

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

**TUESDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 2019 at 9.30AM
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Frances Leneghan
Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Sinéad McDonnell
Maria Bannon
Karen Steele
Simon Burrowes
Ashleigh Mitford
Brian Devlin
Martina Dalton
Eddie Kelly

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.37am.

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 15 August 2019 were published on 18 September 2019.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

In relation to the outstanding action regarding the updating of the Administrative Guide to Claiming Financial Support, Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive asked that the updated guide be forwarded to her for review prior to being published.

Action: Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services to forward a copy of the revised Administrative Guide to Lesley prior to publishing.

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.45am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley stated that continued focus should be on retaining readiness to support the return to normal Assembly business, noting in particular the relevance of 21 October 2019 in the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 and the scheduled EU Exit date of 31 October 2019.

CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

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

Proposed items for the meeting include:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Proposed Partial Electronic Access Control (EAC) System – Parliament Buildings
- Recoupment of Rent and Rates
- Proposed Mediation

Corporate Support Unit Directorate Update

Robin Ramsey advised SMG of keynote events before Christmas.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.05am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, joined the meeting at 10.05am for agenda items 7, 8 and 9.

7. HR Management Information

Sinéad McDonnell presented the monthly HR Management Information.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 September (including agency and seconded staff) was 308.3 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 354.4 FTE.

SMG reviewed the Recruitment Schedule, agreed some changes to the Schedule and asked that two of the tables presented should be combined going forward. SMG noted that a number of merit lists were due to expire in the coming months and agreed that this should be communicated to staff.

Action: Lesley to notify staff of the Recruitment Schedule and merit lists that are due to expire in the coming months as part of her monthly SMG meeting update.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period September 2018 to August 2019, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff had increased to 11.3 days. Sinéad advised SMG that a reduction was expected on the October return to SMG.

Sinéad provided SMG with copies of the updated redeployment table. Following review, SMG agreed that continuing activities should be reviewed and updated as appropriate.

Action: Richard to coordinate a review of continuing activities.

Sinéad also provided SMG with information on case management activity since 1 April 2019.

8. Implementation of Proposals arising out of the Review of Recruitment and Selection and Induction – *On-Boarding Programme*

Sinéad presented the draft On-Boarding Programme which was one of the agreed proposals arising from the Review of Recruitment and Selection and Induction. Sinéad confirmed that staff feedback had been taken into account when developing the Programme.

SMG noted that the Programme had been structured under five headings with the main focus being on the integration of new staff into the Assembly Secretariat.

SMG approved the structure and content of the Programme, subject to some minor amendments and was content for the HR Office to proceed with developing the Programme.

SMG commended Sinéad and her team on an excellent piece of work.

9. Health and Wellbeing Action Plan

Sinéad presented the Close Down Report for the Health and Wellbeing Action Plan for the period July 2017 to July 2019. She noted that at the time of writing the paper, she had been unable to report on both course evaluations and customer satisfaction rates for Inspire Workplace Services, and provided those verbally. SMG asked that the paper be updated to reflect these and recirculated.

SMG noted achievement against the five indicators as outlined in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which overall was very positive.

However, SMG noted that most of the outcomes measured inputs rather than outputs and agreed that when developing the new Strategy for 2020 further consideration would need to be given to the indicators and how outputs were measured.

Action: Sinéad to update the Close Down Report to incorporate the outstanding outcomes and forward a revised copy to the Corporate Support Unit.

SMG also considered the draft Plan for the period July 2019 to March 2020.

Following review, SMG was content to approve the draft Health and Wellbeing Action Plan for 2019/20 subject to some minor changes.

Action: Sinéad to update the draft Health and Wellbeing Action Plan for 2019/20 as proposed by SMG and publish on AsslSt.

SMG thanked Sinéad and her team on the development of a comprehensive plan for 2019/20.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 11.09am.

Comfort break 11.09am to 11.20am.

Maria Bannon, Equality and Good Relations Manager, joined the meeting at 11.20am for agenda item 10.

10. Audit of Inequalities 2019 Review

Maria Bannon presented a mid-point review of the current Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan completed by RaISe.

SMG noted the analysis and findings outlined in the Review Report.

Following consideration, SMG requested that some additional information be included in the RaISe report under the headings 'Recruitment and Selection' and 'Corporate Strategy'.

In relation to the section on 'Recruitment and Selection' Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services stated that the table detailing the '*Age breakdown of Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat staff as at 31 March 2019*' should be updated to include a younger age group. Maria suggested including a bracket for 24 years and upward but agreed to seek advice from RaISe.

In relation to the section on 'Corporate Strategy' SMG reaffirmed that the Assembly Commission is committed to ensuring that equality is at the heart of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Corporate Strategy, as envisaged by the Commission's Equality Scheme.

Tara proposed and SMG agreed that a review of the Equal Opportunities Policy should be carried out.

Action: HR Office to commence a review of the Equal Opportunities Policy.

Richard advised that a forward work plan was currently being drawn up for 2020 for all Equality Action Plans and the Equality Scheme as they are due to expire in 2020/21 and all have to be publically consulted on. He stated that this would involve a considerable amount of work for the Equality Unit but it would also require input and support from business areas.

Lesley queried the purpose of the mid-point review of the Audit of Inequalities, as the report seemed simply to reflect the information that was already presented in the annual return to the Equality Commission and status of the actions in the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan. She noted that it did not critique the Audit of Inequalities, nor attempt to address whether there were any gaps and therefore did not appear to address the issue of whether the Audit of Inequalities remained robust, reliable and fit for purpose. As such she felt the review was of limited utility.

Maria explained that the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme said that a mid-point review would be undertaken. She also confirmed that the Audit of Inequalities was still fit for purpose and that there were no significant gaps at present.

Lesley queried whether the mid-point review should really be a self-assessment given that the expertise on the matter lay with the Equality Unit.

SMG discussed the matter in detail and agreed that the purpose and methodology for conducting any future review of the Audit of Inequalities needed consideration and revision to ensure that it was fit for purpose and more forward looking. Maria explained that a new Equality Scheme needed to be developed and that this would provide a good opportunity to review the purpose and methodology for conducting the Audit of Inequalities.

Action: Maria to discuss the purpose and methodology for conducting the Audit of Inequalities with SMG when developing the new Equality Scheme.

Maria Bannon left the meeting at 11.51am.

Karen Steele, Project Manager, joined the meeting at 11.51am for agenda item 11.

11. Strategic Outline Business Case – Systems Review Project

Karen Steele presented the Strategic Outline Business Case for the Systems Review Project and sought SMG's approval to continue with the project and to incur the associated Stage One project costs.

Tara stated that although the Information Management System sat outside the scope of the Systems Review Project it was imperative that clear links were maintained between the two projects and that this should be reflected in the business case. Karen assured SMG that she would keep the Information Standards Officer informed of any relevant information emerging from the Systems Review Project.

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services noted that this was a large project with a number of strands of work, however he cautioned that the Assembly Commission should not fall into the trap of thinking that it was a special case that required a bespoke solution, as it was not.

Lesley raised some queries regarding the Options outlined in the paper. She queried why an "off the shelf solution" was not being considered, stated that the outsourcing option would need to be reviewed and reaffirmed and queried the merits of the rationale noted in response to the Civil Service Option.

Following consideration of the Strategic Outline Business Case and associated Stage One project costs, SMG agreed that some additional information should be included in the Business Case.

SMG recorded its commitment to the project and was content for the development of the Outstanding Business Case and scoping work to continue. However, it was agreed that due to the value of the proposed expenditure which could be deemed to be ICT or consultancy in nature, approval to proceed would need to be sought from the Assembly Commission.

Action: Karen to take SMG's comments on the Outstanding Business Case into consideration.

Action: Richard to prepare a paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission.

SMG thanked Karen for all the work carried out to date in relation to the project.

Karen Steele left the meeting at 12.55pm.

Change to agenda running order.

Simon Burrowes, Acting Chair of the Internal Communications Group (ICG), joined the meeting at 12.55pm for agenda item 14.

OTHER

14. Staff Survey 2019

Simon Burrowes presented a draft of the 2019 Staff Survey and sought SMG's formal approval on its content. Simon noted that he had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on a number of occasions over recent months to discuss the detail of the Staff Survey, most recently the previous week and that the proposed draft had also been considered in detail by ICG.

Following consideration, SMG approved the content subject to one minor amendment.

Simon confirmed that a Postmaster would issue to staff advising them of the survey launch date of 7 October 2019.

Simon stated that as with the last staff survey in 2017 time would need to be given to staff to allow them to complete the survey, and that he had spoken to some Heads of Business who had confirmed that time would be made available. SMG confirmed that all staff should be given the required time to complete the survey.

SMG thanked Simon for his efforts as Acting Chair of ICG and asked that he pass on SMG's thanks to the members of ICG for their time and effort in producing the 2019 survey.

Simon Burrowes left the meeting at 1.08pm.

Ashleigh Mitford, Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 1.08pm for agenda items 15 and 16.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

15. Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register

Ashleigh Mitford 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 12 September 2019.

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

16. Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers

SMG reviewed the latest Directorate Risk Registers for Corporate Services, Legal, Governance and Research Services and Parliamentary Services, which will be further reviewed by SARC in May 2020.

SMG also considered emerging Risk Clusters and whether any Directorate risks needed to be reflected in the Corporate Risk Register.

SMG agreed that the current risk clusters are reflected in the Corporate Risk Register.

Ashleigh Mitford left the meeting at 1.17pm.

The meeting suspended at 1.17pm and resumed at 2.02pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Brian Devlin, Head of IS, joined the meeting at 2.02pm for agenda item 19.

19. Response to the Report on the Review of ICT Staffing conducted by Alan Balharrie, Group Head of HR and Digital Services in the Scottish Parliament

Brian Devlin formally presented the report on the 'Review of ICT Staffing' together with the IS Office response to the report, its view of the strategic context and a proposed implementation plan for the report recommendations.

SMG noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Brian had met on 23 September 2019 to discuss this report in detail.

SMG welcomed the Review Report, its recommendations and the IS Office responses to the report. SMG accepted the recommendations in principle but noted that there were obviously very significant additional costs associated with implementation for which there was no budget cover.

SMG approved implementation of the recommendations outlined under Phase 1 of the paper and agreed that the implementation of Phases 2 and 3 would be subject to further consideration, following reviews of the progress and effectiveness of the implementation of Phases 1 and 2 and subject to the necessary funding being available.

SMG recorded its thanks to Brian and his team for the extensive work involved in providing a response to the report and noted that Lesley had

written to Alan Balharrie thanking him for producing a comprehensive report.

Brian Devlin left the meeting at 2.04pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES CONTINUED

Martina Dalton, Information Standards and Data Protection Officer, joined the meeting at 2.05pm for agenda item 17.

17. Review of Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Publication Scheme

Martina Dalton provided SMG with an update on issues highlighted during a recent review of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (NIAC) Publication Scheme.

SMG noted that the issues raised related to the publishing of additional information under three classes referenced in the Definition Document produced by the Information Commissioner's Office.

Following consideration, SMG agreed to the publishing of the following additional information:

- For contracts over £30k, supplier name, start date of contract and duration, nature/purpose of contract and contract value;
- NIAC pay and grading details, pay scales and the Staff Handbook with appropriate explanation of the relationship of the Handbook to contracts of employment;
- Details of gifts and hospitality provided to Members and senior staff (i.e. Director level and above); and
- Disclosure Log updated to include details of FoI requests and final responses.

Action: Procurement Office to write to the relevant suppliers informing them of the information that will now be published in respect of their contracts and make arrangements to publish the information quarterly.

Regarding the publishing of financial information in relation to projects and events as proposed in the paper, SMG agreed that this required further consideration and requested that Martina carry out some research in relation to how such information is published in other legislatures, along with any thresholds and report back.

SMG also agreed to review the Publication Scheme in its entirety.

Action: Martina to carry out some research in relation to the publishing of financial information on projects and events and report back to SMG.

Action: Corporate Support Unit to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and the Information Standards and Data Protection Officer to review the NIAC Publication Scheme further.

Martina Dalton left the meeting at 3.18pm.

Eddie Kelly, Acting Head of Internal Audit, joined the meeting at 3.18pm for agenda item 18.

18. Draft Internal Audit Charter

Eddie Kelly presented a draft of the Internal Audit Charter.

Following review, SMG proposed some minor amendments.

Action: Eddie to update the draft in line with the changes proposed and re-circulate via correspondence to Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors for final approval.

Eddie Kelly left the meeting at 3.27pm.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

12. Post-Project Evaluations (PPEs) Update

Richard presented and SMG noted the PPEs for the investments in stab proof vests and X-ray search facilities. Lesley noted that these were comprehensive and proportionate.

It was agreed that PPEs on other completed projects approved by SMG would be presented at future SMG meetings.

13. Signage Requirements

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper in relation to MLA office signage requirements.

Following review, SMG approved the paper for presentation at the October Assembly Commission meeting subject to the inclusion of some additional information.

Action: Richard to present a paper on Signage Requirements at the October Commission meeting.

DIRECTORATE UPDATES

20. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Richard updated SMG on the revenue generated by the Support Services contract in August and on the number of accidents reported since the last SMG meeting.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

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

- Members' Expenses (2018/19);
- Planned and Reactive Maintenance;
- Events; and
- Broadcasting Infrastructure.

SMG also noted the vast number of organisations in receipt of support from RaISe.

Tara confirmed that the Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) tender had been advertised that day. She also confirmed that work was ongoing on the development of an overarching Procurement Strategy for all Assembly Commission procurement activity, for presentation at the November SMG meeting.

Tara gave a special mention to the achievements of the following staff members:

- Simon Kelly, who completed the Law Society's Advanced Advocacy Course for Solicitors;
- Suzie Cave, who is a Chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute;
- Peter O'Hara, who completed a diploma in Librarianship; and
- Kristine Gillespie, who completed a Level 2 course in Tour Guiding.

SMG recorded its congratulations to all the staff mentioned on their achievements.

Parliamentary Services

Gareth advised SMG that work was continuing on the development of a Youth Assembly and on Secretariat preparations for exiting the EU.

It was also noted that together with colleagues from other legislatures, Clerking is supporting the development of a new Parliamentary and Assembly Officer's network which will focus on parliamentary business.

SMG also noted that the Communications Office was currently working with the HR Office on the development of a new site for Recruitment.

OTHER ITEMS

21. Commission papers cleared by correspondence

- Independent Financial Review Panel: Appointment and Legislative Reform; and
- Acting Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman Recruitment.

22. AOB

It was noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors had met with the Head of Finance on 18 September 2019 to agree the Assembly Commission Department of Finance Monitoring return for 2019/20 and also the Budget 2020/21 return and that high level management accounts to August 2019 had been circulated to inform this.

It was also noted that due to the work involved in preparing the 2019/20 Monitoring and 2020/21 Budget returns, a detailed set of management accounts would not be provided for August but would instead be combined with the management accounts for September 2019.

There was no other business.

23. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 23 October 2019.

24. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Options paper on Future Delivery of Member Development and Support for the Assembly Women's Caucus;
- Report on Member Development Activity;
- Inappropriate Behaviours Policy – Key Principles;
- Gender Action Plan – Update; and
- Good Relations Action Plan – Monitoring Update.

The meeting ended at 4.12pm.