

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

**WEDNESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2017 at 9.15AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath (until 1.16pm)
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Frances Leneghan
Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Paula McClintock
Sinéad McDonnell
Karen Martin
David Johnston
David Lynn
Sebastien Mingout

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.20am. Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at the start.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Declarations of Interest

Dr Gareth McGrath declared an interest in agenda item 11.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting together with unrestricted papers were published on 18 September 2017.

Please note change to agenda order, items 5 and 17 taken before item 4.

5. Political Update

Due to the continued ongoing political uncertainty, Lesley Hogg advised SMG that she would be arranging a meeting with Directors early the following week to discuss potential scenarios going forward.

17. Draft Commission Agenda

SMG discussed and agreed the agenda items for the October Commission meeting.

Agenda to include the following items:

- Paper on the Implementation of Major IT Projects;
- Paper on the 2017 Pay Claim;
- Paper on a Memorandum of Understanding between the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) and Politics Plus;
- Clerk/CE Key Report.

Robin Ramsey also informed SMG that a number of written questions to the Commission had been received and highlighted that some of the questions involved a response from more than one business area.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.40am.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Consideration of a possible apprenticeship programme

Tara Caul requested that a Legal Apprenticeship Programme be considered as part of this review.

Agreed: SMG agreed that an apprenticeship programme should be developed but that implementation would not progress until the political situation is resolved.

Responsibility for updating Members' Information of AssISt

Gareth McGrath confirmed that the Business Office would now be responsible for updating Members' information on AssISt.

Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 10.00am for agenda item 6.

CORPORATE SERVICES

6. Management Accounts – August 2017

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for the reporting period to 31 August 2017.

SMG noted the updated forecasted expenditure for 2017/18 and the level of underspend that is expected against the adjusted budget as included in the Secretary of State's Written Statement, issued in July 2017.

Paula advised SMG that the budget profiling exercise had been completed and was reflected in the figures presented in the paper.

In relation to Members' expenses, Paula raised the issue of Members' Assembly travel allowance. This issue was also raised at the recent Commission meeting and SMG agreed that a letter should issue to Members to establish if they still wished to receive this allowance in light of the current political situation.

Action: Paula McClintock to issue a letter to all Members in respect of the Assembly travel allowance.

Richard Stewart raised the issue of the Assembly Commission's payment of Financial Assistance to Political Parties (FAPP) in the current political situation. SMG agreed that a separate meeting should be arranged to discuss this matter further.

Action: Lesley Hogg to arrange a meeting with Richard Stewart and Paula McClintock to discuss FAPP payments.

With regards to the Capital Report, forecasted expenditure on capital projects was noted and approved by SMG subject to the necessary business cases being developed.

Paula McClintock and Richard Stewart left the meeting at 10.31am.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 10.31am for agenda items 7,8,9 and 10.

Karen Martin joined the meeting at 10.31am for agenda item 8.

Please note change to agenda order, item 8 taken before item 7.

8. Progress update on the Gender Project and the Gender Action Plan

Karen Martin spoke to this paper providing SMG with a progress update on the Gender Project and Gender Action Plan. The last update was provided in November 2016.

SMG noted the progress that had been made and thanked the Project Team for their efforts thus far.

Richard Stewart, re-joined the meeting at 10.49am.

SMG also considered the Action Plan and approved the additional actions proposed by the Gender Action Plan Implementation Group, as well as suggesting additional actions that could be incorporated in the plan.

In relation to the measurement of the outcomes of the actions within the Plan, SMG suggested that more work be done on this and advised Karen to liaise with Louise Close in the Outreach Team who is currently doing some work in this area.

Action: Karen to update the Action Plan in line with SMG's suggested amendments and re-circulate to SMG for final approval via correspondence.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 10.58am.

7. HR Management Information

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 September was 328.5 which reflects a slight reduction since August due to the resignation of two full time members of staff.

Sinéad advised SMG that two agency workers remained assigned to the Assembly Secretariat as at 1 September 2017.

An update in respect of temporarily redeployed staff was also provided. SMG noted that as at 1 September 2017, 21 staff had been physically redeployed on short term loan arrangements, with a further 10 due to take up out-postings by early October. SMG also noted that a number of staff were carrying out work for other publicly funded organisations while remaining in Parliament Buildings.

With regards temporary opportunities, Sinéad provided SMG with statistics on the number of positions issued to Secretariat staff, expressions of interest received and positions filled and unfilled.

Sinéad confirmed that short term opportunities would continue to be issued to staff twice weekly.

Sinéad also provided an update on the Recruitment Schedule, advising SMG that the external Clerical Officer competition had completed and that work was progressing well with regards refreshing the AG5, 6 and 7 internal temporary promotion merit lists.

With regards sickness absence, SMG noted that the average days lost per employee due to sickness absence for the year ending 31 July 2017 was 9.2 days against a benchmark of 7.5. SMG requested that the HR Office start capturing lessons learned regarding the causes of sick absence and the effectiveness of the Assembly Commission's support mechanisms once an individual has returned to work.

Action: HR to introduce a process of capturing lessons learned in relation to the causes of sick absence and the effectiveness of the Assembly Commission's support mechanisms.

Finally, Sinéad provided SMG with details on outstanding Performance Review Reports (PRRs) for 2016/17 and Personal Performance Agreements (PPAs). Sinéad also outlined the process that would be followed with regards to performance management for members of staff who have been temporarily re-deployed.

9. Draft Mental Health Policy

Sinéad McDonnell spoke to this paper, seeking SMG's approval for the Human Resources Office to begin formal consultation with TUS and all staff on the draft Mental Health Policy.

SMG considered the draft Policy, Line Managers Guidance and Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) presented.

Agreed: SMG comments should be incorporated in the draft policy and then progress to consultation with TUS and staff.

Action: Sinéad to arrange for the consultation of the Mental Health Policy to launch during the week on which World Mental Health Day occurs (10 October 2017).

10. Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan

Sinéad McDonnell spoke to this paper.

SMG noted that the period of the 2015-17 Health and Wellbeing Action Plan had ended and that a new Action Plan for 2017-19 had been developed.

Sinéad informed SMG that the Assembly had signed up to the Mental Health Charter, developed by the Equality Commission for employers and service providers.

Action: HR to make staff aware that the Assembly has signed up to the Mental Health Charter.

SMG considered the proposed revisions to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the draft Action Plan for 2017-19 and suggested that more work be done in relation to the measurement of the outcomes of the actions.

Agreed: SMG agreed the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan for 2017-19 subject to some minor amendments and subject to further consideration of action outcomes.

Action: Sinéad to update the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan for 2017-19 with amendments as proposed by SMG and re-circulate to SMG for final approval via correspondence.

Richard Stewart advised Directors that there may be a requirement in the future to review the structure of the contract with Inspire in relation to usage by staff family members.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 11.59am.

The meeting suspended at 12noon and resumed at 12.36pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

11. Proposed Memorandum of Understanding between the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and Politics Plus

Gareth McGrath spoke to this paper.

Following discussion, SMG agreed that additional information was required and that a further paper should be brought to the next SMG meeting.

Action: Gareth McGrath to bring a further paper to the next SMG meeting.

David Johnston joined the meeting at 1.04pm for agenda items 12.

LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE SERVICES

12. Review of Corporate Risk Register

David Johnston spoke to this paper.

SMG considered the latest draft of the Corporate Risk Register which will be reviewed by SMG again in December 2017 and by the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) in October 2017.

Agreed: SMG agreed the contents of the current draft Corporate Risk Register, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: In relation to Corporate Risk 4, 'Failure to maintain a suitably skilled, experienced and motivated staff complement', Directors are to review their respective business areas and confirm by the next meeting that they have suitable staff contingency arrangements in place.

Action: Directors to review the inherent and residual risk scores and mitigating actions. In some cases, the mitigating actions do not appear to be reducing the inherent risk. In these cases, Directors should review the nature of the proposed risk responses.

David Johnston left the meeting at 1.16pm.

The meeting suspended at 1.16pm and resumed at 3.07pm.

Gareth McGrath did not re-join the meeting.

David Johnston re-joined the meeting at 3.07pm for items 13 and 14.

13. Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers

David Johnston spoke to this paper. The previous review was in March 2017.

SMG were asked to review the latest Directorate Risk Registers and consider emerging Risk Clusters and whether any Directorate risks need to be reflected in the Corporate Risk Register.

SMG noted the need to revise their Directorate Risk Registers in October to reflect the revised organisational structure.

Richard Stewart reminded colleagues that, as outlined in the Risk Management Strategy, 'failure to deliver aim x' is not a risk and should not therefore be listed in the Risk Registers. Instead the risk should identify the event or uncertainty that may enhance or impede the ability to achieve that aim.

Action: Directors to review the descriptors for risks including those that are titled 'failure to deliver an objective' to ensure that the risk is not simply a descriptor of an adverse outcome.

Action: Directors to review the inherent and residual risk scores and mitigating actions. In some cases, the mitigating actions do not appear to be reducing the inherent risk. In these cases, Directors should review the nature of the proposed risk responses.

Agreed: SMG agreed that the current risk clusters are reflected in the Corporate Risk Register.

14. Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan Document

David Johnston spoke to this paper, seeking SMG's approval of the Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan Document.

David confirmed that the Bribery Risk Assessment had been in place since June 2013 and that it had been recently reviewed, strengthened and updated to reflect the new risk format.

SMG considered the documents and suggested some minor amendments to the action plan.

SMG commended David and Heads of Business on the excellent document presented.

Agreed: SMG agreed the contents of the document presented, subject to some minor amendments to the action plan.

David Johnston left the meeting at 3.18pm.

15. Update on Planning for the Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and consideration of the DPO role in the NIA Commission

Tara Caul spoke to this paper, which provided an update to the paper presented at the last SMG meeting in August.

SMG considered the options outlined in the paper in relation to the designation of a DPO in the Assembly Commission and agreed to proceed with Option 2 as recommended.

Agreed: SMG agreed to proceed with Option 2 in relation to the designation of DPO in the Assembly Commission.

FACILITIES

David Lynn and Sebastien Mingout joined the meeting at 3.25pm for agenda item 16.

16. Marketing Strategy

Sebastien Mingout spoke to this paper, outlining the plan to implement a marketing strategy to support the Revenue Generation Plan.

Sebastien provided SMG with three options for consideration in respect of a marketing strategy, with a recommendation to proceed with Option B, which is to 'continue to advertise services on social media/website platforms etc. Continue to subscribe to Visit Belfast and renew our application for Tourism NI Quality Award.'

Agreed: SMG were content to proceed with Option B to, 'continue to advertise services on social media/website platforms etc. Continue to subscribe to Visit Belfast and renew our application for Tourism NI Quality Award' as recommended.

David Lynn and Sebastien Mingout left the meeting at 3.33pm.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

18. Directors' Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

OTHER ITEMS

19. Commission Papers Cleared by meeting/correspondence

The following items were cleared by SMG via meeting/correspondence:

- Paper on Assembly Commission Staffing: Updates on Staff Planning
- Paper on the Review of Support Services Contract Options
- Paper on the Review of Contracts – Update
- Paper on the Implementation of Major IT Projects – Update
- Paper on the Pay Claim 2017

20. AOB

With regards the quarterly Review of Directorate Business Plan due this month, Lesley Hogg confirmed that this would be addressed at the Corporate Strategy meeting arranged for Friday, 6 October 2017.

21. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is Friday, 20 October 2017.

The meeting ended at 3.45pm.