

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

THURSDAY, 15 AUGUST 2019 at 10.15AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

ARROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Richard Stewart
Brian Devlin (deputising for Gareth McGrath)

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Karen Martin
Kevin Pelan

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 10.15am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr Gareth McGrath, Mr Brian Devlin deputised.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes and unrestricted papers from the meeting of 17 June 2019 were published on 16 July 2019.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 10.22am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, noted that the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 had been passed in July, extending the period for the formation of an Executive from 25 August 2019 to 21 October 2019 and providing the Secretary of State with a limited power to further extend the period for forming an Executive to 13 January 2020.

SMG noted that a number of changes had taken place recently, namely the appointment of a new Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Lesley stated that it was important to maintain a focus on retaining readiness to support the return to normal Assembly business.

CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

SMG reviewed the draft agenda for the next Assembly Commission meeting scheduled for 5 September 2019.

It was noted that the meeting that was due to be a single item agenda meeting regarding potential appointment and reform of the Independent Financial Review Panel but that an additional item had been added in relation to the Acting Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Recruitment.

Action: Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to approve the papers for presentation to the September Assembly Commission meeting via correspondence/separate meeting.

SMG also discussed agenda items for the October Assembly Commission meeting. SMG noted that the Head of Legal Services had been asked to produce a draft Commission paper in relation to proposed mediation regarding a former MLA's entitlement to expenses and agreed that a meeting should be set up with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to discuss.

Action: A meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and the Head of Legal Services to be arranged to discuss a draft Commission paper in relation to proposed mediation regarding a former MLA's entitlement to expenses.

It was also agreed that an update on the Pay and Grading Review would be presented to the Assembly Commission by December 2019.

Action: Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, to provide Assembly Commission Members with an update on the Pay and Grading Review by December 2019.

Corporate Support Unit Directorate Update

Robin Ramsey confirmed that Mr Colin McGrath MLA would be attending future Assembly Commission meetings on behalf of the SDLP in a non-voting capacity.

Robin also commended the generosity of staff who took part in the return event on 26 June, which raised over £900 for charity.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.40am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

7. Management Accounts

Management Accounts for July 2019 were not available for consideration due to the timing of the SMG meeting. SMG was advised that the accounts would be issued later in the day by the Head of Finance, and it was agreed that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services would meet with the Head of Finance to review them.

Action: Head of Finance to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services to review the Management Accounts for July 2019.

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 10.40am for agenda items 8, 9, 10 and 11.

8. HR Management Information

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information.

As the last SMG meeting was held in June, Karen advised SMG of the Staff in Post (SiP) figures as at 1 July and 1 August. SMG noted that at 1 July the SiP including agency and seconded staff was 308.3 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 352.4 FTE. The SiP at 1 August including agency and seconded staff was 308.1 FTE against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 354.4 FTE.

Karen advised that there had been no change to temporary promotion/deputising arrangements and agency workers assignments currently in place since last reported to SMG in June.

Karen provided SMG with copies of the latest temporary redeployment table for review. Following consideration, Lesley asked that details of

inward secondees be recorded in future monthly HR Management Information reports.

Action: Future monthly HR Management Information to include details on inward secondees.

SMG reviewed the Recruitment Schedule and asked that it be updated to include recruitment dates previously agreed by the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors for the temporary positions of AG4, 5 and 6.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period August 2018 to July 2019, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 11.1 days, which represented an increase of 1 when compared with the same period last year. SMG noted its concern with the upward trend in sickness absence. Karen confirmed that the HR Office would continue to manage specific absence cases in accordance with the Managing Attendance Policy. Karen also advised SMG that the issue highlighted at the June SMG meeting in relation to the reporting tool used in iTrent to generate sickness absence information had been resolved.

Karen also provided SMG with an update on the new performance management system since its launch in May 2019. She confirmed that the HR Office had held a number of meetings with staff from across various business areas to gather initial feedback on how they viewed the new approach to performance management and the new software.

It was noted that the overall feedback from staff was positive, but concerns had been raised regarding the frequency of the Regular Performance Conversations (RPCs) with staff feeling that monthly conversations could be problematic once the Assembly returns to normal business. Some staff also felt that the training that was delivered to support better performance conversations was not being fully utilised and that further support was needed to develop a coaching style of management. Karen also reported that some staff felt that insufficient preparation had taken place before performance conversations.

On considering this feedback, SMG reaffirmed the importance of regular monthly meetings with direct reports and agreed that further communication with staff was required including again stressing the importance of each person owning their performance and everyone preparing for their performance conversations.

Action: HR Office to work with the Communications Office to upload articles onto AsslSt conveying the recent staff feedback and promoting the importance and merits of the new approach to performance management.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services asked if consideration could be given to succession planning throughout the organisation to ensure a consistent approach. Karen advised that the HR Office was mindful of the possible retirement timeframes for staff and

that assistance could be provided in relation to forward planning for recruitment. She said the HR Office would give some consideration to the key points of succession planning with a view to sharing these with managers.

9. Review of the Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures

Karen confirmed that following approval of the draft revised Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures by SMG at its meeting on 26 March 2019, formal consultation had taken place with Trade Union Side (TUS) who had agreed the revised Procedures with one suggested minor amendment.

SMG was content with the amendment proposed by TUS and agreed some further minor amendments.

Tara also asked that Karen speak with the Head of Legal Services regarding references to legislation within the Procedures.

Action: HR Office to issue a copy of the revised procedures to staff and include in the staff handbook on AsslSt following discussion with the Head of Legal Services.

10. Revised Capability Policy

SMG noted that the HR Office had reviewed and updated the Capability Policy to ensure that it was consistent with the new approach to performance management.

Karen advised that the HR Office had worked to streamline the policy and she outlined the key changes proposed.

Following discussion, SMG approved the proposed changes subject to some further minor amendments.

SMG thanked the HR Office for all the work undertaken to update and streamline the policy.

Action: HR Office to issue a copy of the revised policy to staff and include in the staff handbook on AsslSt.

Comfort break 11.40am to 11.47am.

11. Implementation of Proposals arising out of the Review of Recruitment and Selection and Induction – Mapping of Cabinet Office ‘Strengths’ to the Assembly Skills and Behaviours

Karen referred to the discussion at the SMG meeting in May 2019 on the Review of Recruitment and Selection and Induction when SMG agreed with the proposal that the HR Office undertake an exercise to “map the Cabinet Office ‘Strengths’ to the Assembly Commission’s Skills and Behaviours” in order to assist future selection panels.

She confirmed that the exercise to map across each Strength within the Success Profiles to one of the five Assembly Skills and Behaviours had been completed and presented the out-workings of the mapping exercise.

Following consideration, SMG was content to agree the out-workings of the exercise undertaken to map ‘Strengths’ used in Success Profiles to the Assembly Skills and Behaviours.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 12.06pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Change to agenda running order.

Kevin Pelan, Head of Communications, joined the meeting at 12.06pm for agenda item 13.

13. Business case for new post of Internal Communications Officer

Kevin Pelan presented a business case for the establishment and recruitment of an Internal Communications Officer post.

Kevin confirmed that the findings of the 2017 staff survey and the January 2019 review of AsslSt had recommended the appointment of an Internal Communications Officer.

Following discussion, SMG approved the business case and proposed some amendments to the draft job description presented subject to the post being evaluated in line with the appropriate procedures.

SMG also agreed that consideration should be given to the structure of the post within the Communications Office.

Action: Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services to consider the structure of the post within the Communications Office.

Kevin Pelan left the meeting at 12.38pm.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

12. Proposed partial Electronic Access Control (EAC) System – Parliament Buildings

Richard presented a draft Commission paper on a proposed partial Electronic Access Control (EAC) System for Parliament Buildings.

Following consideration, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its October meeting.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

14. Directors' Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

Corporate Services

Richard advised SMG that all budget managers would be asked in the coming weeks to contribute to a 3-year budget exercise commissioned by the Department of Finance and he asked Directors to encourage their Heads of Business (HoBs) to fully participate in this exercise.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Tara provided SMG with an update on the Internal Audit Reviews for:

- Support Services;
- Legal Services Office;
- Members Expenses (18/19);
- Planned and Reactive Maintenance and;
- Events.

SMG noted that the next Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) meeting is scheduled for 16 October 2019.

Tara also advised that work was ongoing in relation to the development of an overarching Procurement Strategy, which would be presented at the October SMG meeting.

Parliamentary Services

Brian Devlin, Head of IS Office, advised that the IS Office had signed up to the Cyber Information Sharing Partnership (CISP).

OTHER ITEMS

15. Commission papers cleared by correspondence

- Temporary Loan of Assembly Painting
- Future Delivery of Member Development and Support for the Assembly Women's Caucus
- Broadcasting and Related Services Contract Variation Update

16. AOB

Business cases approved by SMG

SMG reviewed a list of business cases approved by SMG since July 2016 and the dates for completion of the relevant Post Project Evaluations (PPEs). It was agreed that PPEs and Lessons Learned Reports on completed projects which were approved at SMG were to be presented at future SMG meetings, commencing with the September SMG meeting.

Cyber Awareness Sessions

Brian advised that there had been very positive staff feedback from the recent Cyber Awareness Sessions being run by the IS Office and he asked Directors to encourage their staff to attend these very worthwhile sessions.

Delegated Authority

Tara sought clarification on the use of delegated authority in relation to bringing in staff via agency, Interchange or secondment during the current political hiatus when the Assembly is not conducting normal business.

Richard commented that if the work to be carried out was within the business area's agreed continuing activities, the Director had the authority to bring in additional staff via agency/Interchange/secondment.

Lesley added that this was obviously subject to the usual requirement to review any posts that become vacant, or contracts that come to an end, to ensure that there is still a clear business requirement for the post or contract, particularly in the current circumstance where the Assembly is not conducting normal business, and that where there was any doubt this should be discussed with SMG.

17. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, 24 September 2019.

18. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Inappropriate Behaviours Policy – Key Principles
- Review of Audit of Inequalities
- Sustainability Report
- Request for loan of Assembly Artefact
- PPE and Lessons Report on the Electricity Supply for Parliament Buildings
- PPE and Lessons Report on the Replacement of X-Ray Search Equipment
- PPE and Lessons Report on the Issue of Personal Protective Equipment – Stab Proof Vests, Usher Services
- Information Systems Review
- Publications Scheme
- Internal Audit Charter
- Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers
- Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register
- Review of IS Staffing and proposal for the establishment and recruitment of additional posts.

The meeting ended at 1.17pm.