

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2013 AT 10.02AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

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

In Attendance Jim Beatty
Trevor Allen
David Johnston
John Gibson
Karen Martin
Tony Logue
Robin Ramsey

1 Opening/Review

Apologies

- 1.1 Hugh Widdis chaired the meeting until 12.35pm when Trevor Reaney joined the meeting.

Declaration of Interests

- 1.2 No interests were declared.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

- 1.3 The Minutes of the meeting of 4 October 2013 had been approved and were published on 23 October 2013.

Matters Arising

- 1.4 There were no matters arising.

2 SMG Action Points

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

Stephen Welch joined the meeting at 10.08am.

CORPORATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

3 Business Plans Monitoring

- 3.1 SMG considered a paper on the quarterly performance against Directorate Business Plans for q/e 30 September 2013. The significant achievements to date were noted and it was agreed to forward the paper to the Commission.

4 Strategic Work Strands

4.1 Business Efficiency Programme (BEP)

Trevor Allen, former BEP Team member, joined the meeting at 10.10am and updated SMG on BEP progress. The Project Board had met on 11 October 2013 when a number of final reports were agreed. A draft report for the Finance Office and draft BEP Evaluation report were considered – it was agreed to refer these papers back to the next Board meeting. The Project Board noted the implementation schedules relating to the first eight business area reviews. While Directors are responsible for implementing agreed recommendations it was agreed that as BEP was nearing completion, Trevor Reaney should look at how implementation was monitored and co-ordinated. The Project Board will consider records ownership and retention at its final meeting.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

4.2 Institutional Review

Gareth McGrath said that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee is continuing its inquiry into Petitions of Concern. The Committee on Procedures is also continuing with its inquiry into the participation of the Attorney General in the proceedings of the Assembly, and has also issued a call for evidence in relation to its inquiry into the Review of the Business Week of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Committee Review Group's report had been debated in plenary, and subsequently an implementation plan has been developed.

4.3 Organisational Development

SMG was told that Trevor Reaney is currently considering a draft Scoping Document which he would issue shortly to Directors for initial comment.

4.4 Organisational Redesign

The Project Board has recently met and a paper would be considered by the Commission at its next meeting on the viability of an early exit scheme.

5 Implementation Updates

5.1 Co-ordination, Consultation, Communication and Engagement

Richard Stewart updated SMG on the recent Employee Relations Board meeting held on 17 October 2013. Discussions on a small number of BEP consultations are continuing.

5.2 Vacancy Management Group (VMG)

Richard Stewart said that the Group's future role was still under consideration.

5.3 Financial Management Group (FMG)

SMG was told that Trevor Reaney was concerned at the current underspend position and encouraged accurate forecasting and monitoring. Finance Office will look at the budget position in early December. Richard Stewart said that preparations are being made for the Spring Supplementaries. The Clerk/Director General and he had met with the Minister for Finance to discuss arrangements for scrutiny of the Commission's budget. It was agreed that Richard Stewart would circulate to other Directors a draft Memorandum of Understanding on the budgetary arrangements between the Assembly and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

5.4 IT Prioritisation Group

John Stewart said that the Project Board plans to meet when more information is available on the impact of the Roof Project.

LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE

6 Corporate Risk Register

- 6.1 Hugh Widdis spoke to this paper and was assisted by David Johnston who joined the meeting at 10.28am. SMG was briefed on recent changes to the Risk Register.
- 6.2 It was agreed that the Risk 6, Risk Response relating to Director PPAs should be amended to show that the underspend/overspend targets will be reviewed by the end of the year in preparation for PPAs in 2014/15. It was agreed that Hugh Widdis would review the letters of delegation to determine whether they should refer to the targets.

ACTION: HUGH WIDDIS

INFORMATION AND OUTREACH

7 Internet Connections – Business Case

- 7.1 John Stewart said that the recent IT Disaster Recovery Plan identified the need for an additional and separate internet connection into Parliament Buildings. The contract with BT for the provision of the existing single connection expires in March 2014 and cannot be extended.
- 7.2 SMG considered a number of options and while favouring option 3 – two independent connections from the one supplier – there were some issues about use of the existing infrastructure and the costs. Due to tight procurement timescales, SMG approved the Business Case subject to the procurement adequately taking account of the capital investment represented by the existing infrastructure.
- 7.3 It was also agreed that John Stewart would provide further information on the costs.

ACTION: JOHN STEWART

8 Review of Printing and Publishing Contract

- 8.1 John Stewart said that the current contract with TSO expires in July 2014. There is a provision to extend this for one year to July 2015.
- 8.2 In the interim it had been decided to carry out a review of the current contract with TSO in association with staff from the Clerking and Reporting Directorate. The findings of the review were discussed by SMG.

- 8.3 SMG accepted that in the current financial climate reducing costs at every opportunity is important and provides an incentive for staff to look for different and more innovative ways for information to be created, accessed and used.
- 8.4 Stephen Welch welcomed the review but highlighted the absence of photocopying as an issue to be addressed. It was agreed that this vital but costly service had to be included in any future plans. In order to assist the Review Team it was agreed that Sebastian Mingout, Facilities Directorate, would join the team as a full member.
- 8.5 Gareth McGrath acknowledged the excellent work that had been undertaken on a cross-directorate basis and asked that colleagues from Information and Outreach continue to engage and consult with all stakeholders (Secretariat Staff, the Assembly Commission, MLAs etc) on the detailed implementation of the recommendations
- 8.6 After discussion, SMG agreed the recommendations within the paper. John Stewart will bring the issue to the Commission as part of the Digital First project.

9 Parliament Buildings Closing Time

- 9.1 John Stewart said that during a review of Events Policies an issue was identified surrounding the closing time for Parliament. It has been considered necessary to add this issue to the Directorate Risk Register.
- 9.2 SMG discussed the issue and considered that more information was required from a number of sources. It was agreed that John Stewart, Richard Stewart and Stephen Welch would work to bring a revised paper to the next SMG meeting.

**ACTION: JOHN STEWART, RICHARD STEWART,
STEPHEN WELCH**

10 Visitor Experience in Parliament Buildings

- 10.1 John Stewart said that as part of the development of the new Engagement Strategy a detailed analysis has been conducted of the visitor experience in Parliament Buildings. Since 2007 over 450,000 people have visited for functions, events and education programmes.
- 10.2 SMG noted that the vast majority of visitors rated the service, access and facilities as good or excellent. However, SMG acknowledged the less than generous retail opportunities available to our visitors currently mainly as a result of accommodation pressures. Stephen Welch, as Director of Facilities, agreed to keep this matter under review.

- 10.3 SMG agreed that this information should be considered when developing the new Assembly Engagement Strategy.

11 Review of Events Policies

- 11.1 John Stewart said that the Assembly events policies had not been reviewed since 2001 and a number of additional protocols and policies have been developed since then. It was considered appropriate to review all of these policies at this time.
- 11.2 The Events Office consulted with Facilities, Security and Ushering and Communications to ensure that the revised regulations comply with the work of these units and reflect current policies and practices. An initial equality screening process has also been completed.
- 11.3 SMG welcomed the initiative and in the discussion, identified some areas which required clarification. It was agreed that Gareth McGrath would talk to Trevor Reaney and John Stewart about these. Subject to that clarification and consistency with Item 9, SMG approved the first recommendation and agreed that the revised draft policies should go to the Commission. The second recommendation on consultation will be considered in due course.

FACILITIES

12 Roof Project Update

- 12.1 Stephen Welch provided a verbal update on this issue.
- 12.2 Phase 1 has been completed and 7 companies have been shortlisted as potential contractors. Invitations to tender have been issued and it is planned that to appoint a contractor by mid-February 2014.
- 12.3 Plans are being developed for decanting staff in the New Year to Annexe C and Knockview. More staff than initially expected may have to remain in Parliament Buildings and plans are being reviewed to take this into account. The Working Group is meeting today and will issue a further information bulletin to staff.

CORPORATE SERVICES

13 E-Sourcing Procurement

- 13.1 John Gibson joined the meeting at 11.50am and spoke to his paper on this topic.
- 13.2 At present the Procurement Office uses a system provided by Bravo Solutions. In December 2013 Central Procurement Division (CPD) of the Civil Service will be awarding a new e-tendering contract to be implemented in summer 2014. The objective is to create a platform which is easy to use, transparent and a means to reduce bureaucracy in public sector procurement. CPD has gained approval, under an “invest to save” bid to offer this solution to all NI public sector bodies and agencies, including the Assembly, free of charge.
- 13.3 In order to maximise the benefits, the Procurement Office was encouraging a clear linkage between the new system and the payment system (P2P) which is currently being introduced into the Assembly.
- 13.4 SMG discussed the proposals and approved the recommendations.

14 HR Management Update

- 14.1 Richard Stewart said that 249 staff had already attended the Dignity At Work course and it is planned for all staff to attend by the end of March 2014.
- 14.2 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 October 2012 – September 2013 was 9.7 days, which represents a decrease of 0.8 days compared with the period October 2011 – September 2012 figure of 10.5 days.
- 14.3 SMG noted the figures and discussed the effects of the recently revised Managing Attendance programme.
- 14.4 It was agreed that in future HR would provide these absence figures on a three year basis rather than the current one year.

15 Learning and Development Contract

- 15.1 Karen Martin joined the meeting at 12.22pm and spoke to this paper.
- 15.2 The contract for a training and development service was awarded to Bray Leino in April 2010 and the extended contract is due to expire on 31 March 2014. HR recognised the experience and expertise provided

by Bray Leino over the past 4 years, particularly in the design and implementation of the leadership and management development programmes. However, it is considered that future training will concentrate on specialist areas which will be sourced and delivered from external providers.

- 15.3 SMG discussed the proposed options and accepted the recommended Option 2 whereby the Learning and Development team will source and procure learning and development activities on an individual basis, using their knowledge of both the organisation and the Northern Ireland market to ensure quality and value for money. SMG noted that it was anticipated by Richard Stewart that this could be delivered without an increase in the HR staff complement.

16 Gender Action Plan

- 16.1 Tony Logue joined the meeting at 12.30pm and spoke to this paper.
- 16.2 A similar paper had been discussed at the SMG meeting on 4 October 2013 and the recommendations were agreed subject to some changes being made. This paper incorporated those changes and set out a five step process. SMG approved the approach outlined.

17 Future Commission/SMG Business

- 17.1 Robin Ramsey joined the meeting. Tony Logue presented the agenda for the forthcoming Commission meeting. The agreed items are:-
- Clerk/DG's Update
 - Digital First/Print Reduction Strategy
 - External Relations Strategy
 - Developing links with Maryland General Assembly
 - Affiliate membership of the National Conference of State Legislatures
 - Flags Consultation
 - Business Continuity
 - Correspondence from P McGlone MLA

- 17.2 The Commission plans to meet on Wednesday, 20 November 2013.

ADDITIONAL BUSINESS

18 Directors' Updates

- 18.1 John Stewart said that in association with the US Consul, it was planned to show a film in the Great Hall on Wednesday 20 November

2013. Children from a number of primary schools in Londonderry attended a Let's Talk session. The Assembly's Annual Report for 2012/13 has been issued in DVD form. The Assembly Connect workshops are continuing. Visitors from the Kosovo Parliament were in Parliament Buildings recently for a week and the visit was considered very successful by all parties. The Information Systems Office will shortly commence a survey of Assembly laptop users.

- 18.2 Stephen Welch said that it was planned to introduce cashless payments into the catering facilities before Christmas. Staff will be advised shortly.
- 18.3 Hugh Widdis informed SMG that an experienced draftsman from the Office of Legislative Counsel was joining the legal team for a period following an interchange trawl. He also informed SMG that an External Quality Assurance of the Assembly's Internal Audit Unit had recently been completed with very positive results.

Trevor Reaney joined the meeting at 12.35 and took the Chair.

19 Items Cleared by Correspondence

- 19.1 The following items have been cleared by correspondence:-
- Provision of Mobile Phones
 - Changes to EU Procurement Regulations

20 AOB

- 20.1 Stephen Welch said that all security and ushering staff had been issued with the appropriate uniforms and after discussion SMG agreed that it was for Management to continue to monitor and apply the policy as written. Mr Welch told SMG that Facilities had been informed of a protest to be held at Parliament Buildings on Monday, 18 November 2013. Events of this nature were being decided on a one by one basis by Facilities. After advice, Mr Welch recommended that this event and similar forthcoming events should be kept outside the front steps on health and safety grounds. SMG agreed with this approach.
- 20.2 Trevor Reaney said that Tara Caul had been appointed as chairperson to the Internal Communications Group. SMG recorded their appreciation of the excellent work carried out by Simon Burrowes in this role for a number of years. Directors were asked to reconsider how they delivered their responsibilities under the Action Plan of the Internal Communications Strategy prior to review at the next SMG meeting.

ACTION: ALL DIRECTORS

20.3 Three Directors had recently taken up work related appointments:-

- John Stewart as a member of the Northern Ireland Advisory Committee for the British Council
- Stephen Welch as the chairperson of the Facilities Management Committee of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- Hugh Widdis as an Independent Adviser on the Audit Committee of the National Assembly for Wales Commission.

20.4 Trevor Reaney wished Directors well in these appointments.

21 NEXT MEETING

21.1 The next meeting will be held on Friday, 13 December 2013 at 9.30am in Room 106.

The meeting adjourned at 12.57pm.