

# **SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP PERFORMANCE FORMAT**

**FRIDAY, 1 MAY 2015 at 9.45AM  
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

## **APPROVED**

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

**In Attendance:** Jim Beatty  
John Kremer  
Maria Bannon  
Paula McClintock  
Brian Moreland  
Susie Brown  
Robin Ramsey  
Damien Martin  
Patricia Casey  
Nuala Dunwoody

### **1. Opening/Review**

#### **(a) Apologies**

No apologies were received.

#### **(b) Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **(c) Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting of 3 April 2015 had been approved and published on 21 April 2015.

#### **(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. Flags EQIA Presentation**

- 3.1 John Cramer, Policy Arc, and Maria Bannon joined the meeting at 9.45am. John delivered a presentation to SMG on the recent EQIA. After discussion, it was agreed to refer the issue to the next Commission meeting.

## **4. SP15+**

- 4.1 Gareth McGrath said that since the Commission's decisions on the budget a number of events have occurred and as a result, the net change in unallocated expenditure is +£44k.
- 4.2 To date, 14.3 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Posts have been suppressed - a further 18 posts will be reduced. All Business Areas are in the process of implementing the service reductions previously communicated to the Commission.
- 4.3 Following approval from the Commission at its meeting on 18 March 2015, the Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) for Secretariat Staff was launched on 20 April 2015. The closing date for all eligible staff, who are interested in applying for early exit, is 5pm on Friday 15 May 2015.
- 4.4 Since the decision to amend the Secretariat Childcare Scheme for 2015-16, officials have had discussions with Trade Union Side (TUS) on the implementation of this change from a 'salary plus' to a 'salary sacrifice' scheme - it is planned to use a local company (Employers for Childcare) to administer the scheme. Gareth said that a formal disagreement has now been lodged by TUS and this will need to be progressed through the process set out in the Joint Agreement.
- 4.5 A Change Management Group, chaired by Gareth and consisting of nominees from each Directorate as well as the Head of Human Resources and Head of Finance has been established. The group meets weekly to assist in leading, managing and supporting the implementation of the change programme arising from SP15+.
- 4.6 The Commission's current Corporate Strategy covers the period from April 2012-March 2016 - it was intended that it would cover the final three years of the 2011-15 Assembly mandate and the first year of the 2015-19 mandate. However, the mandate of the Assembly has been extended by a further year and it has been necessary to update and

extend the existing Corporate Strategy. The draft has been issued to all staff for comment.

- 4.7 SMG recorded its appreciation of the work to date on SP15+ by Directors, Heads of Business and staff.

## **5. Management Accounts**

- 5.1 Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 10.25am. While there may be some minor changes, current figures for 2014/15 show an underspend of 0.73%, which is below the 2% target.
- 5.2 Paula said that there had been some delays with payment of some Members' T&S claims due to the Exceptional Determination and these have had to be carried forward to 2015/16.
- 5.3 SMG noted the figures and recorded its appreciation of all the work done to achieve the final outcome.

## **6. Insurance Update**

- 6.1 Paula McClintock said that this was the first time that this issue had been before SMG. She provided details of current claims with insurers so that Directors could take action to minimise/reduce future incidents. There have been changes to insurance cover in a number of areas, including defamation, and Members have been advised.
- 6.2 SMG agreed to provide the Commission with an update for information.

## **7. Corporate Risk Register (CRR)**

- 7.1 Hugh Widdis spoke to this paper and asked SMG to note the changes highlighted. Hugh said that the outworkings of SP15+ were likely to lead to further changes.
- 7.2 SMG reviewed the CRR and agreed the changes.

## **8. Internal Audit Update**

- 8.1 Brian Moreland joined the meeting at 10.45am and spoke to his paper.
- 8.2 SMG was told that a total of 10 Internal Audit reports were issued in draft or final form during the period 1st April 2014 to 28th March 2015. Of the 8 final reports, 2 received a substantial assurance rating and 6 were assessed as being satisfactory.

- 8.3 Draft reports in respect of the audit of Secretariat support to NIABT and for Accounts Payable were issued with a satisfactory level of assurance. Nine follow – up audits have been completed and reports issued.
- 8.4 The overall level of assurance for the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015 remains satisfactory. SMG noted that the results of the audits completed during 2014/15 have resulted in either substantial or satisfactory assurance. This is the first time that 100% of the results of the Internal Audit programme have been in these categories. Trevor Reaney commended all staff for achieving this milestone.
- 8.7 The Secretariat Audit & Risk Committee (SARC) met on 3 April 2015 and were presented with an update on Internal Audit activity for 2014/15. The internal audit plan for 2015/16 was approved.

## **9. Directorate Business Plans**

- 9.1 Trevor Reaney introduced this paper which summarised the performance of Directorates to 31 March 2015 against their Business Plans. SMG acknowledged the significant progress during the year and agreed to refer the paper to the Commission for information.

## **10. HR Management Information**

- 10.1 Richard Stewart spoke to this paper. The Learning and Development Team reported that the corporate strategy target of three days training per member of staff had been achieved.
- 10.2 For the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, the average days lost to sickness absence was 8.8, a slight increase from 8.4 days applying a year on year comparison. The Human Resources 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. SMG acknowledged the work which had been undertaken to improve absence levels and asked for all to continue to support staff, especially through the changes and impacts arising from SP15+.
- 10.4 At 1 April 2015, the actual staff in post, including agency and seconded staff, was 390.2 which represents a decrease from the 1 March 2015 figure of 391.2. This does not take into account the posts suppressed under SP15+.

## **11. Media Handbook**

- 11.1 Susie Brown joined the meeting at 11.11am and spoke to this paper.

- 11.2 Susie said that following a review it was recommended that changes should be introduced in three areas relating to the media, namely:-
- (a) Media passes - The proposal is to introduce a third tier of pass, i.e. a permanent pass that allows for escort rights but is not a full Correspondent's Pass. This would address concerns in Usher Services about the size of the Assembly Correspondents Group. This will not result in the overall number of media passes increasing as some personnel who currently hold a Correspondent's pass will come off that list and on to an Intermediate list.
  - (b) Interviews within the Great Hall – the proposal is that the rule for media interviews be updated to allow all persons/groups to be interviewed in the Great Hall as long as they abide by the Visitor Conduct Policy. This update would bring the Media Handbook into line with the current practice in the Great Hall.
  - (c) Use of smartphones in Committee and Plenary galleries – this proposal is that, as at present, the media be prohibited from using their smart devices in either the Press Gallery of the Assembly Chamber or in Committees and that a paragraph outlining the policy and the reasons for this be inserted into the Media Handbook.
- 11.3 SMG discussed the proposals and agreed to implement those relating to media passes and the use of smartphones with immediate effect. However, because its implications, it was agreed to refer the proposal relating to interviews in the Great Hall to the Commission.

## **12. Resource Planning Group Terms of Reference**

- 12.1 John Stewart spoke to this issue.
- 12.2 Amending the terms of reference was ongoing but the group was concerned about its future role and lack of empowerment in the light of SP15+.
- 12.3 Trevor Reaney said that this highlighted a need to reflect on a number of roles including the Strategic Work Strands and the way forward. It was agreed to discuss this in more depth at the next meeting.

## **13. Good Relations Monitoring Report**

- 13.1 Maria Bannon spoke to this paper. The 2012-2016 Good Relations Strategy and associated Action Plan was approved by the Commission at its meeting on 25 September 2012. Screening was also completed.

- 13.2 Maria said that the 6 monthly monitoring report (September 2014-March 2015) provided SMG with an update on the progression of actions undertaken across each of the Directorates. The Good Relations Action Plan Monitoring Report records 22 completed actions, 27 on-going actions, 1 action was suspended, a new action was added and 2 actions were recorded as not complete. This totals 53 actions.
- 13.3 The majority of these actions requiring attention are either scheduled for 2015 and/or sit at an Assembly Commission level and are based on political consensus. It was agreed to refer the report to the Commission.

#### **14. Models for Members' Salaries, Pensions and Allowances**

- 14.1 Hugh Widdis spoke to this paper. At its meeting of 18 March 2015, the Commission asked for further information on the costs of establishing an IPSA-type body for the Assembly, and for other options to make the system more robust and transparent. The draft paper provided that information and options.
- 14.2 SMG agreed to refer the paper to the Commission.

#### **15. Commission/SMG Business**

- 15.1 Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 12.03pm. SMG considered a draft agenda for the next Commission meeting for 13 May 2015. The proposed items are:-
- Clerk/CE's Update
  - Exhibitions Policy
  - Recognition of Individuals
  - Media Handbook
  - Good Relations Monitoring Report
  - Flags EQIA
- 15.2 SMG noted the Forward Work Plan to October 2015.

#### **16. End of Mandate – Consideration of Issues for 2015/16**

- 16.1 Damien Martin and Patricia Casey joined the meeting at 12.20pm. Trevor Reaney introduced by the issue by outlining some of the 'big' issues that have to be faced in 2015 /16, for example, legislative programme, election planning, SP15+ and outworkings of the Stormont House Agreement. Trevor said that it was important to learn from the last year of the previous mandate and to put plans in place as soon as possible.

- 16.2 Damien Martin spoke of the issues that arose during 2010/11 from a Clerking and Reporting perspective and emphasised the need to better manage the legislative process to benefit everyone. He suggested working closer with OFMDFM to prioritise legislation and liaise with Departments.
- 16.3 Gareth McGrath said that with limited resources it was vital to prioritise and recognise that changes had to be made in how the business was managed and delivered.
- 16.4 Following discussions, Trevor Reaney said that it was clear that this issue demanded further development and may require a time limited End of Mandate Planning Group to be created.

## **17. Ad Hoc Committee Staff**

- 17.1 Nuala Dunwoody joined the meeting at 1.12pm and spoke to this paper.
- 17.2 It is necessary to set up two Ad Hoc Committees – one can be managed within current resources but assistance will be required for the other. It is proposed to temporarily transfer the Clerk of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee to oversee the Ad Hoc Committee for the Mental Capacity Bill. However, this will leave a vacancy within the former Committee and it is proposed to fill this with an AG5.
- 17.3 After discussion, SMG agreed the case for an AG5 post but did not agree to provide additional resources – these would have to be found within existing resources. It was agreed that Richard Stewart would lead a discussion with appropriate colleagues to identify the necessary resources.

## **18. Directors' Updates**

- 18.1 John Stewart briefed SMG on the procurement competition for a new print contract, Charity of the Year, Bursary Programme and a well-attended NIABT briefing on Women in Leadership. He provided an update on the Laptop Replacement Project, business case for off-site data replication and work with the National Assembly for Wales and the Assembly of Kosovo. John briefed SMG on the Erasmus+ 'Connections' Project, a meeting at Hillsborough Castle and engagements with diplomats from Australia, Flanders, Israel and the Netherlands.
- 18.2 Hugh Widdis said that the Independent Financial Review Panel plans to issue a further consultation paper before the end of May.

18.3 Stephen Welch updated SMG on issues with the mobile phone service and the IWMS. A revenue generation plan for Parliament Buildings has been started – a workshop has been held and the Assembly is working with DFP on use of the Stormont Estate.

## **19. Items Cleared by Correspondence**

19.1 No items were cleared by correspondence since the last meeting.

## **20. AOB**

20.1 No items were raised under this heading.

## **21. Next Meeting**

21.1 The next meeting will be held on Friday, 29 May 2015 at 9.30am in Room 106, Parliament Buildings. As Trevor Reaney will be absent, it was agreed that Stephen Welch would chair the meeting.

*The meeting adjourned at 1.35pm.*