

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP POLICY FORMAT

FRIDAY, 6 JUNE 2014 AT 9.34AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Trevor Reaney
Gareth McGrath
John Stewart
Richard Stewart
Stephen Welch (Ken Eccles from 11.00am)
Hugh Widdis

In Attendance: Jim Beatty
John Gibson
Sinead McDonnell
Tony Logue
Robin Ramsey

1 Opening/Review

(a) Apologies

There were no apologies.

(b) Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

(c) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of 16 May 2014 had been approved and were published on 27 May 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 Programme and Project Planning

- 3.1 John Stewart said that a number of meetings had been held with stakeholders and two key strands identified. It is planned to bring a paper to the next SMG meeting.

ACTION: JOHN STEWART

4 Members' Development Plan

- 4.1 Gareth McGrath said that the draft programme had been developed after extensive research and consultation. It is anticipated that significant elements of the programme will be delivered by the NIA Legislative Strengthening Trust, subject to the Trust receiving further funding for the period from July 2014 through to 2017.
- 4.2 SMG discussed the viability of the current draft within a number of scenarios. It was agreed that the issue should be raised within the Clerk/CE's report to the Commission.

5 Use of Business Cases

- 5.1 John Gibson joined the meeting at 10.10am and spoke to this paper.
- 5.2 The Clerk/CE had tasked John with presenting a straightforward, clear policy for the use of business cases. At present, there are three templates for setting out business cases, depending on the proposed scale and purpose of the issue.
- 5.3 As part of his evidence gathering, John had interviewed Directors and Heads of Business, considered the current guidance from DFP and reviewed a number of recently completed internal business cases.
- 5.4 Having agreed with the key principles, Stephen Welch raised concerns about the Directors' levels of delegation and potential problems in determining expenditure within a business case or justification.
- 5.5 The role of the Resource Planning Group (RPG) was considered as the proposed procedures would envisage business cases going to that group. John Stewart spoke of the need to ensure consistency with the terms of reference for the group and its role when considering business cases. Gareth McGrath asked for clarification as to the role of RPG, ie, to scrutinise/challenge and/or to approve business cases. The draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for RPG would provide clarity and the issue will be discussed further when the ToR are presented to SMG at the next meeting. It was agreed that the RPG would consider the paper for implementation by October 2014.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART/JOHN GIBSON

Stephen Welch left the meeting at 11.00am and was replaced by Ken Eccles.

6 Staff Hours Policy

- 6.1 Sinead McDonnell joined the meeting at 10.48am and spoke to this paper. The paper had been considered at the previous meeting and SMG had asked for some further information.
- 6.2 Sinead said that she had held further discussions with TUS on the issue but no further changes were agreed.
- 6.3 SMG discussed the potential benefits and impacts of the proposal and agreed that it should go for consultation with the staff. The matter will be considered at the SMG meeting in September 2014.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART/SINEAD McDONNELL

7. Whistleblowing Policy

- 7.1 Sinead McDonnell said that in 2012 the Assembly Commission had adopted the whistleblowing policy used by the NI Civil Service. Some minor amendments had been made to the policy since then. However, in January 2014 the National Audit Office (NAO) published a number of reports on whistleblowing policies and procedures. Subsequently the NAO published eight key criteria upon which public sector bodies should assess their whistleblowing policies. The Assembly HR Office has completed an assessment of the current policy against these eight criteria and identified a number of gaps in order for our policy to be defined as 'excellent'.
- 7.2 Hugh Widdis raised the proposed role of the Head of Audit and it was agreed to replace reference to this postholder with reference to the Director of Legal and Governance Services. Otherwise, SMG agreed the revised policy.

8. Website Enhancement – Business Case

- 8.1 John Stewart said that an external consultant currently working on the Content Management System had identified a number of necessary fixes to the Assembly's website – these were set out in the business case.
- 8.2 SMG approved the business case.

9. Use of IT Resources

- 9.1 John Stewart said that a recent request for access to information had highlighted some minor deficiencies within the current policy and these had been addressed within the paper before SMG.
- 9.2 After discussion, SMG agreed the changes. As these are relatively minor, they do not need to be referred to the Commission.

10. Equality Annual Progress Report

- 10.1 Tony Logue joined the meeting at 11.30am and spoke to this paper.
- 10.2 The report reflected a year of significant achievement in relation to Section 75 throughout the organisation. It was agreed to refer the report to the Commission.

11. Commission/SMG Business

- 11.1 Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 11.35am for this item. Tony Logue presented the agenda for the Commission meeting for 18 June 2014. The proposed items are:-

- Ormiston House
- Clerk/CE's Update
- Commission Governance Arrangements
- Draft PSNI Search MoU
- External Lighting of Parliament Buildings
- Charities Policy
- Annual Equality Progress Report
- SARC Annual Report 2013/14
- SARC Chairperson's Terms of Appointment
- Closed Session with SARC Chairperson

- 10.2 SMG noted the Forward Work Plan to July 2014.

12. Directors' Updates

- 12.1 Ken Eccles said that work was progressing well on the roof project. The Positive Working Relations Initiative will be introduced in Usher Services in ten days.
- 12.2 Gareth McGrath said that the deadline for returning completed Members Survey forms was 5.00pm today but it was likely that this would be extended. Follow-up action would be taken to encourage further responses.

12.3 Hugh Widdis said that the next SARC meeting will be held on 19 June 2014. The Members OCE Audit was ongoing. Preparation for the annual file review was also underway and detail is being issued to all Information Asset Owners.

13. Items cleared by correspondence

13.1 SMG noted that the following items had been issued for clearance by correspondence:-

- Corporate Risk Register

14 AOB

14.1 Trevor Reaney said that good progress had been made on meeting the revised budget reductions – the FMG was due to meet next week to finalise budgets for 2014/15.

14.2 Trevor Reaney asked Directors to give initial consideration to budget planning for 2015/16 in the context of the wider public expenditure environment.

15 Next Meeting

15.1 The next meeting will be held on Friday, 4 July 2014 at 9.30am in Room 106.

The meeting adjourned at 12.12pm.