

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

THURSDAY, 18 JANUARY 2018 at 1.00PM  
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

## APPROVED

**Present:** Lesley Hogg  
Tara Caul  
Gareth McGrath  
Richard Stewart

**In Attendance:** Frances Leneghan  
Janet Hughes  
Paula McClintock  
Karen Martin  
David Lynn  
Brian Devlin  
Louise Close  
Maeve Donnelly

### Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 1.10pm.

#### 1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

#### 2. Declarations of Interest

Dr Gareth McGrath and Mr Richard Stewart declared an interest in relation to item 13.

#### 3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 20 December 2017 together with unrestricted papers were published on 16 January 2018.

#### 4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

#### 5. Political Update

SMG noted the Secretary of State's (SoS) announcement of a new round of talks commencing next Wednesday.

Lesley Hogg advised SMG that she had spoken to the Speaker and Commission Members regarding the use of rooms in Parliament Buildings by the SoS and officials for the impending talks.

*Note change to agenda running order.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 1.31pm for agenda item 7.*

### **7. Management Accounts**

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

SMG noted the monthly accounts together with the updated forecast for income and expenditure for 2017/18.

Paula highlighted the level of underspend expected against the budget as updated in the Department of Finance's (DoF's) December Monitoring round.

SMG discussed the capital projects and the relevant expenditure to be attributed to them before the end of the financial year.

**Agreed:** SMG agreed that a further review of capital expenditure expected before the end of the financial year should be carried out.

**Action:** Finance Office to facilitate conversations with Directors regarding the possible re-distribution of capital funds between business areas.

Paula also advised SMG of an issue regarding the delivery of a number of projects and late end of year accruals. SMG agreed that this would need to be addressed. SMG also highlighted concerns that Heads of Business (HoBs) appeared to be taking decisions not to proceed with projects agreed by SMG.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to liaise with the relevant business areas with regards late accruals and decisions not to proceed with projects agreed by SMG.

Paula confirmed that work was ongoing regarding updating the content of the DAS report. SMG reviewed the latest report and Paula advised that she had spoken with the Head of Information Systems who confirmed that work could be done to DAS in an attempt to improve the output report for SMG but that IS had limited resources available to carry out this work at the present time due to other commitments.

Lesley Hogg reminded SMG that development of a fit for purpose DAS report was a high priority and that adequate resource needed to be allocated to it.

**Action:** SMG agreed to review the latest DAS report and feedback any comments to Paula.

**Action:** SMG agreed that Paula should work on the DAS report with IS to try to improve the output for SMG.

*Paula McClintock left the meeting at 2.08pm.*

In light of commitments within IS, Richard Stewart suggested that it would be useful to review the prioritisation of projects within IS. Following discussion SMG agreed that the IT Strategy should focus on the needs of the business.

**Action:** Gareth McGrath to draw up a Terms of Reference for a sub-group of SMG focusing on IT and the Information Management Strategy.

*Karen Martin joined the meeting at 2.20pm for agenda item 8.*

## **8. HR Management Information**

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 January 2018 (including agency and seconded staff) was 322.4, which is a reduction of 3.5 on 1 December figure due to staff leaving the Assembly.

In light of the ongoing reduction in staff numbers, SMG agreed that a separate list should be created and maintained by Human Resources (HR) tracking vacancies. This should form part of the Monthly Management Information reported to SMG with effect from February.

**Action:** Karen to provide SMG with vacancy information as part of the monthly management information with effect from February 2018.

**Action:** Karen to update the figures in relation to the Assembly commitment to Politics Plus to record 1.38 rather than 1.8 (1.18 AG7 and 0.2 of AG2)

Karen confirmed that all scheduled recruitment competitions had completed with merit lists in place.

Statistics on sickness absence for the period December 2016 to November 2017 were provided and reflected an increase on the same period for 2015/16. For the period December 2016 – November 2017, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 9.7. This represents an increase of 1.9 days when compared with the period from December 2015 – November 2016 which had an

average days lost figure of 7.8 days. This increase is primarily attributable to long term absence, which has increased by 1.6 days.

SMG were concerned with the reported month on month increase in sickness absence and were keen that continued action was taken on seeking to address the causes of long term sick absence. Karen assured SMG that proactive measures were being taken and that HR were continually looking at ways to address staff wellbeing.

Lesley Hogg agreed to have a separate meeting with Karen to review sickness absence statistics with a view to enhancing the reporting of trends and comparison with prior years.

**Action:** Clerk/Chief Executive's Office to arrange a follow-up meeting with Karen Martin to review the reporting of sickness absence statistics.

Finally, Karen mentioned that the Assembly's Head of Security had informed HR of a requirement to return four members of Ushering Staff from redeployment to meet the needs of the new round of political talks.

SMG were content that HR proceed with this request.

*Karen Martin left the meeting at 3.07pm.*

*David Lynn joined the meeting at 3.07pm for agenda item 11.*

## **11. Viewing of Artefacts, Artwork and Furniture in Storage**

Following a request at the November Commission meeting, David Lynn presented a paper for consideration by SMG regarding the viewing of artefacts held in off-site storage.

David proposed that either a short video of the items held in the storage facility be produced and made available to MLAs and the media or that an invitation be extended to MLAs and the media to express an interest in viewing items in off-site storage.

Following discussion, SMG agreed the paper for the January Commission meeting subject to it being updated to include health and safety and access issues relevant to the viewing.

**Action:** David Lynn to update the paper for consideration at the January Commission meeting.

*David Lynn left the meeting at 3.41pm.*

## PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

*Brian Devlin joined the meeting at 3.41pm for agenda item 12.*

### **12. IS Office Staffing – filling of vacant AG5 Application Development Manager post via Temporary Promotion**

Brian Devlin outlined the business need for filling the vacant AG5 Application Development Manager post.

Subject to an amendment being made to the paper regarding external recruitment, SMG was content to proceed with the recommendation to fill the vacant IS Office AG5 Application Development Manager post via a temporary promotion. SMG agreed that the duration of the temporary promotion would be up to one year but with the possibility of extension. Brian also clarified that further internal back-filling may be required.

*Brian Devlin left the meeting at 3.59pm.*

*Louise Close joined the meeting at 3.59pm for agenda item 13.*

### **13. Dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust (NIABT) and establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Network (NIABN)**

SMG noted the NIABT's decision to dissolve and following discussion agreed to consider the establishment of a NIABN at a later date.

**Action:** Lesley Hogg to notify the Commission of the NIABT's decision to dissolve at the January Commission meeting.

*Louise Close left the meeting at 4.25pm.*

*The meeting suspended until 4.33pm*

*Maeve Donnelly joined the meeting at 4.33pm for agenda items 14 and 15.*

### **14. Broadcasting and Related Services Contract Variation**

Maeve Donnelly referred SMG to variations to the Broadcasting and Related Services contract which were agreed by the Commission in July 2017 and September 2017 with a further review to take place in January 2018.

Due to the ongoing broadcasting needs of the Renewable Heat Incentive Inquiry (RHI) it was recommended that the current reduction in the monthly cost of the contract continue until the end of the RHI Inquiry's public hearings, with a further paper being brought to SMG and

the Commission in May outlining proposals for any further variation in order to allow sufficient time for implementation.

SMG asked for and received assurances from the Director of Parliamentary Services and the Head of Communications that the contractor was still meeting its contractual obligations and service levels and noted that discussions between the RHI Inquiry and the Assembly Commission had confirmed that there was no double-charging of services provided to the Inquiry.

SMG considered and agreed with the recommendations made regarding a variation to the Broadcasting and Related Services contract and approved the paper for the Commission subject to an amendment to paragraph 24 of the paper requested by Tara Caul and some other minor amendments.

## **15. Northern Ireland Assembly Media Handbook – Code of Conduct for Media and Filming and Photography Policy and Procedure**

Maeve Donnelly outlined the proposed revisions to the Assembly Media Handbook, namely the inclusion of a Code of Conduct for Media and a Filming and Photography Policy and Procedure.

SMG considered and agreed, subject to a few minor amendments, the proposed Code of Conduct for Media and the Filming and Photography Policy and Procedure for inclusion in the existing Assembly Media Handbook.

*Maeve Donnelly left the meeting at 5.23pm.*

## **CORPORATE SUPPORT**

### **6. Draft Commission Agenda**

SMG discussed the agenda items for the Commission meeting on 31 January 2018.

Agenda to include the following items:

- Clerk/CE Key Report;
- Review of the Security Policy;
- Budget 2018/19;
- Pay Claim 2017 Update;
- Broadcasting and Related Services Contract Variation;
- Viewing of Artefacts, Artwork and Furniture in Storage; and
- Complaints Policy Activity Report.

SMG reviewed the actions recorded at the last Commission meeting in November 2017.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to check if a press release has been issued in relation to the Business in The Community's (BiTC) Environmental Benchmarking Survey.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to further research if any guidance on MLAs role as an employer have been developed and are available to pass on to Members.

**Action:** Corporate Support Unit to produce a Commission meeting action log.

## **9. Pay Claim 2017 Update**

SMG noted the progress made in the negotiations with Trade Union Side (TUS) regarding the 2017 pay claim.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to prepare a paper for consideration by the Commission at its meeting on 31 January 2018.

## **10. Budget 2018/19**

SMG discussed the potential issues that will arise from the formation of its budget for the 2018/19 financial year.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to prepare a paper for consideration by the Commission at its meeting on 31 January 2018.

## **DIRECTORATE UPDATES**

### **16. Directors' Updates**

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

Richard Stewart advised SMG that the transition from Euresst to Sodexo from 8 January had gone very smoothly and that feedback had been extremely positive.

SMG recorded its thanks to Support Services, Procurement, Legal Services and the Evaluation Panel for all their efforts in delivering the contract.

Tara Caul advised SMG that the Legal Services Office had joined the Government Legal Service Northern Ireland (GLSNI).

Tara also asked SMG to ensure that all Internal Audit returns were sent to Internal Audit as soon as possible to enable papers to be finalised for the SARC meeting on 31 January 2018.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

### **17. AOB**

There was no other business.

### **18. Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting is 21 February 2018.

The meeting ended at 6.28pm.