

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

**MONDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2018 at 9.30AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Richard Stewart
Brian Devlin (deputising for Gareth McGrath)

In Attendance: Frances Leneghan
Janet Hughes
Ashleigh Mitford
John Gibson
Maria Bannon
Roisin Mooney
Paula McClintock
Karen Martin

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.35am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, who is currently on a short-term secondment with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Mr Brian Devlin deputised.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 20 November 2018 together with unrestricted papers were published on 17 December 2018.

4. SMG Action Points

On reviewing the outstanding action points, Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive requested that estimated completion dates be added to actions 1, 2, 5 and 24. Lesley also reminded Directors that revised completion dates should be provided as part of the status update if

actions are overdue or if they are not expected to be completed by the due date.

In relation to action 4, Review of Fraud Prevention and Anti-Bribery Policy and Response Plan, SMG agreed to amend the action to request that the Director of Corporate Services provides SMG with a copy of the draft MoU between the Public Sector and the PSNI for review so that SMG can consider whether the Assembly Commission should request that it becomes a party to the MoU.

Action: Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services to provide SMG with a copy of the draft MoU between the Public Sector and the PSNI for review.

In relation to action 5, insurance cover for unintentional data breaches, Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services requested a meeting with the Head of Finance to obtain clarification on the scope and requirements of the insurance quotation.

Action: Richard to arrange for the Head of Finance to meet with Tara Caul to discuss the scope and requirements for a quotation for insurance cover for unintentional data breaches.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, advised that there were no further updates and the Assembly Commission was continuing to maintain readiness for a return to normal business.

Ashleigh Mitford joined the meeting at 9.59am for agenda items 6 and 7.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

6. Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register

SMG considered the latest draft of the Corporate Risk Register which will be reviewed by SMG again in March 2019 and by the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) in February 2019.

SMG agreed the contents of the current draft subject to a few minor amendments.

Action: Ashleigh Mitford to update Corporate Risks 2 and 5 as agreed by SMG.

7. Annual Review of Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan

Ashleigh presented the revised Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan.

Following discussion SMG approved the documents subject to a few minor amendments to the Checklist and Bribery Risk Assessment.

Action: Ashleigh to update the Self-Assessment Checklist and Bribery Risk Assessment as agreed by SMG.

In order to comply with an action within the plan in relation to the next steps for fraud and bribery awareness and possible further training for those most at risk, Ashleigh sought advice from SMG on how best to identify those members of staff.

SMG agreed that the best approach was for Directors to identify staff within their relevant directorates and forward details to Ashleigh, who would then arrange for those identified to attend a meeting to discuss this risk and assess whether additional training was required over and above the on-line training provided in September 2018.

Action: Directors to identify staff within their respective directorates most at risk of fraud and bribery and forward details to Ashleigh.

Action: Ashleigh to invite relevant staff as identified by Directors to a meeting to discuss the risk of fraud and bribery.

Tara Caul thanked Ashleigh for the comprehensive work done on this matter and praised the effectiveness of the process in operation.

Ashleigh Mitford left the meeting at 10.09am.

John Gibson joined the meeting at 10.12am for agenda item 8.

8. Review of the Delegated Procurement Policy

John Gibson presented the findings of a review of the Assembly Commission's Delegated Procurement Policy together with proposals for a central document storage facility for all relevant contract documentation i.e. award letters, contract documents and any contract variations.

SMG noted that the Assembly Commission's current approach to delegated procurement including the threshold was comparable to the approach used by other legislatures and public bodies.

SMG also noted John Gibson's findings that there is currently no persuasive evidence that greater centralisation of procurement, via the

reduction in the delegated procurement threshold from the current £30k, is necessary.

Lesley Hogg stated that in her view not all historical compliance issues had been fully reflected in this review. John Gibson confirmed at the meeting that in his view, the only compliance issues which had arisen in the course of the reviews of delegated procurement contained in papers dated 26 October 2017 (with further discussion at a meeting on 9 November 2017) and 19 June 2018 were in relation to the clarity of specifications and separation of duties, that SMG had raised no other compliance concerns and that there was therefore no evidence of a significant compliance gap at present. John said that in his opinion the compliance issues identified through his reviews were not significant enough to warrant centralisation.

Following detailed consideration of the findings and in light of John Gibson's assertion that in his view there was currently no evidence of a significant compliance gap, SMG agreed with the recommendation within the paper to not make any changes to the Delegated Procurement Policy in relation to the current threshold at this time. However, SMG requested that a further review be carried out in one year's time to check on the progress made and provide an opportunity for SMG to confirm that all compliance issues had been addressed and that no new compliance issues had arisen.

Action: Procurement Office to carry out a further review of the Delegated Procurement Policy in December 2019.

In relation to the issue of a centralised contract storage facility, John outlined three possible options, namely:

- 1) A SharePoint system developed internally;
- 2) A contract documentation repository;
- 3) A low cost sourcing tool; or
- 4) An E-Sourcing system.

Following consideration of the proposed options SMG noted that a centralised contract storage was within the scope of the Assembly Commission's Systems Review Project. However, Tara Caul was of the view that an interim solution should be sought and SMG therefore discussed the merits of possible interim solutions.

Action: John to provide further information on the scope and costs of options for an interim solution and prepare a short paper for further consideration by SMG.

Tara thanked John for the level of work that had gone in to the production of this paper.

John Gibson left the meeting at 11.31am.

Maria Bannon and Roisin Mooney joined the meeting at 11:31am for agenda item 9.

9. Inclusive and Accessible Events: Guidance and Checklist

Maria Bannon presented the draft Inclusive and Accessible Events Guide and Checklist for review by SMG.

Maria also highlighted that during consultation with business areas in the development of the guide and checklist, a number of wider accessibility issues were raised. SMG noted that whilst these issues fell outside the scope of the paper presented it was important for them to be addressed and agreed that the Equality Unit should in the first instance, inform the relevant business areas of the issues raised and bring relevant staff together to discuss collectively if need be.

Action: Equality Unit to inform business areas of the wider accessibility issues raised and if necessary bring relevant staff together to discuss collectively.

Following consideration SMG approved the draft guide and checklist for publishing on AsslSt.

Action: Equality Unit to arrange for the Inclusive and Accessible Events Guide to be published on AsslSt.

Maria Bannon and Roisin Mooney left the meeting at 11.37am.

Paula McClintock joined the meeting 11.38am for agenda item 10.

10. Management Accounts

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for the reporting period November 2018.

Paula confirmed that the formal monitoring exercise commissioned by the Department of Finance (DoF) had been completed and SMG noted the current forecast outturn figures for 2018/19. Paula stated that this reported position would now represent the final budget position for the Commission and would be the amount reflected in the Spring Supplementary Estimate for 2018/19. Paula also advised SMG that there would be no further formal opportunity to bid for or surrender resources with DoF.

SMG considered and approved an additional capital bid of £33k for Gas Suppression Container Units.

Paula updated SMG on her meeting with Information Systems Office (IS) staff in relation to further developing the Decision Authorisation System (DAS) and a schedule of the development issues relating to DAS was provided to SMG. She confirmed that this detailed list of required amendments had been provided to the IS Office and advised that there were several issues that could be addressed quite quickly however, there were a number of remaining issues that were more complex and would

require a substantial amount of developer time which the Head of IS stated would be difficult to facilitate due to other work pressures. In light of this, Paula advised SMG that the Finance Office had reviewed the remaining issues and identified two which should take priority, i.e. a change in workflow when a Director/Head of Business (HoB) goes on deployment/secondment and the ability to close a DAS record on the system once the Finance Office have been instructed by the HoB. Paula sought approval from SMG to submit a formal request to IS Office for this work to be completed. SMG was content for a request for these improvements to be made to the IS Office.

Action: Finance Office to submit a request for updates to DAS in relation to a change in workflow and the ability to close a DAS record to IS as agreed by SMG.

11. Parliamentary Travel for Members

Paula presented proposals for Parliamentary travel for Members.

Following consideration, SMG requested that detailed guidance be drafted and that additional legal advice sought and a further paper presented to SMG in February 2019.

Action: Paula to prepare detailed guidance and submit a request to Legal Services for further legal advice.

Action: Paula to prepare a further paper for presentation at the February SMG meeting.

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 12.12pm.

Karen Martin joined the meeting at 12.12pm for agenda item 12.

12. HR Management Information

SMG noted the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 December (including agency and seconded staff) was 311.7 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) compared with 314.4 on 1 November 2018.

Karen Martin presented an amalgamated table in respect of temporary promotion and deputising arrangements and agency workers assignments as requested at last month's SMG. She confirmed that there had been no change in these arrangements since last month's report to SMG.

SMG reviewed the current redeployment figures which had been updated following business area returns on staff resources required for continuing activities. Richard Stewart advised that more work was required on the figures presented and confirmed that this would be completed in time for the next SMG meeting.

SMG noted that the table of merit lists had been updated to include the temporary Parliamentary Reporter post which has been extended until November 2019.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period December 2017 to November 2018, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 9.1 which compared favourably with the period December 2016 to November 2017 in which the figure was 9.7 days.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 12.22pm.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

13. Directors' Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

OTHER ITEMS

14. Commission papers cleared by the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors at a separate meeting

Secretariat Pay Policy
Future investment in Politics Plus
Principles for Review of Events Policy
Media Handling

15. AOB

There was no other business.

16. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday, 23 January 2019 at 9.30am in Room 106.

17. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- HMRC Employer's Compliance Review
- Inappropriate Behaviours Policy – Key Principles
- FoI Charging Policy

The meeting ended at 12.29pm.