

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

THURSDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2021 at 9.30AM
ROOM 106 PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Paula McClintock
Karen Martin
Donna-Marie Clark
Shauna Mageean
Paul Gill

The meeting commenced at 9.31 am.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

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 18 and 26 November 2021 were in the process of being published.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

SMG discussed the action from the meeting on 26 November 2021 in relation to Directors reviewing IT requirements for home-working with their staff and it was agreed that Directors would submit requests for additional devices to the Head of IS Office by close of business on 17 December 2021, with the Decision Authorisation System to be approved by SMG to allow the devices to be purchased before the end of the financial year.

SMG discussed the mechanisms by which users access IT services provided by the Assembly Commission and agreed that the future direction of travel should be to transition all users, from Aportal to direct access. SMG noted that a portfolio of IT projects was already planned for 2022-23 and appreciated that any move away from Aportal would therefore take time and investment and agreed that such transition would need to take place in a planned and managed way. SMG requested a paper in the New Year on this.

Action: Head of IS Office to prepare a paper for SMG on the current limitations and capacity of the existing infrastructure to support additional direct access devices and to what level; and what new infrastructure would be required to increase capacity to allow all users to move to direct access, along with the estimated cost, resource and timeframe for doing so.

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 10.04 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

The upcoming recess period was noted.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

It was noted that the date for the next Assembly Commission meeting had yet to be agreed.

Proposed items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Display of Artefacts in Parliament Buildings
- Support Services Contract Business Case
- Broadcasting Contract Business Case
- Disability Action Plan 2021-2025
- Assembly Members Pension Scheme Accounts and Actuarial Valuation
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.19 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Paula McClintock, Head of Finance, joined the meeting at 10.19 am for agenda item 7.

7. **Assembly Members' Pension Scheme Accounts and Actuarial Valuation**

Paula McClintock presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Annual Report and Accounts of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme as at 31 March 2021 and the Northern Ireland Members' Pension Scheme Valuation 2020 report.

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

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 10.25 am.

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 10.25 am for agenda item 8.

8. **HR Management Information**

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 December 2021.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 December 2021 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 351.2 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 393.3 FTE.

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, sought SMG approval to increase the staff complement within the IS Office by 0.2 x AG7. SMG approved the increase in staff complement as outlined.

On reviewing the staffing figures, Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, requested that the end date for the two Complement Plus posts in relation to the Grading and Pay Benchmarking Review be amended from March 2022 to the end of December 2021, as the project had progressed quicker than expected.

Action: Karen to update the staffing figures in relation to complement plus posts, as requested by SMG.

SMG noted the temporary promotions/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place.

Karen updated SMG on the recent recruitment activity.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period December 2020 to November 2021, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 7.4 days, compared with an average of 7.8 days during the period December 2019 to November 2020.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 10.50 am.

9. Disability Action Plan 2021-25 and Consultee Comments/Response Table

Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, presented the Disability Action Plan 2021-25, which included proposed revisions following public consultation.

SMG noted the consultee responses and following consideration, agreed revisions to the Plan.

Action: Disability Action Plan 2021-25 to be amended as agreed by SMG and presented to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

In relation to the information recorded in the Equality Screening Form for the Plan, SMG requested that this be reviewed, updated as necessary and re-circulated for final approval. Lesley also highlighted that consideration needed to be given to how the findings from the Section 75 Survey Report would, if at all, be utilised in Equality Screening.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to review the Equality Screening Form, update as necessary and re-circulate to SMG for final approval.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to give consideration to how the findings from the Section 75 Survey Report would, if at all, be utilised in Equality Screening.

Change to agenda running order.

The meeting suspended from 11.23 am until 11.29 am.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 11.29 am for agenda item 11.

11. Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register

SMG noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Data Protection and Governance Officer, had met on 9 December 2021 to discuss the Corporate Risk Register in detail.

SMG approved the Corporate Risk Register for December 2021 and noted that it would be presented to the Assembly Commission and the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee at their next meetings.

Donna-Marie left the meeting at 11.30 am.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Shauna Mageean, EU Affairs Manager, joined the meeting at 11.30 am for agenda item 12.

12. Quarterly Update on EU Exit

Shauna Mageean updated SMG on the latest news regarding EU Exit and related interparliamentary and intergovernmental relations.

Shauna Mageean left the meeting at 12.02 pm.

10. Section 75 Survey Findings Report

Richard presented a report on the Section 75 Survey Findings.

On reviewing the findings, SMG noted the significant percentage of staff who had identified as having no religious belief and agreed that consideration needed to be given to how this is reflected and/or utilised going forward.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to give consideration to how the findings in relation to staff who had identified as having no religious belief is reflected and/or utilised going forward.

SMG agreed that consideration should be given to the data collected when staff are recruited. SMG also noted that the Survey results were markedly different from the results obtained from the annual Disability Audit. It was felt that this divergence might be explained by the fact that the Survey did not have any linkage to a request for a reasonable adjustment and that the Disability Audit would be amended to clarify this.

It was agreed that the Disability Audit would be amended to make it clear that all applicable disabilities could be recorded and not just those where a reasonable adjustment was sought.

Action: Richard to arrange for the Disability Audit to be amended to make it clear that all applicable disabilities could be recorded and not just those where reasonable adjustment was sought.

SMG approved the report for publishing on the Assembly's Intranet (AsslSt).

In relation to the frequency of future reports, it was agreed that Richard would investigate if the data collected in the survey was already captured by other means, as this may impact on the necessity for future surveys. SMG to give further consideration to the frequency of future surveys following Richard's findings.

Action: Richard to advise SMG on the Section 75 data that is captured when staff are recruited.

13. Renewal of Legislative and Corporate Print Contract

Gareth advised SMG that the current legislative and corporate printing contract would expire in March 2022 and presented an outline business case for a new six-year printing contract.

SMG noted that discussions were ongoing between the Bill Office and the Procurement Office and that the target for the new contract to be in place by March 2022 was being reviewed.

SMG approved the outline business case as presented.

14. Parliamentary Services Directorate Succession Planning

SMG noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors had met on 13 December 2021, to discuss succession planning for the Parliamentary Services Directorate in detail.

SMG approved the proposal as outlined in the paper.

Paul Gill, Clerk Assistant, joined the meeting at 12.36 pm for agenda item 15.

15. Parliamentary Culture

Paul Gill presented a paper on a proposed definition of parliamentary culture.

It was agreed that SMG would provide feedback to Paul on the proposed definition and that a final version would then be prepared for SMG's agreement.

Action: SMG to provide feedback to Paul Gill on the proposed definition of parliamentary culture.

SMG also noted a draft action plan to improve understanding of parliamentary culture in all areas of the Assembly Commission's work.

Paul Gill left the meeting at 1.10 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

16. Directorate Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

Corporate Services

Usher Services

Richard updated SMG on the tender for the Parliament Buildings Security System.

Building Services

Richard noted a need for additional volunteers to be trained to assist with evacuations.

Action: Richard to arrange for an email to issue to all staff seeking volunteers to assist with evacuation roles.

Richard also advised that the Assembly Commission had been awarded the gold quintile in the 2021 Business in the Community Arena benchmarking survey.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Internal Audit

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, provided an update on the Internal Audit Reviews for:

- Delegated Procurement
- Youth Assembly
- Recruitment and Selection
- Members Expenses (2021/22 Interim Testing)
- Business Office
- Member Induction and Orientation
- Assembly Commission Travel

Information Standards

Tara confirmed that the revised Information Assurance Policy approved by SMG, had been issued to Information Asset Owners.

Tara also advised that guidance on the Sensitivity Review had been published on AsslSt and that training would be provided in February 2022.

Tara noted that a revised Retention and Disposal Schedule was being considered by SMG at its January 2022 meeting and asked Directors to forward any further comments they had to her and the Data Protection and Governance Officer.

Procurement Office

It was noted that a new member of staff had joined the Procurement Office on a temporary basis for a period of 18 months.

Tara provided details on the position of the current procurement projects and encouraged Directors to review those within their business areas to check they were progressing in line with their expectations.

Parliamentary Services

Communications Office

Gareth advised that the tender for a Broadcasting framework had closed and that the specifications for the projects to upgrade the Assembly Chamber and committee rooms would be issued to framework suppliers early in the New Year.

Gareth also confirmed that the first live signing and subtitling pilot had taken place and general feedback had been positive.

IS Office

Gareth informed SMG that there had been a number of phishing emails recently and it was noted that a password checking tool was being used by the IS Office to detect issues with passwords.

Gareth also advised that the tender for the TV distribution system had issued.

17. AOB

Lesley proposed an end of mandate staff event in March 2022 and it was agreed that details of this would be given further consideration.

18. Date of next meeting

Next meeting to take place on 28 January 2022.

19. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Review of Building Maintenance
- Health and Safety Report
- Procurement Planning
- Examiner of Statutory Rules Resources
- Support Services Contract Business Case
- Broadcasting Contract Business Case
- Display of Artefacts in Parliament Buildings

The meeting ended at 1.44 pm.