

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

**FRIDAY, 26 MARCH 2021 at 9.30 AM
(VIRTUAL MEETING VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS)**

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Paula McClintock
Billy Mahoney
Karen Martin
David Lynn
Sebastien Mingout
Ryan Fleming
Julie Devlin
Eddie Kelly
Alice McKelvey
Simon Burrowes
Tracey Wilson
Shauna Mageean

Opening/Review

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 26 February 2021 were published on 23 March 2021.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

In relation to an outstanding action from the July 2020 SMG meeting, Richard Stewart confirmed that a meeting would be arranged with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Head of Buildings Services in mid-April to consider the Maintenance and Minor Capital Works Review, prior to a paper being presented at the May 2021 SMG meeting.

Action: Richard to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and the Head of Buildings Services to discuss the Maintenance and Minor Capital Works Review.

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.36 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

SMG noted the recent announcement by the UK Government on the flying of the Union flag from government buildings and contemplated the impact this might have on the Department of Culture, Media and Sport designated days for flying the Union flag currently followed by the Assembly. It was agreed that a paper would be prepared on this issue for consideration by the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Action: Richard to prepare a paper for consideration by the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, on the flying of the Union flag from Parliament Buildings, in light of the recent announcement by the UK Government.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey noted that the date of the next Assembly Commission had yet to be agreed but that a date of 5 May 2021 had been proposed.

Proposed items for the May meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Potential Rescheduling of the Assembly Members (Remuneration Board) Bill
- Legal Expenses Insurance Cover for Members
- Provision of Human Resource Services to Members
- Members' Allowances Determination
- Maternity, Paternity or Adoption Support for Members
- Assembly Commission Artefacts
- Flying the Union Flag at Parliament Buildings
- Support Services Contract

- Service Level Agreement between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Assembly Commission
- Review of Parliament Buildings: Special Lighting Policy
- Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21: March 2021 Update
- Gender Action Plan: March 2021 Update
- Complaints Policy Annual Activity Report
- Assembly Members' Pension Scheme Annual Report and Accounts and Annual Funding Update

Corporate Support Unit Update

Centenaries

Robin advised SMG that work was underway to deliver the Assembly Commission's programme of centenary events for 2021. It was noted that the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann had agreed to join the Speaker in launching the lecture series on 28 April 2021.

Artefacts

Robin noted that discussions were ongoing in relation to the additional staffing resources required to assist with the artefacts project and the exhibition on woman members over the last hundred years.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.17 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Paula McClintock, Head of Finance, joined the meeting at 10.18 am for agenda item 7.

Billy Mahoney, Deputy Head of Finance, joined the meeting at 10.18 am for agenda item 7.

7. Management Accounts

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for February 2021, highlighting the forecast level of underspend against the final budget position.

Paula advised that the forecast for Secretariat salaries was as reported the previous month, as there had not been time to re-forecast the figures. However, Paula provided SMG with a breakdown of the posts yet to be filled, as requested at last month's SMG meeting.

Lesley highlighted the need to improve and refine the salary forecasting process going forward and asked that the Finance Office ensure that the full year salaries forecast takes account of planned recruitment and

any slippages in recruitment activity. Paula agreed to review the process in relation to salary forecasting for the new financial year.

Richard stated the need for SMG to assure itself that the salaries budget for 2021-22 would be fully utilised during the year. Lesley noted that this would require co-operation between the HR Office and the Finance Office.

Paula also advised SMG of expenditure against Administration Costs and Members' Costs. SMG noted the need to accurately forecast the costs associated with Members.

In relation to the Capital budget, Paula advised that as requested at the previous SMG meeting, Billy had spoken with Budget Managers and identified some capital requirements for 2021/22 that could be progressed before the end of the financial year.

Lesley congratulated Directors, Heads of Business and the Finance Office for all their efforts in managing capital expenditure and delivery against budget.

On reviewing the Decision Authorisation System (DAS) Reports, Lesley noted that the support services contract was not showing on the report. Billy agreed to investigate and update the report accordingly.

Action: Billy to update the DAS records with details of the support services contract.

In relation to year-end reporting, Paula advised SMG that all goods and services received, needed to be receipted on PECOS by the end of March 2021.

Action: Finance Office to email staff to remind them of the deadline for receipting goods and services on PECOS.

Paula McClintock and Billy Mahoney left the meeting at 10.56 am.

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR joined the meeting at 10.56 am for agenda item 8.

8. HR Management Information

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

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure as at 1 March 2021 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 351.0 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 384.6 FTE.

Karen advised of two revisions required to the staffing figures presented. It was noted that the 1 FTE AG4 Engagement Manager had not been included in the staff complement figures and that the Governance Officer complement figure should be 1 FTE AG6. Karen confirmed that the staff complement figures for 1 April would be updated to reflect these changes.

On reviewing the staffing figures recorded against the Legal, Governance and Research Services Directorate, Tara Caul requested that an AG8 currently recorded against staff in post in the Legal Services Office, be recorded against staff in post in the Office of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. Tara confirmed that the AG8 post in the Legal Services Office was currently vacant.

Action: Karen to amend the staff in post figures, to record an AG8 in the Office of the Examiner of Statutory Rules as opposed to the Legal Services Office.

Karen advised SMG of the temporary promotions/deputising arrangements and agency work assignments currently in place.

Lesley queried the number of temporary promotions recorded at AG4. Karen agreed to review the records and update SMG accordingly.

Action: Karen to review the AG4 temporary promotion records and advise SMG of any amendments.

On reviewing the Recruitment Schedule, Karen confirmed that the competition for the AG5 Procurement Managers had completed and that interviews for the AG7 Human Resources Supervisor had recently concluded. It was also noted that a job related skills test had been held in respect of the AG6 Assistant Editor competition, and that competitions had been advertised for five AG5 Research Officer posts and an AG6 Librarian post. Karen also confirmed that the IS Scholarship programme had been advertised.

Karen advised SMG that efforts to fill the vacant post of Public Engagement Manager through the agency route had been unsuccessful and sought SMG's views on adding the post to the prioritised table for recruitment competitions and evaluating it. SMG agreed that the post should be evaluated and added to the prioritised table for recruitment competitions.

Karen also sought SMG's views on prioritising competitions for two AG7 Senior Developer vacancies within the IS Office. SMG agreed in principle to prioritise the posts, provided they could be accommodated within the current Recruitment Schedule, but asked to be advised if this would impact on any other planned recruitment.

Action: HR Office to review the Recruitment Schedule and advise SMG if the inclusion of the two AG7 Senior Developer posts

in the prioritised table, impacted on any other planned recruitment.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period March 2020 to February 2021, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 6.3 days, compared with an average of 10.6 days during the period March 2019 to February 2020.

Lesley enquired about the use of the contract for occupational health matters with Blackwell Associates Ltd and Karen confirmed that it had been used on number of occasions and was providing a good service. Karen also stated that the Occupational Health Service (OHS) had resumed full service.

Lesley also noted that some business area organisation charts and staff contacts on AssISt were not up to date and she asked that these be reviewed.

Action: HR Office to arrange for organisation charts on AssISt to be reviewed and updated.

Action: Gareth to arrange for staff contacts on AssISt to be reviewed and updated.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 11.28 am.

Meeting suspended at 11.28 am and resumed at 11.43 am.

David Lynn, Head of Building Services, joined the meeting at 11.43 am for agenda items 9 and 10.

Sebastien Mingout, Support Services Manager, joined the meeting at 11.43 am for agenda item 9.

9. Support Services Contract - Optional Year 5 Proposal

Sebastien Mingout noted that both he and the Head of Building Services had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 12 March 2021 to discuss in detail, a year 5 contract proposal from the Support Services contractor.

Sebastien advised that a response seeking clarification of the proposal had been sent to the Support Services contractor and it was noted that as soon as this clarification was received, SMG and the Assembly Commission would need to urgently consider the matter further.

Sebastien Mingout left the meeting at 11.52 am.

10. Roof Project Issues

David Lynn noted that the paper was a follow-up to one presented at the November 2020 SMG meeting, provided an update on the issues associated with the roof project and sought approval from SMG to seek the view of an independent expert.

Following discussion, SMG agreed that the services of an independent expert should be sought up to an expenditure level as outlined in the paper.

Tara Caul advised that David should provide detailed instructions and documentation to the Head of Legal Services Office in this matter as soon as possible.

Action: David to provide detailed instructions and documentation to the Head of Legal Services Office.

David Lynn left the meeting at 12.46 pm.

11. Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21: March 2021 Update

SMG noted that after discussions with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 had been extended for a further 6 months to facilitate the preparation of a new Good Relations Action Plan.

Richard provided SMG with a progress update on the actions in the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 for the six-month reporting period ending March 2021. It was noted that this was the penultimate update on the 2016-21 Plan.

In relation to the overdue action to 'Develop an e-learning package for staff training', it was noted that the package was to be developed in consultation with the NICS and the Equality Commission's Statutory Duties Forum. Richard advised that work on the package was ongoing, but that the work of the Forum had been delayed as NICS staff had been redeployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Richard did however confirm that an 'Introduction to Section 75' e-learning programme had been put in place.

Regarding the Assembly Visitor Survey action, which had been suspended due to the closure of Parliament Buildings, Richard advised that a review of the visitor survey had been carried out and that a paper would be presented to SMG meeting in May 2021.

Action: Paper on the review of the visitor survey to be presented at the May 2021 SMG meeting.

In relation to the Good Relations Action Plan for 2021-26, Richard said that it was anticipated that it would have fewer but more focused actions

and that, where possible, it would seek to measure Good Relations outcomes. Richard also confirmed that to assist with the preparation of a draft Good Relations Action Plan for 2021-26, a “key principles” paper on Good Relations would be prepared for discussion with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors.

SMG approved the monitoring update for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Action: Equality Unit to prepare a paper for presentation at the next Assembly Commission meeting, reporting the position on the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 as at 31 March 2021.

12. Gender Action Plan: March 2021 Update

Richard provided a progress update on the Gender Action Plan 2019-23, for the six-month reporting period ending March 2021.

SMG noted the four overdue actions within the Plan and agreed to arrange a separate meeting to discuss the overdue actions in relation to the development of a Transgender Policy and the provision of staff training on transgender issues. It was also noted that work was ongoing in relation to the overdue action to develop a Menopause Policy.

Action: Equality Unit to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to consider the three overdue transgender related actions.

SMG approved the monitoring update for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to an amendment to the status of the action in relation to implementing a Senior Women’s network.

Action: Equality Unit to amend the status update for the action in relation to implementing a Senior Women’s network.

Action: Equality Unit to prepare a paper for presentation at the next Assembly Commission meeting, reporting the position on the Gender Action Plan 2019-23 as at 31 March 2021.

13. Disability Action Plan 2021-26: Public Consultation

Paper deferred to a future meeting.

Meeting suspended at 1.04 pm and resumed at 1.32 pm.

Change to agenda running order.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Ryan Fleming, Data Protection and Information Standards Officer, joined the meeting at 1.32 pm for agenda item 16.

16. Review of Data Protection Policy

Ryan Fleming presented a revised Data Protection Policy, which had been updated to reflect changes in legislation following exit from the EU.

SMG approved the revised policy for publishing, subject to some further minor amendments and the checking of hyperlinks referenced in the policy.

Ryan Fleming left the meeting at 1.44 pm.

Julie Devlin, Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 1.45 pm for agenda items 16 and 17.

17. Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Julie Devlin presented the latest draft of the Corporate Risk Register.

It was noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors had met on 4 March 2021 and discussed the Corporate Risk Register in detail.

SMG agreed the contents of the Corporate Risk Register.

18. Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers

SMG reviewed the contents of the February 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 queried the timing of the presentation of the Directorate Risk Registers to SARC, as it would mean that the February registers would be presented to a May meeting. It was agreed that it would be more reflective of the current position to present the April 2021 Directorate Risk Registers to the SARC meeting in May 2021.

Action: SMG to review the timings for the review of the Directorate Risk Registers going forward.

SMG also agreed a change to the Corporate Risk Summary Section of the Register to ensure consistency going forward.

Action: Julie to update the Corporate Risk Summary Section of the Directorate Risk Registers to ensure consistency.

Julie Devlin left the meeting at 1.55 pm.

Eddie Kelly, Acting Head of Internal Audit, joined the meeting at 1.56 pm for agenda item 19.

19. Review of the 2020/21-2022/23 Internal Audit Strategy (Including 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan) and the Internal Audit Charter

Eddie Kelly presented the Internal Audit Strategy 2020/21 – 2022/23 and the Strategic Plan, both of which had been amended slightly following the annual review.

SMG were also asked to consider the 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan which had been developed following discussion with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors, a review of Corporate and Directorate risk registers, and consideration of the results of 2020/21 activity.

With regards the Internal Audit Charter, Eddie confirmed that this had been reviewed and no amendments were required.

Following consideration, SMG approved the Internal Audit Strategy, the Strategic Plan, the Annual Plan for 2021/22 and the Internal Audit Charter.

Action: Updated Internal Audit Strategy, Strategic Plan, Annual Plan for 2021/22 and Internal Audit Charter to be presented to SARC at its meeting in May 2021.

Eddie Kelly left the meeting at 2.23 pm.

Alice McKelvey, Legal Adviser, joined the meeting at 2.23 pm.

20. Litigation Update

Alice McKelvey provided SMG with an update on potential litigation to which the Assembly Commission is currently a named party.

Alice McKelvey left the meeting at 2.32 pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Simon Burrowes, Head of Public Engagement, joined the meeting at 2.33 pm for agenda item 21.

21. Review of Parliament Buildings: Special Lighting Policy

Simon Burrowes presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the operation of the Special Lighting Policy during 2020.

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

Action: Simon to update the paper as requested by SMG for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

SMG discussed and agreed a change to the documentation supporting lighting request applications. It was agreed that a form would be designed, which assessed the request against the policy and that this should be issued along with the request to Assembly Commission Members.

Action: Simon to arrange for a form to be designed to accompany lighting requests issued to Assembly Commission Members for consideration.

Simon Burrowes left the meeting at 3.01 pm.

Tracey Wilson, Information Officer, joined the meeting at 3.02 pm for agenda item 21.

22. Room 21 Layout and Acoustic and Lighting Surveys for Broadcast Rooms in Parliament Buildings

Tracey Wilson advised SMG that a project was underway to design, build and install a new televised committee room in Room 21 and that this would be used as a technological 'template' for the future upgrading of Rooms 29, 30 and the Senate Chamber.

Tracey outlined a preferred layout for Room 21 and sought SMG's approval.

Following discussion, SMG approved the proposed layout, subject to consultation with the Chairpersons' Liaison Group.

Tracey also outlined the business case for acoustic and lighting surveys to be undertaken in all of the broadcast-enabled rooms Parliament Buildings.

SMG approved the business case and requested that the Training Room be included in the acoustic survey.

Tracey Wilson left the meeting at 3.37 pm.

Shauna Mageean, EU Affairs Manager, joined the meeting at 3.37 pm for agenda item 23.

23. Quarterly Update on EU Exit

Shauna Mageean provided SMG with an update on the latest news regarding EU Exit and developments in the UK-EU relationship, including the establishment of new governance structures which may involve the devolved administrations.

SMG thanked Shauna for a very comprehensive update.

Shauna Mageean left the meeting at 4.05 pm.

Meeting suspended at 4.05 pm and resumed at 4.15 pm.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

14. Maternity, Paternity or Adoption Support for Members

Richard stated that the paper being presented had been prepared following a letter to the Speaker from Nichola Mallon MLA, regarding Maternity provision for MLAs.

SMG considered the potential provision of additional support to assist MLAs during a period of maternity, paternity or adoption and agreed that a paper should be prepared for consideration by the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Action: Richard to prepare a paper regarding potential maternity, paternity or adoption support for MLAs, for consideration by the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

15. Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Assembly Commission

SMG reviewed the draft SLA for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024 and agreed that approval for the resultant expenditure should be sought from the Assembly Commission, as it exceeded the Clerk/Chief Executive's delegated authority.

Action: Richard to present the draft SLA to the Assembly Commission for approval at its next meeting.

OTHER ITEMS

24. Directorate Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

Corporate Services

Usher Services

Richard advised that tenders were currently being evaluated in relation to the Parliament Buildings Security System consultancy.

Honours – Imperial Service Medal (ISM)

Richard advised that the HR Office had put in place a process for establishing potential recipients of an ISM. It was also noted that Lesley had asked the Assembly's Internal Communications Officer, Liz Beaton, to look at recognition for long service in the Assembly. Richard suggested that Liz speak with Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR as she had done some work on this.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Internal Audit

Tara advised that the fieldwork on the Reviews of Overtime, Bill Office Follow-up and Accounts Payable had been completed; the draft Procurement Office Report had been produced and the Review of Members Expenses was nearing completion.

Tara also confirmed that the (Acting) Head of Internal Audit had recently met with the new Assembly Commission SARC representative to provide him with an outline of the work of SARC.

Research and Information Services (RaISe)

Tara commented on the excellent work which continued to be carried out by RaISe.

Parliamentary Services

Clerking

Gareth noted that there was very little Executive business in plenary coming through at the moment but that there continued to be very significant volumes of business in committees.

25. Revised SMG Papers Following Meetings

- HR Management Information – presented at the January 2021 SMG meeting; and
- Review of Data Breach Management Plan – presented at the February 2021 SMG meeting.

26. Assembly Commission papers cleared by SMG via correspondence

- Youth Assembly Update and Recruitment Process; and
- Consideration of Commencement of Part 3 of the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 – Complaints Standards Authority Role for the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

27. Items cleared by correspondence

SMG Register of Interests – updated March 2021.

28. AOB

There was no other business.

29. Date of next meeting

Next meeting to take place on 30 April 2021.

30. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Members' Allowance Determination
- Six-monthly update: Audit of Inequalities 2016-21
- Update on the Creation of Refuge Points for People with Disabilities
- Sustainable Development Office Report on the Outturn against the 2021-21 Action Plan
- Risk Management Strategy
- Quarterly Update on Internal Communications
- Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy and Procedure Report for 2020-21
- Report on the 2021 Members' Survey and Action Plan
- Internal Communications Group Update

The meeting ended at 4.58 pm.