

## Minutes – Health Protection NSW (HPNSW) and Health Services Union (HSU) Union Specific Consultation Committee (USCC)

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday 4 April 2023

**Meeting Time:** 2:00 pm

**Chair:** Andrew White

<i>Item No.</i>	<i>Agenda Item</i>
1	<b>Welcome</b>
	The Chair opened the meeting with an acknowledgement of country.
2	<b>Attendance and Apologies</b>
	<p><b>Attendees-</b> Andrew White – Chair (NSW Ministry of Health); Tom Stevanja (Health Services Union); Robin Gilmour (Member Representative); Su Reid (Member Representative); Carmen Pereira (Health System Support Group, Human Resources); Dr Paul Douglas (A/Executive Director, HPNSW)</p> <p><b>Apologies-</b> Kim Morgan (HSU)</p> <p><b>Secretariat-</b> Dr Natalie Klees (Office of the Chief Health Officer / HPNSW)</p>
3	<b>Draft Terms of Reference</b>
	The Terms of Reference were accepted by attendees
4	<b>Agenda Items</b>
4.1	<b>Overview of Proposed Changes</b>
4.2	<b>Rationale and Purpose</b>
4.3	<b>Consultation Process</b>
	<p>HPNSW commenced the discussions with an overview of proposed changes and context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current realignment builds upon changes that have been developed over the last several years, including the creation of the Epidemiology, Data and System Branch (EDBS) in 2022.</li> <li>• COVID-19 temporary positions are due to cease 30 June 2023, affecting a significant number of staff</li> <li>• An additional 28 permanent FTE has been approved</li> <li>• Predominant changes in current process are to realign staff with branches and functions.</li> </ul> <p>HSU described issues raised by members in relation to the consultation process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members have described that an unofficial consultation process has occurred over several years during which staff have provided feedback, which they feel has not been validated, incorporated, or responded to.</li> <li>• Members have provided feedback that they perceive the current consultation process to be ‘top down,’ and that have not been meaningfully involved in decision-making.</li> <li>• HSU stated that they were supportive of the increased staffing proposed, however their predominant concern related to the incorporation and acknowledgement of current and previous feedback.</li> </ul>

The rationale of the timing and context of the current realignment was discussed including:

- Request from the Chief Health Officer to confirm the HPNSW establishment and funding bid at the commencement of the A/Executive Director of HPNSW secondment in January
- The current realignment builds on an established structure, and aims to incorporate positions aligned with the principles that were put in place during the 2019 and 2022 restructures, as well as feedback from formal reviews regarding the COVID-19 public health response (which are yet to be formally published)
- HSU members have expressed concern that this process has been progressing for some time, and that previous feedback has not been incorporated or considered. This includes the previous review conducted by Della Prowse in 2022.

The Della Prowse Review (the Review) was discussed in further detail:

- Member Representatives expressed that the Review had been perceived by staff to be the process by which the 2019 restructure was reviewed and formalised, and ensure staff felt heard after a very challenging experience in 2019.
- Member Representatives expressed concern that the focus on supporting temporary staff has come at the cost of impacting permanent staff; and that while staff had provided feedback during the current consultation process, the final structure would be put through without change or consideration. Member Representatives commented that while they could appreciate change was necessary, staff felt demoralised.
- The HPNSW A/ED noted that the Report was focused predominantly on culture rather than structure, and that the themes were communicated to staff by the substantive ED in 2022. At this time, it was also communicated that the report would not be released in full on the advice of Human Resources due to it containing negative feedback that was directly attributable to individual staff members.
- The HPNSW A/ED appreciated that this messaging could have been improved, however believed that the current consultation process has been comprehensive and aligned with Ministry of Health policies and processes; with over 50 written responses received, and frequent A/ED or Director team meetings over the last few weeks. However, the HPNSW A/ED also acknowledged that some staff may feel that they did not have sufficient access to Directors for questions, and has been working with HSSG HR to ensure that they have access to support.
- The HPNSW A/ED apologised for the experience of staff during the 2019 and 2022 reviews, however noted that there may be some conflation between previous and current processes. The HPNSW A/ED commented that:
  - The HPNSW executive team has tried to incorporate feedback from the Report and previous staff comments into the proposed structure
  - Not all feedback can be incorporated, particularly where opposing views exist. The HPNSW executive and CHO will be required to make decisions that some staff may not agree with.
  - A summary of feedback (excluding those comments in relation to a specific individual or position) was presented to all staff last week, with positive feedback from team members.
- The HPNSW A/ED acknowledged that the time frames for the realignment are short, and that recruitment will need to occur as soon as possible in order to provide outcomes for temporary staff, and certainty for new teams.

	<p>HSU stated that they appreciated that feedback may be opposing in views and offered to discuss this further with members. They commented that they felt that staff members would have benefited from a more formal closure of the consultation process that occurred in 2022, which was noted by attendees.</p> <p>The Chair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted that the agency change management guidelines utilised by NSW Health are based upon those published by the Public Service Commission, which are currently undergoing review.</li> <li>• Expressed their opinion that HPNSW had conducted its current consultation process in alignment with the requirements of the Guidelines, however appreciated the comments from HSU members that some staff felt they had not been heard.</li> <li>• Proposed that the USCC continue to meet monthly until the realignment process had been finalised. This was supported by all attendees.</li> <li>• Noted that a subcommittee of staff members could also be established if required.</li> </ul>
<b>ACTION</b>	The USCC to continue to meet monthly until the HPNSW realignment process has finalised
4.4	<p><b>Affected Staff</b></p> <p>Attendees discussed the impact on permanent staff members currently acting in other roles, who would be able to return to their substantive positions.</p> <p>The Chair noted that the current HPNSW realignment does not include any positions that meet the definition of an affected employee (i.e. <i>“staff members whose positions have been deleted, altered or relocated as a result of organisational change and who will become excess if they are not placed in a position within the new structure.”</i>)</p> <p>The HSU noted this comment and stated that they would take the issue on notice.</p>
4.5	<p><b>Excess Staff</b></p> <p>The Chair similarly noted that the current HPNSW realignment does not include any positions that meet the definition of an excess employee (i.e. staff members who no longer have a position with NSW Health.)</p>
4.6	<p><b>Generic Position Descriptions</b></p> <p>HSSG HR noted that many position descriptions have been revised to make them more generic, compared to some current position descriptions that are very disease focused.</p> <p>The HPNSW A/ED commented that the revision to position descriptions has occurred to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a broader range of experience for staff members</li> <li>• Promote flexibility and agility to respond to public health issues - in recognition of the lessons learnt during COVID-19</li> <li>• Spread specialist expertise, and reduce single-person dependencies</li> </ul> <p>The HPNSW A/ED reported that some team members had expressed interest and excitement at being able to work in areas that they haven’t previously, and that the generalisation did not detract from the need to have expertise in specific areas to support the NSW public health network.</p>

	<p>Member Representatives supported the changes in recognition of current single person dependencies, however expressed concerns related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current staff are trained as epidemiologists, and have been informed they will continue to manage some data analytics functions</li> <li>• The generalised position descriptions may attract applicants that do not have appropriate skills for HPNSW's needs</li> </ul> <p>Member Representatives suggested that the general position descriptions are revised to incorporate applied epidemiology knowledge.</p> <p>The HPNSW A/ED appreciated the feedback provided and commented that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The EDSB was established in 2022 to support data analytics and interpretation for team members.</li> <li>• While all staff will need an understanding of basic data interpretation, the EDSB are available for specialist support.</li> <li>• Feedback regarding ongoing functions has been recognised and is being discussed with Directors and the CHO as to how these can be supported moving forwards.</li> </ul>
4.7; 4.8	<p><b>Training; Assistance with Job Application Training</b></p> <p>HSSG HR commented that two training sessions (each provided twice) to support job application preparedness had been arranged for HPNSW staff, the first running 04.04.23.</p> <p>The HPNSW A/ED noted that additional feedback had been received regarding supporting managers in management functions, which was being responded to with a range of education and training opportunities that will be available for current and future staff.</p> <p>The HPNSW A/ED also noted concerns raised by staff whose position descriptions are changing, and that support would be provided for team members. This has been communicated to Directors and should be incorporated into regular professional development discussions.</p> <p>HSU and Member Representatives expressed appreciation for opportunities being made available, and incorporation of training and professional development support into the realignment process.</p>
4.9	<p><b>Post Change Workload Fears</b></p> <p>HSU and Member Representatives expressed concerns regarding the ongoing workload for HPNSW, particularly in the context of a significant reduction in current staffing numbers with the ending of temporary contracts related to COVID-19. Additional concerns were raised regarding the uneven distribution of staff between teams.</p> <p>The HPNSW A/ED thanks Member Representatives for their feedback, and noted that this had been taken into consideration as part of the review process. The A/ED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted the proposed establishment has approximately 50% additional permanent FTE compared to pre-pandemic staffing</li> <li>• Expressed appreciation of staff concerns with the decrease in temporary positions, and commented that this had been raised with the Chief Health Officer, with an agreement to explore if additional funding may be available for further positions.</li> <li>• Noted that there has been consistent communication of the need to review and reduce current workload (in consultation with stakeholders).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commented that workload will continue to be evaluated as the realignment progresses, and welcomed the regular USCC meetings as an additional mechanism to receive feedback from staff.</li> </ul> <p>HSU recommended that workload remain a standing item on the USCC, and commented that the success of any change will be measured by the impact on staff workloads.</p> <p>Attendees agreed that workload should remain a standing item on the USCC agenda.</p>
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Workload to remain as standing item on the USCC agenda</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Other Items</b>
	<p>No other business was raised.</p> <p>The A/ED HPNSW thanked members and asked them to please encourage other staff to contact him if they have any additional questions</p> <p>The Chair also thanked members for attending; acknowledging that this can be a difficult experience for some, and expressed his appreciation of the A/ED's open door policy.</p>
<b>6</b>	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>
	TBC – early May 2023

#### Actions List:

Item No	Action	Responsible	Progress
4.1, 4.2, 4.3	The USCC to continue to meet monthly until the HPNSW realignment process has finalised	Carmen Pereira	
4.9	Workload to remain as standing item on the USCC agenda	Carmen Pereira	