

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

**TUESDAY, 26 MARCH 2019 at 9.30AM  
PRIVATE DINING ROOM, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

## **APPROVED**

**Present:** Lesley Hogg  
Tara Caul  
Richard Stewart  
Brian Devlin (deputising for Gareth McGrath)

**In Attendance:** Frances Leneghan  
Janet Hughes  
Robin Ramsey  
Paula McClintock  
Karen Martin  
Maria Bannon  
Christine Watts  
Ashleigh Mitford  
Simon Burrowes

### **Opening/Review**

The meeting commenced at 9.33am.

#### **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 Brian Devlin deputised.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3. Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting on 26 February 2019 together with unrestricted papers were published on 25 March 2019.

#### **4. SMG Action Points**

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

**Action:** Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, to provide estimated completion dates for two actions in relation to the 'Effective use of Corporate Support Systems: Lessons Learned'.

In relation to the action on the reporting of data breaches, SMG agreed that only data breaches that had been referred to the Information Commissioner's Office are required to be included in the Directors' Report.

**Action:** Tara Caul, Director of Legal Governance and Research Services, to revise the estimated completion date for the action to 'prepare a paper on the Review of the Information Management System' to May 2019.

In relation to the action to 'source an interim contract management solution and prepare a short paper for SMG', Tara informed SMG that there would be further slippage to the completion date of this action due to the ongoing staff shortages within the Procurement Office. She advised that, as agreed by SMG at the last meeting, she had written to Heads of Business (HoBs) asking if they had any spare capacity to assist with this piece of work. The responses received indicated that there was no staff resource available at the moment. SMG therefore agreed to review taking this action forward once the AG5 Procurement Manager post had been temporarily filled.

Richard raised a query in relation to the action to 'update the screening document' for the IS Scholarship Programme to ensure that imbalances are addressed in welcoming statements.

**Action:** Brian Devlin, Head of IS, to speak with the Assembly's Equality Manager to discuss the content of the IS Scholarship Programme screening document and any further mitigations that might be appropriate. Updated screening document to be circulated to SMG by correspondence.

*Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.49am for agenda items 5 and 6.*

## **5. Political Update**

SMG noted that the Secretary of State (SoS) has under the Northern Ireland (Extension of Period for Executive Formation) Regulations 2019 extended the period for the formation of an Executive to the 25 August 2019.

## CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT

### 6. Draft Commission Agenda

SMG reviewed the draft agenda for the next Commission meeting scheduled for 11 April 2019.

Proposed items for the meeting include:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Future Investment in Politics Plus
- Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman – Salary Matter
- Members' Parliamentary Travel Scheme
- Support Services Contract
- Update on the Draft Public Engagement Strategy
- Gender Action Plan: 2016-18 Closure Report and Continuing Gender Action Plan 2019-23
- Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21: Position as at 31 March 2019

*Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.10am.*

## CORPORATE SERVICES

*Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 10.10am for agenda items 7 and 8.*

### 7. Management Accounts

Paula McClintock presented the monthly Management Accounts for February 2019 together with the final forecast for income and expenditure for the full year. SMG noted that the Spring Supplementary Estimate (SSE) had been laid at Westminster.

Paula outlined areas of expected under/over spend against budget. She also outlined the position regarding the Annual Assembly Travel Allowance for Members and agreed to write to Members to explain the position.

**Action:** Paula to write to Members to explain the position regarding the Annual Assembly Travel Allowance.

SMG noted the successful appeal of an HMRC ruling in respect of tax and National Insurance Contributions relating to an area assessed and deemed non-compliant.

With regards the Decision Authorisation System (DAS) Paula advised SMG that Finance Office staff were working closely with HoBs to review and update, if necessary, DAS records with end dates of 31 March 2019. She also asked Directors to ensure that all expenditure within

their business areas to be accounted for in this financial year was recorded on PECOS and receipted by 29 March 2019.

SMG thanked Paula for her work on getting a successful outcome to the HMRC tax liability appeal.

## **8. Incidental Costs of Parliamentary Travel Scheme**

Further to initial discussion by SMG in December, Paula presented a draft Incidental Costs of Parliamentary Travel Scheme for consideration by SMG.

Paula emphasised that the proposed scheme covers travel costs incurred on business related to the Assembly that is not provided for under the travel provisions of the Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Tara Caul stated that based on legal advice, claims would only cover incidental costs associated with travel that could not be paid for centrally and should only be made in exceptional circumstances as set out in the policy.

Following discussion, SMG was content for the draft scheme to be presented to the Commission at its April meeting, subject to minor amendments and additional consultation with Legal Services.

**Action:** Paula to update the draft scheme in line with comments from SMG and consult further with Legal Services.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to prepare a paper for presentation to the Commission at its April meeting.

*Paula McClintock left the meeting at 11.03am.*

*Karen Martin joined the meeting at 11.03am for agenda items 10 and 11.*

## **9. HR Management Information**

SMG noted the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 March (including agency and seconded staff) was 309.9 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff Complement of 349.4 FTE (including Complement plus).

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

Karen confirmed that as requested at the February SMG meeting, HR had emailed HoBs a table containing information on temporarily redeployed staff for checking prior to it being presented to SMG. Following review, SMG was content with the staff redeployment figures presented.

**Action:** HR Office to add Directors to the email distribution list regarding staff temporary redeployment information.

Karen informed SMG that the Recruitment Schedule had been updated to include the AG5 Procurement Manager post.

**Action:** HR Office to amend the Recruitment Schedule to include the grade of AG5 against the Procurement Manager post and also change it from 'temporary' to 'permanent'.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period March 2018 to February 2019, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 8.9 which compared favourably with the period March 2017 to February 2018 figure of 9.5 days.

In response to a query regarding the imminent expiry dates for some of the merit lists, Karen advised SMG that a paper would be presented to the May SMG meeting highlighting issues in relation to the Assembly's ability to retain readiness in light of the expiring merit lists.

## **10. Review of the Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures**

Karen presented a draft of the revised Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures.

Following consideration, SMG approved the revised draft for consultation with Trade Union Side (TUS) subject to minor amendments and the inclusion of additional clarification that HoBs must ensure that adequate measures are put in place to ensure compliance with GDPR and Data Protection Legislation in relation to working at home.

**Action:** HR Office to update the draft procedures as per SMG's comments and consult with TUS.

*Karen Martin left the meeting at 11.32am.*

*Maria Bannon joined the meeting at 11.32am for agenda items 12 and 13.*

## **11. Gender Action Plan: 2016-18 Closure Report and Continuing Gender Action Plan 2019-23**

Maria Bannon presented a Closure Report for the 2016-18 Gender Action Plan together with a proposed Continuing Gender Action Plan for 2019-23.

SMG noted that of the 39 actions recorded for 2016-18, 36 were complete, 1 was suspended and 2 were overdue.

Following review of the Closure Report, SMG asked that the status key be updated to reflect the end of year position and that clarification be sought on the status update for action 14 which related to the Dignity at Work and Equal Opportunities Policies.

**Action:** Maria to contact HR Office to clarify the position on one of the actions recorded in the Closure Report.

Following review of the Continuing Plan for 2019-23, SMG requested that some minor amendments be made to a few of the actions.

SMG asked that clarification be sought from the Outreach Office on the rationale for the inclusion of action 6 'Implement proposals for an Assembly Trainers Network on resumption of Assembly business' as it did not appear to be gender related.

**Action:** Maria to contact the Outreach Office to discuss action 6 'Implement proposals for an Assembly Trainers Network on resumption of Assembly business'.

SMG asked that actions 9 and 10 be moved to Theme 2 and linked with action 7.

**Action:** Maria to update the Closure Report and Continuing Plan as per SMG's comments and re-issue to SMG via correspondence.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to prepare a paper for presentation at the April Commission meeting.

## **12. Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21: March 2019 Six-monthly Monitoring Update**

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

SMG reviewed the progress made on the actions and was content to approve the plan subject to a few minor amendments.

**Action:** Maria to update the plan as agreed by SMG and re-issue to SMG via correspondence.

**Action:** Richard Stewart to prepare a paper for presentation at the April Commission meeting reporting the position as at 31 March 2019.

*Maria Bannon left the meeting at 12.07pm.*

### **13. Sustainable Development Office (SDO) Annual Environmental Management Report Update**

Paper deferred to a future meeting.

*Christine Watts joined the meeting at 12.07pm for agenda item 14.*

### **14. Sustainable Development Office (SDO) Revised Updated Targets**

Christine Watts provided SMG with an update on performance against targets for electricity, gas, recycling and paper which were included in the paper. She also tabled water consumption performance against target which had been omitted from the paper on the basis that it could not be externally verified. SMG confirmed that water consumption performance should be included in the 2022 targets as the Commission had meters with which to record this. Christine outlined the rationale behind the proposed targets and the key initiatives that will be undertaken to help deliver them by 2020.

SMG noted performance against targets in relation to five areas and acknowledged that due to the temporary redeployment of staff there had been a noticeable reduction in volunteering over the past year. SMG asked that future reporting in relation to volunteering records the number of challenges undertaken rather than the number of people who took part to reflect the actual target.

SMG congratulated Christine on the reductions recorded in the paper and agreed the targets for 2022.

*Christine Watts left the meeting at 12.24pm.*

*Change to agenda running order.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

*Simon Burrowes joined the meeting at 12.27pm for agenda item 17.*

### **17. Update on Draft Public Engagement Strategy**

Simon Burrowes updated SMG on the continued development of a public engagement strategy and presented a draft for consideration.

SMG reviewed the draft strategy and action plan and was content that a paper be prepared for the April Commission meeting to update Members on the progress to date and for officials to continue to work to progress the draft strategy in line with the next steps proposed in the paper.

**Action:** Simon to prepare a paper for the April Commission meeting, informing Members of the progress to date in relation to the draft public engagement strategy.

SMG congratulated Simon on the progress made in relation to the development of a draft strategy.

*Simon Burrowes left the meeting at 1.00pm.*

## **18. Future Investment in Politics Plus**

Paper deferred, separate meeting to be arranged, awaiting information from Politics Plus.

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

*Ashleigh Mitford joined the meeting at 1.00pm for agenda items 15 and 16.*

## **15. Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register**

SMG considered the latest draft of the Corporate Risk Register which will be reviewed by SMG again in June 2019 and by the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) in May 2019.

SMG was content to agree the contents of the current draft 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 2019.

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

SMG recognised the concerns from the various directorates in relation to Corporate Risk 4, 'Loss of staff, skills and knowledge and/or staff engagement' as a result of the ongoing political situation.

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

*Ashleigh Mitford left the meeting at 1.15pm.*

## **DIRECTORATE UPDATES**

### **19. Directors' Updates**

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

#### **Corporate Services**

Richard confirmed that 'Accident Reporting' had now been included in the monthly SMG Directorate update for Corporate Services.

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

**Action:** Tara asked that Directors ensure that in light of the current closure of the Procurement Office, their HoBs are monitoring contracts over £30k in relation to variations, extensions etc. and that any decisions to extend are fully documented.

#### **Parliamentary Services**

Brian advised SMG that the upgrade of the IT infrastructure, following the cyber-attack in March 2018, had been completed and commended Stuart Porter and David Perry for all their hard work over the past year.

Brian made SMG aware of a potential issue concerning a Private Branch Exchange (PBX) telephone-line in Parliament Buildings and advised that options were being considered to help mitigate any risks.

Lesley asked that business areas engage with the Communications Office as early as possible in relation to internal/external projects or events to ensure there is an appropriate level of input.

Lesley thanked all the staff involved for their hard work in ensuring the Speaker's event in conjunction with the Assembly Women's Caucus, held on 8 March to mark International Women's Day 2019 was such a success.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

### **20. Items cleared by correspondence**

SMG Register of Interests – updated 4 March 2019

### **21. AOB**

There was no other business.

## **22. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 16 April 2019 at 9.30am.

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

- Review of Recruitment & Selection and Induction
- Risk Management Strategy
- Internal Audit Plan
- Internal Communications Group Update
- Business Case for the Renewal of the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement
- Complaints Policy and Procedure 2019 Report

*The meeting ended at 1.39pm.*