

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 26 MAY 2017 at 1.00PM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Brian Devlin
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: James Gilsean
Janet Hughes
Alice McKelvey
Sinéad McDonnell

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 1.23pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Stephen Welch. Brian Devlin deputised.

Please note change to agenda, item 6 taken before item 2.

Alice McKelvey joined the meeting at 1.23pm for agenda item 6.

6. Internal Communications Group: Staff Survey

Alice McKelvey spoke to this paper seeking approval from SMG to proceed with the Staff Survey 2017 and to agree proposals regarding timescales and methodology.

Alice advised that SMG feedback on the draft survey had been considered by the Internal Communications Group (ICG) and presented a revised draft for final approval.

Alice also provided SMG with a draft survey cover letter which she confirmed had been cleared by the Assembly's Information Standards Officer.

In order to maximise staff responses to the survey Alice stated that ICG had discussed various incentives but had settled on the proposal to offer ten incentives for participation of one day's leave.

SMG approved the draft cover letter, the incentive proposal, and the revised draft survey subject to some clarification being considered in relation to the section on 'Unacceptable Behaviours'.

Action: Alice to liaise with the Head of Human Resources to consider the merits of inserting a definition of 'Unacceptable Behaviours' into the survey before issuing to staff.

Lesley Hogg thanked Alice and asked her to pass on SMG's thanks to ICG on the hard work put into devising the new survey.

Action: James Gilsean to publish Staff Survey 2014 Action Plan on AsslSt in consultation with Alice McKelvey.

Alice McKelvey left the meeting at 1.53pm.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting together with papers were published on 17 May 2017.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

5. Political Update

In light of the ongoing political uncertainty, Lesley Hogg advised SMG that Richard Stewart would be chairing a Heads of Business (HoB) working group to consider Secretariat staffing issues; it is anticipated that the group will have its first meeting next week.

CORPORATE SERVICES

7. Management Accounts – April 2017

Richard Stewart presented the Management Accounts for the reporting period April 2017.

Richard confirmed that the 2016/17 Resource Accounts were submitted to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) on 22 May 2017 and that the Audit Office is completing its field testing and analysis. SMG will be advised when the final outturn is agreed after the audit is completed.

Richard also advised SMG that monthly meetings will re-commence with Budget Holders in June to assist with the reviewing of the expenditure and forecasting outturn.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 2.19pm for agenda items 8, 9 and 10.

8. HR Management Information

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 May was 332.6 against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 351.7. The reduction in the May figures was due to two permanent members of staff and ten agency workers leaving the Assembly during the month of April.

Sinéad also provided the annual update on sick absence and equality information:

Sickness Absence

SMG noted that the average days lost to sickness absence per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) member of staff was 9.2 against an agreed absence benchmark of 7.5. This increase is primarily attributable to long term sick absence and the overall estimated cost of absence was £382,000.

Equality Information

SMG also noted the breakdown of gender, age and community background of staff as at 31 March 2017.

SMG discussed the Assembly's staff age profile and agreed to consider a possible apprenticeship programme.

Action: SMG to consider a possible apprenticeship programme.

Sinéad provided SMG with an update on current recruitment competitions as per the Recruitment Schedule.

9. Development of a Mental Health Policy

Sinéad McDonnell spoke to this paper seeking approval from SMG on the key principles of a proposed Mental Health Policy and agreement to proceed with the development of the policy through the Employee Relations Group (ERG) Policy Sub Group.

SMG approved the development of the policy.

SMG thanked Sinéad and her team on the excellent work done to date in relation to this matter.

Action: Draft policy to be developed in line with the proposed policy development process.

10. Annual Review of Learning & Development Activities in 2016/17

SMG noted progress made between April 2016 and March 2017 in relation to the implementation of Learning and Development activities for Secretariat staff.

Sinéad McDonnell advised SMG that a total of 1267.09 training days were delivered during 2016/17 equating to an average of 3.86 learning and development days per staff member against a target of 2.5 days.

SMG members noted that it was likely that the average number of Learning and Development (L&D) days per staff member was higher because not all informal learning that takes place is captured on iTrent. Sinéad advised that HR Office has just updated the L&D Guidance and when it is being issued to staff, we will include a reminder to staff to record informal learning activities on iTrent as well as information on how to do this.

Action: HR Office to distribute the revised L&D Guidance to staff with a reminder to ask staff to record their informal learning activities on iTrent and that staff should be advised how to do this.

Discussion took place in relation to increasing the target of 2.5 learning days per person as it has been comfortably exceeded in recent years, and it was agreed that this would be addressed as part of the Corporate Strategy discussions.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 2.55pm.

11. Commission Paper on the Support Services Contract

SMG approved the paper for the Commission meeting on 30 May 2017.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

12. Members Survey 2016/17 Action Plan

SMG noted the Members Survey Action Plan but agreed that the proposed action to develop an Extranet for Members was unnecessary and should be removed.

Action: Gareth McGrath to remove the proposed action to develop an Extranet for Members from the Action Plan.

Gareth McGrath sought agreement from SMG that the implementation of the Action Plan be reviewed biannually.

SMG agreed that an AsslSt Editorial Board should be established as part of Phase Two of the AsslSt project and that it should consider access to AsslSt and the issue of personal information.

Action: CCSU to incorporate a bi-annual review of Members Survey Action Plan into CCSU 17/18 SMG Work Plan.

Action: AsslSt Editorial Board to be established as part of Phase Two of the AsslSt project to consider access to AsslSt and the issue of personal information.

Action: Action Plan to be forwarded to Commission Members for consideration following the first Implementation Review in November 2017.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

13. Draft Commission Agenda

There was no change to draft agenda discussed at the April SMG meeting, however, SMG agreed that the following information be issued to Commission Members by correspondence:

- Good Relations Action Plan 16/21: Six-monthly update
- Progress update on the Gender Action Plan 16/18
- Health and Safety Management Report
- Financial update – 16/17 year end outturn
- Reminder of position in relation to 17/18 budget
- Risk Management Guidance

Action: Richard Stewart to prepare papers for issue to the Commission in respect of the fourth and fifth bullet points from the above list.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

14. Directors' Updates

SMG noted the Directorate and Corporate Support Unit updates.

Richard Stewart provided SMG with an update on his visit to the Welsh Remuneration Board.

OTHER ITEMS

15. Items to be Cleared by Correspondence

Corporate Risk Register – awaiting update from Corporate Services.

16. AOB

Commission Paper on Assembly Commission Staffing and Services: Preparatory planning for decisions which may need to be considered in July 2017

SMG approved the paper for the Commission meeting on 30 May 2017.

Lesley Hogg advised that she had asked Gareth McGrath to provide an update from the Assembly Secretariat Exit EU Working Group and the EU Withdrawal Scrutiny Process at the next meeting.

17. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 3.54pm.