

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

WEDNESDAY, 3 JULY 2013 AT 2.04PM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Trevor Reaney
Gareth McGrath
Tara Caul
John Stewart
Richard Stewart
Stephen Welch

In Attendance Edmund Kelly
Tony Logue
Brian Moreland
Robin Ramsey
Ruth Roberts

1 Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Hugh Widdis. Tara Caul deputised on Mr Widdis' behalf.

2 Declaration of Interests

- 2.1 No interests were declared.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting/Matters Arising

- 3.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 13 June 2013 were approved.
- 3.2 John Stewart advised SMG that the visit from staff from the Kosovo Parliament has been postponed to October 2013.

4 SMG Action Points

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

CORPORATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

5 Business Plans

- 5.1 SMG noted that forms for monitoring performance against objectives within Directorate Business Plans for q/e June 2013 are now on the Project Centre. A report will be presented to SMG in September 2013.

6 Strategic Work Strands

6.1 Business Efficiency Programme

Eddie Kelly, BEP Team leader, joined the meeting at 2.10pm and updated SMG on the BEP progress. The final reports which had been agreed at the last Project Board meeting are with the Clerk/DG for consideration. The BEP team is in the middle of the final tranche of reviews and it is planned to have draft reports completed for 19 August 2013. Sean Gallagher is leaving the team at the end of July.

6.2 Institutional Review

Gareth McGrath said that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's report had been noted in the Plenary on 2 July 2013. A report will be completed by the Committee Review Group after the Summer recess.

6.3 Organisational Development

There were no developments to note.

6.4 Organisational Redesign

Trevor Reaney told SMG that a Project Board had been established and had met to agree Terms of Reference. The Board will next meet in September. A Project Manager will be appointed soon and work on the project will continue throughout the Summer.

7 Implementation Updates

7.1 Co-ordination, Consultation, Communication and Engagement

There were no developments to note.

7.2 Vacancy Management Group (VMG)

Richard Stewart informed SMG that there were currently 384.1 Full Time Equivalent staff and 373.3 of these were directly employed by the Commission. The Group has considered the need for limited external recruitment. This will be considered by SMG as part of a more general review. The future role of the Group was discussed and it was agreed that further consideration was required as to how best retain key functions.

7.3 Financial Management Group (FMG)

Richard Stewart informed SMG that while budgets for 2013/14 had been agreed, profiling has yet to be done. SMG discussed the delegation of budgets and financial planning and this will be considered in more detail later.

7.4 IT Prioritisation Group

At the last Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) meeting it was noted that Internal Audit recommendations in respect of the ISO were still outstanding. The IT Prioritisation Group had met recently and reviewed IS work plans. The Group will meet again to agree these.

LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE

8 Corporate Risk Register

- 8.1 Brian Moreland joined the meeting at 2.35pm and briefed SMG on recent changes to the Risk Register. SMG agreed to the changes.
- 8.2 SMG queried some current entries and it was agreed to refer these to David Johnston for clarification.

9 Internal Audit Update

- 9.1 Brian Moreland spoke to his paper on this issue. The Internal Audit activity report detailing the annual overall level of assurance was presented to the SARC meeting on 24 June 2013. The overall level of assurance remains satisfactory and reflects the results of the assignments completed in the 2012/13 year.
- 9.2 At the SARC meeting the issue of auditing of the Northern Ireland Assembly Legislative Strengthening Trust (NIALST) was raised. Trevor Reaney referred to the Assembly's close links with the NIALST and the need to provide assurance, particularly in respect of reputational risk.

Gareth McGrath said that he is currently in talks with Brian Moreland as to how best take this issue forward.

- 9.3 John Stewart questioned the submission of the Procurement Compliance Report to SARC before consideration by SMG. Brian Moreland said that this was a timing issue on this occasion and it was agreed that all future reports would be referred to SMG prior to referral to SARC.
- 9.4 Stephen Welch raised the issue of the timing of audits at a time of change and work pressures. Brian Moreland assured SMG that Internal Audit work plans are subject to discussions with local managers.
- 9.5 A business case for the provision of investigative services has been submitted to the Speaker for approval and it is hoped that, if approved, it will go for tender during the Summer.

INFORMATION AND OUTREACH

10 Membership of National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

- 10.1 John Stewart spoke to his paper which recommended one year trial membership of the NCSL. This recommendation derives from the External Relations Strategy which was approved by the Commission, subject to consideration of a recent consultation.
- 10.2 The NCSL is a bipartisan organisation serving all of USA's states and provides research, technical assistance and exchange opportunities. The Scottish and Welsh legislatures are already members and it was suggested that a number of areas within the Assembly, namely the Speaker, Committees, management and staff would directly benefit from membership.
- 10.3 SMG discussed the issue and recognised many potential benefits from membership of NCSL. As John Stewart is to attend a NCSL conference in Edinburgh, it was agreed that further information would be sought during his visit and the issue would come back to SMG in September.

ACTION: JOHN STEWART

11 Maryland General Assembly – Learning/Development Link

- 11.1 John Stewart spoke to this paper which recommended that the Assembly should establish and maintain formal links with the Maryland General Assembly. This recommendation derives from the External

Relations Strategy which was approved by the Commission, subject to consideration of a recent consultation.

- 11.2 It was recognised that the NI Assembly has had close links with US administrations in Washington for a number of years. However, it was considered that there would be significant advantages from forming closer links with a state legislature. As a result of an earlier visit, John Stewart recommended Maryland which is close enough to Washington to allow visits to both locations.
- 11.3 After discussing the potential opportunities and benefits SMG agreed for the matter to be referred to the Speaker prior to referral to the Commission.

FACILITIES

12 Conduct and Behaviour of Visitors Policy

- 12.1 Stephen Welch spoke to this paper which proposed an amendment to the current policy.
- 12.2 The proposal sets out to remove ambiguity and to provide clearer guidance for all building users and staff in relation to protests, demonstrations and rallies. SMG discussed the proposed amendment and identified some issues requiring clarification. It was agreed that a view would be sought from Hugh Widdis, Director of Legal Services and Governance.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

CORPORATE SERVICES

13 Procurement Activity Report

- 13.1 Ruth Roberts joined the meeting at 3.45pm and spoke to this paper.
- 13.2 SMG was told that this is the second such report to be presented to SMG and covers the period from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013. The paper also included the Procurement Compliance report which had been previously presented to SARC. This latter report recorded a 99.1% procurement compliance. Contracts were awarded for 39 procurement exercises with an estimated budget of £8.1m and all competitions and quotations were awarded without legal challenge. The number of procurement cards in use increased from 18 cards to 24 cards.

- 13.3 SMG discussed the paper and some concerns were raised about project expenditure against original Business Case approvals and the wording within some paragraphs of the paper. It was agreed that Richard Stewart would develop a process to recognise material project cost increases and to refer these to SMG for approval.
- 13.4 SMG noted the report which reflected the good work done within Procurement Unit and by contract managers and agreed the recommendations.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

14 Purchase To Pay Update

- 14.1 Richard Stewart spoke to this paper which outlined progress on the project to date.
- 14.2 Elcom Systems will be the provider and the project will commence the process of installation in July 2013 with a 'go live' date in February 2014. It was emphasised that in order to ensure the success of the project, each business area will need to be fully engaged, to consider the goods/services required and to review their internal processes. In doing this, the new system will be able to provide directly the current, accurate and timely information held.
- 14.3 After a discussion on the way forward, including the timing of the project and need to avoid a two-tier system, SMG noted the paper.

15 Future Commission/SMG Business

- 15.1 Tony Logue and Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 4.35pm. SMG noted the future work plans and considered the agenda for the next Commission meeting, namely:-
- Clerk/DG Update Report
 - Digital First
 - External Relations
 - Flags Consultation
 - NCSL
 - Maryland General Assembly
- 15.2 The Commission will next meet on Wednesday, 29 September 2013 at 4.00pm.

ADDITIONAL BUSINESS

16 Directors' Updates

- 16.1 Richard Stewart told SMG that the new payroll system was in operation and it was planned to move to further modules.

17 Items Cleared by Correspondence

- 23.1 No Items were cleared by correspondence.

18 AOB

- 18.1 Trevor Reaney said that the Directors would meet on 28 August 2013 to discuss strategic issues and the way forward. Richard Stewart will consider the inputs required.

19 NEXT MEETING

- 26.1 The next meeting will be held on Thursday, 12 September 2013 at 10.00am in Room 106.

The meeting adjourned at 4.47pm.