SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

WEDNESDAY, 3 MAY 2023 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support (Items 5 and 6)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 7 and 8)
Cathy McGowan, Learning and Development Manager (Item 8)
David Lynn, Roof Project Manager (Item 9)
Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications (Item 12)
Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer (Item 12)
Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IT (Item 14)
Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Items 15 and 16)

The meeting commenced at 9.34 am.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

Lesley Hogg welcomed the new Director of Corporate Services, Steven Baxter, to his first SMT meeting.

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 March 2023 had been published.

4.   SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Lesley noted that the update provided in relation to the end of Mandate Lessons Learned report, in respect of the work of the Finance Office, appeared to limit the scope of the Report to Members and advised that this was not to be the case.

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

5.   Political Update

Lesley noted that local Government Elections would be taking place in council areas across Northern Ireland on 18 May 2023.

Lesley advised that she would be meeting with Directors and Heads of Business on 17 May to discuss a number of business matters.

Gareth McGrath noted that a copy of the Northern Ireland (Interim Arrangements) Bill, which was introduced to the House of Commons on Thursday, 27 April 2023, had been circulated to the relevant officials.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6.   Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

SMT noted that officials were considering a possible date for the next Assembly Commission meeting.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Pay Claim 2023
- Annual Plan 2022-23 End of Year Performance Report
- Five-Year Review of the Disability Action Plan 2018-2023
- Gender Action Plan 2019-2023 Closure Report
- Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy and Procedures Report for 2022-23
- Interim Review of the Pioneer Phase of the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.44 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 9.47 am for agenda items 7 and 8.

7.   HR Management Information

Sinéad McDonnell presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 April 2023.

SMT noted the temporary promotions/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place. Sinéad informed SMT of the expenditure incurred under the Temporary Worker Contract for the period 28 June 2021 to 31 March 2023. SMT noted that although expenditure was more than the estimated spend for the period, it was still within the overall agreed contract value.

Sinéad updated SMT on recruitment activity. In light of pausing the recruitment competitions for the IS Office and in order to utilise the temporary Recruitment Team, Sinéad proposed bringing forward recruitment competitions for AG6 Engagement and Outreach Coordinator (formally Outreach Officer), AG6 Payroll Manager and AG8 Clerical Officer. SMT was content with this proposal. A competition for a permanent AG7 Senior Usher was also added to the Recruitment Schedule.

SMT considered and approved a request for an increase in the value of the contract for recruitment testing as outlined in the paper, to support current recruitment activity.

SMT also approved a request from Tara Caul to extend the AG5 Procurement Manager temporary staff complement so that it would run from 1 June 2023 for a period of 12 months.

Sickness absence information was noted.

Cathy McGowan joined the meeting at 9.59 am for agenda item 8.

8.   Corporate Learning and Development Matters

Sinéad and Cathy McGowan presented a paper which outlined three matters relating to corporate learning and development.

Sinéad stated that currently corporate learning and development activities are reported under both the Corporate Learning and Development Framework and the Learning and Development Strategy. In order to streamline and consolidate activities, Sinéad proposed presenting corporate learning and development activities under the three Priorities in the Learning and Development Strategy, and to withdraw the Learning and Development Framework.

Following consideration, SMT approved the new approach as proposed.

Sinéad and Cathy outlined in detail the proposed corporate learning and development activities for 2023/24, under the three Priorities in the Learning and Development Strategy, along with the associated budget.

On discussing the changes that were being made to the 'People Manager Programme' following feedback from staff, it was noted that a pilot of the new 'Essential People Skills for Managers' module was taking place. SMT requested a copy of the proposed content of the module once the pilot had run and feedback had been considered.

Sinéad noted that the spend associated with redesigning and delivering the People Manager Programme was higher than budget and the overall cost of all the proposed Learning and Development activities in the paper was significantly higher than budget.

In view of budget pressures, SMT agreed to limit the proposed increase in the Learning and Development budget to £38k, bringing the total Learning and Development budget to £100k for the year; and that Learning and Development activities would be realigned to match the available budget.

Action: Cathy to forward the content of the 'Essential People Skills for Managers' module of the 'People Manager Programme' to SMT following the conclusion of the pilot.

In relation to the objective to enhance inter-team collaboration and communication, Cathy advised that discussions were ongoing with the IS Office to explore the possibility of maximising the use of MS Teams and that in-house awareness training for Citizen Space was being delivered by the Assembly's Engagement Team.

Steven stated that the Microsoft licence may come with a range of courses and that it would be worth reviewing these to see if any could be used or tailored for use by staff. It was agreed that Gareth would meet with Mary-Ellen Nutt (Head of IT) and Steven to discuss the wider opportunities of using Microsoft products more generally.

Action: Gareth to meet with Mary-Ellen and Steven to discuss the wider opportunities of using Microsoft products more generally.

SMT asked that when business areas are planning bespoke training, consideration should be given to whether it would also be useful to other business areas. Sinéad advised that the HR Office already did this and would continue to do so going forward.

In relation to Application and Interview Skills training, SMT felt that demand was likely to exceed that proposed in the paper and asked that the Learning and Development Team give consideration to maximising the number of attendees that could be accommodated per course.

SMT considered proposals arising from the review of Mandatory eLearning. Sinéad advised that currently there were ten mandatory eLearning courses

with an additional three in development, and that feedback from staff indicated a perception that there are too many mandatory eLearning courses.

Following discussion, SMT agreed that a critical assessment of what should be included in the list of Mandatory eLearning was required, along with how training was designated as mandatory, and asked the Learning and Development Team to give the matter further consideration.

Action: Learning and Development Team to prepare a paper on Mandatory eLearning, for consideration by SMT at a future meeting.

Sinéad raised the limited staff resources within the Learning and Development Team and asked if there would be an opportunity to bid for an additional staff member at AG8. Lesley stated that due to significant budget pressures a bid for additional staff could not be considered at this time.

Steven thanked Sinéad and Cathy for their efforts in preparing such a well-structured paper.

Sinéad McDonnell and Cathy McGowan left the meeting at 11.04 am.

David Lynn joined the meeting at 11.04 am for agenda item 9.

9.   Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings

David Lynn presented a draft Assembly Commission paper, which provided an update on the current position in relation to defects in the roof of Parliament Buildings.

David advised SMT of some temporary measures that had been introduced to ensure the health and safety of building users and additional planned remedial works.

SMT noted the update and approved, subject to some minor amendments, the draft paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, noting that it was likely to require updating prior to the Assembly Commission meeting to reflect ongoing developments.

Action: David to amend the draft Assembly Commission paper as agreed by SMT and update if required, prior to the next Assembly Commission meeting.

David Lynn left the meeting at 11.19 am.

Meeting suspended at 11.19 am and resumed at 11.28 am.

10. Annual Plan 2022-23 End of Year Performance Report

Lesley presented the draft Annual Plan 2022-23 End of Year Performance Report, together with a draft Assembly Commission paper for consideration by SMT.

SMT reviewed the Report and following discussion, agreed that some outcomes should be amended to more accurately reflect progress.

Action: Lesley to update the Annual Pan 2022-23 End of Year Performance Report for presentation to the Assembly Commission, as agreed by SMT.

Change to agenda running order.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Michael Cairns and Liz Beaton joined the meeting at 11.41 am for agenda item 12.

12. Internal Communications Quarterly Update

Michael Cairns and Liz Beaton presented a paper on internal communications activity that had taken place since the last update provided to SMT on 31 January 2023.

Liz informed SMT of the achievements and milestones reached under the four themes of the Internal Communications Strategy and outlined the planned activity for the period April to July 2023.

Michael referred to the Corporate Calendar on AssISt, which he stated could be better used as a planning tool and agreed to discuss this at one of the Heads of Business (HoBs) meetings.

SMT briefly discussed the Members' Portal and Lesley asked that the current stock images be replaced.

Action: Gareth to arrange for the stock images within the Members' Portal to be replaced.

Liz asked SMT to consider which business area should feature in the May/June edition of the Staff Newsletter. Following discussion, it was agreed that Liz should agree a programme with HoBs for the next six months.

Liz informed SMT that Research and Information Services (RaISe) was analysing staff feedback from the recent 'All Staff Event' and that this would be considered by the Internal Communications Group at its next meeting.

Tara thanked Liz for her help producing the podcast to explain the Supporting Personal Resilience Working Group's findings and recommendations.

Michael Cairns and Liz Beaton left the meeting at 12.12 pm.

13.   Renewal of Microsoft Enterprise Agreement 2022 Post Project Evaluation

This paper was deferred to the June 2024 SMT meeting.

Mary-Ellen Nutt joined the meeting at 12.12 pm for agenda item 14.

14.   Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Cyber Security

Mary-Ellen Nutt presented a paper highlighting the need to further enhance protection across the Assembly Commission's data and systems, in light of an ever-increasing cyber threat.

Mary-Ellen noted that there was no explicit Cyber Security Risk on the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and that it was part of a wider security incident risk. She therefore recommended that it was separated out into a discrete risk and managed at a corporate level. Mary-Ellen also proposed that the Assembly Commission carry out an independent technical review to support the creation of an Assembly Commission Digital Strategy.

Following consideration, SMT agreed that 'Cyber Security Risk' should be a discrete risk on the CRR and managed at a corporate level. SMT also approved the preparation of a Business Case for an independent Cyber Security review of all Assembly Commission IT systems.

Action: Mary-Ellen to prepare a Business Case for an independent Cyber Security review of all Assembly Commission IT systems, for consideration by SMT at its next meeting.

Mary-Ellen Nutt left the meeting at 12.23 pm.

11.   Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy and Procedures Report for 2022-23

Gareth presented a draft Assembly Commission paper, outlining that one complaint had been received during the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

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

Action: Gareth to arrange for the draft Assembly Commission paper to be amended as proposed by SMT.

Lesley stated that going forward, it would be useful for SMT to be notified of any complaints and the outcome of any investigations as soon as they are concluded. It was agreed that any future complaints would be reported in the relevant monthly Directors' Update to SMT.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark joined the meeting at 12.32 pm for agenda items 15 and 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 14 March 2023 to discuss the CRR in detail.

SMT agreed 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 for June 2023.

16.   Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers

SMT reviewed the contents of the April 2023 DRRs for Corporate Services, Legal, Governance and Research Services and Parliamentary Services

SMT also considered emerging Risk Clusters and agreed that other than Cyber Security as previously discussed, there were no further risks that required escalation to the CRR.

It was agreed, that the removal of DR6 'Assembly Commission IS Office managed IT systems are Vulnerable to cyber-attack', from the Parliamentary Services DRR should be reflected in the next biannual review of DRRs scheduled for September 2023.

Donna-Marie Clark left the meeting at 12.48 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

17.   Directors' Updates

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Litigation

Tara noted ongoing litigation.

Examiner of Statutory Rules

Tara advised that although the Assembly was not conducting normal business, the Examiner continued to consider those statutory rules that were subject to Assembly procedure and laid before the Assembly.

Governance

Tara stated that the next meeting of the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee was scheduled for 18 May 2023.

Information Standards

Tara informed SMT that comments from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland on the Assembly Commission's Retention and Disposal Schedule were currently being reviewed by the Data Protection and Governance Officer.

Tara advised that the first Records Management Sensitivity Review was currently being conducted. She highlighted the significant amount of work involved with the review, and in light of the small team within Information Standards, sought a temporary AG4 member of staff to assist with the review. Gareth agreed to provide temporary cover from within the existing staff complement of the Parliamentary Services Directorate.

RaISe

Tara noted the work carried out by RaISe since the last update to SMT.

Procurement

Tara advised SMT of a Procurement Initiation Form that had been introduced by the Procurement Office to assist with the management of procurement projects and provided an update on current procurement projects.

Tara highlighted that a business case for the procurement of replacement mobile phones, was needed as a matter of urgency.

Parliamentary Services

Gareth provided a detailed account of the work undertaken by Clerking, Hansard, Public Engagement, the Communications Office and the Information Systems Office, since last reported at the SMT meeting on 28 March 2023.

Corporate Services

HR Office

Steven informed SMT that the provision of HR Services to Members was due to be reviewed, and the outcome of the Review would be presented to SMT in the Autumn.

Finance Office

Steven noted ongoing staffing pressures within the Finance Office, which he stated were particularly challenging during year-end activities.

Building Services

Steven noted the ongoing refurbishment work in the Committee meeting rooms.

18.   AOB

There was no other business.

19.   Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 2 June 2023.

20.   Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Office Resources Update
- Annual Environmental Management Review
- Pay Claim 2023
- Public Engagement Activity: Biannual Report (November 2022 to April 2023)
- Business Case for the Procurement of an Independent Technical Security Specialist to undertake a Cyber Security Review
- Interim Review of the Pioneer Phase of the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

The meeting ended at 1.28 pm.