

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

TUESDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2019 at 10.30AM  
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

## APPROVED

**Present:** Lesley Hogg  
Tara Caul  
Richard Stewart  
Simon Burrowes (deputising for Gareth McGrath)

**In Attendance:** Frances Leneghan  
Janet Hughes  
Robin Ramsey  
Paula McClintock  
Karen Martin  
Brian Devlin  
Richard Scott  
Shauna Mageean  
Martina Dalton  
Sinéad McDonnell  
Richard Anderson

### Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 10.33am.

#### 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 Simon Burrowes deputised.

#### 2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 23 January 2019 together with unrestricted papers were published on 20 February 2019.

#### 4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

With regards the two actions from 21 February 2018 meeting on 'Effective use of Corporate Support Systems: Lessons Learned', Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, sought SMG's views on the membership of the Project Board, as he felt that considerable user input was required into the project. Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, proposed that Richard seek expressions of interest from Heads of Business (HoBs)/senior staff systems users to join the Project Board. Richard was content to proceed on this basis. In relation to the second action to develop a Lessons Learned Registry, Lesley requested that an interim measure be put in place whilst awaiting development of a registry by the IS Office.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to issue an expression of interest for membership of the Corporate Support Systems Project Board to HoBs/senior staff systems users.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to develop an interim measure to share lessons learned pending development of a Lessons Learned Registry.

*Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 10.46am for agenda items 5 and 6.*

## **5. Political Update**

Lesley Hogg informed SMG that as requested by Party Whips at a recent meeting she had written to the Secretary of State (SoS) highlighting their concerns in relation to an issue regarding Members' expenses which will arise as a result of EU Exit and regarding the terms and conditions which Members can offer to their staff. While no reply had yet been received, it was noted that the Speaker had received a letter from the SoS advising of her intention to apply a technical fix to resolve the issue arising on EU Exit.

## **CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT**

## **6. Draft Commission Agenda**

SMG reviewed the draft agenda for the next Commission meeting scheduled for 25 March 2019.

Proposed items for the meeting include:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Draft Budget 2019/20
- Future Investment in Politics Plus
- Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman – Salary Matter
- Draft Engagement Strategy
- Gender Action Plan – Closure Report
- Good Relations Action Plan – Monitoring Update

*Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 11.03am.*

*Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 11.03am for agenda items 7 and 8.*

## **7. Management Accounts**

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for January 2019 and confirmed that for internal reporting purposes and the December Monitoring exercise it had been assumed that there will not be a return to full Assembly business for the remaining two months of the financial year.

SMG noted the current forecast position for January 2019 for each category of expenditure compared to the budget position.

Paula explained that as far as she was aware the Spring Supplementary Estimates had been prepared and were ready to go through Westminster, although she did not know when this was likely to happen.

In relation to updates to the Decision Authorisation System (DAS), Paula confirmed that the IS Office is due to commence work on those changes to the system which are possible within a 2-3 week timeframe in April.

Lesley asked how the Northern Ireland Audit Office Interim Audit was progressing. Paula explained that no issues had been identified but that some disclosure issues were being discussed.

## **8. Draft Budget 2019/20**

Paula presented the 2019/20 draft budget which comprised of two sets of figures, i.e. scenario 1 - a budget which reflected reduced continuing activities and scenario 2 - a budget based on a fully operational Assembly.

SMG considered the draft budget for 2019/20 under both scenarios outlined and were content for these to be presented to the Commission at its March meeting subject to a minor wording change to paragraph 8 of the paper.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to prepare a paper on the 2019/20 Draft Budget for the March Commission meeting and reflect the minor wording change to paragraph 8.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, referred to a minor legal issue arising in relation to scenario 2.

**Action:** Finance Office to request formal legal advice in relation to this issue.

Richard explained that he was not sure when the SoS would be able to table a Budget Bill and that the Commission was therefore likely to

receive a vote on account of up to 70% of its cash budget in the interim.

*Paula McClintock left the meeting at 11.41am.*

*Karen Martin joined the meeting at 11.44am for agenda items 9,10, 11 and 12.*

## **9. HR Management Information**

SMG noted the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 February (including agency and seconded staff) was 310.1 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff Complement of 344.9 FTE. It was agreed that the staff complement figure should be noted in future cover papers for comparative purposes.

Karen Martin confirmed that there had been no change to temporary promotion/deputising arrangements currently in place since last month's report to SMG but that two new agency staff had joined the Finance Office to cover a project-based temporary redeployment and a long-term sick absence.

SMG also noted that there had been no change in recruitment activity since last reported.

Tara Caul sought approval from SMG to add a Procurement Manager post (AG5) to the Recruitment Schedule as a permanent vacancy and also requested that in the interim the post be filled on a temporary basis via an agency worker or interchange opportunity for a period of six months with an option to extend if required. SMG was content to proceed on this basis.

**Action:** HR Office to add the post of Procurement Manager (AG5) to the Recruitment Schedule and in the interim advertise for the post to be filled on a temporary basis via agency/interchange opportunity.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period February 2018 to January 2019, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 8.9 which compared favourably with the period February 2017 to January 2018 figure of 10.5 days.

SMG reviewed the staff temporary re-deployment figures presented by Karen and following discussion it was agreed that it would be helpful if the table presented to SMG each month showing the breakdown of staff within each Directorate was also forwarded to Heads of Business (HoBs) for review.

**Action:** HR Office to forward a copy of the re-deployment figures to HoBs going forward.

## **10. Revision of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy**

Karen Martin presented a draft of the revised Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy.

Following review, SMG approved the revisions to the policy and proposed some further minor drafting amendments.

**Action:** HR Office to update the policy in line with changes proposed by SMG and issue to staff.

## **11. Review of the Whistleblowing Policy**

Karen presented a draft of the revised Whistleblowing Policy and Investigation Procedure.

SMG considered and approved the revised draft.

**Action:** HR Office to consult with Trade Union Side (TUS) on the revised draft.

## **12. Development of an Apprenticeship and Placement Framework**

Karen presented a draft Apprenticeship and Placement Framework. Karen also highlighted that the proposed IS Scholarship Programme fitted within this general framework.

SMG considered and approved the draft for consultation with TUS and the Assembly's Equality Manager subject to a minor amendment to paragraph 15 regarding salary.

**Action:** HR Office to amend paragraph 15 and consult with TUS and the Assembly's Equality Manager.

*Karen Martin left the meeting at 12.27pm.*

*Brian Devlin and Richard Scott joined the meeting at 12.30pm for agenda item 13.*

## **13. IS Scholarship Programme**

Richard Scott presented a paper on an IS Scholarship Programme, which seeks to replace the current IS Sandwich Student Programme.

SMG noted that a number of meetings had taken place with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and other key internal stakeholders to discuss the proposed IS Scholarship Programme in detail.

SMG considered and was content to approve the recommendation within the paper to work in partnership with Queen's University of Belfast (QUB) to develop a tailored undergraduate IS Scholarship Programme for the Assembly Commission.

On reviewing the screening document that accompanied the paper, SMG requested that some additional information be recorded.

SMG commended Richard and Brian on the work undertaken so far in developing this proposed programme and for the consultation process with relevant individuals.

**Action:** Richard to update the screening document as requested by SMG and re-circulate to SMG for final approval.

**Action:** IS Office to work in conjunction with the HR Office and QUB to proceed with implementing the IS Scholarship Programme.

Brian highlighted that the IS Scholarship Programme was only one of the measures that would need to be considered when assessing the level of staffing resources required in the IS Office.

*Brian Devlin and Richard Scott left the meeting at 12.48pm.*

*The meeting adjourned at 12.50pm until 2.03pm.*

***Change to agenda running order.***

*Shauna Mageean joined the meeting at 2.03pm for agenda item 17.*

## **17. Update on EU Exit**

Shauna Mageean provided SMG with a very comprehensive update on the progress of the UK's exit from the EU since last reported in October 2018.

Shauna advised SMG that the Secretariat EU Exit Working Group continued to meet on a monthly basis and outlined revisions to its Terms of Reference (ToR) in light of the political impasse and the principle of 'retaining readiness' as detailed in the Assembly's Corporate Plan 2018/19.

SMG also noted the revised Secretariat Brexit Response Plan which had been updated by the EU Exit Working Group in December 2018.

SMG thanked Shauna for her detailed update.

*Shauna Mageean left the meeting at 2.19pm.*

*Martina Dalton joined the meeting at 2.20pm for agenda items 21 and 22.*

## 21. Charging Policy: Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)

Martina Dalton presented four options in relation to a proposed charging policy for requests received under the FoIA and the EIR.

Following consideration, SMG agreed to proceed with Option 2, i.e. to introduce a charging policy providing the current calculation of costs regarding FoIA and applying the same calculation to EIR requests with the inclusion of disbursement costs for both. SMG agreed that overheads would not be included in the EIR charges at this time but that the matter could be revisited at a later stage if there was a need to do so.

## 22. Implementation of GDPR: Lessons Learned

Martina outlined the lesson learned from the implementation of the GDPR Project. SMG agreed that these should be shared with HoBs and uploaded onto the GDPR section of the Assembly's Intranet (AssISt) to help inform other ongoing projects.

**Action:** Lessons Learned to be uploaded onto Assist and shared with HoBs.

SMG noted that a number of the lessons learned recommendations were already being taken forward as outlined in the paper, and discussed those remaining.

With regards to the recommendation that establishing a Contract Managers Group should be considered in relation to the challenges facing Contract Managers, Richard Stewart agreed to set up a Contract Managers Group to assist with training in Commission Policy and Procedures in relation to contracts and also provide a forum for learning and sharing best practice, as this was already an action in his Directorate Risk Register.

In relation to the recommendation that a database of all Commission contracts, agreements, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and Service Level Agreements (SLAs) be maintained, it was noted that work relating to the implementation of a centralised contract database was already being taken forward by the Head of Procurement, so no further action was required.

In relation to the recommendation that consideration should be given as to how large groups may usefully collaborate and whether another approach to document sharing and multi-user editing may be appropriate, it was agreed that Martina would include this as part of the Information Systems Review.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to set up a Contract Managers Group.

**Action:** Martina Dalton to incorporate information sharing and multi-user editing into the Information Systems Review.

*Martina Dalton left the meeting at 3.18pm.*

*Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 3.23pm for agenda items 14, 15 and 16.*

#### **14. Summary paper on the Review of Performance Management**

SMG noted the work that has taken place regarding the Review of Performance Management and discussed its administrative impact on the management of pay awards and the transition from the old performance management process to the new approach. SMG approved the use of the Capability Policy for the management of pay awards in the absence of box markings. In addition, draft forms for the conclusion of the 2018/19 performance year were discussed and agreed, subject to some amendments.

SMG discussed how the success of the new approach to performance management would be measured in the future. It was agreed that the performance management project goals would be measured approximately six months after the launch of the new approach either through the Staff Attitudes Survey or a specific survey.

**Action:** HR Office to update the draft forms to be used to conclude the 2018/19 performance year as requested by SMG.

**Action:** HR Office to measure the performance management project goals approximately six months after the launch of the new approach to performance management either through the Staff Attitudes Survey or a specific survey.

#### **15. Proposed Amendments to Human Resources Policies**

Sinéad informed SMG that a number of HR policies would be impacted by the new approach to performance management in terms of procedural and/or terminology changes and as a result require amendment.

SMG noted that the majority of the policies only require minor terminology changes but that the Capability Policy, the Internal Recruitment Policy and the Job Evaluation Policy all required policy changes. Sinéad advised SMG that she is currently undertaking a substantial review of the Capability Policy and plans to bring a revised draft to SMG for consideration soon. With regards to the other two policies, SMG approved the proposed changes with the exception of one change in respect of the Job Evaluation Policy and some other wording changes. SMG noted that both policies will be further considered as part of more substantial reviews in the future.



**Action:** HR Office to arrange for the Internal Recruitment and Job Evaluation policies to be updated as agreed and changes communicated to staff.

SMG recorded their thanks to Sinéad McDonnell and those who had worked with her to develop the new approach to performance management.

## **16. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) – Salary Matter**

SMG considered a paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its March meeting.

Following discussion, SMG requested that some additional information be included in the paper, with a revised draft re-circulated to SMG for final approval.

**Action:** Sinéad McDonnell to update the NIPSO paper as requested by SMG and re-circulate for approval.

*Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 4.35pm.*

## **18. Request for Job Evaluation**

SMG noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors had met separately to discuss this request and that it was content for the post to be re-evaluated.

*Richard Anderson joined the meeting at 4.35pm for agenda item 19.*

## **19. Health and Safety Management Report 2018**

Richard Anderson presented the Health and Safety Management Report providing SMG with a detailed account on accidents and other health and safety issues along with, training and improvements made during the year ending 31 December 2018.

Lesley Hogg requested that information on the number of accidents be reported to SMG monthly via the Corporate Services monthly Directorate update.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to include details on the number of accidents reported in the Corporate Services Directorate monthly update to SMG.

Lesley also sought confirmation from Richard Anderson that all follow-up actions arising from any accidents or near misses had been completed.

SMG thanked Richard and his team on the production of a very comprehensive report.

*Richard Anderson left the meeting at 4.47pm.*

## **20. Position of the Support Services Contract**

SMG noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors had held a separate meeting to consider this paper in detail.

SMG requested that some additional information be included in the paper and that a further meeting be held with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to discuss.

**Action:** Updated paper to be presented to SMG in March.

## **23. Personal Data Breach Report**

SMG noted a data breach as outlined in the report and was content that appropriate action had been taken.

## **DIRECTORATE UPDATES**

### **24. Directors' Updates**

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

#### **Legal, Governance and Research Services**

Tara Caul reiterated the serious resource pressures within the Procurement Office and confirmed that measures were being taken to fill the vacant AG5 Procurement Manager post on a temporary basis. As a result, the Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and Security Management System (SMS) Projects have been paused.

#### **Parliamentary Services**

Lesley Hogg advised that the report outlining the Scottish Parliament review of the IS Office had now been received and that its recommendations were being considered and would be brought to SMG at a later date.

**Action:** Lesley Hogg to issue a copy of the recent report from the Scottish Parliament on the review of the IS Office to Directors for information.

#### **Corporate Support Unit**

Staff Return Day being planned for May/June.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

### **25. AOB**

Richard Stewart advised SMG that the draft Statement by the SoS in respect of the Commission's budget for 2019/20 reflected the "reduced continuing activities" scenario i.e. the Assembly not carrying out its full range of functions for the year and that this would need to be revised prior to the Assembly returning to normal business.

### **26. Date of next meeting**

Corporate Support Unit to liaise with Directors to agree a suitable date for the March SMG meeting.

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

- Parliamentary travel for Members
- Gender Action Plan – Closure Report and Update
- Good Relations Action Plan – Monitoring Update
- Insurance Update
- Litigation Update
- Future Investment in Politics Plus
- Support Services Contract
- Draft Engagement Strategy
- Corporate Risk Register
- Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers
- Sustainable Development Office Annual Environmental Management Report and Update
- Sustainable Development Office Revised Updated Targets

*The meeting ended at 5.22pm.*