

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

MONDAY, 17 JUNE 2019 at 9.30AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Rose Morwood
Robin Ramsey
Paula McClintock
Maria Bannon
Karen Martin
Sinéad McDonnell
Simon Burrowes

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.35am.

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 of 22 May 2019 were published on 12 June 2019.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

SMG discussed the status of an action from the December 2018 meeting regarding the sourcing of an interim contract management solution for all contracts. Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, advised that she was now content with the current

database maintained by the Procurement Office for over £30k procurements as it had recently been updated and that, on the basis that under £30k contracts remained delegated at present, it was not immediately necessary at this stage to source an interim contract management solution for centralising under £30k contract documentation. She noted that business areas should, however, ensure that all under £30k contract documentation was regularly updated and held together in an accessible way. Tara confirmed that the issue of a centralised contract database for all contracts would be revisited by the Head of Procurement in December 2019.

SMG agreed to close off this action and revisit in December 2019 when the Head of Procurement was due to report on a further review of the Delegated Procurement Policy, including a review of the holding of contract documentation in relation to under £30k contracts as outlined in Action Point number 6.

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.44am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, advised that talks were continuing. She stated that continued focus should be on retaining readiness to support the return to normal Assembly business and noted the very comprehensive plenary rehearsal that had been held on 7 June.

CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

SMG reviewed the draft agenda for the next Assembly Commission meeting scheduled for 24 June 2019.

Proposed items for the meeting include:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Incidental Costs of Parliamentary Travel by Members
- Future Delivery of Member Development and Support for the Assembly Women's Caucus
- Options Paper for a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly
- Post-EU Exit Implications for Independent Financial Review Panel (IFRP) 2016 Determination
- IFRP Reform
- Independent Audit of Financial Assistance for Political Parties (FAPP) Scheme 2016
- Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission 2018-2019
- Corporate Plan 2018-19: Year-End Report
- Broadcasting and Related Services Contract Variation

- Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) Annual Report 2018-19
- Calculation of Holiday Pay
- Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) – Salary Matter

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.05am.

Paula McClintock, Head of Finance, joined the meeting at 10.05am for agenda items 7 and 8.

CORPORATE SERVICES

7. Management Accounts

Paula McClintock apologised for only providing SMG with copies of the management accounts just prior to the meeting, which was due to the timing of the SMG meeting and collation of returns from business areas. She also highlighted that the copy of the Capital Plan provided was not the most up to date version and that she would provide greater detail at the next meeting.

Paula appreciated that SMG had had little time to review the covering paper and accounts and stated that she was happy to answer any detailed questions from SMG after the meeting.

Paula updated SMG on the final outturn position for the year ended 31 March 2019 and presented the management accounts for May 2019.

Paula asked SMG to consider additional bids in relation to admin expenditure and capital expenditure. Lesley queried why there was a £42k overspend in respect of the renewal of the Microsoft Enterprise licence since this had been discussed and agreed at the budget meeting in February and that Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services had confirmed at the April 2019 SMG meeting, that the anticipated 25% increase in cost had been incorporated in the budget for 2019/20.

SMG was content to approve the additional admin costs bids other than the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement licence costs pending clarification of this. SMG also approved the capital expenditure bid for fryers.

Paula agreed to seek additional information in relation to the other bids discussed and stated that she would review the status of the approved Capital Plan and present a more informed Capital Plan to SMG at its next meeting.

Action: Paula to clarify the expenditure on the renewal of the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement licence with the IS Office and advise SMG.

Action: Paula to review the status of approved capital expenditure and present an updated Capital Plan to the next SMG meeting.

SMG discussed the June monitoring round and agreed not to surrender any funds at this time.

8. Independent Audit of Financial Assistance for Political Parties (FAPP) Scheme 2016

Paula presented her paper and advised that under Article 2(2) of the FAPP Scheme the Assembly Commission must annually engage the services of an external auditor.

Paula confirmed that the external audit for 2018/19 had been completed, and that certificates had been obtained for each of the political parties that received funding under the Scheme during 2018/19, verifying that expenditure claimed was in accordance with the requirements of the scheme.

Paula stated however, that although the auditor confirmed expenditure was in accordance with the scheme, the report highlighted a number of areas for potential improvements to internal control and made six recommendations to improve governance arrangements. SMG considered each of the recommendations and agreed with the management responses provided within the paper.

Paula advised that declarations of compliance had not been received from the nominated signatory of two political parties and Tara Caul recommended that further correspondence be sent to these parties reminding them of the importance of signing these declarations.

Action: Richard Stewart to seek Assembly Commission approval of the management responses to the FAPP audit at its next meeting.

Action: Paula to correspond with those parties yet to return a signed declaration of compliance.

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 11.06am.

Maria Bannon joined the meeting at 11.06am for agenda item 9.

9. Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission 2018-2019

Maria Bannon, Equality Manager, presented the 2018- 2019 Annual Progress Report on Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties.

SMG reviewed the report and was content, subject to a few minor amendments, for it to be presented to the Assembly Commission at its

next meeting, prior to being forwarded to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI).

SMG agreed that an update on the status of the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan should be presented to SMG annually prior to incorporation in the Annual Equality Progress Report. Lesley also highlighted that some of the actions and outputs in the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan were being amended without being highlighted or approved by SMG.

Tara Caul recommended that it would be useful for the Strategy Steering Group dealing with Equality, Regulation and Governance issues (Building Excellence and Innovation in Our Services) to consider how section 75 could be more effectively mainstreamed in relation to papers presented to SMG.

Action: Richard Stewart to present the Annual Equality Progress Report 2018-19 to the Equality Commission to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Action: Update on the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan to be presented annually to SMG in April.

SMG thanked Maria for a very comprehensive report.

Maria Bannon left the meeting at 11.22am.

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 11.22am for agenda items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16.

10. HR Management Information

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR management information.

SMG noted the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 June (including agency and seconded staff) was 308.3 which is against a staff Complement of 350.4 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) (including Complement plus).

Karen advised that there had been no change to temporary promotion/deputising arrangements and agency workers assignments currently in place since last month's report to SMG.

Karen provided SMG with copies of the updated redeployment table for review.

Karen also informed SMG that there had been no change to the Recruitment Schedule since last reported. SMG noted that the IS Office Scholarship Development programme competition had been completed, and that the two successful candidates would commence their placements on 1 July 2019.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period June 2018 to May 2019, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 10.1 days. Karen reported that the HR team was concerned that the sickness absence information generated by the reporting tool used in iTrent appeared to be low for May 2019 and on inspection some cases of long term sickness were not included. Karen advised that the figure reported to SMG in May 2019 should have been 9.7, and not 9.0. HR to investigate further to identify any other anomalies in previous figures reported.

Action: HR to review previous sickness absence figures reported to check for accuracy and report back to SMG.

11. Review of the Whistleblowing Policy

Karen advised that the draft Whistleblowing Policy had previously been considered by SMG in October 2018 and February 2019 when SMG approved the draft policy for consultation with Trade Union Side (TUS). Karen informed SMG that no changes had been made to the policy following the consultation with TUS.

Following review, SMG approved the draft revised Whistleblowing Policy.

Going forward SMG requested that the version number and issue date be included on all new or amended policies.

Action: HR to issue the revised Whistleblowing Policy to staff and update the Staff Handbook on AssISt.

Action: HR to forward a copy of the Whistleblowing Policy to Governance Services for inclusion on the agenda for the September SARC meeting.

Action: Directors to inform Heads of Business (HoBs) to include the version number and issue date on all new or amended policies.

12. Development of an Apprenticeship and Placement Framework

Karen advised SMG that this was an overarching paper and policy for the development of an Apprenticeship and Placement Framework within the organisation.

SMG considered and approved the draft Apprenticeship and Placement Framework, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: HR to issue a copy of the Apprenticeship and Placement Framework to staff and include in the Staff Handbook on AssISt.

Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, joined the meeting at 11.49am for agenda items 13, 14, 15 and 16.

13. Retaining Readiness for Resumption of Assembly Business

Karen advised that the paper being presented today to SMG was to consider a further extension to existing merit lists and the priority order for recruitment competitions. She confirmed that she had spoken with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and consulted with TUS regarding a further possible extension.

SMG noted the advice from the ECNI and the concerns of TUS regarding a further extension of the existing merits lists but concluded that a further and final six month extension was necessary and appropriate in the current political circumstances in order to be able to maintain readiness and fill vacancies at the point at which the Assembly returned to normal business. SMG also noted that the Secretary of State (SoS) was facilitating a new talks process.

Action: HR to inform TUS of SMG's decision to extend existing merit lists by a further and final six months.

However, SMG agreed that planning work should be undertaken in relation to the running of temporary recruitment competitions for those merit lists that are due to expire before the end of the year, in the event of the Assembly not having resumed normal business by that time. It was noted that even with the further extension, recruitment competitions would be required at the appropriate time to replace the extended merit lists. SMG agreed that this should be factored into planning for future recruitment activity and prioritisation.

Action: HR to start planning for the running of recruitment competitions for merit lists that are due to expire by the end of this year and to factor in the replacement of other merit lists when planning future recruitment activity.

SMG agreed that Directors would meet with their HoBs to discuss the list of current vacancies and the priority of recruitment competitions within their respective Directorates. To assist with this, SMG asked if HR could provide Directors with a table detailing all vacancies within their Directorate and the expiry dates of existing merit lists.

Following Directorate meetings, a meeting will be arranged between the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and HR to advise HR on the priority of recruitment competitions.

Action: Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to meet in early July to agree the priority of recruitment competitions and to advise HR accordingly.

14. Staff Complement of the Human Resources Office

Sinéad McDonnell presented this paper seeking SMG's approval to temporary changes to the staff complement of the HR Office and also their agreement to the securing of additional financial resources to allow the changes to be made. She explained that the need arose from work arising out of the Review of Recruitment and Selection and Induction. Sinéad also noted that there had been two separate meetings with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to discuss her proposals in detail.

Sinéad informed SMG of the concern that there are currently 16 competitions to be run for which there are no merit lists. She proposed that planning work for these competitions be carried out over the summer. It was noted that training for interview panel members would be required following the introduction of the new Assembly Skills and Behaviours and that interview panels would need to convene to agree the necessary paperwork.

Sinéad stated that she wanted to defer the start of work on Success Profiles in order to prepare for recruitment competitions. SMG indicated that it was not content with this proposal as it would likely mean that the large number of recruitment competitions would have to be carried out under the Assembly Commission's existing methodology.

SMG therefore requested that an implementation schedule be prepared setting out the work and timeline required to complete Success Profiles along with the work needed to be carried out on all of the recruitment activity.

Action: HR to circulate an implementation schedule and timeline for the delivery of the work required to complete Success Profiles and arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to discuss.

SMG considered and approved the request to temporarily increase the staff complement of the HR Office to manage the impending work to be carried out in relation to Recruitment and Selection and Induction.

15. Annual Review of Learning and Development Activities in 2018/19

SMG reviewed the Learning and Development (L&D) activities undertaken during the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

Sinéad informed SMG that on average there were 3.4 days training per staff member during 2018/19.

SMG noted that the HR L&D Team had facilitated a large volume of learning and development activities during 2018/19 under the five themes in the L&D Framework.

Sinéad advised that the HR L&D Team had struggled with securing suitable accommodation in Parliament Buildings for training. Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services advised that the Strategic Steering Group (Investing in the development, expertise and wellbeing of our people) was aware of this problem and is focusing on this issue in detail.

SMG requested a minor change to the paper presented and asked for a revised copy to be issued to the Corporate Support Unit.

Action: Sinéad to update the paper as requested by SMG and forward a revised copy to the Corporate Support Unit.

SMG asked Sinéad to pass on their thanks to the HR L&D Team for the comprehensive paper which provided a detailed overview of learning and development activities undertaken in 2018/19.

16. Calculation of Holiday Pay

SMG considered a draft Assembly Commission paper in relation to the calculation of Holiday Pay.

SMG agreed that the paper should be updated in line with the recent Court of Appeal ruling and some other SMG comments and presented to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Action: Calculation of Holiday Pay paper to be updated and presented to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Sinéad McDonnell and Karen Martin left the meeting at 1.22pm.

The meeting adjourned at 1:22pm until 2.02pm.

17. Post-EU Implications for IFRP 2016 Determination

SMG considered the likely impact of the UK leaving the EU without an amendment to the 2016 Determination issued by the IFRP.

Richard outlined four options for consideration which would seek to avoid a situation where Members would be unable to recover any expenditure incurred with a UK-based supplier after the formation of an Executive.

Following discussion SMG was content for a paper to be presented to the Assembly Commission based on the options outlined.

Action: Paper to be prepared for consideration by the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

OTHER

Simon Burrowes, acting Chair of the Internal Communications Group/Head of Official Report and Public Engagement, joined the meeting at 2.18pm for agenda items 18 and 21.

18. Staff Survey 2019 Methodology

Simon Burrowes advised that at the April 2019 SMG meeting it was agreed that the Internal Communications Group (ICG) would oversee the 2019 Staff Survey. He therefore provided SMG with ICG's initial thoughts about the survey and sought its approval on an indicative timetable and the proposed methodology.

Simon reported that ICG proposed bringing a final draft of the survey to SMG at its September meeting for approval with a view to issuing the survey early October and providing a report on the findings by the end of the year.

SMG noted the work of ICG in relation to the 2019 Staff Survey and approved the proposed timetable and methodology that will be employed to undertake the survey.

Change to agenda running order.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

21. Options Paper on the Development of a Youth Assembly

Simon advised that the options paper on the development of a Youth Assembly had been discussed in detail by the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors at a separate meeting the previous week and that comments had been provided to further inform the paper.

SMG considered the five options within the paper and agreed with the recommended option.

Following discussion, SMG was content for the paper to be presented to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to some minor amendments.

SMG thanked Simon and Peter for their work on what was a very comprehensive paper.

Simon Burrowes left the meeting at 2.40pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

19. Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register

Tara Caul sought SMG's formal approval of the latest Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed in detail by the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors at a meeting on the 5 June.

SMG was content to approve the contents of the latest Corporate Risk Register.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES CONTINUED

20. Broadcasting and Related Services Contract Variation Update

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services to forward a paper on this agenda item to the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors for approval via correspondence prior to presentation to the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 24 June 2019.

22. Future Delivery of Member Development and Support for the Assembly Women's Caucus

Gareth McGrath to forward a paper on this agenda item to the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors for approval via correspondence prior to presentation to the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 24 June 2019.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

24. Directors' Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

Corporate Services

Richard advised that Karen Steele had commenced work on the Corporate Review Project. He stated that a series of emails would shortly be issued to staff seeking input from them on the project. Richard asked Directors to encourage their staff to engage with Karen on this very important project.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Tara confirmed that Internal Audit reports had been produced on the following areas of business:

- Interim Review of Members Expenses (2018/19)
- Roof Project - Follow Up
- Corporate Governance - Follow Up
- GDPR Compliance

Tara also confirmed that the next SARC meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, 18 June 2019.

Parliamentary Services

Gareth advised that the Plenary Rehearsal which took place on 7 June

went well but did highlight a number of issues which would be followed up.

Gareth also advised that the review of the Events Policy was ongoing.

OTHER ITEMS

25. AOB

Janet advised that the Data Protection and Information Standards Officer (ISO) was reviewing the Assembly Commission's Publications Scheme and had asked that consideration be given to the inclusion of Directors biographies on the Assembly website. Lesley asked Tara if she was aware of any other issues that had been highlighted during the review of the Publications Scheme. Tara confirmed that some other issues had been raised and it was agreed that rather than deal with issues individually in isolation, a paper should be prepared and presented to SMG for consideration.

Action: Data Protection and Information Standards Officer to prepare a paper for consideration by SMG on the issues raised following the review of the Assembly's Publication Scheme.

26. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, 15 August 2019.

27. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

Staff Travel Policy
Inappropriate Behaviours Policy – Key Principles
Review of Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures
Electronic Access Control System Proposals
Internal Audit Charter
Library Staffing Capacity

The meeting ended at 3.05pm.