

# **SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)**

**WEDNESDAY, 24 OCTOBER 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  
Maria Bannon  
Sinead McDonnell  
Karen Jardine  
Ashleigh Mitford  
Martina Dalton  
Debra Savage

## **Opening/Review**

The meeting commenced at 9.33am.

### **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 19 September 2018 together with unrestricted papers were published on 10 October 2018.

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, advised that an action was omitted from the approved minutes of 19 September 2018 SMG meeting in relation to the agenda item on the 'Review of Business Justifications and Cases.'

**Action:** Head of Procurement to circulate a Lessons Learned Report to Heads of Business (HoBs) highlighting the key issues from the recent review of business justifications and business cases.

#### **4. SMG Action Points**

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted. Tara Caul, Director of Legal Governance and Research Services, asked Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, to keep her updated regarding insurance cover for unintended data breaches.

*Frances Leneghan joined the meeting at 9.41am.*

##### **Action from 22 August 2018 SMG meeting - Update of Corporate Governance Framework**

Tara Caul to check the progress on this action with the acting Head of Internal Audit.

*Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.43am for agenda items 5 and 6.*

#### **5. Political Update**

Lesley Hogg advised that legislation in the form of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Bill was being introduced in the House of Commons today.

### **CORPORATE SUPPORT**

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

SMG reviewed the draft Commission agenda for the next Commission meeting.

Proposed items for the meeting include:

- Chairperson's Business
- Matters Arising
- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Secretariat Pay Policy
- Draft Corporate Plan 2018/19
- Display of Assembly Artefacts
- Commission's Relationship with Politics Plus
- Proposed Membership of Diversity Champions Programme

The next Commission meeting is scheduled for 5 December 2018.

Robin Ramsey informed SMG that officials were working on a schedule of dates for SMG and Commission meetings covering the period

January to summer 2019 and that these would be circulated in due course.

Robin provided SMG with an update of upcoming events, namely, the Remembrance Service, the Lighting of the Assembly Christmas Tree and the annual Carol Service.

SMG also noted that a Westminster Quadrilateral was planned for January/February 2019.

*Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.10am.*

*Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 10.10am for agenda item 7.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **7. Management Accounts**

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for September 2018.

Tara Caul asked Paula whether a paper would be presented to SMG regarding potential tax liabilities following the recent HMRC inspection. Paula confirmed that a paper would be brought to SMG at a future meeting.

**Action:** Paula to present a paper regarding potential tax liabilities arising from the recent HMRC inspection to SMG at a future meeting.

SMG noted a forecast outturn of £34.882m and Paula confirmed that following the October monitoring round an amount of £2.209m had been surrendered to the Department of Finance (DoF).

Following discussion of budget movements in relation to administration costs, Lesley Hogg requested that HoBs provide explanations for movements in respect of over/under spends. The agreed limits for switching funds between budget lines within Directorates (£40k for Corporate Services and £10k for all other Directorates) without approvals from SMG was discussed.

**Action:** Directors to ask their HoBs to provide more detailed explanations on the monthly return to Finance Office in relation to movements of funds due to over/under spends.

Paula informed SMG of areas of Members' expenditure that could be impacted by the revised Determination on Members' Salaries and Allowances which is due to be issued by the Secretary of State (SoS).

**Action:** Paula to forward a copy of the revised draft Determination

to the Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services.

Paul Gill, Clerk Assistant, advised that as the shareholdings threshold for the registration of Members' interests was based on salary, the revised Determination could have an impact on the threshold and that, if so, the Clerk of Standards would write to all Members to draw this to their attention.

**Action:** Clerk of Standards to write to all Members, if the revised Determination has an impact on the threshold for the registration of Members' interests.

Paula also advised that she would shortly be writing out to all political parties seeking confirmation that they are content that all party expenditure was in line with the Financial Assistance for Political Parties (FAPP) Scheme.

On the issue of capital expenditure, Paula advised SMG that Finance Office staff had met with HoBs to gain a better understanding of their business area capital requirements for the remainder of the financial year and that a subsequent meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors had led to the surrender of £350k from the capital budget.

Approval for two requests of additional capital funding of £17k for Replacement Blinds and £32k for the Digital Signage/Annunciator Project was sought. SMG approved the additional funding for the Replacement Blinds subject to completion of the Decision Authorisation System (DAS) process but was not content at this time to approve the £32k requested for the Digital Signage/Annunciator Project and requested further details in relation to this bid.

**Action:** Paula to liaise with the relevant budget holder in relation to the capital bid for the Digital Signage/Annunciator Project, seeking additional information to allow SMG to give further consideration to this request.

SMG reviewed the latest DAS Reports and Paula informed SMG that as requested, guidance had issued to HoBs outlining the checks they should be carrying out when completing their monthly returns to the Finance Office. SMG noted that HoBs had subsequently raised a few issues with the DAS reporting system in relation to the workflow and changes in responsibility regarding approvals. Paula confirmed that the Finance Office had approached the IS Office in relation to the issues raised and was advised that programming changes would need to be made to address these issues which would require an amount of developer time. Paula asked if SMG wanted the IS Office to invest time in addressing these issues. SMG agreed this was dependent on the extent of developer time required and that it was worth identifying the extent of work that would be involved. SMG suggested that Paula batch together the different issues raised by HoBs and prepare a mini specification for the IS Office to review and provide advice on the extent of work required

**Action:** Paula to prepare a mini specification for review by the IS Office in relation to possible further developments to DAS and report back to SMG at a future date.

Paula advised SMG that the timetable for the final January monitoring exercise had yet to be confirmed by DoF but anticipated it to commence in early December.

Paula raised an issue in relation to the reducing level of detail being provided by business areas when completing their respective monthly returns to the Finance Office. Directors will address this with their HoBs as per earlier action.

Richard Stewart added that the Commission's view would be sought regarding any assumptions for a date of return to normal Assembly business in order to inform completion of January monitoring returns.

**Action:** Commission Members' views to be sought at the December Commission meeting regarding any assumptions for a date of return to normal Assembly business in order to inform completion of January monitoring returns.

*Paula McClintock left the meeting at 11.00am.*

*Maria Bannon joined the meeting at 11.00am for agenda items 8, 9 and 10.*

## **8. Proposed Membership of Diversity Champions Programme**

Maria Bannon informed SMG that the Gender Action Plan Implementation Group (GAIG) had noted that limited work had taken place within the Assembly Secretariat on the category of sexual orientation under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. In an effort to address this issue, Maria advised SMG that the Group had recommended the Assembly Commission become a member of the Diversity Champions Programme.

SMG considered the benefits of becoming a member of the Diversity Champions Programme, sought confirmation that membership would only apply to Assembly Secretariat staff and also sought confirmation that membership would not reflect or be perceived to reflect on any debate that the Assembly may have on any related matters and agreed approval should be sought from the Commission.

**Action:** Maria to prepare a draft Commission paper for consideration at the November SMG meeting.

## 9. **Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21: October 2018 six-monthly monitoring update**

Maria Bannon provided SMG with a progress update on the actions in the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 for the six-month reporting period and stated that there had been little change since last reported to SMG in March.

Following review of the report, SMG agreed that due to the ongoing political situation it would be more appropriate to record the status of relevant actions in relation to clerking as 'Suspended' instead of 'Complete' given the absence of Assembly business.

**Action:** Maria to update the plan to record the status of relevant actions in relation to clerking as 'Suspended'.

SMG considered the recommendation to provide the Commission with an update every six months and agreed that an annual update at the end of the year was sufficient but on the understanding that any matters arising that could be considered as novel, contentious or politically sensitive would require earlier referral to the Commission.

## 10. **Gender Action Plan six-monthly update: October 2018**

SMG noted the progress update on the Gender Action Plan 2016-18 for the six-month reporting period.

Maria Bannon provided an update on action 17 of the plan i.e. 'Consider models for a Gender Leadership Network, including model of Assembly Leadership Forum (ALF)'. Maria confirmed that the GAIG had carried out research as requested by SMG on leadership networks and was seeking a meeting with SMG to discuss and agree a way forward.

**Action:** Maria to circulate research carried out by GIAG in relation to leadership networks to the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors.

**Action:** Maria to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to discuss models for a Gender Leadership Network.

Maria also informed SMG that as the reporting period for the Gender Action Plan was coming to end, a Closure Report would be produced and presented to SMG and the Commission at a future meeting.

**Action:** Maria to prepare a Closure Report for presentation at future SMG and Commission meetings.

*Maria Bannon left the meeting at 11.46am.*

*The meeting adjourned until 11.55am.*

*Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 11.55am for agenda items 11, 12,13,14,15 and Karen Jardine joined for item 11.*

## **11. Development of an Apprenticeship and Placement Framework**

Sinéad McDonnell informed SMG of the research that had been carried out since this item was last discussed by SMG in June 2018. She advised that Higher Level Apprenticeships do not fall within the responsibility of the Department for Economy (DfE), and that DfE does not provide any funding for such apprenticeships set up by public bodies such as the Assembly.

A number of proposals were presented in relation to the further development of a draft Apprenticeship and Placement Framework.

Tara Caul noted that at bullet point 6 in the background section of the paper it referred to special arrangements that may be put in place to facilitate a legal apprentice. She advised that legal apprentices are not “placed” through the Law Society and that if a legal apprenticeship scheme is proceeded with in future, legal apprentices would also be appointed through fair and open competition. The sentence “However ... Law Society” could therefore be removed.

Following discussion, SMG approved the proposals with the exception of one relating to the financial package offered to apprentices. SMG requested that additional salary benchmarking research be undertaken and agreed to give this matter further consideration on receipt of the research findings.

**Action:** HR to carry out additional salary benchmarking research in relation to the proposed financial package for apprentices and update SMG with their findings.

SMG noted its disappointment at not being able to participate in the DfE scheme.

**Action:** Letter to issue to DfE noting disappointment at not being able to participate in the DfE scheme.

*Karen Jardine left the meeting at 12.18pm.*

## **12. HR Management Information**

SMG noted the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 October 2018 (including agency and seconded staff) was 315.4.

Sinéad McDonnell confirmed that there had been 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 currently the main work associated with staff redeployment relates to Hansard staff with a majority becoming available for redeployment from 5 November 2018. Progress has been made with identifying a number of temporary redeployment posts for staff to take up.

In relation to recruitment, SMG noted a vacancy within RaISe for an Equality and Social Justice Research Officer (AG5). SMG approved the inclusion of this post on the recruitment schedule on resumption of full Assembly business.

Sinéad referred to previous discussions with SMG, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and TUS in relation to the extension of existing merit lists by a period of six months. SMG noted the concerns of TUS regarding the extension of these existing merits lists but concluded that a six-month extension was necessary and appropriate in the circumstances.

Paul Gill emphasised that, in order to be able to maintain readiness, it would be necessary to have lists in place to fill vacancies at the point at which the Assembly returned to normal business.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to issue a response to TUS.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period October 2017 to September 2018, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 9.2 which compared favourably with the period October 2016 to September 2017 figure of 9.6 days but was still above the agreed absence benchmark of 7.5 days.

Sinéad sought SMG views on HR obtaining comparative data on sickness absence from individual Northern Ireland Civil Service departments. SMG didn't feel it was necessary to approach individual departments, however Mrs Hogg asked if it was readily available for figures from comparative private sector bodies to be obtained and reported to SMG.

**Action:** HR to provide SMG with sickness absence statistics from comparative private sector bodies, if readily available.

Lastly, Sinéad provided SMG with a summary of case management activity for the period April 2018 to September 2018.

### **13. Review of the Whistleblowing Policy**

SMG considered revisions to the current Whistleblowing Policy reflecting legislative changes which came into force in October 2017.

Following discussion, SMG proposed some further amendments to the policy and agreed that HR should develop guidance for Line Managers on dealing with whistleblowing issues brought to their attention.

Lesley Hogg stated that a central point for tracking whistleblowing cases was needed and Sinéad confirmed that a central record would be maintained by HR. It was also agreed that future monthly Directorate Updates for Corporate Services would include a heading on 'Whistleblowing'.

**Action:** HR to maintain a central record of all whistleblowing cases.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to include a heading on Whistleblowing on future monthly SMG Directorate Updates for Corporate Services.

**Action:** HR to develop guidance on handling cases of whistleblowing.

**Action:** HR to further revise the policy in line with amendments proposed by SMG and re-circulate by correspondence for final approval.

#### **14. Review of the Staff Hours at Work Policy**

SMG considered revisions to the current Staff Hours at Work Policy following consultation with HoBs as part of an agreed review.

Following discussion, SMG was content with all but one of the proposed changes. It was agreed that SMG would meet again to consider this proposed change in more detail.

**Action:** Clerk/Chief Executive's Office to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to give further consideration to a proposed change to the Staff Hours at Work Policy.

*Meeting adjourned at 1.33pm until 2.09pm.*

#### **15. Bi-annual Review of Learning and Development Activities**

Sinéad McDonnell provided SMG with an update on the progress made from April 2018 to September 2018 in relation to the implementation of Corporate Learning and Development (L&D) activities for Secretariat staff.

SMG noted that a range of activities had been implemented over the last six months. It was further noted that currently the number of training days delivered equated to an average of 0.93 days per staff member against an average target of 2.5 days per staff member.

Sinéad presented a budget versus spend profile for each of the five categories within the L&D Framework and sought SMG's approval to proposed changes to the Corporate L&D budget for the remainder of the

financial year. SMG considered and approved proposed changes to the Corporate L&D budget as outlined.

SMG noted that the content of a training programme to support the launch of the new approach to performance management and the associated costs were still to be finalised and agreed by SMG.

Some discussion took place regarding whether a place should be made available on a senior leadership programme in the current political circumstances and given the performance management and management development programme being planned. It was agreed that Directors would consider whether there was such an identified need and if so, that they would inform HR, which in turn would consider how this training need could be met.

**Action:** Directors to inform HR if a need is identified for senior leadership training.

**Action:** Sinéad to forward an outline of a number of senior leadership courses for SMG to consider.

SMG thanked Sinéad and her team for a very comprehensive report.

## **16. Assembly Skills and Behaviours**

Sinéad McDonnell presented drafts of two documents entitled 'Assembly Skills and Behaviours' and 'Assembly Skills and Behaviours - A Guide for Managers and Staff' which had been produced to replace the current Competency Framework following research and consultation undertaken. SMG approved the draft documents subject to some minor amendments regarding consistency of terminology with the draft Corporate Strategy.

**Action:** Clerk/Chief Executive to issue a communication to staff advising them of the new Assembly Skills and Behaviours.

**Action:** Directors to table the new Assembly Skills and Behaviours documents at their next HoB meeting and ask HoBs to subsequently table at their team meetings.

*Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 3.05pm.*

*Please note change to agenda running order.*

## **LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES**

*Ashleigh Mitford joined the meeting at 3.07pm for agenda items 18 and 19.*

## **18. Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register**

SMG noted that Directors had met on 1 October 2018 to review the

Corporate Risk Register in detail and approved the contents of the latest Corporate Risk Register.

**Action:** Lesley Hogg to provide an update at the December Commission meeting on the Corporate Risk Register.

## **19. Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers**

SMG noted that Directors had met on 1 October 2018 to review the Directorate Risk Registers in detail and approved the contents of the latest Directorate Risk Registers. No further observations or comments were made.

*Ashleigh Mitford left the meeting at 3.09pm.*

*Martina Dalton joined the meeting at 3.13pm for agenda item 20.*

## **20. Report and Self-Assessment of the Information Security Group (ISG)**

Martina Dalton presented an Annual Report and Self-Assessment of ISG for the period 4 March 2015 to 30 September 2018.

SMG noted that going forward, ISG planned to carry out self-assessments on an annual basis in accordance with the Terms of Reference.

Martina advised SMG of future actions the group would be considering which included a review of the 'Assembly Restricted' protective marking contained within the Information Assurance Policy and a review of procedures for issuing 'Assembly Restricted' information to current and former Members.

Lesley Hogg reminded Martina that all changes to the Information Assurance Policy should be considered and approved by SMG in advance of them being issued. Lesley also asked that the practical implications and outworkings of proposed policy changes be considered before policy changes are recommended to SMG for approval so that these are fully understood.

**Action:** Martina to ensure that all changes to the Information Assurance Policy are approved by SMG prior to being issued and that the practical implications and outworkings of proposed policy changes are considered before being recommended to SMG for approval.

Paul Gill highlighted that the Information Assurance Policy contained specific provisions in relation to providing protectively marked material to committees and that if changes were going to be proposed to these sections then it would be necessary to liaise with relevant committee staff to consider practical implications for Members.

**Action:** Consultation to take place with committee staff if changes are proposed to the sections of the Information Assurance Policy relating to providing protectively marked material to committees.

Tara Caul stated that ISG was an exemplary group and was a good mechanism for sharing lessons learned between business areas.

*Martina Dalton left the meeting at 3.30pm.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

*Debra Savage joined the meeting at 3.30pm for agenda item 22.*

### **22. Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy Procedure 2018 Report**

Debra Savage presented the complaints report for the period September 2017 to September 2018 and SMG approved it for publication on the Assembly website. Richard Stewart advised that the Commission is required to report on complaints in its Annual Report and, for that reason, it would be helpful to record complaints by financial year (as opposed to by Assembly session). This was agreed.

**Action:** Communications Office to arrange for the complaints report for September 2017 to September 2018 to be published on the Assembly website.

**Action:** Communications Office to arrange for a further complaints register to be collated for the period October 2018 to March 2019 and thereafter by financial year.

**Action:** Lesley Hogg to provide Commission Members with a copy of the complaints report for the period September 2017 to September 2018 at the next Commission meeting.

*Debra Savage left the meeting at 3.35pm.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED**

### **17. Request for Job Evaluation**

*Richard Stewart and Paul Gill left the meeting at 3.37pm.*

SMG considered and approved a request for a job evaluation. Tara Caul requested some further background information.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to provide Tara Caul with some further background information.

*Richard Stewart and Paul Gill re-joined the meeting at 3.41pm.*

## **23. Politics Plus Report on 2017 Activity**

SMG noted a report from Politics Plus to the Assembly Commission on its activity and outcomes for 2017, together with Politics Plus's audited financial statement for the year ended 31 December 2017.

Tara Caul drew a matter to the attention of the Clerk/Chief Executive in relation to a note in the financial statements which referred to deferred income under the heading 'Going concern'.

Paul Gill said the auditors had explained that the deferred income reported in the accounts related to monies received in advance, and that conditions of this funding stated that it couldn't be drawn down until matched income was received. Paul will arrange for Politics Plus to provide further detailed information in relation to this issue.

**Action:** Clerk/Chief Executive to be provided with clarification from Politics Plus in relation to this note in the financial statements.

SMG also noted a letter from the Chair of Politics Plus to the Commission, advice on which would be provided at the next Commission meeting.

**Action:** Draft Commission paper to be prepared and presented at the November SMG meeting.

## **DIRECTORATE UPDATES**

### **24. Directors' Updates**

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

### **25. AOB**

There was no other business.

### **26. Date of next meeting – 20 November 2018**

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday, 20 November 2018 at 9.30am in Room 106.

### **27. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

- Health and Wellbeing Initiatives

- Delegated Procurement Review
- Draft Commission paper on the background to the Commission's Relationship with Politics Plus
- Information Assurance Policy Review
- Review of Information Management
- Effective use of Corporate Support Systems: Project Initiation Document (PID)
- Draft Commission paper on the Secretariat Pay Policy
- Members Survey 2017-17 Action Plan – 6 monthly update

## **21. Personal Data Breach Report**

The meeting went into closed session at 4.20pm to consider this agenda item.

**Action:** Tara Caul to provide a confidential minute to the Corporate Support Unit of this agenda item.

*Paul Gill, Frances Leneghan and Janet Hughes left the meeting at 4.20pm.*