



Notes of the Branch Meeting held on Tuesday 19th February 2008, 2pm
Monet Room, St Clements Hospital

Present: Steve Cook, Philip Bloyce, Abigail Jordan, Liz Potter, Annette Petty
Yvonne Cleary, Ian Talbot – notes

Apologies: Ray Hill, David Edginton, Wendy Allen

The meeting opened without a chairperson for the proceedings as Philip Bloyce had recently stepped down that position, so by default Ian Talbot opened the meeting to all those present and apologised as there was no official agenda on offer, but the following topics were tabled for discussion.

- 1) Recycling in the NHS – Abby Jordan
- 2) Health Conference – Liz Potter
- 3) Equal Pay – Ian Talbot
- 4) Foundation status – Ian Talbot
- 5) Branch re-organisation – Ian Talbot

1) Abby enquired how recycling waste within SMHP NHS Trust was dealt with as there is little evidence to suggest this is normal practice. Ian replied this has previously been discussed at the branch health and safety meeting which includes Risk Management representatives from both the PCT and SMHPT. Due to a government initiative, those NHS Trusts not already recycling will be eligible for grants to help set them up the schemes. If a Trust is already partially or fully recycling its waste, the grant will not be eligible, so many Trusts have done nothing or very little to ensure they get the financial boost required to get started.

2) Liz Potter will be attending the Health Conference in Manchester later this year.

3) Since UNISON's U Magazine alerted members to seek their equal pay rights, there has been a sharp upturn of applications especially from the local government side. At branch level, we are aware of only one application through the legal system at Thompson's solicitors and a further six or seven cases had been dealt with locally by Philip Bloyce. Due to the overwhelming influx of cases nationally, UNISON has already spent £4.2 million on these claims last year, but it is proposed these costs will rise sharply and over the next few years forecasts indicate an additional £15 million will be required. In order to find this extra money requirement, UNISON will be seeking to recover its losses by indirect charging of branches by under funding overall capital. The charging is to be calculated by a scaling factor based on national recruitment, but may incur additional costs to individual branches of up to 2.5%. Suffolk HealthCare isn't overly impressed with this enforced funding especially as the vast majority of pay claims will be from local government. Surely UNISON nationally had the capital reserve to encounter these claims beforehand and if not, should it have embarked upon such an undertaking in the first place?

4) Foundation status for SMHP is well under way and despite UNISON's strong objections, but it would appear there is not much use fighting this government backed initiative as it will happen, period. Locally, things seem dammed if you do, dammed if you don't. On the one hand if SMHPT stays unchanged, it is likely several services would be sold off or even dismantled altogether. On the other hand, a Foundation Trust will shed the weak services to maximise the strong ones.

5) With AGM looming next month and a succession of events over the past year at branch level, we have no alternative but to restructure and reorganise the branch internally. It had been said we are at breaking point or even the term "melt-down" has been banded around to describe recent events due to an acute shortage of active and supportive reps. In a nutshell, we need more reps to cover many more workplaces throughout the county. We must also have key people taking on officer roles. As many may already know, Suffolk HealthCare has thousands of members from around 80 different employers in Suffolk making servicing, representation, distribution, negotiations, recruitment and communication a much harder task than many other branches who have just one employer and one workplace. Suffolk HealthCare is around 9 years old now and nearly doubled in membership growth. Within that time, things have changed dramatically and dare I say, become more complex.

Following a meeting last week with the Regional Head of Health and the regional branch officer, it was made clear we must have key role officers now that the branch secretary can no longer continue the position since he is now solely employed by the branch due to NHS redundancy and there is no provision under national rules. However, there will be a slight move with the new position and title of branch manager which will oversee day to day running of branch business and predominantly private and voluntary health sector case working. Should key officers fail to be found, both Annette and Ian from the branch office would be made redundant and the branch will be forced into administration. This would never reflect the work and dedication of all involved, but merely a default of the national rules.

This now opens up a position for a new branch secretary, of which Steve Cook and Abigail Jordan will be sharing should their nominations be accepted next month. Philip Bloyce has placed a nomination to continue as chairperson, while Liz Potter has pledged her nomination for Treasurer. An additional two persons have pledged nominations as branch auditors to satisfy the books. End of year branch accounts will continue to be contracted to MST for business advisory and final year end submissions, debt collection and accountancy.

The retired members section led by Ray Hill has been given a new business account and pre-set budget funding by the main branch. Monies owed to the branch for third party running costs have been calculated and all back payment bills for the past three years will be sent out with new annual billing sent out at each year end.

Date/Time of Next Meeting - AGM

Tuesday 18th March 2008 @ 14:00, Monet Room, St Clements Hospital. Ipswich

Refreshments will be available

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