

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

WEDNESDAY, 23 OCTOBER 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  
Karen Martin  
Sinéad McDonnell  
Diane Lamont

### Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.38am.

#### 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 24 September 2019 were published on 22 October 2019.

#### 4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

In relation to the action on *'Effective use of Corporate Support Systems: Lessons Learned'*, Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services advised SMG that he would be issuing a link to Heads of Business (HoBs) to request that they populate the lessons learned registry for the

completed projects within their business area. The registry will then be communicated across the wider Secretariat.

*Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.42am for agenda items 5 and 6.*

## **5. Political Update**

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive noted the intensive preparations that had been undertaken for Monday's sitting and thanked staff across the Secretariat for their hard work and efforts to ensure that everything ran smoothly.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services advised SMG that the Northern Ireland (Extension of Period for Executive Formation) (No. 2) Regulations 2019 had come into force, extending the period for Executive formation to 13 January 2020.

Robin Ramsey confirmed that the current Speaker remained in office and continued to hold the position of Chair of the Assembly Commission following Monday's sitting.

## **CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT**

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

SMG reviewed the draft agenda for the next Assembly Commission meeting re-scheduled from 7 October 2019 to 5 November 2019.

Proposed items for the November meeting include:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Proposed Partial Electronic Access Control (EAC) System
- Recoupment of Rent and Rates
- Proposed Mediation
- Lighting of Parliament Buildings Policy
- Systems Review Project
- Future delivery of Member Development and Support for the Assembly Women's Caucus
- Politics Plus Report on 2018 Activity
- Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) Terms of Reference
- Members' Parliamentary Travel
- Trade Union Side (TUS) Pay Claim for 2019 (subject to receipt of claim from TUS)

Robin confirmed that a further Assembly Commission meeting had been scheduled for 9 December.

## Corporate Support Unit Directorate Update

Robin advised SMG that the annual Act of Remembrance Service would be held on 11 November and that a Staff Corporate Return Event had been planned for 27 November 2019.

Robin also confirmed that the draft Corporate Plan 2019-23 had recently been issued for engagement with staff.

*Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.23am.*

## CORPORATE SERVICES

*Paula McClintock, Head of Finance, joined the meeting at 10.23am for agenda item 7.*

### 7. Management Accounts

Paula presented the Management Accounts for September 2019, providing an indication of the forecast for income and expenditure for the 2019/20 year.

SMG noted that a budget re-profiling exercise had recently been carried out. Paula advised that a further re-profiling exercise would be commissioned at the end of October due to the size of the variances highlighted between budget profiles and actual expenditure. Paula informed SMG that the October reporting cycle would be the final opportunity to review and align budgets prior to the final monitoring round. In light of this, she asked that Directors ensure that their budget managers carry out a detailed review of their proposed expenditure between now and the end of the financial year and engage as much as possible with the Finance Office. It was agreed that Directors would raise this at their Directorate team meetings.

SMG considered a bid from the Communications Office for additional funding to cover photographic and videography costs for the recruitment portal. Due to the level of funding requested, SMG agreed that additional information was required in relation to this bid before it could be considered.

**Action:** Communications Office to provide additional information in relation to the bid for funding to cover photographic and videography costs.

In relation to a bid from the IS Office for PEN Testing, Lesley stated that this would be regular expenditure and questioned why this had not been budgeted for at the start of the financial year. Paula advised that she would flag this up with the IS Office.

SMG considered a capital bid for replacement fryers and was content for this to be added to the capital plan.

SMG noted that the HyperV/SAN project was being progressed for implementation in 2020-21. Gareth undertook to discuss with the Head of IS Office whether there was any possibility of bringing the project forward to 2019-20.

**Action:** Gareth to discuss the possibility of bringing the HyperV/SAN project forward to 2019-20.

With regards the Decision Authorisation System (DAS), Paula advised SMG that a number of DAS references were nearing their Requirement End Date and that the Finance Office had only received commentary on a small number of these. Paula asked that Directors stress to their HoBs the importance of providing commentary and keeping the DAS records up to date.

Lesley asked that Directors focus on the forecasts for capital and admin costs as well as DAS references that are due to expire, in advance of the final monitoring round.

**Action:** Directors to ensure that HoBs provide commentary on DAS references that are nearing their end date.

**Action:** Directors to ensure that the forecasts for capital and admin costs are thoroughly reviewed before the next monitoring round.

Lesley noted that while the tablet computers used by Directors and HoBs had been replaced with Surface Pros, it was time to consider whether there was a need to replace the tablets for other key staff who require them and asked that Directors review requirements.

**Action:** Directors to consider whether the tablets of other key staff needed to be replaced.

*Paula McClintock left the meeting at 10.54am.*

*Comfort break until 11.01am*

*Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR joined the meeting at 11.01am for agenda items 8, 9 and 10.*

*Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 11.01am for agenda item 8.*

## **8. HR Management Information**

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 October (including agency and seconded staff) was 303.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE)

against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 354.4 FTE.

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

Karen provided SMG with copies of the latest temporary redeployment table for review. Following consideration, Lesley asked that Karen check some of the figures for accuracy.

**Action:** Karen to check figures recorded in the redeployment table.

SMG reviewed the Recruitment Schedule and Karen confirmed that the recruitment team was continuing to work with HoBs regarding future recruitments.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period October 2018 to September 2019, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 11.5 days, which represented an increase of 2.3 when compared with the same period last year.

*Karen Martin left the meeting at 11.14am.*

*Diane Lamont, Senior HR Manager joined the meeting at 11.14am for agenda item 9.*

## **9. Implementation of Proposals arising out of the Review of Recruitment and Selection and Induction – Proposed changes to recruitment policies and procedures**

Sinéad McDonnell presented this paper following a number of previous discussions with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors. She sought SMG's approval on proposed changes to the Recruitment Policy and Procedures that have evolved out of the proposals arising from the Review of Recruitment and Selection and Induction.

Sinéad advised SMG that the Human Resources Office had met with TUS to consult on the proposals and she confirmed that it was broadly content, but wanted to reflect on the detail and would respond formally in due course.

Following consideration, SMG approved the proposals within the paper and agreed that the categories the Assembly Commission monitored should be extended to include all Section 75 categories with this information being requested on a voluntary basis. Lesley noted that as the information would be provided on a voluntary basis it would be incomplete and that careful consideration would be required prior to the use of the data.

SMG thanked Sinéad, Diane and the rest of the HR team for all their efforts in this major piece of work.

*Diane Lamont left the meeting at 11.34am.*

## **10. Bi-annual review of Learning and Development Activities**

Sinéad provided SMG with an update on the progress made from April 2019 to September 2019 in relation to the implementation of Corporate Learning and Development (L&D) activities for Secretariat staff.

SMG noted that currently the number of training days delivered equated to an average of 1.07 days per staff member based on 308.3 FTE staff.

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

In relation to Category 4: Management and Leadership Skills, Sinéad asked that Directors encourage staff to avail of the training and development offered by the People Manager Programme modules.

Given that it was a new programme, Lesley asked that HR ensure that detailed feedback is obtained from participants on each of the People Manager Programme modules, to enable any issues highlighted to be addressed and modules adapted as necessary.

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

**Action:** Directors to encourage staff to avail of the modules in the People Manager Programme.

**Action:** Sinéad to ensure that feedback is obtained on the quality and content of each module on the People Manager Programme.

*Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 11.55am.*

## **11. Gender Action Plan six-monthly update: October 2019**

SMG noted the progress update on the Gender Action Plan 2019-23 for the six-month reporting period.

SMG considered some proposed amendments to the plan and was content to include a new action to develop a Menopause Policy and a slight delay in the application deadline for Diversity NI Charter Mark. SMG did not agree to extend the timeline for Diversity NI Charter Mark as the target timescale should not be amended but advised that the progress update could reflect the later date. SMG declined a request to

extend the timeline for the provision of training on transgender issues since the original timeline for completion of this action in the 2016-18 Gender Action Plan was September 2017. Progress against these actions will continue to be monitored against the original timescales.

**Action:** Equality and Good Relations Unit to update the Gender Action Plan to include an action to develop a Menopause Policy.

## **12. Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21: October 2019 six-monthly monitoring update**

Richard provided SMG with a progress update on the actions in the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 for the six-month reporting period.

Richard highlighted that of the 41 actions within the Plan only one was recorded as 'overdue' and he confirmed that this was being progressed.

SMG discussed the progress update for action 1.1 on 'Equality and good relations issues are discussed at Secretariat Management Group (SMG) and Assembly Commission meetings'. SMG agreed that the monitoring of Equality and Good Relations issues via the template for SMG and Assembly Commission papers was just one of the ways in which this action was achieved and that the progress update should also refer to the wide variety of Equality related papers that are presented to SMG and the Assembly Commission.

**Action:** Equality and Good Relations Unit to include additional information on the wide variety of Equality related papers considered by SMG and the Assembly Commission in future progress updates for action 1.1.

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

### **13. Draft Commission paper on Proposed Mediation**

SMG noted that this paper had been discussed at length by the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and the Head of Legal Services at a meeting on 26 September 2019.

SMG was content for the paper to be presented to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

**Action:** Paper to be presented to the Assembly Commission at its meeting in November.

## PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

### 14. Transition of delivery of Member Development and Support for the Assembly Women's Caucus from Politics Plus to the Assembly Commission

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services presented this paper outlining the phases of the proposed transition process for the delivery of Member development and support for the Assembly Women's Caucus from Politics Plus to the Assembly Commission.

Following discussion SMG agreed that the paper should be presented to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting subject to some minor amendments.

**Action:** Gareth to prepare a cover paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its November meeting.

### 15. Politics Plus Report on 2018 Activity

SMG noted correspondence from Politics Plus to the Assembly Commission on its activity and outcomes for 2018, together with Politics Plus's audited financial statement for the year ended 31 December 2018.

**Action:** Gareth to prepare a cover paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its November meeting.

## OTHER

### 16. Directors' Updates

#### Corporate Services

Richard informed SMG that the Equality and Good Relations Unit had a heavy workload in 2020 as the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme and numerous Action Plans ended in 2021 and new plans would have to be produced.

SMG noted the fall in revenue from afternoon tea. In light of the limited revenue generated through afternoon tea, SMG agreed that active consideration should be given to whether the offering was sustainable. It was SMG's view that the level of income generated from afternoon tea did not justify the continuation of this service offering.

**Action:** Richard to review the income and contribution generated from afternoon tea and provide a report to SMG in December.



SMG also noted that the Sustainable Development Office had been recommended for continued accreditation to ISO 14001:2015.

### **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) and Usher Services; and
- Broadcasting.

SMG noted that a sub-£30k procurement exercise for Internal Audit software would be carried out late October/early November.

Tara informed SMG that the Procurement Office was planning to publish over £30k contracts on the external website and SMG confirmed that it was content to proceed with this. Tara also confirmed that a paper on a Procurement Strategy would be provided to the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors for discussion in November.

SMG also noted that work was continuing on the RaISe Digital Strategy and that RaISe expected to launch it in early December.

### **Parliamentary Services**

Gareth advised SMG that work had started on planning for the future of broadcasting the proceedings of the Assembly and he proposed presenting a paper on this at the November SMG meeting.

Gareth also informed SMG that a desktop exercise for plenary business which commenced on 14 October to ensure preparedness for any resumption of normal business was overtaken by the recall of the Assembly on 21 October 2019.

## **17. AOB**

There was no other business.

## **18. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 20 November 2019.

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

- Inappropriate Behaviours – Key Principles
- Sustainability Report
- Post-Project Evaluation Updates

- Revised Data Protection Policy
- Information Security Group – Annual Report and Self - Assessment
- Annual Risk Management Self-Assessment
- Procurement Strategy
- Members' Survey Action Plan – Implementation Review
- Assembly Broadcasting 2019 to 2025.

The meeting ended at 1.03pm.