

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

**FRIDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2012 AT 9.35AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present: Trevor Reaney
Peter Hall
Gareth McGrath
Sebastian Mingout (from 11.20am)
Richard Stewart
Stephen Welch (to 10.35am)
Hugh Widdis

In attendance: Jim Beatty
Eddie Kelly (Agenda item 6)
David Johnston (Agenda item 9)
Glenda Grant (Agenda item 10)
Kevin Shiels/Eva Grosman (Agenda item 13)
Tony Logue/ Robin Ramsey (Agenda item 15)

1 Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were noted from John Stewart. Peter Hall deputised on his behalf.

2 Declaration of Interests

- 2.1 Richard Stewart and Peter Hall declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item 12. Trevor Reaney and Gareth McGrath declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item 13.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting/Matters Arising

- 3.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 10 October 2012 had been approved and published on 30 October 2012.
- 3.2 All issues within Matters Arising will be dealt with through the Action Points or discussed as substantive agenda items.

4 SMG Action Points

- 4.1 The Action Point list was reviewed. Members were asked to advise Jim Beatty of further updates and amendments.

CORPORATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

5 Business Plans 2012/13 – updates on Directorate Business Plans

- 5.1 SMG considered the quarterly report on the performance against objectives within Directorate Business Plans for the period ending 30 September 2012. The Clerk/DG commended everyone on the progress made to date.
- 5.2 Stephen Welch advised SMG that it is hoped to have an Action Plan in relation to the Staff Survey outcomes early next week. There has been extensive consultation on this issue including ALF and an ERG sub-group. When completed, the draft Action Plan will be referred to SMG for consideration.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

6 Strategic Work Strands

6.1 Business Efficiency Update

Eddie Kelly, BEP Team leader, joined the meeting at 9.48am and updated SMG on the BEP progress. A number of initial reports on current reviews and finalised reports on areas already completed will be discussed at the next Project Board meeting on 16 November 2012. Initial meetings have been held with HoBs for the next tranche of reviews – reports for these will be concluded by March 2013.

SMG discussed how best to keep staff informed of the current position of reviews and it was agreed that this should be raised at the next Project Board meeting. SMG acknowledged the different roles of the Project Board and Secretariat in this aspect.

6.2 Institutional Review

Gareth McGrath provided an update on progress. The AERC is still considering its report on the number of Departments which is due to be completed within the next few weeks.

Terms of Reference have been drafted for two recommendations from the AERC's recent report on 'Numbers of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly', namely, a review of the Committee system and the scheduling of parliamentary business. A paper will be brought to the next SMG meeting.

ACTION: GARETH McGRATH

6.3 Organisational Development

The Clerk/DG is considering how to take this issue forward.

6.4 Organisational Redesign

The team undertaking the Organisational Redesign Project (Ken Hughes and Dianne Bevin) have concluded their planned interviews and are analysing the outcomes.

7. Co-ordination

- 7.1 SMG noted that there were no outstanding issues regarding co-ordination on the implementation of the Corporate Strategy.

8. Consultation, communication and engagement

- 8.1 SMG noted the on-going consultation, communication and engagement work in respect of the Corporate Strategy. The Clerk/DG advised that he considered a review of the Corporate Strategy to be appropriate to ensure that it is relevant and up-to-date prior to agreeing business plans and budgets for next year. He will take this forward in the New Year.

LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE

9. Corporate Risk Register

- 9.1 David Johnston joined the meeting at 10.12am and briefed SMG on recent changes to the register.
- 9.2 After discussion, some further updates were identified and agreed. David Johnston will incorporate these into the register.
- 9.3 Hugh Widdis said that an internal audit of our risk management processes will be done before March 2013, possibly by an external provider. He asked that in advance of that, all Directors should satisfy

themselves that risk management is embedded within their directorates.

10. Internal Audit Update

- 10.1 Glenda Grant, Internal Audit, joined the meeting at 10.20am and spoke to the update paper which had been provided to SMG.
- 10.2 At its meeting on 9 October 2012 SARC had been advised that the annual overall level of assurance had remained as satisfactory. Eight audit reports had been completed during April to October 2012 with a range of outcomes. Three follow-up audits in the same period now considered the level of assurance in these three areas as substantial.
- 10.3 An Internal Quality Assurance is underway in accordance with the guidance from HM Treasury and in advance of an External Quality Assurance review next year.
- 10.4 A member of staff, working here on an Interchange assignment, will leave at the end of November and discussions have begun on arrangements to replace him.
- 10.5 The Head of Internal Audit received a request recently under the whistleblowing policy. In acknowledging that it was not appropriate to bring any of the specific details to SMG, Richard Stewart said that it was important that SMG was able to review the related processes to ensure that this type of case was handled in the correct manner.

The meeting adjourned at 10.32am.

The meeting reconvened at 11.20am.

Sebastian Mingout replaced Stephen Welch for the remainder of the meeting.

INFORMATION AND OUTREACH

11. Interim Commissioner for Standards – response to recommendations

- 11.1 Peter Hall spoke to the paper on this issue which contains proposals from the Secretariat Working Group for implementing recommendations from the Interim Commissioner for Standards investigation into the unauthorised disclosure of a Public Accounts Committee report.
- 11.2 The Chairperson's Liaison Group was consulted on the recommendations and agreed with the proposed way forward.

- 11.3 SMG considered and agreed the 17 recommendations and the proposals for implementation.
- 11.4 SMG agreed to refer the paper to the Commission.

12. NI Assembly Business Trust (NIABT) Memorandum of Understanding

- 12.1 Peter Hall spoke to the paper on this issue. The NIABT has grown in size since its inception in 2002 and currently has over 140 members. A recent Internal Audit review recommended that the relationship between the Assembly and the NIABT should be formally recorded through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).
- 12.2 The proposed MoU sets out the support that will be provided by the Commission to assist the NIABT in carrying out its role. In recognising the success of the NIABT, the paper proposes a framework for improved governance and sets out clear arrangements for funding and resources.
- 12.3 SMG acknowledged the progress made by the NIABT and agreed that the proposed MoU should be referred to the Commission.

CLERKING AND REPORTING

As a member of the NIA Legislative Strengthening Trust Board, Trevor Reaney stood aside as chairperson for the following item. Richard Stewart acted as interim chairperson.

13. Legislative Strengthening Trust (LST)

- 13.1 Eva Grosman and Kevin Shiels joined the meeting at 11.50am and assisted Gareth McGrath in presenting the paper on this issue.
- 13.2 The LST is a separate entity funded by Atlantic Philanthropies for the purpose of delivering a professional developmental programme to MLAs and support staff. An evaluation of the work to date, carried out in October 2012 by Brendan Murtagh, QUB, made a number of recommendations to improve the programme.
- 13.3 A pilot session on Questioning and Challenging Techniques was run for the Public Accounts Committee in October 2012 and this had been well received. There will be further consultation with committee chairpersons in respect of committee needs.
- 13.4 SMG commended the work to date and noted the positive reception from many Members on the proposed programme. It was accepted that

the relationship with the Assembly Commission may need to be formalised through an agreed Memorandum of Understanding.

- 13.5 Gareth McGrath said that a communication strategy was being developed and this will address informing staff of the work of the Trust. Kevin Shiels told SMG of the developing relationships between the Trust and other UK legislatures and future meetings would share best practice.
- 13.6 It was agreed that the paper should be circulated to Commission members for information.

ACTION: GARETH McGRATH

Trevor Reaney resumed the chair of SMG.

CORPORATE SERVICES

14. HR Management Information – Absence Analysis

- 14.1 Richard Stewart spoke to the paper on this issue. The average working days lost per employee for the period September 2011 – August 2012 was 10.4 days. While this remains above the benchmark, the figure has remained static when compared with the period August 2011- July 2012. The figures for August 2012 show a decline in the number of days lost due to absence from 370 days lost in July to 280 days lost in August. The decline is reflected in both long and sick term absence.
- 14.2 SMG acknowledged the on-going initiatives to reduce the absence figures and recognised the need to continue to explore ways to address this.
- 14.3 The average number of training days to date was in line with the target of three training days on average to be taken by staff across the year. A number of corporate training programmes will be rolled out later this year and SMG emphasised the need for the Learning and Development team to be informed of all training.

15. Future Commission/SMG Business

- 15.1 Tony Logue and Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 12.18pm. SMG noted the future work plans and considered the agenda for the next Commission meeting:-
- Clerk/DG Update report
 - Update on IT Refresh Update
 - Business Continuity Planning

- Workplace Pension Reform – Auto-Enrolment
 - Review of FAPP
 - Pension Scheme Rules
 - Commission Newsletter
 - Monitoring of Corporate Strategy
 - Proposals for Electronic Access
 - Community Art
 - NIABT MoU
 - Interim Commissioner for Standards – response to recommendations
- 15.2 Robin Ramsey said that as part of the Good Relations Action Plan, the Community Art group had been approached and proposed to consult with communities and to produce artwork for display within Parliament Buildings. Some funding would be required over the next three years.
- 15.3 SMG agreed the proposal and asked for a paper to be referred to the Commission and copied to SMG.
- 15.4 It was noted that the Commission will meet on Wednesdays from January 2013.

ADDITIONAL BUSINESS

16. Directors' Updates

- 16.1 Peter Hall said the Education Service website had won a prestigious national award for e-learning. Brian Devlin and John Power are going to Kosovo and the NIABT is going to Brussels at the end of November.
- 16.2 Richard Stewart said TUS had been consulted on the proposed MLA/Staff Protocol and HR was now considering how best to take this forward. A review of the Corporate Strategy will look at how equality issues have been addressed and all directors were asked to look again at directorate business plans to ensure a consistent approach to equality objectives.

ACTION: ALL DIRECTORS

- 16.3 Gareth McGrath said that it is planned to carry out a Members' survey in January 2013. The Social Development Committee had agreed a motion to establish an ad-hoc committee to consider equality and human rights issues within the Welfare Reform Bill. This motion will be considered by the Assembly within the next few weeks.
- 16.4 Hugh Widdis said that options were being considered for filling the vacancy left by the departure of the Interchange secondee from Internal Audit. A significant number of future audits were planned and it

was important that these were completed. In light of the heavy workload at present in Legal Services Office, especially for work coming from committees, options for diverting other work were being explored.

- 16.5 Sebastian Mingout said that work on the new front ramps was nearing completion and that the roof project was progressing well. Following the visit from the National Autistic Society last week, it is expected that the Assembly will be awarded accreditation from the Society over the coming weeks.

17 Items dealt with by Correspondence

- 17.1 No items were dealt with by correspondence.

18. AOB

- 26.1 There were no issues under this heading.

19. Next Meeting

- 19.1 The next meeting will be at 9.30am in Room 106 on Wednesday, 5 December 2012.

The meeting adjourned at 1.10pm.