

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

WEDNESDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2020 at 9.30AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Paul Stitt
Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Sinéad McDonnell
Diane Lamont
Karen Martin
Jonathan McMillen

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.33am.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, acknowledged that this month's SMG meeting was being held much earlier in the month than usual and thanked Directors and Head of Business (HoBs) for their efforts in getting meeting papers prepared.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

It was noted that the minutes and unrestricted papers from the meeting on 24 January 2020 would be published in the next few days.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

In relation to two actions from last month's meeting, Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, confirmed that he would recirculate the updated Post-Project Evaluations (PPEs) for the Stationery and IT Consumables Contract and External Lighting Project to SMG for information.

Action: Richard to recirculate updated PPEs for the Stationery and IT Consumables Contract and External Lighting Project to SMG for information.

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.39am for agenda items 5, 6 and 7.

5. Political Update

Lesley praised the continued efforts of staff and contractors to ensure the smooth running of the Assembly since resumption of normal business.

CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

SMG reviewed the draft agenda for the next Assembly Commission meeting scheduled for 19 February 2020.

Proposed items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Assembly Commission's Draft Budget for 2020/21
- Assembly Members' Support Staff Pension Scheme: Replacement of the Mercer (Elect) Pension Scheme
- Support for Members with Young Children/Families
- Parliament Buildings: Special Lighting Policy
- Delivery of Commission Approach to Decade of Centenary Events: 2020 Event
- Appointment of a Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards
- Implementation of 'New Decade, New Approach'
- Business Case for Virtualisation Solution (Hyper-V) Upgrade
- Independent Financial Review Panel (IFRP) Reform Consultation Update
- Draft Corporate Strategy 2018-23 and Draft Corporate Plan 2019-23
- Support for Private Members' Bills

SMG discussed the recent IFRP Reform consultation and proposed arranging a workshop/meeting with Members of the Assembly Commission and a Party representative, in order to move the process

forward. It was agreed that this proposal would be raised at the next Assembly Commission meeting.

SMG also agreed that it would be beneficial, by way of background information, for the new Assembly Commission Members to have sight of two previous papers on IFRP, entitled 'Updated Submission on Review of Implementation of the IFRP Determination' and 'Independent Financial Review Panel: Appointment and Legislative Reform', that were presented to former Assembly Commission Members at its meetings in June 2019 and September 2019 respectively, in advance of the next Assembly Commission meeting.

Action: Corporate Support Unit to issue two previous IFRP Commission papers, entitled 'Updated Submission on Review of Implementation of the IFRP Determination' and 'Independent Financial Review Panel: Appointment and Legislative Reform' to the new Assembly Commission Members for information.

7. Draft Commission paper on Delivery of Commission Approach to Decade of Centenary Events: 2020 Event

Robin Ramsey presented a draft Assembly Commission paper proposing and outlining an event to mark the centenary of the Government of Ireland Act in December 2020 at Parliament Buildings.

It was noted that the Assembly Commission had agreed the centenaries to be marked in Parliament Buildings during the 2017-22 mandate, at its meeting in October 2018, which included the event outlined above.

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

Action: Robin to present a paper on the Delivery of Commission Approach to Decade of Centenary Events: 2020 Event at the February Assembly Commission meeting.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.23am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

8. Staffing and Finance

Due to the earlier timing of the meeting, Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, advised that it was not possible to produce the normal monthly Management Accounts and HR Management Information. He did however, provide headline information in relation to staffing and finance.

Richard stated that the current Staff in Post (SiP) figure was 311 Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) which included 18.48 agency workers. It was noted that a number of staff had left the Assembly over the last month and Lesley asked that SMG be provided with a list of leavers, since the last HR SMG update.

Action: Richard to provide SMG with a list of those staff who had left the Assembly since the last HR SMG update and thereafter on a monthly basis.

Richard noted that the year-end forecast for Administration costs had not changed and that the challenge was forecasting Secretariat Staff costs given the uncertainty regarding the timing of filling vacant posts.

Richard advised SMG that staffing requirements to the end of March had been reviewed by the Head of Finance and that a schedule listing the vacancies and assumptions when they would be filled had been produced. Richard confirmed that budget provision was in place to fill the listed vacancies in this financial year.

SMG discussed the need to fill priority vacancies before 31 March 2020 and agreed that Richard would issue a schedule of the vacant posts included in the forecast, to the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors, to ensure that expectations for filling posts corroborated assumptions made in the schedule.

SMG noted that if the budget did not accommodate Directors' expectations, then a meeting would need to be held to prioritise the posts to be filled.

Action: Richard to issue a schedule of the vacant posts included in the forecast to the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors, to ensure that expectations for filling posts corroborated assumptions made in the schedule and that a meeting would be held to prioritise posts if this was not the case.

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, sought SMG's views on re-advertising the IS Office AG8 post in the next few months.

SMG discussed recruitment prioritisation and agreed that discussion would need to take place with the HR Office to determine if re-running this competition could be accommodated, in light of the heavy recruitment schedule already agreed and in place. SMG agreed to raise this matter during the next agenda item.

Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, joined the meeting at 10.48am for agenda items 9 and 10.

Diane Lamont, Senior HR Manager, joined the meeting at 10.48am for agenda item 9.

9. **Approval of the Recruitment and Selection Policy Statement and Recruitment and Selection Procedures**

In respect of Agenda Item 8, SMG asked the HR Office whether an IS Office AG8 recruitment competition could be added to the Recruitment Schedule in the next few months. HR Office advised they would review the Recruitment Schedule to confirm whether this would be possible without having an impact on other planned competitions.

SMG agreed in principle to re-advertise the IS Office AG8 post, subject to identifying a suitable slot in the Recruitment Schedule. It was also agreed that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors would be notified if re-running this competition would have an impact on the current recruitment schedule.

Action: HR Office to notify the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors if the re-running of the IS Office AG8 competition would have an impact on the current recruitment schedule.

Diane Lamont presented this paper, which sought approval from SMG on the revised Recruitment and Selection Policy Statement and Recruitment and Selection Procedures.

Diane confirmed that consultation had taken place with Trade Union Side (TUS) which was content with the documents as presented. It was however, noted, that TUS had requested a review be built in and stressed the importance of training for panel members. Assurance was given that both of these matters were in hand.

Following consideration, SMG approved the documents, subject to some minor amendments and additional clarification.

The following next steps were agreed:

- new Recruitment and Selection policy and procedures to issue to staff;
- training to be provided to selection panels on the new Recruitment and Selection Framework; and
- staff briefings to be arranged on the new approach to Recruitment and Selection.

Lesley thanked Sinead and the HR Team for their excellent work in developing the new Recruitment and Selection Policy and associated Procedures.

Diane Lamont left the meeting at 11.47am.

10. Appointment of a Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards

Sinéad McDonnell presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the appointment of a Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards.

Following consideration, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting, subject to a few minor amendments.

Action: Sinéad to update the paper as proposed by SMG for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 11.57am.

Meeting suspended at 11.57am and resumed at 1.55pm.

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 1.55pm.

11. Assembly Members Support Staff Pension – Replacement of the Mercer (Elect) Pension Scheme

Karen Martin presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Assembly Members Support Staff Pension – Replacement of the Mercer (Elect) Pension Scheme.

Karen informed SMG that the contract with Mercer ended in May 2020, and that a suitable alternative pension scheme needed to be in place at that time. Options for the provision of new pension arrangements had been identified and outlined in the draft Assembly Commission paper.

Following consideration, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting, subject to the inclusion of some additional information.

Action: Karen to update the paper as proposed by SMG for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 2.25pm.

Change to agenda running order

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services, joined the meeting at 2.25pm for agenda item 13.

13. Human Resources in the Legal Services Office

Jonathan McMillen outlined the likely increased pressures in the Legal Services Office following resumption of normal business and requested an increase in the staff complement to meet the resource pressures identified.

Lesley cautioned against comparing numbers of Legal Services staff against the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales, as the total number of staff in those legislatures was significantly higher than the Northern Ireland Assembly across virtually all business areas and that the Legal Services Office was not unique in this regard.

Lesley raised a concern in relation to the fact that two legal advisors appeared to be dedicated to corporate and information work as she felt this was excessive and queried the rationale for this. Jonathan explained that a large part of their work did not relate to corporate matters and that he would reconsider the name of this team.

Lesley also queried the increase in complement for clerical staff and was advised that this was a typographical error and was not reflected in the annualised cost.

Following consideration, SMG agreed in principle, the proposal to increase the staff complement by 2 full time equivalent staff, with a further 0.2 increase in complement plus for a period of one year, subject to obtaining the required financial resources.

Tara thanked Jonathan for a very comprehensive and detailed paper.

Action: Jonathan to amend the paper in relation to clerical staff and re-circulate to SMG.

Jonathan McMillen left the meeting at 3.09pm.

Comfort break until 3.17pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

14. Amendment to the 'Parliament Buildings: Special Lighting Policy'

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Parliament Buildings: Special

Lighting Policy, which had been slightly amended following discussion at the Assembly Commission meeting in December 2019.

SMG considered the amendments and was content for the paper to be presented to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting.

Action: Paper to be presented to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

12. Support for Members with Young Children/Families

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on Support for Members with Young Children/Families.

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

Action: Richard to present the paper as approved by SMG, to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES CONTINUED

15. Implementation of ‘New Decade, New Approach’

Gareth presented this paper, highlighting those actions within the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ that are likely to require action by the Assembly and/or the Assembly Commission.

Gareth outlined proposals for how the actions highlighted might be progressed and their implementation monitored.

Following discussion, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting, subject to amendment as agreed.

Action: Gareth to update the paper as agreed by SMG for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

16. Directors’ Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Tara advised that the Acting Head of Internal Audit would be contacting the Director of Parliamentary Services to carry out a close-out meeting in relation to the Assembly Broadcasting and Related Services Contract.

Parliamentary Services

Gareth confirmed that Assembly Commission Members would be in receipt of their tablet devices prior to the February Assembly Commission meeting.

OTHER ITEMS

17. AOB

Gareth referred SMG to agenda item 15, i.e. his paper on the Implementation of 'New Decade, New Approach' and the paper on Bill Office Staffing, which he presented at the December 2019 SMG meeting. SMG was asked to note a correction to the additional staffing costs quoted in both papers. Gareth confirmed that the corrected figures would be reflected in the papers being presented to the Assembly Commission at its February meeting.

18. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, 27 March 2020.

19. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Sustainable Development Office Annual Environmental Management Report
- Good Relations Action Plan 2016-2021: March 2020 six-monthly update
- Gender Action Plan six-monthly update: March 2020
- Post-Project Evaluation: Temporary Workers Contract
- Post-Project Evaluation: Support Services Contract
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers
- Retention and Disposal Schedule
- Procurement Strategy
- Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR) Resources
- Members Survey 2017-19 Action Plan
- Staff Survey 2019 Report

The meeting ended at 4.24pm.