

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP PERFORMANCE FORMAT

FRIDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER 2015 at 9.37AM  
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

## APPROVED

Present: Trevor Reaney  
Ken Eccles  
Gareth McGrath  
John Stewart  
Richard Stewart  
Hugh Widdis

In Attendance: Jim Beatty  
Paula McClintock  
David Johnston  
James Gilsenan  
Karen Martin  
Robin Ramsey

### 1. Opening/Review

#### (a) Apologies

Apologies were received from Stephen Welch. Ken Eccles deputised on Mr Welch's behalf.

#### (b) Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

#### (c) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of 2 July 2015 had been approved and published on 15 July 2015.

#### (d) Matters Arising

John Stewart said negotiations with Williams Lea have concluded successfully and a new contract for printing Bills will be effective from 1 September 2015 to 31 August 2016. Peninsula Print will remain as our printer but will not proof any work received. Planning for post August 2016 has already begun.

## **2. Action Points**

- 2.1 The outstanding Action Points were reviewed. Members were asked to advise Jim Beatty of any future changes.

## **3. SP15+**

- 3.1 Gareth McGrath provided a verbal update. He said that 19.5 posts had been suppressed to date. The deadline for Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) applications had closed on Friday 28 August 2015 but there was uncertainty over the future of the funding arrangements. There was an ongoing consultation relating to the Childcare Scheme and this would close on Friday, 12 September 2015. Some initial discussions had been held on taking forward the Commission's decision to explore the potential for greater use of the NICS Shared Services.

## **4. Management Accounts**

- 4.1 Up-to-date accounts were tabled for SMG and Richard Stewart said that based on these figures and planned expenditure, the Assembly was on target to meet the annual financial objectives. Additional costs for MLAs will be bid for within the December Monitoring Round – these costs are normally met by DFP.

*Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 9.50am.*

- 4.2 Richard pointed out that the salaries budget was predicated on VES savings being achieved. Gareth McGrath asked about the possibility of using non-salaries budgets to finance VES but this was unlikely. Richard hopes to have more information by 16 September 2015 when he will update the Commission.

## **5. Insurance Update**

- 5.1 Paula McClintock said this was the second quarterly update for SMG. The brokerage contract was up for renewal and a procurement process had begun. The business case will be brought to SMG. A recent independent audit had highlighted some potential insurance risks and these had been addressed. SMG agreed to forward the paper to the Commission.

## **6. Business Plans 2015/16 Update**

- 6.1 Trevor Reaney said that the preparation of Business Plans had been delayed because of the revision of the Corporate Strategy. This had

now been completed and Directors had been working on finalising their plans.

- 6.2 A monitoring exercise will be completed at the end of September and the outcome brought to a future SMG meeting

## **7. (a) Directorate Risk Registers**

- 7.1 David Johnston joined the meeting at 10.12am and assisted Hugh Widdis in presenting this item.
- 7.2 Having reviewed each of the Directorate Risk Registers, a number of 'risk clusters' had been identified including:-
  - (a) Insufficient skilled staff
  - (b) Contract failure/over reliance on service providers, and
  - (c) Inadequate Information Management/Security
- 7.3 It was accepted that the benefit of knowing these allowed action to be directed to minimise any risk across Directorates.

## **(b) Corporate Risk Register**

- 7.4 Recent changes made to the CRR were discussed and the availability of staff and budgets were identified as new risks to be included. Richard Stewart said that the primary risk was in not achieving those objectives deriving from the Corporate Strategy and if staffing/budgets were likely to impact it may be necessary to review the objectives. It was agreed that Directors would review the alignment between service expectations and budgetary realisation.

**ACTION: DIRECTORS**

## **8. HR Management Information**

- 8.1 Richard Stewart said that at 1 August 2015 the staff in post figure including agency workers and inward secondees was 368.3, which is a decrease of 1.9 FTE from the previous month. The decrease is due to departure of agency workers and the agreement to a number of flexible working requests by permanent secretariat staff to reduce their hours.
- 8.2 For the period August 2014 to July 2015, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 8.4, which represents an increase of 0.6 days when compared with the August 2013 to July 2014 figure of 7.8 days. The HR Office will continue to work proactively with managers and staff to ensure that sickness absence cases are managed effectively and in accordance with the provisions of the Managing Attendance Policy.

- 8.3 On this date there were 157.5 trainings days overall and 0.42 days on average per member of staff. The new corporate objective for 2015/16 is 2.5 days' training per annum per employee which reflects the reduction in this budget. Further training has been scheduled by HR Office.
- 8.4 Disciplinary action has been taken against a member of staff for breaching the Social Media policy.

## **9. Gender Action Plan Update**

- 9.1 John Stewart spoke to this issue. The Gender Action Plan Steering Group produced a report, which was approved by the Commission on 10 December 2014. At that meeting, it was also agreed that a quarterly update paper would be presented to SMG/Commission throughout the lifespan of the Gender Project.
- 9.2 The Group is currently drafting the full action plan, which will be circulated to group members for comment and then presented to SMG and Assembly Commission at their October meetings. To give SMG early sight of proposed actions, a draft action table was tabled for discussion.
- 9.3 The actions are grouped into five broad themes covering ongoing and future work:
- Leadership and Development
  - Equal Pay
  - Communication and Engagement
  - Life Balance/Health and Well-being
  - Transgender Issues

John pointed out that as this action plan is in draft form, it may be subject to change. This action table will form part of the full Gender Action Plan.

- 9.4 SMG also considered correspondence from the Equality Commission on quotas. This follows a request from the working group for clarification on the use of quotas in recruitment and in appointing staff to internal decision-making groups.

## **10. External Relations Strategy**

- 10.1 John Stewart spoke to this paper. The Commission had agreed an External Relations Strategy for 2013 – 15 and this has recently been reviewed. A draft strategy for 2013 – 16 has been prepared.

- 10.2 John said that the review of the 2013 – 15 Strategy had shown a number of successes, particularly the good work done in association with the Kosovo Government. The servers had been received and were to be assembled in Parliament Buildings before shipping to Pristina.
- 10.3 An All Party Group on China had been recently formed and talks were ongoing about funding for visits.

## **11. Union Flag EQIA Issues**

- 11.1 John Stewart said that following an EQIA by the independent consultancy company, Policy Arc, the Commission received a presentation on the report on 17 June 2015. After a vote, the Commission decided to adopt one of the report's recommendations – to fly the Union flag from Parliament Buildings on designated days as defined by the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
- 11.2 While this was seen as the key recommendation, the report contained a number of other recommendations for consideration. It was hoped that these would contribute to the development of one clear policy on the subject which would allow decisions to be made without further referrals to the Commission.
- 11.3 SMG discussed the paper and other issues relating to a neutral working environment including the provision of art work. It was agreed to refer the paper to the Commission.

## **12. Media Handbook**

- 12.1 John Stewart spoke to this paper. The amendments to the Media Handbook in connection with interviews in the Great Hall had been previously discussed by the Commission and further information had been sought from other legislatures. This had now been obtained.
- 12.2 SMG discussed the practicalities surrounding the monitoring of these interviews and legal liabilities. It was agreed to refer the paper to the Commission.

## **13. Staff Survey Action Plan**

- 13.1 James Gilsenan and Karen Martin joined the meeting at 11.22am. They were members of the group chaired by Trevor Reaney tasked with drafting an action plan to address issues arising from the recent Staff Survey.

- 13.2 James provided some background to explain why the group had proposed specific actions, for example, a rebuild of AsslSt and the opportunities this may present.
- 13.3 SMG discussed the proposals including those relating to SMG meetings and papers and agreed some changes. Richard Stewart emphasised the need to be clear about the purposes and outcomes of this work.
- 13.4 It was agreed that Directors would give further consideration to the draft proposals and inform James of any comments by Friday, 12 September 2015.

**ACTION: DIRECTORS**

**14. AQO/AQW Protocol**

- 14.1 Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 12.15pm and spoke to this paper. The Commission and Clerk/Chief Executive's Office (CCEO) has reviewed procedures around the handling of Questions to the Assembly Commission to ensure that the necessary requirements and deadlines are met and the draft protocol was designed to agree the boundaries within which CCEO, Directorates and Commission Members will operate.
- 14.2 The protocol covers corporate responses, language issues and deadlines. SMG agreed to refer the paper to the Commission.

**15. Commission/SMG Business**

- 15.1 James Gilsenan tabled a draft agenda for the next Commission meeting for 16 September 2015. The proposed items are:-
- Clerk/CE's Update
  - Insurance Litigation Update
  - External Relations Strategy

- 15.2 SMG noted the Forward Work Plan to October 2015.

**16. Directors' Updates**

- 16.1 John Stewart briefed SMG on progress in relation to the Kosovo Technical Co-operation Plan and working in the future with the Hungarian Parliament. He provided an up-date on 'Digital First' and the new print contract arrangements. John briefed SMG on a meeting with NICCY and the Erasmus+ 'Connections' Project and meetings with

Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University on potential new projects. He also briefed SMG on meetings in Derry/ Londonderry on Equality/ Good Relations and Youth Engagement and visits to the Assembly by students from South Korea and Taiwan.

- 16.2 Ken Eccles said that the roof project was nearing completion and the contractor should leave the site next week. Discussions are continuing on the mobile phone service. Staff have been advised about a PSNI search of the building.
- 16.3 Gareth McGrath said some Committee teams had been busier than ever over the Summer Recess and this had impacted on staff across the Secretariat and on some leave arrangements.
- 16.4 Richard Stewart reminded everyone that the Staff Hours at Work Policy comes into operation on Monday, 7 September 2015.

## **17. Items Cleared by Correspondence**

- 17.1 SMG noted that no items had been cleared by correspondence since the last meeting.

## **18. AOB**

- 18.1 No issues were raised.

## **19. Date of Next Meeting**

- 19.1 The next meeting will be held at 9.30am in Room 106 on Friday, 2 October 2015.

*The meeting adjourned at 12.57pm.*