

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP PERFORMANCE FORMAT

FRIDAY, 4 JULY 2014 AT 9.35AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Trevor Reaney
Gareth McGrath
John Stewart
Richard Stewart
Stephen Welch
Hugh Widdis

In Attendance: Jim Beatty
Brian Moreland
Sinead McDonnell
Cathy McGowan

1 Opening/Review

(a) Apologies

There were no apologies.

(b) Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

(c) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of 6 June 2014 had been approved and were published on 19 June 2014.

(d) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

2 Action Points

- 2.1 The Action Points list was reviewed. Members were asked to advise Jim Beatty of any further updates/amendments.

3 Strategic Work Strands

(a) Assembly Future Terms of Reference

- 3.1 Gareth McGrath spoke to this paper. The primary and immediate focus of the group is to review the Corporate Strategy before considering its other work. The group plans to meet in August. SMG discussed the breadth of membership of the group and it was agreed that Stephen Welch would take this forward with Gareth McGrath.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

(b) Organisational Development Terms of Reference

- 3.2 Richard Stewart spoke to this paper. Based on the overarching parameters set by the Clerk/Chief Executive, the key focus will be on monitoring and reviewing the OD Strategy.

(c) Resource Planning Group Terms of Reference

- 3.3 John Stewart spoke to this paper. The group has met twice and plans to next meet again on 24 July 2014. The Terms of Reference are almost completed – the Finance section needs to be amended. John Stewart said that John Gibson would bring a revised Justifications and Business Case Policy to SMG in September 2014 following a discussion at the Resource Planning Group. It was noted that the work of the former Financial Management Group (FMG) has been subsumed within this group and SMG recognised the work and contributions from those within the FMG.

(d) Draft Organisational Strategy

- 3.4 Richard Stewart spoke to this paper. The OD Steering Group has identified four principal themes for the strategy, namely:-
- Skilful and Knowledgeable – A Learning Organisation;
 - Engaged and Empowered – An Accountable Organisation;
 - Responsive, Modern, Innovative – A Progressive Organisation;
 - and
 - Excellence in Service Delivery – A Professional Organisation

SMG agreed that this was a framework to take forward and not a detailed plan for delivery. It was also recognised that acceptance and implementation of the strategy will entail a significant resource investment at a time when such funding is limited. It was agreed that this vital work needed to proceed and would be given priority in budget planning. It was also agreed to refer the paper for consultation. Richard Stewart agreed to include this as an item on the agenda for the next Employee Relations Board meeting.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

4 Corporate Strategy – Measures of Success

- 4.1 Trevor Reaney said that it was relatively early within the business year to assess performance but emphasised the need for continued monitoring and review.
- 4.2 Gareth McGrath said that the results of the recent Members' survey should be available in September 2014.

5 Budgets 2014/15 Update

- 5.1 Richard Stewart said that in its final meeting the Financial Management Group had agreed the budget for 2014/15.

6 Budget Planning 2015/16

- 6.1 Trevor Reaney said Directors had been asked to consider the impact of pressures on 2015/16 budgets and to send their assessments to Richard Stewart who will collate them for the Clerk/Chief Executive.

7. Directorate Business Plans

- 7.1 Returns for Directorate performance against business plans for q/e 30 June 2014 have just been completed and a summary will be brought to the next SMG meeting. It may be necessary to amend business plans in light of financial pressures.

8. Corporate Risk Register

(a) Review

- 8.1 Hugh Widdis introduced this paper. Subject to some changes within an e-mail from Gareth McGrath, the register was accepted as it stands.

(b) Refresh

- 8.2 Hugh Widdis said that the contents of the current risk register, although updated regularly, have not substantially changed since July 2012 and it was timely to review the risks and the allocation of risk ownership.

- 8.3 SMG discussed and identified some continuing and some changing factors. Hugh Widdis will develop further and recirculate before the 3 September 2014.

ACTION: HUGH WIDDIS

9. Internal Audit Update

- 9.1 Brian Moreland joined the meeting at 11.05am and spoke to his paper. The overall level of assurance remains satisfactory and the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee is positive about the improved findings.
- 9.2 Eleven Internal Audit reports were issued in final form in respect of work completed for the 2013/14 programme. Four of these were assessed as substantial, six were satisfactory and one was limited. A number of follow-up audits have also been completed. The four assignments currently in progress are Members' Expenses, the Justice Committee, Information Assurance and Ethics. Directors discussed the rationale and scope of the audit into ethics. The Clerk/Chief Executive welcomed undertaking this innovative audit.
- 9.3 Price Waterhouse Cooper has been appointed as a supplier for investigative services.

10. Internal Communication Action Plan

- 10.1 Sinead McDonnell joined the meeting at 11.25am and spoke to this paper. The Internal Communications Action Plan was agreed by SMG in April 2014 and this represented an initial review only.
- 10.2 SMG noted the progress to date and recommended some changes. It was agreed that Directors would confirm the appointment of AsslSt editors within each business area.

ACTION: DIRECTORS

11. HR Management Information

- 11.1 Sinead McDonnell spoke to the paper on this issue. At 31 May 2014 a total of 70 training days have occurred which equates to an average of 0.2 days per staff member.
- 11.2 Over the next year, the HR Office will roll out a number of formal training events across the Assembly Secretariat which will continue to build on the average number of training days. These events will include Project Management, Financial Planning and Budgetary Management, Health & Safety Awareness, Fire Awareness, Health and

Well-Being sessions, Social Media, Drugs, Alcohol & Substance abuse, Contract Management and Whistleblowing.

- 11.3 In 2010, SMG agreed an absence benchmark of 7.5 average working days lost per annum per employee. The cumulative average working days lost per employee for the period June 2013 – May 2014 was 8.1 days, which represents a decrease of 2.7 days compared with the June 2012 – May 2013 figure of 10.8 days
- 11.4 SMG noted that at 1 June 2014 381.4 staff were working within the Secretariat of which 363.5 were permanent staff.

12. Review of Job Evaluation Policy

- 12.1 Sinead McDonnell said that in May 2014 SMG had asked for a review of the current policy to be carried out. This review has now been completed.
- 12.2 Some issues were identified in meetings with stakeholders and it was proposed that the suggested changes will bring clarity to the process. Aside from these changes, Human Resources Office will also develop separate guidance for Directors to assist them when considering requests from their staff on the re-evaluation of a post.
- 12.3 SMG discussed the revised policy, especially the ‘felt fair’ section and it was agreed that Sinead McDonnell would provide further information to the Clerk/Chief Executive to enable him to decide on the application of the revised policy to current processes.

ACTION: SINEAD MCDONNELL

13. Engagement Strategy

- 13.1 John Stewart spoke to this paper. The Project Board had met on 1 July 2014 and considered the comments received from Directors on the draft document. Some further changes were identified by the Project Board Chairperson, Caitriona Ruane MLA.
- 13.2 SMG welcomed the draft and agreed to refer it to the Commission for approval. However, it was recognised that the full funding to implement the strategy was not yet available and this will require further consideration by the Commission within the overall budget pressures.

14. Programme and Project Management

- 14.1 John Stewart said that this issue had been before SMG previously and the paper had been amended accordingly. Having considered a

number of project and programme management methodologies, it was recommended that the Secretariat adopts PRINCE2 as the accepted methodology. After discussion, this was agreed.

- 14.2 In the past, 15 staff have already undertaken formal PRINCE2 training and 45 staff have had other project training that used similar tools and terminology. Further staff training, to also include senior managers, will be necessary and Gareth McGrath suggested that this should be incorporated into Personal Development Plans.

15. Microsoft Premier Support Renewal – Business Case

- 15.1 John Stewart said that Microsoft offers a Premier Support Agreement to large enterprise customers and the public sector clients to assist in the development, deployment and management of business systems based on Microsoft products. This comprises proactive technical support; access to fast, expert resolution of technical issues for all Microsoft products on a 24x7 basis; specialist focused training workshops, seminars and workshops on current and emerging technologies and enhanced access to an Account Manager. The service is delivered via telephone and web based contact centres.
- 15.2 The service has been used successfully for the past 12 years providing insurance against system software faults that disable critical business systems along with support for emerging technologies.
- 15.3 This support now needed to be renewed and it was proposed that the new contract should be for three years – full details were provided within the business case. After consideration, SMG approved the business case.

16. Usher Services – Internal Audit Review

- 16.1 Stephen Welch spoke to this paper. The Assembly's Internal Audit office recently carried out an audit of Usher Services and awarded an assurance level of Satisfactory. 14 recommendations arose out of the audit, all of which have been accepted by Facilities Directorate. Actions in respect of 11 of those recommendations which are either risk rating (2) or (3), have already been completed or are scheduled for completion within the next few weeks.
- 16.2 The remaining three recommendations which are risk rating (1) were considered by SMG. These recommendations relate to Members' access, external/internal access and a risk register.
- 16.3 It was agreed that the issues would be referred to the Commission indicating support for implementation of the recommendations in reducing risks.

17. Gender Action Plan Findings Report

- 17.1 Cathy McGowan joined the meeting at 12.38pm and spoke to this paper. On 12 June 2013, at the request of the Clerk/Chief Executive, a group of senior staff met to discuss how the Secretariat might examine the existence of any barriers, whether perceived or actual, in relation to gender within the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat and to consider what actions might be necessary.
- 17.2 The Gender Action Plan Steering Group used a questionnaire and desk based research to inform the findings of its report and the recommendations within the report were before SMG for consideration. The key recommendations were:-
- A Gender Action Plan is established for the Assembly Secretariat in order to implement the recommendations identified within the report at Annex A.
 - The initial Draft Gender Action Plan report be tabled at the September 2014 Commission meeting and, if the report is agreed, issued to Secretariat staff for information.
 - The initial Gender Action Plan is further developed by a group of nominated Secretariat staff who will ensure timely implementation and monitoring.
- 17.3 SMG welcomed the report and discussed its findings. It was agreed that further consideration was required on the points raised. Trevor Reaney will speak with the Equality Officer, Maria Bannon, and write to Directors.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

18. Commission/SMG Business

- 18.1 Cathy McGowan presented the agenda for the Commission meeting for 17 September 2014. The proposed items are:-
- Clerk/CE's Update
 - External Lighting of Parliament Buildings
 - Members Development Programme
 - Engagement Strategy
 - Budget Planning
 - Usher Service Internal Audit Report
 - Recognition of CS Lewis and S Heaney
 - Gender Action Plan
- 18.2 SMG noted the Forward Work Plan to March 2015.

19. Directors' Updates

- 19.1 John Stewart briefed colleagues on good progress in relation to the Laptop Replacement Project, Assembly Community Connect and NIABT Annual General Meetings, meetings with diplomats from Israel and Azerbaijan and meetings with the British Council NI and US-UK Fulbright Commission on opportunities to work together in the future. John thanked colleagues in Research and Library Services for their work on the WW1 Interactive Exhibition for the Great Hall and colleagues in Communications and Outreach for their work on progressing the new Engagement Strategy, Digital First Strategy and Print Reduction Plan.
- 19.2 Richard Stewart reminded Directors of the need for everyone to submit PPAs and PDPs.
- 19.3 Stephen Welch provided an update on the roof project and the sale of Ormiston House.
- 19.4 Hugh Widdis told SMG that Simon Kelly has taken up the post of Legal Advisor. ISG had considered a recommendation to enhance security in connection with personal devices linking to the NIA e-mail server and was considering how best to control access.

20. Items cleared by correspondence

- 20.1 SMG noted that the no items had been issued for clearance by correspondence since the last meeting

21 Future Cycle of Meetings

- 21.1 Trevor Reaney presented a future timetable for SMG meetings up to July 2015 based on a rotation of the three themes, namely, performance, policy and strategy. This was agreed.

22. AOB

- 22.1 No items were raised.

23 Next Meeting

- 23.1 The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, 3 September 2014 at 9.30am in Room 106.

The meeting adjourned at 1.15pm.