

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP POLICY FORMAT

**THURSDAY, 2 JULY 2015 at 9.40AM  
ROOM 401, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**APPROVED**

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

**In Attendance:** Jim Beatty  
Susie Brown  
Damien Martin

## **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 29 May 2015 had been approved and published on 15 June 2015.

### **(d) Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **2. Action Points**

2.1 There were no outstanding Action Points.

### **3. SP15+**

- 3.1 Gareth McGrath provided a verbal update. He said that two papers relating to a draft budget for 2016/17 and consideration of options for the greater use of NICS Shared Services had been noted by the Commission at its meeting on 24 June 2015. Initial work on the consideration of options for the greater use of the NICS Shared Services will begin over the coming months in conjunction with the Heads of Business and in consultation with TUS. Plans for the suppression of 20 posts by 3 July 2015 are nearing completion and the Voluntary Exit Selection Panel will meet on Friday, 3 July to begin selecting those who applied under the Scheme.
- 3.2 SMG discussed the approach to managing this further reduction in permanent posts. Gareth outlined that he will be bringing a paper on this issue to a future SMG meeting once the outcome of the Voluntary Exit Scheme has become clearer.

### **4. Management Accounts**

- 4.1 Trevor Reaney said that although the Budget Bill had been passed in the Assembly last week, the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement remained problematic. The Chancellor was due to make a budget statement on 8 July 2015 and the potential impact of this was unclear. June monitoring had been completed but there was no feedback on its outcome as yet. At this stage, work was proceeding on the basis that funding would be provided to complete the Voluntary Exit Scheme. As the NICS Scheme was due to move by 30 September, an announcement was expected before then.
- 4.2 Richard Stewart said that although it was only two months into the financial year, expenditure has been in line with expectations and he was optimistic that targets would be met.

### **5. Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015/17**

- 5.1 Richard Stewart said The Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan 2013/15 aimed to help improve the health and wellbeing of staff by:
- Empowering staff to make informed and accessible choices about their own wellbeing
  - Increasing employee commitment
  - Improving attendance, and
  - Assisting in combatting stress

- 5.2 A Health & Wellbeing Team was set up with representatives from across the organisation to develop wellbeing initiatives and implement the Action Plan. The Action Plan was delivered within budget (£6,686) and the initiatives were well attended by staff.
- 5.3 A draft Health & Wellbeing Action Plan for 2015/17 has been developed by the Human Resources Office for consideration and this was before SMG for approval.
- 5.4 SMG discussed the proposed plan and considered the planned actions reasonable, timely and deliverable with a mixture of proactive and reactive initiatives. SMG approved the plan.

## **6. Engagement Strategy EQIA**

- 6.1 John Stewart said that at its June 2013 meeting, the Assembly Commission approved a proposal to develop a new Engagement Strategy. The draft Engagement Strategy was agreed by the Commission in October 2014. The strategy was equality screened during development and although only minor impacts were found, the Assembly decided to carry out a full EQIA.
- 6.2 The consultation on the Equality Impact Assessment of the Strategy has been completed and is ready to be issued following approval from the Assembly Commission. John said that very few concerns had been identified during the consultation and sought SMG's approval to refer the draft back to the Commission. This was agreed.

## **7. Print Contract/Digital First**

- 7.1 Susie Brown joined the meeting at 11.00am.
- 7.2 John Stewart provided the background to the current position. The print contract was due to expire on 22 July 2015 and a procurement exercise had concluded. Expenditure on the print contract had reduced from £865,000 in 2009/10 and was likely to be under £60,000 in 2015/16.
- 7.3 Susie Brown outlined the four options within the paper for SMG consideration. While all four were feasible to a degree, only two options provided a real way forward.
- 7.4 SMG discussed the matter at length and it was agreed that John Stewart would convene a meeting with all internal stakeholders next week to agree the way forward.

**ACTION: JOHN STEWART**

## **8. Legislative Programme Planning 2015/16**

- 8.1 Damien Martin joined the meeting at 11.55am. He said that during the final year of the Fourth Assembly it is anticipated that there would be up to 31 Bills for scrutiny and enactment and the delivery of 75 amending stages. For comparison, only 32 Bills have been enacted so far during this Assembly.
- 8.2 This will result in significant resource pressures across the organisation and very substantial pressures on a small number of relatively small offices. In some of the offices, such as the Bill Office and Business Office, there has been and continues to be, considerable turnover of staff as a result of the various organisational change processes. As a consequence, the level of experience in these offices is considerably lower than would seem appropriate in responding to the pressures of an extensive, back-ended legislative programme.
- 8.3. Over the past years SMG has considered papers on how to proceed and agreed to revisit the issue at a later meeting.
- 8.4 Damien said that one of the lessons learned from the final year of the Third Assembly was that a more corporate and proactive approach was required if the legislative programme and its impacts are to be managed more effectively and it was now proposed to establish a project to support a more strategic and corporate approach to the management of the programme. The proposed aim for the project is “to support Assembly staff to maintain high quality legislative scrutiny and compliance with statutory obligations and Assembly procedures whilst facilitating the final year legislative programme”.
- 8.5 After discussion, SMG agreed to the project. Gareth McGrath agreed to lead the project team.

## **9. Front of House/Retail Space**

- 9.1 Stephen Welch said that as part of the Speaker’s Respect Initiative for more people to visit Parliament Buildings, Facilities was considering plans to separate the gift shop from the front café. In order to achieve this, it would be necessary to reallocate and redesign some rooms at the front of the building. Stephen provided SMG with floorplans and sought views on the proposals.
- 9.2 SMG identified and discussed a number of options but accepted that the space currently available limited development. It was agreed that the Clerk/CE would approach OFMdFM about the use of rooms. Stephen Welch will consider how best to proceed and, in light of a response from OFMdFM in due course, bring a business case back to SMG.

**ACTION:       TREVOR REANEY**

## **10. Procurement Compliance Report 2014/15**

- 10.1 Trevor Reaney said that the Procurement Office produces a formal Procurement Compliance Report on a yearly basis (as well as regular in year reports to Directors). The annual Report is prepared as soon as possible following the end of the financial year and prior to the signing off the annual accounts.
- 10.2 This is an in-depth review of various governance positions and no other public sector body within Northern Ireland undertakes such an in-depth and detailed review on such a regular basis.
- 10.3 The 2014/15 financial year has shown that compliance with NIA Procurement guidelines remains very high. The overall position in relation to Business Case budgets versus 'actual expenditure' continues to improve, and this is expected to continue with the full implementation of the Business Case policy. Trevor Reaney requested that Directors ensure that Business Cases are updated to reflect changes to circumstances. He noted that he did not expect to see any reports of actual expenditure on projects exceeding the Business Case (including agreed revisions) in future reports.
- 10.4 Stephen Welch advised that the Business Cases within Facilities had been completed and Richard Stewart advised that the Business Case in Corporate Services would be completed by 31 August 2015.
- 10.5 Where frameworks are concerned and particularly in reference to the tender/contract documentation, progress has been very good. It was also noted that a new policy focused upon the management of business justifications and Business Cases is reaching its final stages and it is anticipated that this will significantly improve the governance of Business Cases.
- 10.6 SMG welcomed the progress made and acknowledged the work of the Procurement Office.

## **11. Report to those charged with Governance 2014**

- 11.1 Trevor Reaney spoke to this report from the NIAO. The report is based on their findings arising from a 2014/15 audit and three issues were highlighted within the findings. The most significant was an overspend in respect of an unforeseen increase in the provisions for Members' pensions. Despite the circumstances of this excessive expenditure, the C&AG had to issue a qualified opinion. The report was noted.

- 11.2 Richard Stewart said that the C&AG had signed the annual accounts and these would be laid in the Assembly prior to the summer recess.

## **12. Commission/SMG Business**

- 12.1 The draft agenda for the next Commission meeting will be discussed on 4 September 2015.
- 12.2 SMG noted the Forward Work Plan to October 2015.

## **13. Subscriptions to Lexus News and Legal Library**

- 13.1 John Stewart spoke to this business case.
- 13.2 This online resource provides legal information and news archives and is considered crucial for RaISe and Legal Services to fulfil their obligations to meet the business and information needs of Members, their staff and secretariat staff. It is the Library's most used resource with over 9,700 uses within the last year.
- 13.3 SMG approved the business case.

## **14. Directors' Updates**

- 14.1 John Stewart briefed SMG on two meetings of the Election Planning Group, an Assembly Community Connect annual networking event and NIABT annual general meeting. He said that Dr Non Gwilym from the National Assembly for Wales had visited the Assembly to brief senior staff on youth engagement developments in Wales. John said that RAISE had hosted a visit to the Assembly by a delegation of researchers from the Parliament of Jordan and that he had attended meetings with diplomats from Israel and France.
- 14.2 Richard Stewart advised that he had received further correspondence from TUS in respect of the Childcare Allowance.
- 14.3 Stephen Welch updated SMG on the latest developments in relation to the mobile telephone service. A review of the service will be carried out following a trial of using Wi-Fi for voice calls.
- 14.4 Hugh Widdis said that the IFRP was about to issue its final consultation paper. It had been decided that a conflict register for staff would have little value. The issue of same sex marriages is in the High Court for a judicial review.

## **15. SMG Self-Assessment**

15.1 Trevor Reaney said that this is an established annual exercise. He will arrange for questionnaires to be issued to SMG members. Hugh Widdis had reviewed the process last year and revised the associated paperwork.

## **16. Items Cleared by Correspondence**

16.1 SMG noted that the following items had been cleared by correspondence:-

- Corporate Risk Register
- HR Management Information.

## **17. AOB**

17.1 No issues were raised.

## **18. Date of Next Meeting**

15.1 The next meeting will be held at 9.30am in Room 106 on Friday, 4 September 2015.

*The meeting adjourned at 12.32pm.*