

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

WEDNESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2019 at 9.30AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Frances Leneghan
Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Paula McClintock
Sinéad McDonnell
Maria Bannon
Ashleigh Mitford
Simon Burrowes

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.34am.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes and unrestricted papers from the meeting on 23 October 2019 were published on 15 November 2019.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services advised that an earlier action to develop a Lessons Learned Registry had been delayed due to technical IT constraints. He confirmed this would be implemented once these constraints are resolved by the IS Office.

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.40am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive noted that there were a number of events in the next few month namely, the UK Parliamentary Election on 12 December, the deadline for Executive formation of 13 January 2020 and the scheduled EU Exit date of 31 January 2020 that were likely to have an impact on restoring the Assembly and emphasised that continued focus should be on retaining readiness to support a return to normal Assembly business.

CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

SMG reviewed the draft agenda for the next Assembly Commission meeting re-scheduled from 9 December 2019 to 16 December 2019.

Proposed items for the December meeting include:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Draft Corporate Plan 2019-23, Draft Annual Plan 2019-20 and In-year Progress Report
- Proposed Partial Electronic Access Control (EAC) System
- External Lighting Policy for Parliament Buildings
- Pay Claim for 2019 (subject to receipt of claim from TUS)
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) Update on the Administration Agreement between the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and the Trustees of the Northern Ireland Assembly Members Pension Scheme

Ashleigh Mitford, Governance Officer joined the meeting at 10.06am for agenda item 7.

7. Draft Corporate Plan 2019-23, Annual Plan 2019-20 and In-year Progress Report

Robin Ramsey presented this paper and noted that it had been prepared following a number of meetings with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors, through the Corporate Strategy Co-ordinating Group, to consider proposals for the draft Corporate Plan 2019-23.

SMG noted feedback from the staff engagement process and approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its December meeting.

Robin recorded his thanks to Ashleigh Mitford and the members of the Strategy Steering Groups (SSGs) for all their efforts and hard work.

SMG also recorded its thanks to Robin and Ashleigh and to the members and chairs of all SSGs.

Ashleigh Mitford left the meeting at 10.10am.

Corporate Support Unit Directorate Update

Robin advised SMG that invites had been issued for the staff briefings scheduled for the morning of 27 November and that these would be followed by the Speaker's Event to light the Assembly Christmas Tree.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.11am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Paula McClintock, Head of Finance, joined the meeting at 10.12am for agenda item 8.

8. Management Accounts

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for October 2019.

SMG noted the latest forecasted position in relation to income and expenditure for 2019/20, which highlighted the level of under/over spend expected against the September monitoring position.

On reviewing an underspend in relation to Secretariat Salaries, Paula informed SMG that there was a significant variance in October due to an overestimate of overtime costs associated with the 2018/19 pay award and confirmed that this would be reviewed and closely monitored.

Paula informed SMG that budget managers had been asked to finalise their forecast over the last two reporting cycles and that if SMG was content with the October changes presented, a final re-profiling exercise would be undertaken to estimate monthly costs for the remainder of the year.

On reviewing the Capital Plan, Paula asked that SMG note the status changes and the surrender of funds relating to the Parliament Buildings Security System (PBSS) project.

Lesley emphasised the importance of estimating, as accurately as possible, capital expenditure for the remainder of the financial year and that expenditure should be closely monitored.

Paula advised that this was the last formal opportunity for SMG to review the forecast for the year and stated that the Finance Office would work with key budget managers in the forthcoming days to discuss any emerging issues, which would inform the final monitoring submission due on 4 December 2019. Paula said that she would set up a separate

meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to discuss the December Monitoring return.

Action: Paula to meet with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to discuss the December Monitoring return.

Richard highlighted that the forecast that would be issued to the Department of Finance would be prepared on the basis that there would not be a return to normal Assembly business during the financial year and that if the Assembly resumed normal business in the financial year, there would be insufficient funds to fund this. He explained that this could result in an Excess Vote for the Assembly Commission.

Richard stated that if the Assembly resumed normal business, there would also be two further major issues to be dealt with. Firstly, as there had been no response from the Secretary of State (SoS) in relation to the EU Technical Fix issue, the Speaker may need to write again to the SoS following the General Election. Secondly, he said that a paper would need to be prepared and presented to the Assembly's Audit Committee at its second meeting in relation to the Assembly Commission's budget for 2020/21. Lesley asked that the drafting of this paper commence immediately.

Action: Richard to draft a paper for the Assembly's Audit Committee.

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 10.46am.

Comfort break until 10.53am.

Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR joined the meeting at 10.53am for agenda items 9 and 10.

9. HR Management Information

Sinéad McDonnell presented the monthly HR Management Information.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 November (including agency and seconded staff) was 304.4 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 353.4 FTE.

Sinéad provided SMG with copies of the latest temporary redeployment table for review. SMG noted and was content with the figures, which had been reviewed by HR staff for accuracy following a request by SMG at the October meeting.

SMG reviewed the Recruitment Schedule. Sinéad highlighted that the current internal temporary Clerical Supervisor AG7 merit list expired on 22 May 2020 and asked SMG to consider scheduling a competition to

refresh this. SMG was content for the temporary Clerical Supervisor competition to be added to the Recruitment Schedule for March 2020.

Sinéad provided sickness absence information for the period November 2018 to October 2019 and highlighted that, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 11.5 days, which did not compare favourably with the prior year figure of 9.2 days. Sinéad noted however, that long-term sickness had reduced significantly.

Action: Sinéad to add the temporary Clerical Supervisor competition to the Recruitment Schedule for March 2020.

10. Review of the Administration Agreement between the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and the Northern Ireland Assembly Members Pension Scheme

SMG considered a draft Assembly Commission paper, seeking approval of revisions to the Administration Agreement between the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and the Northern Ireland Assembly Members Pension Scheme.

Sinéad informed SMG that the agreement had been revised in order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Following discussion, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its December meeting subject to some minor amendments.

Action: Sinéad to update the draft Assembly Commission paper in line with the amendments proposed by SMG for presentation at the December meeting.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 11.07am.

Maria Bannon, Equality and Good Relations Manager joined the meeting at 11.07am for agenda item 11.

11. Stonewall Membership Update

SMG noted the progress since the Assembly Commission joined the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme in January 2019.

Maria Bannon sought approval to issue a voluntary, anonymous Section 75 monitoring survey to all staff in January 2020. SMG approved the request and also agreed that staff be provided with an update on Stonewall and Diversity Mark NI membership. Maria informed SMG that the draft survey would be brought to SMG for approval prior to issue.

Action: Maria to present a draft survey to SMG for consideration at a future meeting.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to issue a voluntary, anonymous Section 75 monitoring survey to all staff.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to provide staff with an update on Stonewall and Diversity Mark NI membership.

Maria Bannon left the meeting at 11.11am.

12. Post-Project Evaluation Update (PPE)

Richard presented and SMG noted the PPE for the supply of electricity to Parliament Buildings.

Richard informed SMG that the supply of electricity via the pan governmental framework was approved in March 2016 for a 2-year period and then extended by the Department of Finance for a further 2 years. Richard advised that there had been an oversight in relation to the extension period, which should have been referred to SMG for consideration and approval.

SMG agreed that the Lessons Learned section of the PPE should be updated to include reference to the fact that SMG's approval should have been sought for the extension period.

Action: Lessons Learned section of the PPE to be updated.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

13. Revised Data Protection Policy

Lesley noted that Tara had requested that the paper be deferred to December's SMG meeting.

14. Report and Self-Assessment of the Information Security Group (ISG)

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services presented an Annual Report and Self-Assessment of ISG for the period 1 October 2018 to 26 September 2019.

Tara advised that the group had met on three occasions since the last self-assessment and had dealt with a broad range of issues. She also noted that a response had now been received from the Information Commissioner's Office regarding the data breach notified to it and that no formal action was being taken.

SMG noted the work undertaken by the ISG over the last year and future actions for consideration by the group.

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services asked that the protective marking on this paper and any future updates be revised to allow it to be shared with Heads of Business (HoBs). SMG approved this request.

Action: Corporate Support Unit to amend the protective marking on this submission and re-circulate to Directors.

SMG recorded its appreciation and thanks to the ISG for the work carried out over the last year and on the production of a very comprehensive report.

Ashleigh Mitford, Governance Officer joined the meeting at 11.38am for agenda item 15.

15. Risk Management Self-Assessment

Ashleigh Mitford presented the Risk Management Self-Assessment, which had been developed following a review of the Assembly Commission Risk Management Strategy in April 2019.

Ashleigh noted that she had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors in October to discuss an early draft of the document and that the draft presented had taken account of amendments proposed at that meeting.

SMG considered the revised draft and was content to approve it subject to some further minor amendments.

Action: Ashleigh to update the Risk Management Self-Assessment document in line with amendments agreed by SMG.

Lesley thanked Ashleigh and Directors for their input into the completion of the comprehensive assessment and acknowledged the extra effort required in the first year of completion.

Ashleigh Mitford left the meeting at 11.47am.

16. Personal Data Breach Report

SMG noted the data breaches as outlined in the SIRO's report and was content that appropriate action had been taken.

Richard referred to a response from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in relation to a reported data breach within his Directorate. He advised SMG that he had considered a course of action suggested by the ICO to help mitigate against a similar breach occurring in the future but stated that he would not be adopting this suggested approach as he felt that the response was disproportionate.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the relevant business area should inform Tara (as SIRO) of the ICO's response to the reported data breach, along with the Directorate/business area's response to any recommendations made. Tara said that she would consider whether there were any matters which had organisational wide significance and if so, bring to SMG for further consideration.

Action: Relevant business area to inform Tara (as SIRO) of the ICO's response to the reported data breach along with their response to any recommendations made.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Simon Burrowes, Head of Public Engagement joined the meeting at 12.07pm for agenda items 17 and 21.

17. Draft Internal Communications Strategy 2019/20

Simon Burrowes presented a revised draft of the Internal Communications Strategy 2019/20 following consultation on an initial draft with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors in October 2019.

SMG approved the draft Internal Communications Strategy 2019/20 as presented.

Action: Simon to arrange for the Strategy to be published on AsslSt.

Change to agenda running order.

OTHER ITEMS

21. AOB – External Lighting Policy for Parliament Buildings

Lesley apologised for the late inclusion of the paper in the pack, but advised that it had been completed earlier than anticipated and that she had taken the opportunity to include it as AOB for the meeting rather than convening a separate meeting to discuss.

Simon presented a draft Commission paper incorporating a revised External Lighting Policy for Parliament Buildings, for consideration.

It was noted that the Assembly Commission at its November meeting had indicated that the policy should be more permissive.

Following review, SMG approved the draft paper and policy for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its December meeting, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: Simon to update the draft policy in line with amendments proposed by SMG for presentation at the December Commission meeting.

Simon Burrowes left the meeting at 12.28pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES CONTINUED

18. Proposed Extension of the contract for Assembly Broadcasting and Related Services

Lesley noted that the Head of Communications had held a separate meeting with her and Directors to discuss a proposed extension of the contract for Assembly Broadcasting and Related Services and agreed to defer further discussion on this matter to the January SMG meeting.

19. Members Survey 2016/17 Action Plan – update (November 2019)

SMG noted the six monthly update on the implementation of the Members Survey 2016/17 Action Plan.

Following discussion, SMG agreed that the status of one of the actions should be marked complete and the Finance Office would re-consider the wording of the action relating to the 2016 Determination. As the other outstanding actions were dependent on resumption of normal Assembly business SMG agreed that further regular updates were not required until then.

Action: Richard to arrange for the action relating to the 2016 Determination to be updated.

Action: Outstanding actions within the Members Survey 2016/17 Action Plan to be reviewed by SMG when the Assembly resumes normal business.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

20. Directors' Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

Corporate Services

Richard advised SMG that the December Monitoring return was to be submitted to the Department of Finance by 4 December.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Tara provided SMG with an update on the Internal Audit Reviews for:

- Planned and Reactive Maintenance;
- Events;
- Equality and Good Relations Unit;
- Research and Information Services (RaISe);
- Usher Services;
- Payroll; and
- Broadcasting.

Tara also informed SMG that details of Assembly Commission contracts valued over £30k would be published in early December and asked Directors to ensure that they were content with the wording of the list of contracts which had been circulated to them by William Long.

Action: Directors to review the wording of the list of contracts issued by William Long.

SMG noted that an Expression of Interest had recently issued in relation to the temporary position of Data Protection and Information Standards Officer (AG5).

Parliamentary Services

Gareth informed SMG that work was continuing on the Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Procurement.

SMG also noted that temporary internal recruitment for the posts of Assembly Clerk (AG4) and Senior Assistant Clerk was progressing.

OTHER ITEMS

22. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, 17 December 2019.

23. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Transgender Policy Principles
- Sustainability Report
- Post-Project Evaluation Updates
- Scope of Public Catering
- Revised Data Protection Policy
- Corporate Risk Register
- Annual Review of Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan
- Retention and Disposal Schedule
- Publication Scheme
- Staffing in the Bill Office

The meeting ended at 12.45pm.