

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

**WEDNESDAY, 23 JANUARY 2019 at 9.30AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

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

In Attendance: Frances Leneghan
Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Paula McClintock
Sinéad McDonnell
Karen Martin
Diane Lamont
David Lynn

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. Apologies were also received from Ms Tara Caul, Mr Jonathan McMillen deputised.

2. Declarations of Interest

Paul Gill declared (in relation to agenda item 9) that a family member was an employee of HMRC.

Jonathan McMillen declared an interest in agenda item 9.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 17 December 2018 together with unrestricted papers were published on 17 January 2019.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.40am for agenda items 5, 6 and 7.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, informed SMG that Party Whips had requested a meeting with her on Wednesday 30 January to discuss concerns they have with the operation of the Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016.

CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT

6. Draft Commission Agenda

SMG reviewed the draft agenda for the next Commission meeting scheduled for 5 February 2019.

Proposed items for the meeting include:

- Correspondence
- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Potential Exhibition/Loan of Assembly Artefacts
- Corporate Plan 2018/19: Reporting for April – December 2018
- Advice note on the Assembly Commission's Relationship with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)
- Future Investment in Politics Plus
- HMRC Settlement
- Request for external lighting of Parliament Buildings to mark the European Day for Victims of Terrorism

7. Corporate Plan 2018/19: Reporting for April – December 2018

Robin Ramsey, Head of Corporate Support, presented a report on the progress against Corporate Plan 2018/19 targets for the period April to December 2018.

On reviewing the report SMG agreed that a few amendments were required, mainly to the 'status and commentary' section of the report.

Action: Mr Ramsey to liaise with the Head of HR regarding the status update of the Learning and Development Action Plan.

Action: Clerk/Chief Executive to liaise with the Head of IS in relation to the status update for the action on 'Network Storage'.

Action: Clerk/Chief Executive to liaise with the Head of Public Engagement in relation to the status update for the action on the 'Youth Assembly'.

Action: Robin to follow up with those business areas that have yet to provide a status update in relation to the action on 'Retaining Readiness'.

SMG thanked Robin for all the work that had gone into producing such a comprehensive update.

Robin recorded his thanks to Karen Jardine for all the work undertaken by her in relation to the Corporate Plan 2018/19.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.16am.

Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 10.17am for agenda items 8 and 9.

8. Management Accounts

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for December 2018, detailing the forecast level of underspend against the budget submitted to the Department of Finance (DoF) for the December Monitoring round.

SMG also noted the total amount surrendered to DoF across a number of expenses categories from the three formal monitoring rounds carried out so far this year.

Paula highlighted the amount of capital expenditure to date against forecast expenditure for 2018/19 and said that no amendments have been put forward this month.

As noted at the previous SMG meeting, a detailed list of required amendments to the Decision Authorisation System (DAS) had been provided to the IS Office and Paula confirmed that the IS Office was currently working to progress those changes which were possible within a 2-3 week timeframe. Paula informed SMG that a further discussion would be taking place with the IS Office in relation to agreeing a timeframe for progressing two of the substantial issues raised in relation to workflows and closing off DAS records. Paula also confirmed that control of DAS would be transferring to the Finance Office and that they would be reviewing the staff guidance and re-issuing if necessary.

9. HMRC Employer's Tax Compliance Review

SMG considered the findings of the HMRC Employer's Tax Compliance Review.

Of the risks that were assessed, four were recorded by HMRC as being non-compliant and Paula outlined each of these in detail. Following discussion, SMG agreed a course of action in relation to each of the risks identified as being non-compliant.

SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Commission at its February meeting subject to the inclusion of some additional information.

Action: Paula to update the paper as agreed with SMG for presentation to the Commission at its February meeting.

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 11.34am.

Comfort break until 11.42am.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 11.42am for agenda items 10, 11 and 12.

10. Guidance to Managing & Developing Performance in the Assembly

Sinéad McDonnell presented the 'Guidance to Managing and Developing Performance in the Assembly' and sought SMG's approval to include this revised approach to performance management in the Staff Handbook and communicate the change to all staff.

SMG reviewed the guidance and was content for it to be inserted in the Staff Handbook and issued to all staff subject to a few minor revisions.

Action: HR to update the Staff Handbook as agreed by SMG and communicate to all staff.

Diane Lamont joined the meeting at 11.58am for agenda items 11 and 12.

Karen Martin joined the meeting at 11.58am for agenda items 11, 12 and 13.

11. Inappropriate Behaviours Policy – Key Principles

Diane Lamont presented this paper. She outlined the different approaches undertaken by other legislatures on the actions they are taking in relation to addressing inappropriate behaviours and proposed key principles for the development of an Inappropriate Behaviours Policy for the Assembly Commission.

Following discussion, SMG raised some concerns regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of the Commission, the Committee on Standards and Privilege and officials. In light of this, SMG agreed that further consideration and discussion was required in relation to the development of this Policy prior to seeking Commission approval on the key principles. SMG asked for some further process work to be carried out between HR and Clerking and for this to be discussed with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors at a separate meeting to allow greater time for consideration.

Action: HR and Clerking to work on developing an Inappropriate Behaviours process and to meet with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to discuss.

12. Inspire Report entitled “Review of Behaviours at Work”

Diane presented a report on the ‘Review of Behaviours at Work’ produced by Inspire Knowledge and Leadership.

SMG considered the recommendations within the report and noted that while the practical implementation of some of the recommendations was still being considered by the Assembly’s Unacceptable Behaviour Working Group, all the recommendations had been accepted by the Working Group, and agreed that these should be implemented. SMG was also content for the report to be issued to all staff.

Action: A copy of the Inspire Report to be issued to all staff and its recommendations to be implemented.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 12.50pm.

Diane Lamont left the meeting at 12.50pm.

13. HR Management Information

SMG noted the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 January (including agency and seconded staff) was 311.6 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff Complement of 344.9 FTE.

Karen Martin confirmed that there had been little or no change to temporary promotion/deputising arrangements currently in place, agency worker assignments and redeployments since last month’s report to SMG.

SMG noted a few anomalies in relation to the breakdown of redeployed staff within business areas and agreed to review the figures.

Action: Directors to meet with their Heads of Business (HoBs) to check HR staff redeployment figures for accuracy and update accordingly, notifying the HR Office of any amendments.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period January 2018 to December 2018, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 9.1 which compared favourably with the period January 2017 to December 2017 figure of 9.8 days.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 1.05pm.

Meeting suspended at 1.05pm and resumed at 1.47pm.

David Lynn joined the meeting at 1.47pm for agenda item 14.

14. Potential Exhibition/Loan of Assembly Artefacts

David Lynn presented this paper outlining four options for consideration by the Commission should it wish to facilitate an exhibition of some or all of its artefacts either at Parliament Buildings or elsewhere.

Following discussion, SMG approved the paper for consideration by the Commission at its next meeting subject to a few minor amendments.

SMG thanked David on a well presented paper.

Action: David to update the paper in line with SMG's comments for presentation to the Commission at its February meeting.

David Lynn left the meeting at 2.23pm.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

15. Directors' Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

Jonathan McMillen gave a special mention to Karl Hedley from the Assembly's Information Standards Office, who had obtained the British Computer Society Certificate of Freedom of Information.

OTHER ITEMS

16. AOB

There was no other business.

17. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday, 26 February 2019 at 9.30am in Room 106.

18. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy
- Update on EU Exit & Brexit Response Plan
- FoI Charging
- Parliamentary Travel for Members
- GDPR Lessons Learned
- Data Breach Report

The meeting ended at 2.33pm.