when they receive such changes and advised staff to always ask for explanations.

He explained the positive sides of the change to using home deliveries from specific pharmacy for 90-day supply, and how both staff members and the Insurance Fund benefit from this arrangement. He also mentioned that there is a new communication officer in the Insurance Section and thought it would be a good idea to invite her to one of the Council meetings and discuss these issues with her, which was supported by the 1st VP.

The Secretary Sherif Mohamed asked Michelle Rockcliffe, in her capacity as a member of the HLCM, about the mechanism of the work of the Committee, how the committee makes its decisions, and highlighted that the role of the representatives of staff on this committee is to deliver the voice of the staff rather than the personal opinions of the members of the committee.

Michelle Rockcliffe stated that there was much analysis involved in the process and asked for time to prepare answers for these questions and invited the Council members to forward questions to her and promised to try to bring the staff representatives on the HLCM to answer the Council members' questions.

8. AOB

Nothing was raised.

The meeting adjourned at 15:16.
