

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

TUESDAY, 21 JUNE 2022 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Paula McClintock
Maria Bannon
Karen Martin
Cathy McGowan
David Lynn
Alice McKelvey
Susie Brown
Frank Geddis
Simon Burrowes

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 25 May 2022 had still to be approved and published.

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 9.39 am for items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, noted the ongoing political situation.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, noted that progress on the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill was being monitored.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey noted that the next Assembly Commission meeting had been scheduled for 28 June 2022.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Annual Plan 2021-22 End of Year Performance Report
- Pay Claim 2022 and Update on Industrial Action
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Report on the Development of an Unacceptable Behaviours Policy
- COVID-19 Arrangements
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Business Case for the Refurbishment of Audio and Video Systems in the Assembly Committee Rooms
- Parliament Buildings Wi-Fi Network Replacement Project 2022
- Constituency Office Broadband Services
- Appointment of Trustees for the Assembly Members Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016
- Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy and Procedures Report for 2021-2022
- The Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 Closure Report (covering the monitoring period November 2016-January 2022)
- Draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25: Public Consultation
- Publication of the Audit of Inequalities Closure Report 2016-21
- Consultation on draft Equality Scheme and Audit of Inequalities Report and Action Plan 2022-26
- Gender Action Plan: March 2022 Update
- Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission 2021-22
- Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission for the Year Ended 31 March 2022

Lesley noted the number of Equality papers going to the Assembly Commission meeting and sought Directors views on whether it was necessary for them all to be presented, going forward. Following discussion, SMG proposed presenting only two papers, namely the Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission, which could incorporate updates on the Gender Action Plan and the Good

Relations Action Plan and each new Equality Scheme. It was agreed that the views of Assembly Commission Members would be sought at the next Assembly Commission meeting on this proposal.

Action: Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, to seek the views of Members at the next Assembly Commission meeting, on the Equality papers to be prepared and presented going forward.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.50 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

7. Management Accounts

It was noted that the Management Accounts for May 2022 were still being finalised and would be issued to SMG for consideration via correspondence.

Action: Paula McClintock, Head of Finance, to arrange for the Management Accounts for May 2022 to be issued to SMG via correspondence for consideration.

Paula McClintock, Head of Finance, joined the meeting at 9.54 am for agenda item 8.

8. Appointment of Trustees for the Assembly Members Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016

Paula McClintock presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Appointment of Trustees for the Assembly Members Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016.

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

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 10.00 am.

9. Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016.

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

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

Maria Bannon, Equality and Good Relations Manager, joined the meeting at 10.17 am for agenda items 10 and 11.

10. Consultation on Draft Equality Scheme and Audit of Inequalities Report and Action Plan 2022-26

Maria Bannon noted that she had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 8 June 2022, to consider in detail, the draft Equality Scheme and Audit of Inequalities Report and Action Plan 2022-26 for public consultation.

Maria advised that amendments proposed at the meeting had been incorporated in the draft Assembly Commission paper presented.

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

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

11. Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission 2021-22

Maria presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission 2021-22.

On reviewing the draft paper, Lesley stated that it would be more helpful to include only the status updates from closure reports for those action plans which had come to an end, as these incorporated any in-year outcomes and the new action plans were either only recently agreed or in the process of being agreed.

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

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

Maria Bannon left the meeting at 10.38 am.

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 10.38 am for agenda items 12 and 13.

12. HR Management Information

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 June 2022.

SMG noted the number of staff in post (including agency and inward secondees) and the temporary promotions/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place.

Karen advised SMG of the updated position in relation to the Recruitment Schedule. Gareth requested that the position of Managing Editor of Debates be added to the non-scheduled section of the Schedule. Tara requested that the position of Head of Procurement be added again to the Schedule for September 2022.

Action: Karen to update the Recruitment Schedule to include the position of Managing Editor of Debates and Head of Procurement.

Karen informed SMG that the contract for the 'Provision of Tests and Assessment Exercises for Recruitment Competitions for the Assembly' was in its extension year with effect from 26 May 2022. Karen stated that given the continuing high level of recruitment activity, HR had forecasted that an additional £3,063 may be required to cover the anticipated costs of the testing and assessments required during the one-year extension and sought SMG's approval for this increase in the contract. SMG approved the increase.

Karen also noted that to assist with recruitment, SMG had previously approved additional resources for the HR Office of two AG6 and two AG7 staff for six months. Karen advised, however, that the HR Office had only been able to fill one AG6 and one AG7 post and sought SMG approval to extend the current AG6 and AG7 contract from six months to 12 months instead. SMG approved the extension to the existing AG6 and AG7 posts as requested.

Sickness absence information was provided and noted.

13. Report on the Development of and Unacceptable Behaviours Policy

Karen presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Report on the Development of an Unacceptable Behaviours Policy.

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

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

Karen Martin left the meeting at 11.22 am.

Cathy McGowan, Learning and Development Manager, joined the meeting at 11.23 am for agenda item 14.

14. Annual Report of Learning and Development Activities and Associated Spend for 2021/22

Cathy McGowan provided SMG with an update on the learning and development activities undertaken by staff during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 and the associated spend.

Cathy advised that while the COVID-19 pandemic had continued to have an impact on the activities provided during the year, particularly those which were classroom based, the Learning and Development team had continued to support a large number of activities.

It was however noted, that with the recent lifting of social distancing restrictions, the Learning and Development team intended to further promote the delivery of classroom style events within the new Learning and Development room.

Cathy informed SMG that the Learning and Development team had established positive working relationships with counterparts in both Wales and Scotland, in the delivery of virtual inter-parliamentary 'Manager as Coach' programmes and that the team was in discussion with other legislatures to explore new ways to work more collaboratively.

SMG approved the HR Learning and Development Annual Report Summary for publication.

SMG thanked Cathy and her team for the comprehensive report and for maintaining such a high level of support during the year.

Action: Cathy to arrange for the HR Learning and Development Annual Report Summary to be published on AssISt.

Cathy McGowan left the meeting at 11.33 am.

Meeting suspended at 11.33 am until 11.41 am.

Change to agenda running order.

David Lynn, Building Services Manager, and Alice McKelvey, Legal Adviser, joined the meeting at 11.41 am for agenda item 16.

16. Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings

Alice McKelvey provided SMG with a verbal update on the position in relation to the defects in the roof of Parliament Buildings.

Action: David Lynn to prepare a paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

David Lynn and Alice McKelvey left the meeting at 12.07 pm.

17. Annual Environmental Management Review

Paper deferred to the next SMG meeting.

18. COVID-19 Arrangements

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on COVID-19 Arrangements.

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

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

SMG discussed the daily COVID-19 update reports provided by the HR Office and agreed that these were no longer required.

SMG also requested that the HR Office review the categorising of COVID-19 related absences and report back to SMG.

Action: HR Office to review the categorising of COVID-19 related absences and report back to SMG.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 12.29 pm for agenda item 19.

19. Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register

SMG noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Data Protection and Governance Officer, had met on 7 June 2022 to discuss the Corporate Risk Register in detail.

SMG approved the Corporate Risk Register for June 2022.

Donna-Marie left the meeting at 12.30 pm.

Dan Hull, Senior Research Officer, joined the meeting at 12.30 pm for agenda item 20.

20. Subscription to Lexis Legal Library and Lexis News

Dan Hull presented this paper, outlining the business case and seeking approval from SMG, to renew the Library's subscription to Lexis Legal Library and Lexis News for a further three years.

Following consideration, SMG approved the renewal of the Library's subscription with Lexis Legal Library and Lexis News for a further three years.

Dan Hull left the meeting at 12.36 pm.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

15. Pay Claim 2022 and Update on Industrial Action

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Pay Claim 2022 and Update on Industrial Action.

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

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

Meeting suspended at 1.00 pm until 1.47 pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Susie Brown, Head of Communications, joined the meeting at 1.47 pm for agenda items 21 and 22.

21. Business Case for the Procurement of Additional Broadcasting Technical Advice

Susie Brown presented this paper, and sought approval from SMG to proceed with the procurement of an independent Broadcasting Technical Adviser, to support the completion of the refurbishment projects in the Assembly Chamber and committee rooms.

Following consideration, SMG approved the business case to procure additional broadcasting technical advice, on the basis of value for money and the significant added value this expertise would bring to the work of the project.

As the value of the business case was in excess of the Clerk/Chief Executive's delegated authority, it was noted that approval would be sought from the Speaker.

Action: Lesley to seek the Speaker's approval for the business case to procure additional broadcasting technical advice.

22. Business Case for the Refurbishment of Audio and Video Systems in Assembly Committee Rooms

Susie presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on a Business Case for the Refurbishment of Audio and Video Systems in Assembly Committee Rooms.

Richard noted the need for close monitoring of planned capital expenditure in 2022-23 and 2023-24 against the amounts agreed by the Audit Committee and approved by the Assembly. Following consideration, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to a minor amendment.

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

Susie Brown left the meeting at 2.07 pm.

Change to agenda running order.

24. Staffing Support for the Northern Ireland Assembly Women's Caucus

Gareth presented this paper, and sought approval to appoint a Programme Manager (AG7) to support the Northern Ireland Assembly Women's Caucus, for an initial period of 11 months, with the possibility for an extension for a further 25 months.

Gareth stated that the post would be fully funded by grants from Politics Plus to the Assembly Commission.

Following consideration, SMG approved the appointment of a Programme Manager for an initial period of 11 months, with the possibility of an extension for a further 25 months and noted that it would be fully funded by grants from Politics Plus.

Frank Geddis, Clerk Assistant, joined the meeting at 2.14 pm for agenda item 23.

23. Staffing Support for the Members' Bills Unit

Frank Geddis presented this paper, outlining the recommendations contained within the Committee on Procedures' Inquiry Report on Members' Bills, as agreed by the Assembly on 14 March 2022.

Frank referred in particular, to the recommendation that the Members' Bills Unit be retained, with appropriate resources allocated to sustain and develop the Unit. Approval to increase the staffing complement in the Members' Bills Unit within the Bill Office, by one Clerk (AG4) and two Senior Assistant Clerks (AG5) was subsequently sought.

Following discussion, SMG approved the increase in the staffing complement within the Members' Bills Unit as outlined. It was noted that funding for these posts was already included in the Assembly Commission's budget for 2022-23. The timing of the appointments was also considered and it was agreed that Parliamentary Services management would work with the HR Office to make the necessary appointments, following the election of a Speaker and Deputy Speakers.

Lesley asked Frank whether any consultation had taken place with colleagues in the other business areas involved with the work of the Members' Bills Unit in the last Mandate and suggested that a meeting be arranged with all relevant business areas to get their views on the process and note any lessons learned.

Frank Geddis left the meeting at 2.34 pm.

Simon Burrowes, Acting Chairperson of the Internal Communications Group (ICG), joined the meeting at 2.50 pm for agenda item 25.

25. ICG Report on the 2022 Staff Survey

Simon Burrowes noted that he had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Aaron McMurray (Research Officer) on 17 June 2022, to consider in detail, the ICG Report on the 2002 Staff Survey.

SMG noted the content of the ICG Report and accepted all recommendations.

Action: Simon to arrange for the report to be published on AsslSt. SMG thanked Simon and the other members of ICG for their efforts in designing and issuing the survey and producing the report.

SMG wished Simon well on his retirement and thanked him for his long and valued contribution to the Assembly.

Simon Burrowes left the meeting at 3.04 pm.

26. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Building Services

Richard advised that an electric car charging point had been installed in the lower east car park.

Finance Office

Richard informed SMG of staffing issues within the Finance Office.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Legal Services Office

Tara advised that Adam Leitch had joined the Legal Services Office as a Legal Adviser and that a further vacant Legal Adviser post would be filled in September 2022.

Internal Audit

Tara provided an update on the Internal Audit Reviews for:

- Youth Assembly
- Procurement
- Accounts Payable
- Members' Expenses (Final) 2021/22
- Engagement (Outreach)
- Business Office
- Bill Office

Information Standards

In relation to FoI requests, Tara asked Directors to advise their business areas again to work closely with the Information Standards Office to ensure statutory deadlines are met.

Procurement Office

Tara asked that HoBs review the Procurement project list and notify the Acting Head of Procurement of any inaccuracies.

Action: HoBs to review the Procurement project list and notify the Acting Head of Procurement of any inaccuracies.

Lesley sought further clarification on the arrangements that would be put in place following the expiry of the Stationery and IT Consumables contract. Richard advised that he would clarify this separately.

Parliamentary Services

SMG noted the work undertaken by the Parliamentary Services Directorate, since last reported at the SMG meeting on 25 May 2022.

Gareth provided SMG with an update on the status of the Support Services Contract retender.

27. AOB

There was no other business.

28. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 5 August 2022.

29. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Review of HR Policies - Special Leave/Career Break/Secondment Policies
- Review of HR Policies – Job Evaluation Policy
- Procurement of Learning and Development Consultancy Services Post Project Evaluation
- Annual Environmental Management Review
- Proposal for an Increase in the Control Room Staff Complement
- Staff Complement Plus Request to Assist with Roll Out of New HR, Payroll, Finance and Procurement Solution
- Corporate Plan Quarterly Update
- Internal Audit Functions
- Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Post Project Evaluation
- Youth Assembly/Assembly Commission Memorandum of Understanding

The meeting ended at 3.28 pm.