

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2017 at 9.30AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Gareth McGrath
Jonathan McMillen
Richard Stewart
Stephen Welch

In Attendance: James Gilsonan
Janet Hughes
Sinéad McDonnell
David Lynn
Maeve Donnelly
Barbara Love
Robin Ramsey

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.36am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Tara Caul. Jonathan McMillen deputised.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the meeting of 18 January 2017 were published on 16 February 2017 together with all unrestricted meeting papers.

4. Draft SMG Action Points

Progress on all action points was noted.

5. Election Planning Update

Stephen Welch advised SMG that a letter would issue to candidates now that information from the Electoral Office has been collated. This will be followed by a letter from the Clerk/Chief Executive to all elected MLAs inviting them to attend reception days at Parliament Buildings.

Stephen confirmed that there will be two Reception Days which, following feedback from the last reception days in 2016, have been revised to ensure that less, but better targeted, orientation information will be supplied and that MLAs will be asked to provide more detail in advance. This will allow other business areas to provide more tailored initial information to MLAs as part of the longer term induction process.

Action: Lesley Hogg and Gareth McGrath to further consider the content of the MLA induction events.

6. Political Update

Lesley Hogg provided an update on recent developments.

Gareth McGrath provided SMG with a draft procedural timetable of events following the elections.

The next Election Planning Group meeting is scheduled for 27 February 2017.

CORPORATE SERVICES

7. Management Accounts

Richard Stewart presented the monthly management accounts for January 2017.

Richard advised SMG that in the absence of a Budget Bill there would be no Spring Supplementary Estimate, therefore the Main Estimate will be the allocation for the year 2016-17.

Richard highlighted the position at the end of January and forecasted expenditure for year end, which has been significantly impacted by dissolution.

Richard confirmed that budgets will continue to be monitored against the December monitoring position with any additional pressures being met in the first instance from surpluses that have been identified as a result of dissolution.

8. Revised Draft Budget 2017/18

Richard presented the Revised Draft Budget for 2017/18 for consideration by SMG.

The original budget for 2017/18 had previously been approved by the Audit Committee last October, however a revision is required due to the reduction in MLAs, and associated costs, from 108 to 90 following the March 2017 Election.

Richard recorded his thanks to Heads of Business (HoBs) for forwarding additional budget returns under very tight deadlines.

Action: CCEO to arrange a meeting between the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Business to consider administration budgets and capital project proposals for the 2017-18 financial year.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting for agenda items 9,10,11,12,13 and 14 at 11.08am.

9. HR Management Information

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 February was 350.7 against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 351.7.

Sinéad advised that as at 1 February there were 17 staff on temporary promotion and 19 agency staff.

Sinéad referred SMG to the recruitment schedule which has been updated to reflect the progress on a number of external recruitment competitions.

Sinéad advised that due to a recent resignation at Research Officer (AG5), a further external recruitment competition would need to be added to the recruitment schedule and asked SMG for a decision on where this competition should be placed in the recruitment schedule.

Agreed: The post of Research Officer (AG5) to be added to the recruitment schedule.

Discussion also took place regarding the filling of a specialist temporary post within the IS Office.

Agreed: In advance of the competition being planned, Stephen Welch to be involved in meeting with HR to discuss the requirements of the IS Office AG8 post.

Agreed: SMG were content for all new and existing merit lists to remain 'live' for a period of up to 18 months.

10. Flexible Working Provisions for Assembly Secretariat Employees

SMG noted the draft Assembly Commission paper on Flexible Working Provisions for Assembly Secretariat Employees.

This paper was produced following a request at the December 2016 Commission meeting to outline flexible working provisions available to staff of the Assembly Secretariat.

Sinéad advised SMG that at present 62 staff avail of flexible working or partial retirement.

Agreed: SMG approved the paper for the Commission.

SMG noted that HR is currently reviewing the Hours at Work Policy and that training for staff will be rolled out.

11. Corporate Learning and Development Activities 2017-18

Sinéad spoke to this paper detailing the proposed learning and development (L&D) activities and opportunities for staff for the 2017/18 reporting year.

Sinéad outlined the programs that HR intended to run together with approximate costings. As this was an extensive paper, Directors requested an additional meeting to discuss the detail.

Action: Additional meeting to be arranged with Directors to discuss further.

12. Revision of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy

Sinéad explained that the Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy had not been reviewed for some time.

To ensure that the policy reflects current best practice and addresses an action within the Assembly's Gender Action Plan, HR have drawn up a list of key principles to guide the revision of the policy.

Agreed: SMG approved the policy revision exercise and also agreed that HR should develop a Mental Health Policy to complement work already being undertaken in this area.

13. Standards of Conduct Policy – Political Activities

The Political Activities section of the Standards of Conduct Policy remains suspended pending consideration by the Commission.

SMG agreed that the paper should go to the next Commission meeting.

14. Review of the Social Media Policy

HR and Trade Union Side have engaged in a review of the Assembly's Social Media Policy to ensure that it remains appropriate and robust.

SMG noted the proposed amendments to the current Policy and HR will now consult with TUS on the proposed amendments.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 12.47pm.

The meeting adjourned until 1.20pm.

David Lynn joined the meeting for agenda item 15 at 1.20pm.

FACILITIES

15. Storage of Furniture and Assembly Artefacts

David Lynn asked SMG to consider a draft Commission paper that considers the best way to rationalise Assembly owned items that are currently held in storage.

The items consist of furniture, artefacts and artwork and disposal of furniture (but no artefacts or artwork) would reduce storage costs without the loss of items with a financial or historical worth.

Agreed: SMG approved the paper for the Commission.

David Lynn left the meeting at 1.38pm.

Maeve Donnelly joined the meeting for agenda item 16 at 1.38pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

16. Draft Internal Communications Strategy

Maeve Donnelly presented a draft Internal Communications Strategy, for initial consideration by SMG. She explained that the draft strategy is designed to cover 2017-2020 with annual reviews of performance and effectiveness and contains 16 actions for consideration.

Agreed: SMG agreed that a further Directors' meeting should be convened to consider the paper in further detail, and that Directors should provide initial comments to Maeve in advance of the meeting.

Maeve Donnelly left the meeting at 2.06pm.

Barbara Love joined the meeting for agenda item 17 at 2.06pm.

17. Members Survey 2016/17

Barbara Love presented her Research Paper outlining the findings of the NIA Members Survey 2016/17. It was noted that this was the first time an all-interview (18 MLAs were interviewed) format had been used for the Survey and was similar in format to surveys undertaken in other jurisdictions.

Secretariat staff received very positive feedback and Directors were asked to draw together Actions from the survey findings to be amalgamated into a Secretariat Action Plan.

It was also noted that the survey findings were broadly in keeping with the findings from the House of Commons 2016 Members' Survey.

Lesley Hogg congratulated Barbara and colleagues on a very comprehensive survey and paper.

Action: Directors to feed Action Points back to Gareth McGrath to allow the compiling of a Secretariat Action Plan.

Barbara Love left the meeting at 2.23pm.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 2.23pm.

CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT

18. Establishing the Speaker in the New Mandate

Robin Ramsey outlined his paper and noted that as the election of a Speaker is the first business to be conducted by a new Assembly, initial arrangements to support a new or re-elected Speaker must be in place for the first sitting.

SMG noted the actions in the paper and Robin undertook to liaise further with Directors to ensure all actions are completed in good time.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

19. Directors' Updates

SMG noted the Directorate and Corporate Support Unit updates.

SMG noted that the RHI Inquiry has yet to confirm the location for its work.

OTHER ITEMS

20. Items cleared by Correspondence

Corporate Risk Register

Noted

21. AOB

There was no other business.

22. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Friday, 24 March 2017 at 9.30am in Room 106.

The meeting ended at 2.53pm.