

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

FRIDAY, 22 OCTOBER 2021 at 9.30 AM  
ROOM 135, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

## APPROVED

**Present:** Lesley Hogg  
Tara Caul  
Gareth McGrath  
Richard Stewart

**In Attendance:** Janet Hughes  
Karen Martin  
Julie Devlin  
Karl Hedley  
Donna-Marie Clark  
Susie Brown  
Liz Beaton  
Debra Savage

### Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.33 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 23 September 2021 had been published.

#### 4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

In relation to an outstanding action from the SMG meeting on 30 April 2021, on 'the creation of refuge areas for people with disabilities', Lesley

Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive requested that officials clarify regulatory requirements with a view to progressing this work.

## **5. Political Update**

SMG noted the position on Executive legislation.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, noted that progress on the Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill continued to be monitored.

Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, advised that the Election Planning Group had been formed and had commenced work on planning for the May 2022 election.

## **CORPORATE SUPPORT**

### **6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda**

SMG noted that an Assembly Commission meeting had taken place on 20 October 2021 and that a further meeting was to be arranged for November 2021.

Proposed items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Review of the Display of Artefacts in Parliament Buildings
- Annual Plan 2021/2022 Outturn
- Annual Plan 2022/2023
- Pay Claim 2021
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- COVID-19 Regulations: Guidance
- Update on the Defects of the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots
- Enhancing Accessibility of Assembly Proceedings to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities
- Broadcasting Contract Re-tender
- Outline Business Case for the Assembly Broadcasting Upgrade
- Portraits Policy
- Disability Action Plan 2016/2021: Closure Report

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 10.00 am for agenda item 7.*

## 7. HR Management Information

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

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 October 2021 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 340.4 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 391.3 FTE.

On reviewing the staff complement figure, it was agreed that Karen would include a breakdown of those posts that had been removed from the complement plus figure, in future monthly reports to SMG.

SMG noted the temporary promotions and deputising arrangements currently in place. Karen highlighted that the temporary promotion end date for the post of Head of Internal Audit was 31 October 2021 and she sought SMG's views on extending this. SMG approved an extension until the end of December 2021 and agreed to review again at that time.

In relation to agency worker assignments, Karen provided SMG with information on spend under the new Temporary Worker Contract, which commenced in June 2021. Karen stated that it was anticipated that the spend on agency workers would be high at the beginning of the new contract given the need to continue to utilise agency workers to backfill gaps across the Secretariat, but that with the continuing permanent filling of vacancies that spend should decrease.

Karen updated SMG on recent recruitment activity and advised of two additional competitions to be added to the Recruitment Schedule. It was agreed that a separate meeting would be arranged to consider the inclusion of the two additional competitions on the Recruitment Schedule, to review the priority of recruitment competitions and to establish those that could be run in parallel.

**Action:** HR Office to reconsider the scheduling of recruitment competitions and then meet with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to review the priority of recruitment competitions and establish those that can be run in parallel.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period October 2020 to September 2021, the average sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 5.6 days, compared with an average of 9.3 days during the period October 2019 to September 2020.

In relation to the management and recording of COVID-19 sickness absences, Karen confirmed that the process agreed at the last SMG meeting on 23 September 2021 had been implemented. Karen also advised SMG on the case management activity since 1 May 2021.

*Karen Martin left the meeting at 10.25 am.*

## **8. Biannual Review of Learning and Development Activities**

This paper was deferred to the November 2021 meeting.

## **LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES**

*Julie Devlin, Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 10.26 am.*

## **9. Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers**

SMG reviewed the contents of the September 2021 Directorate Risk Registers for Corporate Services, Legal, Governance and Research Services and Parliamentary Services.

SMG also considered emerging Risk Clusters and agreed that there were no further risks that required escalation to the Corporate Risk Register.

Lesley proposed a slight amendment to the formatting of the risk scores within the Registers going forward and queried the amendment of some of the implementation dates. It was reiterated that implementation dates should not be amended but that any revised implementation date could be included in the 'position at' column of the Register for monitoring purposes.

**Action:** Julie Devlin to amend the formatting of the risk scores and to revert to original implementation dates within the Registers going forward.

*Julie Devlin left the meeting at 10.33 am.*

*Karl Hedley, Clerical Supervisor, and Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 10.34 am for agenda item 10.*

## **10. Report and Self-Assessment of the Information Security Group (ISG)**

SMG welcomed Donna-Marie Clark to the Assembly, in her new role as Data Protection and Governance Officer.

Tara Caul recorded her thanks to the members of ISG for their work over the last year.

Karl Hedley presented the Annual Report and Self-Assessment of ISG for the year to September 2021.

SMG noted the work undertaken by the ISG during the reporting period and the future actions for consideration by the group.

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, noted potential inconsistencies in relation to the usage of protective markings on Assembly material within his Directorate and queried whether information recorded in Confidential Registers was appropriately marked.

**Action:** Directors to review Confidential Registers within their business areas in conjunction with Information Asset Owners, to ensure protective markings are in line with the definitions in the Information Assurance Policy.

*Karl Hedley and Donna-Marie Clark left the meeting at 10.45 am.*

## **11. Review of Information Assurance Policy**

Tara presented a revised Information Assurance Policy for approval by SMG, which had been reviewed to take account of changes in legislation and to make it more accessible and straightforward for staff to apply.

Tara noted that the proposed revised Policy had incorporated changes to content, layout and formatting following consultation with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and staff involved with both the Information Asset Owner Forum and the Information Security Group.

Following consideration, SMG proposed some further minor amendments and asked that further clarification be sought from the Head of Information Systems Office on the methods of encryption to be used when emailing Assembly Restricted material to email accounts not on the Assembly Commission network.

**Action:** Tara to speak with the Head of Information Systems Office on the methods of encryption used when emailing Assembly Restricted material to email accounts not on the Assembly Commission network and advise SMG accordingly.

**Action:** Tara to update the Policy as proposed by SMG and re-circulate via correspondence for final approval.

*Meeting suspended at 11.26 am until 11.37 am.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

### **12. Update to Procurement Approach in Relation to the Design, Build and Installation of a New Committee Room and Additional Capacity for Concurrent Broadcasting**

This paper was deferred to the November 2021 meeting.

*Susie Brown, Head of Communications and Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer, joined the meeting at 11.37 am for agenda items 13 and 14.*

### **13. Feedback on Consultation on the Draft Internal Communications Strategy with Staff and Trade Union Side (TUS)**

Susie Brown updated SMG on the results of staff and TUS consultation on the draft Internal Communications Strategy, following its initial consideration by SMG at its meeting on 23 October 2020.

Susie advised that a staff COVID-19 Well-being and Communications survey, had launched at the end of June and was accompanied by two 'Let's talk' Internal Communications sessions. Susie advised that staff feedback from the 'Let's Talk' sessions was very positive and had been collated to produce an infographic which Liz Beaton presented to SMG. Following the presentation, Liz sought approval from SMG to publish the feedback in the October 2021 staff newsletter.

SMG was very pleased with the positive progress that had been made with internal communications and with the feedback from the consultation and approved its publication in the October 2021 staff newsletter.

Celebrating success and recognition of long service was discussed, with SMG keen for these to be progressed as soon as possible. Susie agreed to provide a series of options for consideration by SMG in order to help to move this forward.

**Action:** Susie to provide a series of options on celebrating success and recognition of long service for consideration by SMG at a future meeting.

Susie advised that a revised draft Internal Communications Strategy would be produced for consideration by SMG at its November 2021 meeting, taking account of the consultation feedback.

**Action:** Susie to produce a revised draft Internal Communications Strategy for consideration by SMG at its November 2021 meeting.

Susie also advised that she planned to carry out a piece of work on consultations, in general, focussing on consistency, content and providing support to business areas. Lesley was very supportive of this work and asked that Susie give consideration to how this could be co-ordinated through the Communications Office.

**Action:** Susie to give consideration to how consultations, in general, could be co-ordinated through the Communications Office and update SMG accordingly.

## **14. Internal Communications Quarterly Update**

SMG noted the internal communications activity during the quarter ended 30 September 2021 and the draft plan for the quarter ended 31 December 2021.

*Liz Beaton left the meeting at 12.30 pm.*

*Debra Savage, Information Officer, joined the meeting at 12.30 pm for agenda item 15.*

## **15. Draft Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Style Guide**

Susie presented a new Assembly Commission Style Guide along with proposals on the staff engagement process.

Susie advised that the new guide had been produced following a review of the Assembly's current guide, as well as guides from other comparable legislatures and organisations that communicate with the public. It was noted that the use of plain English was a key factor in the new Guide.

In relation to the staff engagement process, Susie proposed that Heads of Business and staff would be consulted on the draft Guide through a number of internal 'Let's Talk' events, as well as by internal communications channels, over a four-week period during November and December 2021, with feedback reviewed and incorporated in the draft Guide, where appropriate.

Following consideration, SMG proposed some initial amendments to the draft Guide prior to engagement with staff, but agreed that more substantial amendments would be considered following staff feedback.

Susie advised that any further revisions to the draft Guide would be completed by the end of February 2022 and the new Guide implemented by the end of March 2022.

*Susie Brown and Debra Savage left the meeting at 12.51 pm.*

## **16. Assembly Commission papers cleared by SMG via correspondence/meeting**

- Working Group Report on the Review of the Display of Artefacts in Parliament Buildings
- Matters Relating to the Appointment of a Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland
- Administration of Ill Health Retirement for Members
- Postponement of the Parliament Buildings Open Day
- Pay Claim 2021

## 17. Directors' Updates

### Corporate Services

#### HR

Richard advised that an HR Manager to take forward the HR Services for Members work had taken up post in October 2021.

#### Systems Review Project

Richard advised that a member of staff from both the HR Office and the Finance Office would be assisting with the work of the Systems Review Project for a period of time.

#### Procurement of Classified Advertising

Richard advised that the contract for classified advertising expired at the end of October 2021.

**Action:** Richard to clarify the position with the Department of Finance's Central Procurement Directorate of the Assembly Commission being party to a public-service-wide Advertising Framework.

#### Building Services

In relation to the roof project defects, Richard advised that the expert reports should be finalised by the end of October 2021.

### Legal, Governance and Research Services

#### Internal Audit

Tara provided an update on the Internal Audit Reviews for:

- Standing Committees
- Delegated Procurement
- Mobile Phones
- Establishment of the Youth Assembly
- Recruitment and Selection

#### Governance

Tara noted that the initial main focus of the new Data Protection and Governance Officer would be on reviewing the Assembly's Retention and Disposal Schedule.



## **Procurement Office**

Tara advised of the continuing staffing resource issues within the Procurement Office, and that agencies had been approached again.

## **Parliamentary Services**

### **Clerking**

SMG noted the Executive and Non-Executive Bills currently at various stages of passage in the Assembly.

### **Engagement**

Planned VIP visits to the Assembly were noted along with those that had taken place in September 2021.

## **18. AOB**

There was no other business.

## **19. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 18 November 2021.

## **20. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

- Portraits Policy
- Review of the Display of Artefacts in Parliament Buildings
- Standards of Conduct Policy: Political Activities
- Review of Recruitment, Selection and Induction
- Biannual Review of Learning and Development Activities
- Gender Action Plan: October 2021 Update
- Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21: October 2021 Update
- Audit of Inequalities Action Plan – Monitoring Update
- Audit of Inequalities 2022-2026 Key Principles
- Disability Action Plan 2016-2021 Closure Report
- Disability Action Plan 2021-2025
- Review of Building Maintenance
- Update on the Defects of the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- COVID-19 Regulations: Guidance
- Annual Plan 2021-2022 Outturn Update
- Annual Plan 2022-2023
- Pay Claim 2021
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Data Breaches – Lessons Learned
- Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment
- Risk Management Self-Assessment

- Outline Business Case for Assembly Chamber Broadcasting Upgrade
- Update to Sequencing of Proposed Broadcasting Projects 2021-2024
- Broadcasting Contract Re-tender
- Revised Internal Communications Strategy
- Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots

The meeting ended at 1.25 pm.