

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

**TUESDAY, 19 JUNE 2018 at 9.30AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Richard Stewart
Paul Gill (deputising for Gareth McGrath)

In Attendance: Frances Leneghan
Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Paula McClintock
Karen Martin
Ruth Roberts
David Johnston
Brian Devlin

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.34am.

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 Paul Gill deputised.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 22 May 2018 together with unrestricted papers were published on 14 June 2018.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.46am for agenda items 5, 6, 7 and 8.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, advised that she was not aware of any progress on any formal political talks or amendments to the 2016 Independent Financial Review Panel Determination.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Commission Agenda

SMG reviewed the draft Commission agenda for the 5 July Commission meeting.

Proposed items for the meeting include:

- Clerk/Chief Executive Report
- Draft Corporate Strategy
- Salary Benchmarking Report
- Broadcasting and Related Services Contract Variation
- Proposal for an Exhibition and Request for Loans of Assembly Artefacts
- Proposed Amendments to the Assembly Commission's Events Policy
- Commission Approach to Decade of Centenary Events during the Political Impasse: Agreed Review of Current Position
- Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission 2017-2018
- Gender Action Plan – yearly update: June 2018

Proposed date for next Commission meeting, early October.

7. Commission Approach to Decade of Centenary Events during the Political Impasse: Agreed Review of Current Position

SMG considered a draft Commission paper seeking agreement to continue with the Assembly Commission's previous decision back in November 2017, that the process of agreeing centenary events to be marked this mandate would not be initiated until the Assembly appoints a successor Commission.

SMG was content with the approach outlined in the paper and for approval to be sought from Commission Members at the July Commission meeting, to proceed on this basis.

Action: Robin Ramsey to present this paper at the July Commission meeting.

8. Approval of Draft Corporate Strategy 2018 – 2023 and next steps

Robin Ramsey sought SMG's approval of the draft Corporate Strategy for 2018 – 2023.

Robin confirmed that extensive staff consultation had taken place, with very positive results. He stated that the consultation had been extremely helpful in shaping the draft strategy, which is very different from those of previous years.

SMG noted that the Corporate Strategy was based on a return to normal business and would be the key document for guiding the Assembly Commission's activities. SMG agreed with the recommendation that the draft strategy be used in as a template for 2018/19 business planning.

It was also agreed that further discussions would be undertaken with SMG to initiate processes to develop the underlying detail of the draft strategy as well as targets and guidance for 2018/19 business planning.

SMG approved the draft Corporate Strategy and was content for it to be presented to the Commission at its July meeting.

Action: Robin Ramsey to prepare a paper on the Draft Corporate Strategy for presentation at the next Commission meeting.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, commended Robin Ramsey and Karen Jardine for the way in which the consultation was carried out.

SMG thanked Robin and Karen for all their hard work and efforts in producing a very good draft strategy.

Robin recorded his thanks to IS Office staff and Researchers for their assistance with graphics and analysis of information. He also thanked Damien Martin for his help with the development of the strategy.

Robin Ramsey finished by providing SMG with an update on Corporate Support Unit activities since the last SMG meeting.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.24am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 10.25am for agenda item 9.

9. Management Accounts

Paula presented the Management Accounts for May 2018, providing SMG with an early indication of the forecast for income and expenditure for the 2018/19 year.

Paula also highlighted the levels of under/overspend anticipated against the opening 'reduced continuing activities' budget as agreed by SMG and the opening budget allocation as detailed in the Secretary of State's budget statement. She noted a number of profiling issues and agreed to remind Heads of Business (HoBs) of the importance of accurate profiling.

Action: Paula McClintock to liaise with HoBs and remind them of the importance of accurate profiling.

Lesley Hogg also requested that notional costs be included in the Management Accounts.

Action: Paula to include notional costs in Management Accounts going forward.

SMG considered and approved a bid from the IS Office for additional capital of £4.9k to purchase a number of end of life Wireless Access Points (WAPs) for the Parliament Building's WiFi network.

SMG reviewed the Decision Authorisation System (DAS) Reports and reiterated that if the DAS requirement end date has passed or is nearing expiry and the requirement is still necessary, then a variation should be processed. SMG also discussed when DAS records should be closed.

Action: Paula to liaise with relevant HoBs to clarify the position on three entries recorded on the Expenditure vs DAS Approved Limits Report.

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 11.02am.

10. Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission 2017-2018

Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, presented the 2017-2018 Annual Progress Report on Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties.

SMG reviewed the comprehensive report and raised a couple of issues in relation to the inconsistent use of justified text throughout Part A of the report and in Part B, the non-achievement of action 50 i.e. 'Mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December) which SMG had not been made aware of.

Lesley Hogg indicated that she was concerned that over recent months there were a number of actions in various action plans that had not been completed with staff redeployment cited for this, but which did not appear to have been discussed with Directors or SMG in advance of the decision being taken. Lesley Hogg asked that going forward any proposals not to deliver agreed actions in Assembly Commission published action plans should be discussed and agreed with SMG in advance of the decision being taken.

Action: Directors to ensure that going forward any proposals not to deliver agreed actions in Assembly Commission published action plans should be discussed and agreed with SMG in advance of the decision being taken.

Richard noted that the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) is usually complimentary about the comprehensive and professional Report that the Assembly Commission provides.

Action: Richard Stewart to discuss the importance of consistent formatting and presentation of text within the Annual Equality Progress Report with the Assembly's Equality Manager.

Action: Lesley Hogg to liaise with the Head of Outreach to seek further clarification on the non-achievement of Action 50.

SMG was content for the report to be presented to the Commission at its July meeting for approval, prior to being forwarded to the ECNI.

Action: Richard Stewart to present the Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission 2017-18 to the Commission at its July meeting.

11. Gender Action Plan – 6 monthly update: June 2018

Richard Stewart presented the 6 monthly update on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2018.

SMG noted the updates and agreed the Action Plan be presented to the Commission at its July meeting. SMG also agreed that going forward it would be more appropriate to present the Action Plan to the Commission on an annual basis.

Action: Richard Stewart to present the Gender Action Plan – 6 monthly update to the Commission at its July meeting.

Once reviewed by the Commission the Action Plan and associated research papers will be uploaded onto the Assembly's Intranet.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, queried the progress update within the Action Plan in relation to 'Gender Leadership Network'. She noted that while some explanation had been provided in the covering paper, this did not adequately appear to deal with the Network point and sought clarification on any follow-up action that will be taken forward following consideration of models for a Gender Leadership Network.

Action: Richard Stewart to report back to the Gender Action Implementation Group, seeking their views on the issue of

a Gender Leadership Network and update SMG accordingly.

Karen Martin joined the meeting at 11.40am.

12. HR Management Information

SMG noted the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 June 2018 (including agency and seconded staff) was 318.6.

Karen confirmed that there had been little or no change in relation to temporary arrangements currently in place to cover maternity or long-term sickness, temporary promotions and agency workers, since last month's report to SMG.

SMG noted that redeployment figures had remained fairly static over the last few months. Karen highlighted that a number of Assembly Commission staff were temporarily redeployed to schools and that in light of the upcoming school summer holidays HR was contacting all relevant schools and obtaining confirmation that Assembly Commission staff resources would continue to be required by them throughout July and August. Lesley Hogg asked that HR obtain official confirmation from the individual schools providing work to Assembly Commission staff, stating that they will remain open during July and August and that they have a full-time programme of work for Assembly Commission staff.

Action: HR to obtain formal confirmation from schools that they have a full-time programme of work for Assembly Commission staff currently redeployed to them during July and August.

Richard Stewart proposed that it would be timely to review continuing activities and staff resources. SMG was content for Richard to take this forward.

Action: Richard Stewart to seek updates from HoBs on proposed continuing activities and the corresponding staff resources required.

Karen also confirmed that the internal recruitment exercise for the position of temporary Head of Internal Audit had completed and that the successful candidate had taken up post. SMG noted that the internal notice for the temporary post of Governance Officer had been issued.

Following on from last month's SMG discussion on merit list expiry dates, Karen confirmed that advice had been sought from the ECNI in relation to extending the end date of merit lists due to the ongoing political situation. The ECNI has advised that in the current circumstances it is justified and reasonable for the Assembly Commission to extend merit lists. Following this advice, SMG was content to extend the end date of

all merit lists by an initial six months, subject to consultation with Trade Union Side (TUS).

Action: Karen Martin to consult with TUS and update the Clerk/Chief Executive.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period May 2017 to April 2018, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE members of staff was 10.3, which represented a slight decrease of 0.2 when compared with the period April 2017 to March 2018, but an increase of 0.7 when compared with the same period last year.

13. Development of an Apprenticeship and Placement Framework

SMG noted the range of work placement opportunities currently and historically provided by the Assembly Commission.

Karen outlined apprenticeship opportunities in existence throughout the other UK Legislatures and within some private sector companies.

Karen stated that previous discussions with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Business had indicated a level of consensus on how an apprenticeship scheme might operate within the Assembly Commission and proposed developing a draft Apprenticeship and Placement Framework based on a number of key principles.

SMG reviewed and agreed the key principles, subject to some minor amendments and further research being carried out.

Action: Karen Martin to update the key principles as agreed by SMG and carry out additional research.

Paul Gill, Clerk Assistant, requested that Karen liaise with Simon Burrowes to ensure there was no overlap with the proposed bursary scheme review.

Action: Karen to liaise with Simon Burrowes to ensure there was no overlap with the proposed bursary scheme review.

SMG also considered the proposal of making provision for part-time and temporary opportunities for people with disabilities within any new Apprenticeship and Placement Framework and was content for HR to research this further.

Action: HR to carry out further research into the proposal of providing opportunities for people with disabilities within any new Apprenticeship and Placement Framework.

SMG was conscious of the amount of preparatory work needed before rolling out any Apprenticeship and Placement Framework and was keen to have as much practical work done as possible now, to enable this Framework to be progressed quickly on resumption of normal Assembly business.

SMG complimented Karen on an excellent, well presented paper.

14. Use of Photographs of Assembly Commission Employees

SMG considered proposals on the approach to be taken and the roles and responsibilities of business areas in relation to the collection, processing and storage of photographs of Assembly Commission employees, for the purpose of the Assembly Commission's Intranet (AssISt) and any future telephony system.

Following discussion, SMG agreed that for existing staff, the use of their photographs on AssISt and any future telephony system would be based on consent. In the case of future appointments, SMG agreed that the use of photographs will be reflected in the terms and conditions of appointment, with consent sought on appointment. SMG also agreed a set of actions that are now required to take forward the use of photographs on AssISt and any future telephony system.

Action: The Communications Office and IS Office to progress the agreed actions to take forward the use of photographs on AssISt and any future telephony system.

Action: HR Office to consult with TUS on the agreed way forward.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 1.27pm.

The meeting suspended at 1.27pm.

The meeting resumed at 2.03pm.

Change in agenda running order, item 17 and 16 taken before item 15.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Brian Devlin joined the meeting at 2.03pm.

17. Provision of Additional Email Accounts to MLAs

SMG considered a request to increase the number of email accounts issued to MLAs from three to five.

Brian provided SMG with findings following consultation with counterparts in other local legislatures along with an estimate of the additional costs involved in increasing the number of email accounts.

Brian highlighted the pros and cons of increasing MLA allocation but based on his findings and costings recommended the provision of additional accounts to each MLA up to a maximum of five.

SMG was content to approve the recommendation to increase the allocation to five email accounts for each MLA.

Action: Lesley Hogg to inform the Commission of this decision at the July Commission meeting.

Brian Devlin left the meeting at 2.22pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

David Johnston joined the meeting at 2.22pm.

16. Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register (CRR)

SMG noted the significant revision to the contents of the CRR, following the annual SMG Self Evaluation. Corporate Risks are now more closely aligned to “uncertain events” and have reduced in number from seven to five.

SMG considered the latest draft of the CRR which will be reviewed by SMG again in September 2018 and by the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) in June 2018.

Following review, SMG was content to approve the CRR subject to a minor change to the wording of Corporate Risk 3.

SMG noted that this would be David’s last SMG meeting, due to his impending retirement, and took the opportunity to formally record SMG’s thanks for all his hard work and effort. In particular SMG thanked David for his comprehensive review of the Risk Management Strategy and CRR and in relation to the numerous self-assessment governance reviews that had been completed over recent months. SMG wished David a long and happy retirement.

David Johnston left the meeting at 2.26pm.

Ruth Roberts joined the meeting at 2.26pm.

15. Review of under £5k Delegated Procurements

SMG considered the outcome of reviews undertaken by the Procurement Office of delegated procurements up to £5k.

SMG noted that no significant failures were identified in these reviews and was content that the procedures for the conduct of delegated procurements of up to £5k were generally being complied with.

In relation to procurements between £5k and £30k SMG considered that it would be beneficial for the Head of Procurement to bring back a further paper following consultation with relevant HoBs on the following matters:

- A comprehensive overview of the way in which Procurement Offices operate in other legislatures;
- Options in relation to the sourcing and capturing of information relating to all under 30k contracts including potential centralisation of all contract documentation in the Procurement Office or implementing a system which could be utilised and populated by all business areas;
- Options in relation to delegated thresholds for 5k-30k procurements. Although it was agreed that under 5k procurements will remain delegated, contracts relating to under 5k should still be captured in the solutions for the centralisation of all contract documentation – i.e. although the business area may retain delegated authority for under 5k, a solution is still required for capturing the contract documentation.

Action: Head of Procurement to present a further paper to SMG in September 2018, following consultation with relevant HoBs.

Ruth Roberts left the meeting at 2.55pm.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

18. Directors' Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates. Richard Stewart highlighted that the Department of Finance (DoF) had indicated that the Stormont Estate cost recharge for security was likely to increase.

Action: Richard Stewart to arrange for an article to be uploaded on AsslSt in relation to the recent cycling event held in partnership with Sustrans.

OTHER ITEMS

19. AOB

Papers to be cleared before July Commission meeting:

- Proposed Amendments to the Assembly Commission's Events Policy
- Proposal for an Exhibition and request for Loans of Assembly Artefacts

- Broadcasting and Related Services Contract Variation
- Salary Benchmarking Report

Action: Clerk/Chief Executive's Office to arrange meetings with Directors and any relevant Assembly Commission staff to review and approve papers on the items listed prior to the July Commission meeting.

20. Date of next meeting – 24 August 2018

The date of the next meeting is Friday, 24 August 2018 at 9.30am in Room 106.

21. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

Update on Internal Audit Plan
General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Update
Bring Your Own Device
Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Update

The meeting ended at 3.17pm.