

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP POLICY FORMAT

**WEDNESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2015 at 9.47AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present: Trevor Reaney
Gareth McGrath
John Stewart
Richard Stewart
Sebastian Mingout
Tara Caul

In Attendance: Jim Beatty
Robin Ramsey
David Lynn
Sinead McDonnell

1. Opening/Review

(a) Apologies

Apologies were received from Stephen Welch. Sebastian Mingout deputised on his behalf.

Trevor Reaney welcomed Tara Caul to her first meeting as acting Director of Legal and Governance Services.

(b) Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

(c) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of 2 October 2015 had been approved and published on 22 October 2015.

(d) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

2. Action Points

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

3. Reasonable Adjustments – Access to PB

- 3.1 David Lynn joined the meeting and spoke to this paper.
- 3.2 At its meeting on 22 September 2015 the Commission had asked for details of alterations made to meet the needs of a Member who is a wheelchair user along with any further proposed adjustments and future alterations to Parliament Buildings.
- 3.3 David said that some adjustments had been made, eg, temporary ramps in the Chamber and that the Member had been allocated a room on the ground floor. Facilities Directorate has carried out a review of the building and are satisfied that the Member has reasonable access to other offices. Some issues have been identified and some further adjustments may be possible, eg, opening of corridor doors, but it may be better to defer these pending other changes to the Assembly. The Disability Discrimination Act refers to reasonable adjustments and these must be considered in light of a number of factors including budgets.
- 3.4 At present, there are two designated disabled parking spaces on each side of the building and following discussions with the Member, it was recommended that these are increased to four spaces. The creation of a named space was discussed but was not considered necessary at this time.
- 3.5 SMG reviewed the changes already made and directed that where possible, adjustments should be done within this financial year. It was agreed that, with some amendments, the paper should be referred to the Commission.

4. SP15+ Update

- 4.1 Gareth McGrath provided an update on SP15+. He said that some responses had been received from Directorates in response to his request for assessments on the impact of pending staff reductions. These responses would be collated and a paper would be issued to Directors.
- 4.2 Work is continuing on taking forward the exploration of the greater use of NICS Shared Services and it is planned to present a more detailed paper to SMG in December.

5. Management Accounts

- 5.1 Richard Stewart spoke to this paper. There continues to be a significant underspend within GAE and yet only £10k was surrendered last month. He expressed concerns at how much of the remaining GAE budgets will be spent over the coming months. Tara Caul asked about Training and Development expenditure and was told that £25k lies within central control and this should be used by the end of the year.
- 5.2 Richard said that DFP has decided to carry out a November Monitoring Round and responses were required for 3 November 2015.

6. Childcare Scheme

- 6.1 Richard Stewart spoke to this paper.
- 6.2 In order to achieve the Assembly Commission's reduced budget settlement for 2015-16 it was decided to change the 2014-15 Childcare Allowance Scheme for Secretariat staff from one provided on the basis of 'salary plus' to a 'salary sacrifice' scheme. Since then, representations were received from TUS, individual staff and external bodies on the impact of the change on some of the Section 75 categories and compliance of the change in relation to the Commission's Equality Scheme. Correspondence from the Committee for the Administration of Justice had already been provided to the Commission.
- 6.3 From the screening exercise, it was identified that seven of the nine Section 75 categories were not impacted from the change. However, impacts for the categories of Gender and Dependents were noted and mitigating measures were recommended. In addition, it was decided to conduct a staff consultation exercise to consider whether other measures may be identified. The consultation exercise has now concluded.
- 6.4 The proposed measures were:-
- (a) The provision of a level of financial support to contribute towards additional childcare costs incurred when required by the Assembly to attend work which is outside of a staff member's normal working pattern.
 - (b) The provision of a level of financial support for parents of children with disabilities who must use a Specialist in the provision of care for that child.
- 6.5 SMG discussed the findings of the consultation exercise and was content that the impact on the groups identified within S75 was minor

with the adoption of the above mitigating measures. It agreed to refer the matter to the Commission.

7. Vacancy Management Policy

- 7.1 Sinead McDonnell joined the meeting at 10.45am and spoke to this paper.
- 7.2 In May 2015 SMG was asked to consider a revised Vacancy Management Policy and to determine the decision making body for vacancy management matters going forward. It was agreed that the HR Office would take this forward. HR Office also reviewed the Redeployment Protocol and the Policy on the Management of Deputising & Temporary Promotion.
- 7.3 Sinead said that rather than going into the detail within the papers today, it would be more helpful if SMG would consider the key principles which she would then use as a basis for refining the policies. The majority view amongst Directors was that strategic resourcing decisions should be made by SMG - the staff complement and budget should be set by SMG and that resourcing decisions within the set complement may be made by the Director/Head of Business. Resourcing decisions above the set complement/budget would be referred to SMG and decisions on external recruitment would continue to be taken by the Clerk/Chief Executive.
- 7.4 SMG had a lengthy discussion on how best to proceed with this issue. It was agreed to accept the guidelines within 7.3 above with clear delegation of responsibilities to Directors and Heads of Business within allocated budgets and the ability to move both salary and GAE monies to address pressures.
- 7.5 It was agreed that Sinead will bring an amended paper back to SMG.

8. Business Plan Monitoring

- 8.1 Trevor Reaney introduced this paper which summarised the performance of Directorates to 30 September 2015 against their Business Plans. The potential for VES and end of mandate pressures to impact on the delivery of Business Plans in the second half of the year was highlighted.
- 8.2 SMG acknowledged the significant progress made to date and agreed to refer the paper to the Commission for information.

9. Revenue Generation

- 9.1 Sebastian Mingout spoke to this paper. He updated SMG on the success of opening the building over the Summer recess in terms of the number of people visiting and dining and the monies received. In light of this success it was now proposed to extend those facilities to upcoming recess periods and to give further consideration for using Parliament Buildings as a venue centre for corporate events.
- 9.2 SMG acknowledged the positive results from the Summer Recess and endorsed the proposals regarding future recess periods. However, it was the view that more work needed to be done on the estimates and figures surrounding the use of Parliament Buildings as a venue. While there were no objections in principal, it was agreed that more work was needed on these before referring a proposal to the Commission.
- 9.3 Sebastian agreed to prepare a limited paper for the Commission on the use during recesses and a later paper on use as an events venue.

10. Review of SMG Support

- 10.1 Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 11.55am and spoke to this paper.
- 10.2 Following the conclusion of VES, it was proposed that the AG6 post for supporting SMG within the Commission and Clerk/ Chief Executive's Office (CCEO) will be suppressed and the duties absorbed between the AG5, AG7 and Clerk/Chief Executive's Personal Secretary.
- 10.3 CCEO will need to review how SMG can be supported in a more proportionate way within existing resources. This opportunity will also be used to review systems and examine ways to improve the organisation of SMG and Commission meetings going forward and take account of feedback from the Speaker's first few months as Chair of the Commission.
- 10.4 CCEO will also have to consider simplifying the processes around Assembly Questions to the Commission and developing proportionate procedures around requirements arising from the Gender Action Plan. Robin asked Directors to submit their views, concerns or suggestions they have on any of the support functions provided by CCEO within the next few weeks.

11. Commission/SMG Business

- 11.1 Robin Ramsey tabled a draft agenda for the next Commission meeting for 4 November 2015. The proposed items are:-
 - Clerk/CE's Update

- Insurance Litigation Update
- Gender Action Plan
- Disability Access within Parliament Buildings
- Protocol for Answers to Assembly Questions
- Assembly Cycle to Work Scheme
- Disability Access within Parliament Buildings
- Review of Summer Initiative/Public Dining
- IPSA Peer Review of the administration of Members' Expenses
- OFMdfM Committee – Public Services Ombudsperson Bill

11.2 SMG noted the Forward Work Plan to October 2015.

12. Directors' Updates

12.1 John Stewart briefed SMG on progress in relation to the Erasmus+ 'Connections' Project, Election Planning and the 'Art, Architecture and Parliament Buildings' Project. He briefed colleagues on discussions with the All Party Group on China, politicians from Honduras, diplomats from the United States and Brian Devlin and Michael Cochrane's recent visit to the Moroccan Parliament funded by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. John said that the NI Assembly and Business Trust had just undertaken its first study visit to Wales and that work with Queen's University Belfast was progressing on the UK and the EU. The servers for the Kosovo Parliament would be shipped in the next few weeks and plans have made to have these installed and tested.

12.2 Sebastian Mingout said that the Fire and Rescue Service had carried out an exercise in Parliament Buildings last Saturday. All had gone well.

12.3 Richard Stewart said that negotiations on pay were continuing. It was hoped to conclude these shortly.

12.4 Gareth McGrath said the recent political instability had further delayed meaningful engagement with the Executive on the 2015/16 legislative programme. A high level group is in the process of being set up to help manage the anticipated legislative programme.

13. Items Cleared by Correspondence

13.1 SMG noted that the following items had been cleared by correspondence since the last meeting:-

- Corporate Risk Register

- Cycle to Work Scheme
- Review of Bound Volumes
- HR Management Information

13.2 It was noted that the HR Management Information paper will now only be produced quarterly for consideration at the relevant SMG meeting.

14. AOB

14.1 Trevor Reaney said that Jim Beatty was retiring from the Assembly and regrettably this was his last SMG meeting. Jim's contribution to SMG over the past years was acknowledged and SMG wished him well for the future.

15. Date of Next Meeting

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

The meeting adjourned at 12.20pm.