

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP PERFORMANCE FORMAT

**FRIDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2014 AT 9.35AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

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

In Attendance: Jim Beatty
Maria Bannon
Conor Coughlan
Robin Ramsey

1. Opening/Review

(a) Apologies

(b) Declarations of Interest

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(c) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of 14 November 2014 had been approved and published on 26 November 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 and Financial Planning 2015/16

3.1

4. Business Continuity Management System

4.1 SMG reviewed the updated Measures of Success proforma which helps to assess performance against key objectives in achieving the Corporate Strategy. SMG noted the excellent progress to date.

5. Corporate Risk Register (CRR)

5.1 David Johnston joined the meeting at 9.50am and spoke to this paper.

5.2 Following discussion at the October meeting, the agreed changes had been made to the CRR. SMG reviewed the Register and agreed some further amendments.

5.3 At a previous meeting, SMG agreed to review Directorate Risk Registers on a bi-annual basis – this was last done in March 2014. David Johnston had identified a number of risk clusters, that is, common areas of concern across the Registers, and SMG discussed how best to address these. No issues required any amendment to the CRR.

6. Internal Audit Update

6.1 Brian Moreland spoke to this paper. SMG was told that the overall level of assurance for work completed to date for 2014/15 remains satisfactory. A number of reports have been issued over the past months and none have fallen below satisfactory.

6.2 Due to a number of investigations, the work plan has had to be adjusted.

6.3 The follow-up to the external quality assurance review of the Assembly's Internal Audit has concluded that it fully conforms with the Public Sector Internal Audit standards. SMG congratulated Internal Audit on this excellent assessment.

7. Directorate Business Plans – q/e 30 September 2014

7.1 Trevor Reaney introduced this paper which summarised the performance of Directorates to 30 September 2014 against their Business Plans. SMG acknowledged the significant progress to date and agreed to refer the paper to the Commission for information.

- 7.2 Gareth McGrath suggested that it would be useful, in future, for such reports to indicate the impact of not achieving a target in order to focus particularly on those which will have a high impact. SMG agreed that the pro-forma should be changed to reflect this.

ACTION: JIM BEATTY

8. Management Accounts April – October 2014

- 8.1 Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 10.14am and assisted Richard Stewart in presenting the paper.
- 8.2 SMG reviewed the Monthly Management Accounts and noted that there was an overall underspend of 2.1% or £504k (GAE underspend was £397k or 9.37% and salaries underspend was £174k or 1.78%). SMG noted the need to closely monitor and accurately profile expenditure for the remainder of the financial year, particularly in the run-up to December monitoring.
- 8.3 SMG discussed the level of detail required within these papers and agreed that the current level should be retained.

9. Revised Anti-Bribery and Fraud Prevention Policy

- 9.1 Paula McClintock said that as part of the ongoing review of policies, it was agreed that it would be better to amalgamate these two separate policies at this time.
- 9.2 There have been a number of changes to add clarification on specific areas, for example, the previous policies made no reference on application to Members' support staff and the role that they may play in fraud or bribery prevention. The revised policy has been amended to ensure that staff are clear that all Assembly Commission resources are governed by this policy.
- 9.3 SMG was told that from 2008 the Assembly Commission has participated in the statutory bi-annual National Fraud Initiative which allows the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland (on behalf of the National Audit Office) to compare records from across the public sector on payroll, pension and supplier payments. The policy has been amended to reflect this and any subsequent investigations that are generated.
- 9.4 SMG agreed some changes and the revised policy will be issued to all staff when these have been incorporated.

10. Internal Communications Update

- 10.1 Sinead McDonnell joined the meeting at 10.50am and spoke to this paper.
- 10.2 The Internal Communications Working Group has confirmed that the 2014 Staff Survey will be issued w/c 17 November. The revamp of the internal AsslSt pages will not be progressed until 2015/16 due to pressure of other priorities.

11. HR Management Information Update

- 11.1 Sinead McDonnell spoke to this paper. After 7 months of the year, the average training days of 1.31 per member of staff is less than half of the corporate objective of 3 days. Further training programmes have yet to be delivered and the HR Office is content that the 3 days per staff member will be achieved this year.
- 11.2 Directors were asked to remind Heads of Business of the importance of staff recording all training events, formal and informal.

ACTION: DIRECTORS

- 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 October 2013 – September 2014 was 7.9 days, which represents a decrease of 1.8 days compared with the October 2012 – September 2013 figure of 9.7 days. It was noted that the Assembly Commission's absence levels are much lower than other public sector bodies.
- 11.4 At 1 November 2014, the actual staff in post including agency and seconded staff was 382.7, a decrease of 2.4 from 1 October 2014.

12. Review of Further Education Policy

- 12.1 Sinead McDonnell said this this policy had last been reviewed in 2011 and the current review had identified a number of practical issues which needed to be addressed.
- 12.2 The three areas discussed were:-
- Closing date for Applications – it was agreed to change this to 28 February each year. SMG agreed that some flexibility may be shown to applications that are submitted after the closing date;

- Approvals – it was agreed that this would be done through the Learning and Development Co-ordinators and that the budget for FE applications would be held centrally by HR Office. This will be piloted for one year and then reviewed; and
- Level of assistance – it was agreed to change from a maximum of £4k to £2k

13. Broadcast Contract Extension

- 13.1 Tracey Wilson joined the meeting at 11.20am and assisted John Stewart in presenting this paper.
- 13.2 John Stewart thanked SMG colleagues for comments on earlier versions of a paper on this contract.
- 13.3 After discussion SMG agreed some changes to the paper which will proceed to the Assembly Commission.
- 13.4 Trevor Reaney emphasised the need to bring forward papers on the utilisation of the variable aspect of major contracts in sufficient time to allow for retender, if it is decided not to use the variable contract periods.

14. Retention and Disposal Schedule

- 14.1 Martina Dalton joined the meeting at 11.45am and spoke to this paper.
- 14.2 The Assembly already has a policy relating to retention, disposal and Public Record Office storage and this has now been reviewed after two years. New business records were identified and some of the times for retaining/destroying records have been revised – all business areas were consulted on the changes.
- 14.3 After discussion, SMG agreed the proposed changes.

15. Audit of Inequalities – Review

- 15.1 Maria Bannon joined the meeting at 11.57 and spoke to this paper.
- 15.2 In 2011 an audit of inequalities and resultant action plan were produced following a request from the Equality Commission. The action plan has now been reviewed by Assembly Research.
- 15.3 The paper highlighted progress since the 2011 Audit of Inequalities in a number of areas, eg, the installation of access ramps at the front entrance of Parliament Buildings.

15.4 SMG agreed that this is ongoing work and that a revised action plan was required to take account of issues which have arisen since 2011. It was also agreed that the revised plan should be sent to the Equality Commission and then to the Assembly Commission.

16. Commission/SMG Business

16.1 Cathy McGowan joined the meeting at 12.05pm and presented the agenda for the next Commission meeting for 22 November 2014. The proposed items are:-

- Clerk/CE's Update
- Gender Action Plan
- Members Survey
- Draft PSNI Search MoU
- Engagement Strategy EQIA
- Equality Screening Report – Assembly Commission Questions
- Correspondence from solicitor
- Budget 2015/16
- Pay Negotiations
- Broadcasting Contract Extension
- Support Services Contract Extension

16.2 SMG noted the Forward Work Plan to March 2015.

17. Items Cleared by Correspondence

17.1 The following item has been cleared by correspondence:-

- Events Policy
- Staff Hours Policy

18. AOB

18.1 No items were raised

19 Directors' Updates

19.1 John Stewart said that the Assembly is hosting the Inter-Parliamentary Financial Information Network on 13-14 November – researchers from the UK, Republic of Ireland, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Austria and Canada. John highlighted the new Knowledge Exchange Seminar programme and encouraged SMG colleagues to attend the seminars. He also referred to meetings with the House of Commons Digital Democracy Commission, NI

Commissioner for Children and Young People (Youth Assembly) and diplomats from Italy, the Philippines and the United States. John also referred to well attended NI Assembly and Business Trust (NIABT) briefings and a successful training event for A Level Politics Teachers.

- 19.2 Brian Moreland said that Hugh Widdis was hosting the annual Conference of Parliamentary Lawyers of the UK and Ireland in Parliament Buildings today.
- 19.3 Ken Eccles said that the roof project was progressing on schedule.

19. Reflections on new SMG Meeting Cycle

- 19.1 Discussion was deferred to the next SMG meeting.

20. Review of Support Services Contract

- 20.1 Sebastian Mingout joined the meeting at 12.25pm and spoke to this paper.
- 20.2 The current contract has reached a review point and four options were before SMG on the way forward. The contract is with Euresit.
- 20.3 Richard Stewart said that this issue needed to be considered along with all of the other options for spending money and the progression of this paper should not be taken as a pre-emptive allocation of resources. It was agreed that this would be reflected within the paper.
- 20.4 After discussion SMG agreed some further changes to the paper, including a fifth option dealing with contract cost reductions and for the amended paper to proceed to the Commission.

20. Next Meeting

- 20.1 The next meeting (in Strategy Format) will be on Friday, 11 December 2014 at 9.30am in Room 106, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 1.00pm.