

# **SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)**

**WEDNESDAY, 31 JANUARY 2024 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  
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)  
Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR (Items 7, 8 and 9)  
Terri Quigley, Head of Facilities Management (Item 11)  
Christine Watts, Environmental Services and Health and Safety  
Manager (Item 11)  
Ken Eccles, Head of Usher Services/Security (Item 12)  
Steve Cardwell, Principal Assembly Usher (Item 12)  
Dan Hull, Senior Research Officer (Items 13 and 14)  
Frank Geddis, Clerk Assistant (Item 16)  
Barbara Love, Assembly Clerk (Item 16)  
Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IT (Items 17 and 18)  
Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications (Items 19 and 20)  
Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer (Item 19)**

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 14 December 2023 had been published.

#### **4. SMT Action Points**

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

SMT agreed that the outstanding action in relation to the Retention and Disposal Schedule could be recorded as complete.

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

#### **5. Political Update**

Lesley Hogg noted that news of a possible resumption of normal Assembly business was very positive.

#### **6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda**

Robin Ramsey 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
- Corporate Strategy 2023-2028
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Review of Security Arrangements for Members
- Service Level Agreement between the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and the Police Service of Northern Ireland

*Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.50 am.*

### **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Karen Martin joined the meeting at 9.51 am for agenda items 7, 8 and 9.*

#### **7. HR Management Information**

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 January 2024.

Karen advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 January 2024 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 320.2 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 375.3 FTE.

SMT noted the temporary promotions/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place.

Karen informed SMT of the current expenditure under the agency worker contract, and that the three year initial term was due to expire in June 2024

and sought approval to exercise the first one-year extension option. SMT was content to approve the extension option.

Karen presented the Recruitment Schedule which she noted had been revised following discussion at the SMT meeting on 14 December 2023.

Following review of the Schedule, SMT agreed that the competitions for an AG6 General Manager within Research and Library Services (RaLSe) and Chairperson of the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee (ACARC), should be added.

Karen updated SMT on recent recruitment activity. SMT noted that the AG6 Lead Software Developer post had been filled temporarily by an agency worker and that the Head of Business (HoB) would consider how the post should be filled in the longer term.

Karen referred to the hard copy documentation currently provided to interview panel members for recruitment sift meetings, and advised of the proposal to move to soft copy documentation. SMT was content with this proposal, but stated that hard copies should be made available if requested and that appropriate guidance in relation to the security and management of soft copy documentation should be provided to panel members.

Karen advised that the procurement exercise for the Recruitment Assessments and Testing contract had completed and that the anticipated cost over the lifetime of the contract was higher than the value approved by SMT in the business case. In light of this, Karen sought SMT's views on the way forward, outlining three options. Following discussion, SMT agreed to vary the value of the business case approved on 28 February 2023, to that outlined in the paper.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period January 2023 to December 2023, the average sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 15.5 days, compared with an average of 12.2 days during the period January 2022 to December 2022. Karen confirmed that sickness absences continued to be monitored and managed in accordance with the Managing Attendance Policy. Steven Baxter suggested, and it was agreed, that information on sickness absences would be presented in terms of long term and short term absence, in future HR Management Information papers to SMT.

## **8. Section 75 Monitoring Survey for Permanent Assembly Commission Staff (2024)**

Karen noted that the last Section 75 Monitoring Survey had been carried out in 2021 and to ensure that data used for equality screening is as up to date as possible, she sought approval to issue a further survey to permanent Assembly Commission staff.

Karen advised that the Equality Manager and RaLSe had reviewed the 2021

Section 75 Survey and proposed some minor amendments to reflect current developments.

Following consideration, SMT approved the issuing of the proposed updated survey, subject to a further minor amendment.

**Action:** Karen to update the Section 75 Monitoring Survey as requested by SMT, and arrange for it to be issued to all permanent Assembly Commission staff.

## **9. 2022 Staff Survey Action Plan Update**

Karen provided an update on the 2022 Staff Survey Action Plan and, in light of the progress made, sought approval to close down the Plan.

Following consideration, SMT was content for the Plan to be closed down as the small number of ongoing actions were now being progressed through other workstreams, subject to amendments being made to the status of some actions.

**Action:** Karen to arrange for the 2022 Staff Survey Action Plan to be updated as requested by SMT.

SMT acknowledged the significant amount of work that had been undertaken by staff to deliver on the actions within the Plan and recorded its thanks to the Head of HR, Sinéad McDonnell and her Team for all their efforts.

*Karen Martin left the meeting at 10.26 am.*

## **10. Management Accounts**

Due to pressures within the Finance Office, it was noted that the Management Accounts for December 2023 would not be presented at the meeting, but instead issued to SMT via correspondence for consideration.

*Terri Quigley and Christine Watts joined the meeting at 10.33 am for agenda item 11.*

## **11. Health and Safety Management Report 2023**

Terri Quigley and Christine Watts presented the Health and Safety Management Report for the period January to December 2023 and advised that a new electronic Display Screen Equipment (DSE) self-assessment would be launched in 2024-25.

SMT acknowledged the proactive measures undertaken by the Health and Safety Team, which had led to a significant increase in the number of trained first aiders within Parliament Buildings.

Lesley noted that some of the Fire Risk Assessment recommendations made following visits in August 2023, by a Department of Finance Fire Officer, were basic fire prevention measures, and queried why these had not been picked up in the routine checks carried out by the relevant Assembly staff. She also queried whether business areas should be conducting regular fire safety checks in their offices and asked that staff receive regular communications in relation to fire safety and the importance of compliance with fire safety requirements.

Terri and Christine also proposed some further measures that could be introduced to help prevent the recommendations identified in the Fire Risk Assessment from re-occurring in future assessments.

**Action:** Health and Safety Team to arrange for regular communications to issue to staff in relation to fire safety.

*Terri Quigley and Christine Watts left the meeting at 10.50 am.*

*Ken Eccles and Steve Cardwell joined the meeting at 10.50 am for agenda item 12.*

## **12. Service Level Agreement (SLA) Between Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)**

Ken Eccles presented a draft SLA for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2027, noting that the current SLA between the Assembly Commission and the PSNI, in relation to the provision of policing at Parliament Buildings, expires on 31 March 2024.

Following consideration of the draft SLA, SMT asked that clarification be sought on some of the detail within, prior to it being referred to the Assembly Commission for approval, as required under the Clerk/Chief Executive's letter of delegation

**Action:** Ken to seek clarification on some of the detail within the draft SLA for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2027 and report back to SMT.

*Ken Eccles and Steve Cardwell left the meeting at 11.10 am.*

*The meeting suspended at 11.10 am and resumed at 11.20 am.*

## **LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES**

*Dan Hull joined the meeting at 11.20 am for agenda items 13 and 14.*

### **13. Provision of Library Electronic Resources and Journals (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2028)**

Dan Hull advised SMT that there were currently individual business justifications for electronic resources and subscription journals, and that these were due to expire on 31 March 2024.

In relation to the future provision of library electronic resources and journals, Dan proposed, following consultation with the Procurement Office, a single business justification for the ongoing purchase of both, covering the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2028.

Following consideration, SMT approved the business justification and four-term term, as outlined. Lesley also clarified for future reference that SMT's role was to approve the requested expenditure, either via a business case of business justification; and how the business area procured the electronic resources and journals covered by the overarching business justification was a matter for the business area.

### **14. Provision of Appropriate Storage for the Special Collection of the Northern Ireland Assembly Library**

Dan informed SMT of a Special Collection of antiquarian books in the Assembly library, which are a legacy from the early days of the Northern Ireland Parliament 1921–1972, and largely date from the nineteenth century and earlier.

In light of their significant academic and monetary value, Dan proposed that appropriate storage be considered, by way of the construction of specialist shelving in a separate room of the Library, in order to protect them from various forms of potential damage. Dan advised SMT of a quotation that had been obtained from Building Services, to supply the bespoke shelving, and he sought approval to proceed with the works.

Following consideration, SMT approved the proposal, in relation to the provision of appropriate storage for the Library Special Collection, subject to scrutiny by the Head of Facilities Management, of the proposed costings that had been received, to ensure value for money.

*Dan Hull left the meeting at 11.35 am.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

### **15. Procurement of a Broadcasting Technical Adviser Post Project Evaluation**

Paper deferred to December 2024 SMT meeting.

*Frank Geddis and Barbara Love joined the meeting at 11.42 am for agenda item 16.*

## **16. Legislative Drafting Solution Project Update**

Frank Geddis and Barbara Love presented a paper which provided a progress update on the Legislative Drafting Solution Project.

Frank advised that the Legislative Drafting Software Project Board had been considering and were recommending that the Assembly join 'Lawmaker', a service managed by The National Archives, as a new partner. The benefits of joining Lawmaker were noted.

Barbara stated that the Lawmaker Service Steering Group (its management board) had in December 2023, agreed in principle, to the Assembly joining Lawmaker and approved an associated timetable.

Barbara advised of a temporary additional resource requirement, of one FTE AG7, to support the development of Lawmaker for use in the Assembly, and sought SMT approval to increase the staff complement within the Bill Office on a temporary basis.

Following discussion, SMT approved the recommendation of the Legislative Drafting Software Project Board, to pursue the option to extend Lawmaker for use in the Assembly and the appointment of one temporary AG7 to support its development.

SMT requested that the submission paper be updated to include more detailed information in relation to costings and potential risks.

**Action:** Frank and Barbara to update the paper as proposed and re-circulate to SMT.

SMT thanked Frank, Barbara and the other members of the Legislative Drafting Software Project Board for all the work undertaken in relation to the project thus far.

*Frank Geddis and Barbara Love left the meeting at 12.24 pm.*

*Mary-Ellen Nutt joined the meeting at 12.25 pm for agenda items 17 and 18.*

## **17. Business Case for the Procurement of Replacement Devices, Network Components and Secure Remote Access**

Mary-Ellen Nutt presented a business case for the procurement of replacement devices and accessories, to support modern working for Assembly Commission staff, Members and party support staff; a Secure Remote Access solution; and replacement Network Components.

Mary-Ellen advised that a device requirement survey of Assembly Commission staff had recently been undertaken, to ascertain the preferred

device and to establish what additional equipment is in use and how users connect to the Assembly Commission's network. Mary-Ellen noted that Members and party support staff were also being surveyed in relation to their requirements.

Steven Baxter noted that the need for modernisation was long overdue and that the Assembly Commission was far behind other organisations in terms of device provision, remote access and a "customer centric" approach.

Following discussion, SMT approved the business case, subject to securing the necessary capital budget to fund the project beyond the end of the 2023-24 financial year and consultation with the Assembly Commission, as required under the Clerk/Chief Executive's letter of delegation.

## **18. Business Case for the Printer Replacement Project**

Mary-Ellen presented a business case to support the replacement of print/scan/copy services in Parliament Buildings and Constituency Offices.

It was noted that the current printer support contract expires at the end of February 2024, and Mary-Ellen outlined three options going forward, with a recommendation to proceed with Option 3, to procure a leased Managed Print Service and uplift Members' Constituency Office budget to support Members procuring their own print capability for Constituency Offices.

Following consideration, SMT approved the business as presented, subject to consultation with the Assembly Commission, as required under the Clerk/Chief Executive's letter of delegation.

*Mary-Ellen Nutt left the meeting at 1.05 pm.*

*The meeting suspended at 1.05 pm and resumed at 1.32 pm.*

*Michael Cairns joined the meeting at 1.32 pm for agenda items 19 and 20.*

*Liz Beaton joined the meeting at 1.32 pm for agenda item 19.*

## **19. Internal Communications Quarterly Update**

Liz Beaton provided an update on internal communications activity, highlighting both the successes and challenge of getting staff to attend events, since last reported to SMT at its meeting on 22 September 2023. Staff attendance at Directorate and Team meetings was discussed and SMT noted its disappointment that a number of staff were not attending these and wider events.

The launch of the Corporate Plan 2023-28 was discussed, and it was agreed that a high-level introduction would be provided at the Directorate meetings scheduled for February and March, after which, HoBs would hold more detailed meetings with their business areas.



Staff attendance at Directorate and Team meetings was also discussed. In relation to the inclusion of staff photographs on Outlook, it was agreed that Liz would issue a communication to staff with guidance on how to upload photographs.

**Action:** Liz to arrange for guidance to issue to staff on how to upload photographs to Outlook.

SMT acknowledged the excellent work carried out by Liz during the reporting period.

*Liz Beaton left the meeting at 2.00 pm.*

## **20. Strategic Communications Update**

Michael Cairns provided a general update on strategic communications.

*Michael Cairns left the meeting at 2.20 pm.*

## **OTHER ITEMS**

### **21. Papers Cleared by Correspondence**

HR Management Information as at 1 December 2023.

### **22. Directors' Updates**

#### **Corporate Services**

##### **Support Services**

Steven advised that discussions were ongoing with the contractor in relation to the proposed price increases in the Members' Dining Room and that a further update would be provided at the next SMT meeting.

##### **Systems Review Project**

A revised date of the end of February 2024 was noted in relation to Design sign-off for the Systems Review Project.

##### **Finance Office**

SMT noted the ongoing staff pressures within the Finance Office and the measures that were being considered to address these.

##### **Roof Project**

Steven advised that work was proceeding in relation to investigatory and remedial works in relation to the rear parapet of Parliament Buildings.

## **Internal Audits**

Tara Caul asked that updates on Internal Audits be included in the Corporate Services Directorate Update to SMT going forward. Steven agreed to include.

## **Legal, Governance and Research Services**

### **Litigation**

SMT noted ongoing litigation.

### **Governance**

Tara advised that the next meeting of ACARC was to be held on 14 February 2024.

### **Information Standards**

Tara noted that a Records Management Sensitivity Review had been undertaken on a pilot basis by a temporary team, to establish appropriate operational procedures for conducting these. It was noted that the pilot had concluded and the temporary team had finalised their work due to the return of normal Assembly business. Revised guidance for the Information Asset Owners (IAOs) to enable them to undertake this task in future will be presented to the next SMT meeting, reflecting learnings from the pilot exercise.

**Action:** Directors to make IAOs aware of the fact that a number of files will be due for review by them for the Sensitivity Review this year and that revised guidance to assist with this would be produced and issued by the Information Standards Office.

### **RaISe**

Tara noted that the recruitment process to fill vacancies within RaISe was commencing in early February 2024.

### **Procurement Office**

SMT noted ongoing procurement projects.

## **Parliamentary Services**

Gareth McGrath provided a detailed account of the work undertaken by all business areas within the Parliamentary Services Directorate, since last reported at the SMT meeting on 14 December 2023.

## **23. AOB**

Tara informed SMT of an outstanding recommendation from the report of the Supporting Personal Resilience Working Group, in relation to having a Resilience Champion at SMT. Tara offered to undertake the role and the other members of SMT were content with this.

## **24. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 27 February 2024.

## **25. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

- Review of Fraud Prevention and Anti-Bribery Policy and Response Plan
- Corporate Values
- Electronic Access Control
- Business Case for Repairs and Maintenance
- Corporate Plan 2023 - 2028
- Sensitivity Review - Second Release
- Sensitivity Review - Revised Guidance
- Records Management Policy
- Strategic Communications Update

The meeting ended at 3.08 pm.