

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP STRATEGY FORMAT

**FRIDAY, 29 MAY 2015 at 9.40AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

**Present: Stephen Welch
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart
Hugh Widdis
Maria Bannon**

**In Attendance: Jim Beatty
Karen Martin
Robin Ramsey**

1. Opening/Review

(a) Apologies

Apologies were received from Trevor Reaney and John Stewart. Stephen Welch and Maria Bannon deputised on their behalf respectively.

(b) Declarations of Interest

As Chair of the meeting, Stephen Welch declared interests in respect of Items 10 and 11 on the agenda. He will speak to these items as a Director.

(c) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of 1 May 2015 had been approved and published on 15 May 2015.

(d) Matters Arising

The continuation of the Strategic Work Strands had been raised at the last meeting (para 12.3) and was to be discussed today. Stephen Welch said that discussions have been deferred to the Directors' meeting on 5 June 2015.

2. Action Points

- 2.1 The Action Points list was reviewed. Members were asked to advise Jim Beatty of any further updates/amendments.

3. SP15+

- 3.1 Gareth McGrath provided a verbal update on this matter.
- 3.2 The revised Corporate Strategy had been sent to Commission Members – the deadline for comments has been extended to Monday, 1 June 2015. Applications to the Voluntary Exit Scheme have now closed – the Clerk/Chief Executive sent a message to all staff on Monday, 18 May 2015. Trade Union Side (TUS) has lodged a formal disagreement over the proposed changes to the Childcare Scheme. Gareth said that non-implementation of the proposed changes has increased pressures on budgets. HR Office is continuing to work on a revised Vacancy Management Policy and further consideration will have to be given to planned staff moves. A Fundamental Business Review on the further implementation of the Organisational Redesign report has begun – a report will be sent to the Clerk/Chief Executive by Monday, 15 June 2015.
- 3.3 SMG acknowledged the continuing good work done by Gareth McGrath and the Change Management Group.

4. Assembly Commission's Draft Budget 2016/17

- 4.1 Gareth McGrath said that it is important for the Commission to begin financial planning not just for 2016/17, but for the subsequent years leading up to the proposed reduction in the number of MLAs in May 2021. The primary purpose of his paper was to set out a proposed draft budget for the Commission for 2016/17 but it was important for the Commission to consider a more constitutionally appropriate budget setting process.
- 4.2 The paper proposed an approach for 2016/17 based on reducing the Commission's controllable budget whilst still delivering the Commission's vision of best serving the Assembly by being at the forefront of providing progressive, effective and efficient parliamentary services. While the Commission's preparation of a draft budget for 2016-17 is a key decision, it was noted that on two previous occasions the Commission's draft budgets have effectively been overruled by the Executive.
- 4.3 SMG discussed the details of the draft 2016/17 budget and the proposed methodology. It was agreed to refer recommendation 1 (the draft budget for 2016/17) and recommendation 2 (the proposed

methodology for setting the Commission's budget) to the Commission meeting on Wednesday, 10 June 2015.

5. Policy on Externalisation of Services

- 5.1 Gareth McGrath said the additional £2m cash reduction in the Commission's budget for 2015/16 has required a significant reconfiguration of the way services are provided by the Secretariat, including reductions in some service standards. Indications are that public expenditure in Northern Ireland will continue to reduce in future years. The purpose of his paper was to identify whether the recommendation not to change the pattern of externalisation of services within the Organisational Redesign report should be revisited to enable consideration of the greater use of NICS Shared Services.
- 5.2 The Stormont House Agreement included a commitment to extending the use of shared services and on 12 March 2015 Mike Brennan, DFP Budget Director, issued a Dear Accounting Officer (DAO) letter "to set out the key responsibilities of Accounting Officers in relation to recent Executive agreement to extending shared services further in central government". The letter also asked Accounting Officers "to note the requirement for all central government Departments and their NDPBs to work with Enterprise Shared Services (ESS) to consider the extension of shared service coverage".
- 5.3 Whilst no significant changes in the externalisation of services are likely in the near future, the further extension of NICS Shared Services across the wider public sector and the reduction in staffing complement and GAE will result in a direct reduction in the need for some supporting services.
- 5.4 SMG discussed how it should approach this issue and agreed that much more work was required. At this stage, the proposal was simply to inform the Commission of the potential pressures and trends and it was agreed to seek their approval to determine how best to move forward.

6. Shared Parental Leave Policy

- 6.1 Karen Martin joined the meeting at 10.45am and spoke to this paper.
- 6.2 Karen said that the Work and Families (NI) Act 2015 introduced new rights for working parents to avail of shared parental leave in respect of children expected to be born, or placed for adoption, on or after 5 April 2015. The HR Office will shortly develop a Shared Parental Leave Policy and will review other related policies (for example the Flexible Working Policy) to ensure that the new legislation is complied with.

SMG was asked to provide guidance on the way in which the leave may be taken and the level of pay during shared parental leave.

- 6.3 Under the new legislation, eligible employees have a new statutory entitlement to shared parental leave. Where their baby is due on or after 5 April 2015 (or in the case of adoption if the baby will be placed on or after 5 April 2015), mothers will be able to volunteer to end their maternity leave and/or pay early to create leave and pay which they can share with the child's father or their partner, as shared parental leave and pay. Existing rules/policy on maternity and ordinary paternity leave and pay will remain the same. However, the provision of additional paternity leave is abolished. Shared parental leave and pay will also be available to the intended parents in a surrogacy arrangement if they qualify for adoption leave and/or pay.
- 6.4 This means that eligible fathers and partners will be able to request more leave from work during the first year following their child's birth/adoption. As it is shared, there will also be cases where eligible mothers will return to work early because the child's father or their partner is taking leave in their place.
- 6.5 SMG discussed the planned policy and identified potential issues in its application. Depending on the approach taken, there was also the potential for increased budgetary pressures where the partner was not employed by the NIA. It was agreed that to assist in the planning and management of shared parental leave applications and to minimise impact on the Secretariat, employees should be required to take shared parental leave in continuous blocks (up to a maximum of three). It was also agreed to adopt the policy of statutory level payment for shared parental leave as adopted by the NICS and keep this under review in the event of new case law or Government guidance.

7. People Service Plan

- 7.1 Karen Martin said that the People Strategy 2012-16, agreed by SMG in June 2012, outlined the following three people priorities:-
 - Effective Leadership & Management.
 - Staff Capacity & Capability.
 - Enhancing Behaviours & Motivating Staff.
- 7.2 To assist in delivering the three people priorities, a People Service Plan (PSP) was developed – this is a two year plan for the period 2014 to 2016 and the paper provided an update on the activities which have taken place during the 2014/15 financial year.
- 7.3 The Corporate Strategy requires the HR Office to monitor the average number of training days during the course of a year and the Strategy set a target of 3 training days on average to be taken by staff members

across each year. At 31 March 2015, a total of 1,141 training days had occurred which equated to an average of 3.05 days per staff member. In light of continuing budgetary pressures, the revised Corporate Strategy has reduced the target to 2.5 training days on average (per annum /per staff member). Karen said that the availability of funding for learning activities in 2015/16 will be greatly reduced, with a training delivery budget of £23,000. It will therefore be essential to direct spending towards statutory training and other learning that will be of most benefit to the Secretariat and Commission staff.

- 7.4 Significant progress has been made on internal mentoring and coaching with all participating staff now 'paired'. Plans to mentor externally with the NICS have been put on hold pending the outcome of the NICS's Voluntary Exit Scheme.
- 7.5 Apart from noting the significant progress made in delivering the PSP and recognising the excellent work of the Learning and Development team, SMG was asked to suggest areas of training for 2015/16. Gareth McGrath said that the Learning and Development budget reduction was not sustainable especially in light of the many challenges and changes to be dealt with by staff. He said that Politics Plus was introducing a programme for Women in Public Life and said that 5 places had been allocated to Secretariat staff. Hugh Widdis agreed and also suggested that efficiency management training might be of use. Stephen Welch said that the Facilities Management sector has altered greatly and there was a clear need for formal qualifications in this field. These are available at various levels, NVQ to Masters. The ability to use the OnBoard training through Business in the Community was also noted.

8. Gender Action Plan

- 8.1 Maria Bannon spoke to her paper.
- 8.2 On 27 March 2015, a gender workshop was held at Riddel Hall, Queen's University, to allow the entire group to discuss information gathered at subgroup level, including the range of options identified, as a means of addressing perceived barriers in relation to gender.
- 8.3 An informal guest speaker session took place on 1 May 2015 at Parliament Buildings, and was attended by the Clerk/Chief Executive, members of the Gender Action Plan Working Group and a number of guest speakers. The aim of the session was to learn about how gender issues are addressed in other organisations. The informal nature of the session allowed for a useful exchange of information and views. The learning from this session will inform both the action plan and its implementation.
- 8.4 Following on from the Gender Guest Speaker Session, Assembly officials are now exploring the possibility of joining Business in the

Community's Gender Project, a three-year project which aims to support businesses working together to increase gender diversity, shift workplace behaviours and create enabling workplaces for men and women.

- 8.5 The working group is currently considering a range of research, including research/documents from Queen's University Belfast, research utilised by AERC and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, and the European Commission's 'Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy'.
- 8.6 SMG noted the progress to date and complemented Maria and the working groups on the good work to date. However, it was agreed that the update may be improved through inclusion of the many ongoing actions taken throughout the Secretariat but not formally recorded. It was agreed to refer the update to the Commission.

9. Annual Equality Progress Report

- 9.1 Maria said that the Assembly Commission was required to monitor progress achieved in relation to the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties and the implementation of Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. The Assembly Commission is then required to submit an annual review to the Equality Commission detailing the progress achieved against each of the targets. A completed annual review on progress from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 was before SMG for consideration. The report is in the form of a template which will allow for better future comparisons on progress.
- 9.2 SMG noted the excellent work to date and encouraged everyone to note as evidence all/any work that is done. It was agreed to refer the report to the Commission.

10. Revenue Generation

- 10.1 Stephen Welch spoke to this paper.
- 10.2 Support Services, as part of the 2012 contract tender competition, sought added value services from contractors in order to explore Hospitality Revenue Generation (HRG) to further offset cost in view of the CSR budgetary requirements at the time. Following a number of workshops initially involving service delivery stakeholders a HRG plan is currently being designed.
- 10.3 Stephen said that as a first initiative to start generating revenues, initially during "off-peak" business times, it was recommended that the following initiatives should be implemented for Summer Recess 2015:

- Opening of the Members' Dining Room at lunchtime (12 noon to 2.30pm) to the public in July & August 2015
 - Opening of Room 115 to the public for Afternoon Teas in July and August 2015 between 2.00pm and 4.00pm to coincide with hourly public tours
- 10.4 Links have also already been established with Visit Belfast and key Secretariat staff are attending several workshops to plan for the summer especially the arrival of Cruise Ships and the Tall Ships in particular.
- 10.5 It was recommended that the Assembly should explore the feasibility of employing a professional commercial manager (on a cost neutral and limited term basis) to drive and maximise its commercial revenues in view of the booming corporate events' market in the greater Belfast Area and the impact on the overall cost of the Support Services contract and other business areas.
- 10.6 Clarification was provided that the proposal involved the generation of additional sales (leading to reduced costs through the existing Support Services contract) and did not involve the Commission contracting with outside caterers, etc. for the provision of these facilities. Subject to a report coming back to SMG after a test of the arrangements over the summer, SMG agreed to the proposal for the pilots. The issue was referred to the Commission.

11. ID Passes

- 11.1 Stephen Welch spoke to this paper.
- 11.2 Passes are issued to everyone who in the course of their work requires access to Parliament Buildings on a daily/weekly basis, or to those who provide a service to the Assembly and require access to Parliament Buildings on a regular basis. But there are presently a number of Assembly ID/Security Passes issued to individuals who do not work for the NI Assembly or are not covered under the current Assembly Security policy. This is an historical situation that has arisen over time. Stephen said that it was now necessary to review the categories and those with within each category.
- 11.3 SMG reviewed the 14 categories of pass holders and agreed some changes.

12. Commission/SMG Business

12.1 Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 12.17pm. SMG considered a draft agenda for the next Commission meeting for 10 June 2015. The proposed items are:-

- Clerk/CE's Update
- Child Care Scheme
- Assembly Commission Budget
- Equality Annual Report
- Media Handbook
- Revenue Generation
- Flags EQIA

12.2 The next Plenary Commission Questions is scheduled for Monday 23 June 2015.

12.3 SMG noted the Forward Work Plan to October 2015.

13. Directors' Updates

13.1 Hugh Widdis said that a group had met to address legislative programme planning issues and Damien Martin was currently preparing a paper on the way forward. The IFRP have scheduled a number of meetings and consultation exercises and plan to have a draft Annual Report to the Commission by the end of June 2015. A judicial review of the Human Trafficking Act has been mentioned in the media.

13.2 Gareth McGrath noted that the recent Queen's speech in Parliament referred to a Stormont House Agreement Bill.

13.3 Richard Stewart said that the TUS input to the papers relating to the childcare scheme going before the Commission was still awaited. He had attended an Interparliamentary Corporate Contact Group meeting in Dublin which had been very worthwhile.

13.4 Stephen Welch said that plans were being drawn up for the recant of staff back to Parliament Buildings. Room 401 was now fitted out and an additional server room had been moved to the 4th floor. Everyone will be moved before recess. A member of staff has been dismissed.

13.5 Maria Bannon said that the Erasmus+ Connections Project had commenced and the young people participating had received a two-day induction at Parliament Buildings. Thirty five people had been recruited and they had chosen Mental Health as the theme of their inquiry. Richard Stewart asked that liaison with the relevant Committee takes place.

13.6 Maria said that formal consultation had concluded on the Engagement Strategy Equality Impact Assessment and that a report on the findings was being written.

14. Post Evaluation

14.1 SMG considered a request to begin an evaluation of a post. The request was agreed.

15. Items Cleared by Correspondence

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

- Corporate Risk Register
- HR Management Information.

16. AOB

16.1 Maria Bannon said that changes to the Corporate Strategy had a knock-on effect to the dates of her returns, especially to the Equality Commission. After discussion, SMG agreed to the proposed changes.

17. Date of Next Meeting

17.1 The next meeting will be held at 9.30am in Room 106 on Friday, 26 June 2015.

The meeting adjourned at 12.41pm.