

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**FRIDAY, 11 AUGUST 2023 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present:

**Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive
Steven Baxter, Director of Corporate Services
Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services
Paul Gill, Clerk Assistant (deputising for Gareth McGrath, Director of
Parliamentary Services)**

In Attendance:

**Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Billy Mahoney, Deputy Head of Finance – Secretariat (Items 7 and 8)
Gary Browne, Senior Accountant (Item 7)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 9, 10, and 11)
Hugh Stewart, Head of Building Services (Items 12 and 13)
Christine Watts, Environment and Health and Safety Manager (Item 12)
Sebastien Mingout, Support Services Manager (Item 13)
Paddy McAllister, Deputy Head of IT (Item 14)**

The meeting commenced at 9.31 am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Gareth McGrath, Paul Gill deputised.

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 28 June 2023 had been published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg provided an update and reiterated the need for staff to retain readiness to support the Assembly when normal business resumes.

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Lesley advised that the date of the next Assembly Commission meeting had yet to be agreed.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Centenary Stone
- Review of Members' Security
- Corporate Strategy 2023 – 2028

CORPORATE SERVICES

Billy Mahoney joined the meeting at 9.43 am for agenda items 7 and 8.

Gary Browne joined the meeting at 9.43 am for agenda item 7.

7. Management Accounts

Billy Mahoney and Gary Browne presented the Management Accounts for June 2023.

Steven Baxter advised that, as the next SMT meeting was not until 22 September, the July 2023 Management Accounts would issue to SMT via correspondence and that the August 2023 Management Accounts, updated in line with the summer monitoring return, would go to the September meeting as normal.

SMT noted the current forecast outturn for Resource DEL against the Main Estimate position.

Billy highlighted current financial pressures in relation to Salary and Admin costs. Lesley stated the importance, given budget pressures, of robust forecasting and monitoring of salary costs by the Finance Office, working closely with the HR Office and Directorate Management Teams.

Gary Browne advised SMT of expenditure in relation to Members' costs. On discussing Member Establishment Costs, it was agreed that going forward the budget should be more heavily weighted to the first year of the mandate. SMT asked for this to be included in the end of mandate lessons learned report.

With regards future financial forecasting, Steven proposed revising the planning assumption for a return to normal Assembly business from 1 September 2023 to 1 November 2023 and this was agreed.

Steven also noted that the summer monitoring exercise would allow for more detailed analysis, which would assist with assessing the affordability of planned expenditure.

SMT noted the current forecast outturn for Capital DEL. Billy advised SMT of a potential shortfall in capital budget should a number of projects under consideration by business areas be approved. SMT agreed that capital expenditure needed to continue to be closely monitored.

Gary Browne left the meeting at 10.12 am.

8. Report to Those Charged with Governance

Billy presented the final Report to Those Charged with Governance, which had been prepared by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) following an audit of the Assembly Commission's 2022/23 financial statements.

SMT considered the draft management responses in relation to the NIAO's findings and, following discussion, agreed some revisions.

Action: Billy to amend the proposed draft management responses as agreed and re-circulate to SMT for approval.

Billy Mahoney left the meeting at 10.21 am.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 10.26 am for agenda items 9,10 and 11.

9. HR Management Information

Sinéad McDonnell provided the usual monthly HR Management Information in relation to staff complement/staff in post, temporary promotion/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments, as at 1 July 2023.

Sinéad updated SMT on the progress of recent recruitment exercises. On reviewing the Recruitment Schedule, Tara Caul asked that the competition for a Senior Research Officer, AG4, currently in the non-scheduled section be moved to the scheduled period July to October 2023. SMT approved this request.

Sinead also advised that the Finance Office had asked for existing AG6 and AG8 roles to be added to the Recruitment Schedule to reflect the priority of these posts. SMT approved this request.

10. Hybrid Working Policy Review

SMT noted the report arising from the Hybrid Working Policy Review process, which had been reviewed in detail by the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Head of HR at a separate meeting on 18 July 2023.

Action: Sinéad to meet with Heads of Business to discuss the findings within the Report.

11. Grading and Pay Benchmarking Review - Post Project Evaluation Report

Sinéad presented a draft Post Project Evaluation (PPE) report in relation to the Grading and Pay Benchmarking Review project.

Following consideration of the draft PPE report, SMT agreed that some further comments should be incorporated and that, prior to finalisation, a further review of the draft PPE should be undertaken once the recommendations from the Pay Benchmarking Report have been implemented.

Action: Sinéad to arrange for a summary of the lessons learned to be published on the PPE registry once the PPE is finalised.

SMT thanked Sinéad for the excellent work undertaken in both this project and the Hybrid Working Policy Review.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 10.39 am.

Meeting suspended at 10.39 am and resumed at 10.50 am.

Hugh Stewart joined the meeting at 10.50 am for agenda items 12 and 13.

Christine Watts joined the meeting at 10.50 am for agenda item 12.

12. Annual Environmental Management Review 2022 - 2023

Christine Watts presented the annual Environmental Management Review for 2022 - 2023.

SMT noted the progress made against the Continuous Improvement Action Plan and the environmental objectives, targets and management programmes for 2022 - 2023.

Christine subsequently presented the proposed initiatives for the Continuous Improvement Action Plan and the environmental objectives and targets for 2023-24.

Following consideration, SMT proposed some amendments to the Environmental Management Review for 2022-23, the draft Continuous

Improvement Action Plan and the environmental objectives and targets for 2023-24.

Action: Christine to update the Management Review, Continuous Improvement Action Plan and environmental objective and targets for 2023-24, as agreed, and re-circulate to SMT for approval.

SMT also considered and approved a proposal in relation to the establishment of an Environmental Working Group.

Christine Watts left the meeting at 11.22 am.

Sebastien Mingout joined the meeting at 11.22 am for agenda item 13.

13. Office Resources Update

Sebastien Mingout presented a service delivery implementation plan and pilot proposal in relation to a new ordering system for stationery and IT consumables for Members and Assembly staff.

Tara highlighted the importance of the file management system managed by Office Resources staff and stated that it might need investment to ensure that it remained fit for purpose.

Following consideration, SMT proposed some amendments to the proposed service delivery implementation plan and pilot scheme.

Action: Sebastien to review the current file management system and assess both the ongoing viability of the system and the resource required.

Action: Sebastien to update the paper as proposed and re-circulate to SMT for approval.

Hugh Stewart and Sebastien Mingout left the meeting at 11.58 am.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Paddy McAllister joined the meeting at 11.58 am for agenda item 14.

14. Business Case for Mobile Phone Provision

Paddy McAllister presented a business case for the procurement of mobile phone provision.

Paddy outlined a number of options with a recommendation to proceed with Option 5, i.e. to procure a five-year contract for mobile phone provisions with unified endpoint management implementation and support, and

support in migrating staff email and calendar to Microsoft 365 Exchange Online.

Steven outlined the need to ensure that mobile phone provision was part of a wider strategic discussion with particular reference to device provision, non-desk based staff and the use of technology across all business areas.

Following consideration, SMT approved the business case for mobile phone provision, in line with the preferred option as recommended.

Paddy McAllister left the meeting at 12.40 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

15. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Systems Review Project

Steven updated SMT on the Systems Review Project.

Finance Office

Steven advised of ongoing staff resourcing issues within the Finance Office and stated that the structure and staffing model of the Finance Office was to be reviewed.

Usher Services

Steven noted that initial discussions had taken place with the HR Office regarding a possible Usher recruitment competition later in the year.

Internal Audit Plan

Steven noted that an initial Internal Audit Plan had been discussed with Ernst & Young and shared with Directors. He stated that the plan included four specific visits during the year.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Litigation

Tara updated SMT on ongoing litigation.

Governance

Tara noted that the next Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee meeting was scheduled for 25 October 2023.

Information Standards

Tara updated SMT on two complaints made to the Information Commissioner's Office.

Tara advised that the annual file review was progressing well and that the Assembly Commission's Retention and Disposal Schedule would be considered by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) Validation Panel in September 2023. SMT also noted that the first Sensitivity Review had been completed.

Research and Information Service (RaISe)

SMT noted the ongoing work within RaISe.

Procurement

SMT noted the ongoing procurement projects.

Tara referred to the current Property Maintenance collaborative contract which expires in March 2024, and stated that action needed to be taken as soon as possible to assess the future requirement and how it is procured.

Action: Steven to liaise with the Head of Procurement in relation to the provision of property maintenance following expiry of the current contract in March 2024.

Tara also informed SMT that the current standard terms and conditions of contracts were being reviewed and would be introduced for new contracts from September 2024.

Lesley noted a break in the service provision in relation to the office furniture contract, Steven to investigate.

Action: Steven to liaise with the Head of Building Services in relation to the break in service provision of the office furniture contract.

16. AOB

There was no other business.

17. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 22 September 2023.

18. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Review of Capital Management
- Corporate Strategy 2023-28

- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Review of the Risk Management Strategy
- Internal Communications Quarterly Update
- Update on the Work of the Internal Communications Group April 2023 to September 2023

The meeting ended at 1.00 pm.