

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2022 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present:

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive
Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services
Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services
Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services

In Attendance:

Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support
(Items 5 and 6)
Billy Mahoney, Deputy Head of Finance – Secretariat (Item 7)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 8, 9, 10 and 11)
Maria Bannon, Equality and Good Relations Manager (Items 10 and 11)
Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Item 15)

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 from the meeting on 30 November 2022 were in the process of being published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.37 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

SMT noted the ongoing political situation.

Tara Caul noted the UK Supreme Court recent decision, that the provision of the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill was within the legislative competence of the Assembly. Tara advised that the Bill would now be submitted by the Secretary of State for Royal Assent.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey advised that the date of the next Assembly Commission meeting had yet to be agreed, but was likely to be late January 2023.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Allocation of Accommodation for Political Parties in Parliament Buildings following the May 2022 Election
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Update on the Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Review of the Sign Language Pilot
- Funding for Sign Language Interpretation for Meetings Organised by MLAs
- Approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Equality Scheme 2022-26, Audit of Inequalities Report and Action Plan 2022-26 and Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 following Public Consultation
- Annual Plan 2022-23 Quarterly Update

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.45 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Billy Mahoney joined the meeting at 9.45 am for agenda item 7.

7. Abridged Management Accounts for November 2022

Due to the timing of the SMT meeting, Billy Mahoney stated that it had not been possible to prepare the full set of monthly Management Accounts and he instead presented an abridged set of accounts.

Lesley thanked Billy for the effort that had gone into preparing accounts in such a short timeframe.

Billy advised SMT of the year end forecast and of the surrenders since the October 2022 Management Accounts, which were mainly due to the fact

that the Assembly was not conducting normal Assembly business. He then sought approval of a bid from the HR Office to cover additional recruitment campaigns for the rest of the financial year. SMT noted the surrenders and approved the bid request.

Billy also informed SMT of the adjustments and surrenders in relation to the Capital Plan. He advised that Heads of Business had been notified of the change in the capitalisation threshold of fixed assets, as agreed at the SMT meeting on 30 November 2022.

Lesley clarified that the IS Office bid required to complete a survey of the current WiFi provision in Parliament Buildings was in fact a reallocation of funding from capital to General Admin Expenditure. Billy confirmed this was the case.

On reviewing the Capital Plan and proposed forecast underspend, Lesley proposed that budget managers review the Capital Plan for 2023/24 to see if any capital requirements could be brought forward and progressed before the end of the financial year.

Action: Directors to liaise with Budget Managers to identify whether any capital requirements for 2023/24 could be brought forward and progressed before the end of the financial year.

Billy Mahoney left the meeting at 10.19 am.

Change to agenda running order.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 10.19 am for agenda items 8, 9 10 and 11.

Maria Bannon joined the meeting at 10.19 am for agenda items 10 and 11.

10. Approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Equality Scheme 2022-26, Audit of Inequalities Report and Action Plan 2022-26 and Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 following Public Consultation

Maria Bannon presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Equality Scheme 2022-26, Audit of Inequalities Report and Action Plan 2022-26 and the Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25, following public consultation.

Maria advised that a total of 25 responses had been received following the public consultation, none of which had led to any substantive changes to the draft Action Plans.

Following consideration SMT approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: Maria to amend the Assembly Commission paper as proposed by SMT, for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

11. Technologies to Support General Visitor Feedback via Organisational Surveys and Approval of the Section 75 Good Relations and Disability) Visitors Survey

Maria presented a paper seeking approval of the proposed Section 75 Visitors Survey and the procurement of a technological solution to allow for the distribution of organisational surveys.

SMT considered the proposed Survey and, following discussion, asked that the Research and Information Service (RaISe) review the questions to broaden it into a general Visitors Survey.

Action: Maria to arrange for RaISe to review the questions in the proposed Survey to broaden it into a general Visitors Survey.

SMT considered and approved the procurement of the proposed technological solution to allow for the distribution of organisational surveys.

Maria Bannon left the meeting at 11.03 am.

8. HR Management Information

Sinéad McDonnell presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 December 2022.

Sinéad updated SMT on recruitment activity.

Sinéad informed SMT of the recruitment competition for Assistant Assembly Clerk AG6 (Clerking) scheduled for January 2023, and in light of the existing merit list expiring on 14 January asked if the list could be extended for temporary appointments only until the recruitment was completed. SMT agreed to the extension of the AG6 merit list for temporary appointments only.

In relation to the forthcoming Clerical Supervisor (AG7) competition, Sinéad advised SMT that the previous competition had included a 'graduate only' application pathway. Sinéad advised that, given the small number of AG7 vacancies that may be filled from this merit list, it did not seem proportionate to have such a complex application process. SMT agreed it was more practical to have a single, experience-based, application route for this competition. A high-level discussion took place on the development of a graduate programme and Sinéad advised that the HR Office would give consideration to such a programme in the future.

9. Development of Menopause Guidance for Staff and Managers

Sinéad presented a draft Menopause Guidance for Staff and Managers.

Following consideration SMT approved, subject to some minor amendments, the draft guidance for formal consultation with TUS and staff.

Action: Sinéad to amend the draft guidance as proposed by SMT, prior to consultation with TUS and staff.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 11.37 am.

Meeting suspended at 11.37 am until 11.45 am.

12. Draft Assembly Commission Paper on Funding for Sign Language Interpretation for Meetings Organised by MLAs

This paper will be considered by SMT in January 2023, prior to the next Assembly Commission meeting.

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

Richard Stewart presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Review of the FAPP Scheme 2016.

Following consideration, SMT requested that further information be included in the paper, prior to presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Action: Richard to amend the draft Assembly Commission paper as proposed by SMT, for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

14. Business Case for the Procurement of Internal Audit Services

Lesley noted that SMT had agreed at its meeting on 5 August 2022, that the future provision of internal audit services should be delivered through an external provider.

Lesley subsequently sought SMT approval of the business case for the provision of internal audit services. SMT approved the business case.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark joined the meeting at 12.09 pm for agenda item 16.

15. Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register

SMT noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Data Protection and Governance Officer, had met on 5 December 2022 to discuss the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) in detail.

SMT considered and agreed in principle, the escalation of DR 6: 'Assembly Commission IS Office managed IT systems are vulnerable to cyber-attack' from the Parliamentary Services Directorate Risk Register (DRR) to the CRR, subject to further detailed consideration at the next quarterly review in March 2023.

Donna-Marie left the meeting at 12.19 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

16. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Support Services

Richard noted that the tender competition for the Support Services Contract had been completed, and advised that the new contract would be operational with effect from 9 January 2023.

Richard advised that he would be bringing an update paper to SMT on the Systems Review Project, given a delay to the Systems Design stage of the Project.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

RaISe

Tara advised that the business justification for newspapers had been finalised and approved. She stated that quotations had been obtained and that a contract was being prepared for one of the suppliers.

Procurement

Tara noted that an external recruitment competition for a Procurement Manager (AG5) was currently ongoing with applications due by 12 December and interviews to follow in early January 2023.

Tara provided an update on current procurements.

17. AOB

There was no other business.

18. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 27 January 2023.

19. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Health and Safety Management Report 2022
- Draft Transgender Policy
- Update on the Systems Review Project
- Annual Plan 2022-23 Quarterly Update
- Business Case for Partial Electronic Access Control
- Report and Recommendations of the Resilience Working Group
- Business Case for the Digital Archive and Captioning Annunciator
- Internal Communications Quarterly Update
- Draft Assembly Commission Paper on Funding for Sign Language Interpretation for Meetings Organised by MLAs
- Allocation of Accommodation for Political Parties in Parliament Buildings following the May 2022 Election.

The meeting ended at 12.34 pm.