

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

FRIDAY, 24 JANUARY 2020 at 9.30AM  
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

## APPROVED

**Present:** Lesley Hogg  
Tara Caul  
Gareth McGrath  
Richard Stewart

**In Attendance:** Paul Stitt  
Janet Hughes  
Robin Ramsey  
Paula McClintock  
Sinéad McDonnell  
Richard Anderson  
Martina Dalton  
John Gibson  
Eddie Kelly  
Brian Devlin  
Stuart Porter  
David Lynn

### Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.33am.

#### 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 17 December 2019 were published on 24 January 2020.

#### 4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

In relation to the action on the 'Members Survey 2016-17 Action Plan', Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, advised that he would prepare a paper for consideration at the March SMG meeting.

**Action:** Gareth to prepare a paper on the Members Survey 2016-17 Action Plan for the March SMG meeting, referencing the remaining outstanding actions.

Gareth also raised the issue of the need to review those activities within various Assembly Commission action plans which had been paused pending the resumption of normal Assembly business.

**Action:** Directors to speak with their Heads of Business (HoBs) in relation to reviewing activities within any action plans which had been paused pending the resumption of normal Assembly business.

In relation to an action from the December 2019 SMG meeting, Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, provided SMG with costings for the provision of a bespoke Learning and Development room.

Following consideration of the figures SMG agreed that a separate meeting should be arranged with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and other relevant officials to discuss the estimated costs in more detail.

**Action:** Meeting to be arranged to discuss the estimated costings for the provision of a dedicated Learning and Development Room.

In relation to the action on the 'Revised Data Protection Policy', Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, asked that the Equality Screening document for this policy be issued to SMG for reference.

**Action:** Tara Caul, Director of Legal Governance and Research Services, to forward a copy of the Equality Screening document for the revised Data Protection Policy to SMG for reference.

*Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.53am for agenda items 5 and 6.*

## **5. Political Update**

Lesley noted that the agenda item had been added to SMG meetings following suspension of Assembly business, and now that normal business had resumed, asked whether it should remain as a standing agenda item going forward. SMG agreed that it should remain.

SMG noted that normal Assembly business had resumed on 11 January 2020 and that three plenary and a number of committee meetings had successfully taken place. Lesley expressed her thanks and gratitude for

the magnificent efforts, dedication and flexibility, of Directors, staff and contractors throughout the Secretariat in supporting the resumption of normal Assembly business at extremely short notice and with greatly reduced staffing resources.

Richard advised SMG that the Finance Office would be issuing a note to all Members regarding 'Give As You Earn (GAYE) and Lesley asked that this note also include information on how Members can return salary following the recent statement on the matter from the five main Party Leaders.

## **CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT**

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

SMG noted that the remaining two new Assembly Commission Members were due to be appointed on 27 January 2020.

Robin Ramsey stated the intention to hold an Induction meeting for new Assembly Commission Members in the next few weeks prior to the first Assembly Commission meeting.

SMG reviewed the draft agenda for the next meeting.

Proposed items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Implementation of 'New Decade, New Approach'
- Business Case – Virtualisation Solution (Hyper-V) Upgrade
- Independent Financial Review Panel Reform Consultation
- Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Draft Corporate Strategy 2018-23 and Draft Corporate Plan 2019-23
- Bill Office Staffing
- Assembly Commission's Approach to Decade of Centenary Events: 2020 Events

SMG discussed the matter of nominating an Acting Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman and noted that a paper had issued and that Lesley had met with Commission Members and pending Commission Members to discuss.

SMG agreed that the paper should be re-issued to Assembly Commission Members seeking their formal consent to submit a motion to the Assembly Business Office for debate on 3 February 2020.

**Action:** Corporate Support Unit to re-issue the paper to Assembly Commission Members on the Acting Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Nomination seeking their formal consent to submit a motion to the Assembly Business Office for debate on 3 February 2020.

*Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.39am.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Paula McClintock, Head of Finance, joined the meeting at 10.39am for agenda item 7.*

### **7. Management Accounts**

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for December 2019.

Paula confirmed that the January Monitoring round had completed and that a bid submitted in Stage 2 of the Monitoring round, to reflect a return to normal Assembly business in January, was awaiting Executive approval.

SMG noted the revised forecast for 2019/20 and the risk relating to an Excess Vote. Paula advised that any pressures would have to be met from within the existing agreed budget envelope.

SMG considered the budgetary and other staffing and operational implications arising from the resumption of normal Assembly business.

SMG noted the increased forecast in relation to Secretariat salaries due to the resumption of normal Assembly business, agreed that key posts should be filled as a matter of urgency, with others filled on an organisational need basis and that continued, close monitoring of the approval of posts and forecast outturn was essential at this time.

Paula confirmed that the Finance Office would work with budget managers to identify any surplus funds to meet the additional budget pressures. SMG was content with the plans outlined, to address the additional requirements.

Paula sought approval from SMG to add two amounts to the Capital Plan for mobile phones and tablet devices. SMG did however request that prior to replacing a large number of mobile phones, the opportunity should be taken to review whether all of them were still required.

**Action:** Building Services to provide Directors with a list of all current mobile phone users for review.

Following consideration, SMG was content for the two amounts to be added to the Capital Plan.

Paula stated the ongoing benefit of the monthly meetings between Finance Office staff and budget holders within the various business areas. She proposed carrying out a wider review of the financial management process and presenting her findings to SMG at a future meeting. SMG was content with this proposal.

**Action:** Paula to carry out a review of the financial management process and prepare a paper for presentation at a future SMG meeting.

*Paula McClintock left the meeting at 11.27am.*

*Comfort break until 11.34am.*

*Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, joined the meeting at 11.34am for agenda item 8.*

## **8. HR Management Information**

Sinéad McDonnell presented the monthly HR Management Information.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 January (including agency and seconded staff) was 304.1 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 353.4 FTE.

Sinéad provided information on temporary promotion and deputising arrangements as at 1 January 2020. Following review, Lesley asked that future HR Management Information papers set out the agreed or anticipated end dates for temporary promotion/deputising arrangements; agency worker arrangements; and complement plus posts.

**Action:** Sinéad to ensure that future HR Management Information papers include agreed or anticipated end dates for temporary promotion/deputising arrangements; agency worker arrangements; and complement plus posts.

Sinéad provided details of agency workers assigned to the Assembly Secretariat as at 1 January 2020 and informed SMG that an additional ten agency workers had started in the last few weeks.

SMG reviewed the Recruitment Schedule, which had been updated following a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 17 January 2020.

Sinéad confirmed that discussions had taken place with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and that it was content with the HR Office proposal to extend temporary promotion merit lists, due to the current political circumstances. Sinéad also confirmed that Trade Union Side would be updated.

Following discussion, SMG agreed to amend the priority ranking of two competitions, add a further temporary competition and allow temporary promotions from the extended merit lists to continue until a new merit list was in place.

SMG noted that a number of plenary sittings and committee meetings had successfully taken place, despite the large number of staff vacancies and discussed the immediate actions being taken to fill these.

**Action:** Directors to remind HoBs that SMG had agreed a prioritised recruitment schedule and that any changes to the schedule needed to be agreed by SMG.

In relation to the staffing of the Recruitment Team, Sinéad stated that the plan was to have the team filled by agency worker recruitments in the next few weeks.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period January 2019 to December 2019, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 11.2 days, which did not compare favourably with the same period last year of 9.1 days.

Sinéad, however, advised SMG that there had been a decrease in short term and long-term absence in December 2019 and she was hopeful of a continued reduction in long-term absence.

In relation to the future preparation of monthly sickness absence management information for SMG, Sinéad advised that as a result of the resumption of normal Assembly business, and the limited resources now available within the HR Office, agreement had been sought from the Director of Corporate Services to cease providing monthly updates to SMG until normal staffing levels were restored. It was noted that the next update would therefore be produced as at the end of the current financial year and reported to SMG in May 2020.

Sinéad also highlighted the issue of finders fees charged by recruitment agencies and sought assurance from SMG that it was content for the HR Office to continue to use recruitment agencies in light of the potential fees outlined. SMG approved the continued use of recruitment agencies but asked that the HR Office, closely monitor potential fees and keep costs to a minimum.

*Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 12.27pm.*

## **9. Northern Ireland Assembly Visitor Survey (Good Relations) Autumn 2019 Results**

Richard Stewart presented the findings of the Northern Ireland Assembly Visitor Survey (Good Relations) which was conducted in Autumn 2019.

SMG noted that the purpose of the survey was to inform the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Good Relations Action Plan by gathering views of visitors to Parliament Buildings on a range of good relations issues.

SMG considered the feedback from visitors regarding good relations, which overall was very positive, and agreed that no further action was necessary in relation to the findings.

In relation to the reporting of future visitor survey results, SMG requested that they be accompanied by a clear indication of whether any resulting action is recommended.

**Action:** Equality and Good Relations Manager to ensure that future visitor survey results are accompanied by a clear indication of whether any resulting action is recommended.

*Change to agenda running order.*

### **13. Post-EU Exit Implications for Independent Financial Review Panel's 2016 Determination**

Richard Stewart presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Post-EU Exit Implications for the Independent Financial Review Panel's 2016 Determination for consideration by SMG.

Tara Caul asked for more time to give further consideration to the content of the paper prior to issuing to Assembly Commission Members.

Richard advised that if no panel was appointed prior to summer recess, a further paper would be prepared and presented to SMG in August setting out proposals for a permanent legislative solution.

**Action:** Corporate Support Unit to issue a copy of the paper to Assembly Commission Members by correspondence once the final draft is approved by SMG.

**Action:** Richard to prepare a further paper for presentation to SMG in August outlining proposals for a permanent legislative solution, if it is evident, that no panel will be in place before the end of December 2020.

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

*Martina Dalton, Information Standards and Data Protection Officer, joined the meeting at 12.38pm for agenda item 15.*

### **15. Review of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Publication Scheme**

It was noted that a separate meeting had been held with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and the Information Standards and Data Protection Officer, to enable the proposed revisions to the current Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Publication Scheme to be discussed in detail.

Martina Dalton presented the revised Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Publication Scheme, providing additional information sought by SMG following its meeting on 24 September 2019.

Following consideration, SMG confirmed it was content with the next steps as outlined in the paper, subject to some minor amendments to the Scheme.

**Action:** Martina to amend the Publication Scheme in line with the changes proposed by SMG.

SMG thanked Martina for the work carried out on reviewing the Scheme.

*Martina Dalton left the meeting at 12:53pm.*

*Meeting suspended at 12.53pm and resumed at 1.45pm.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED**

*Richard Anderson, Health and Safety Officer, joined the meeting at 1.45pm for agenda item 10.*

### **10. Health and Safety Management Report 2019**

Richard Anderson presented the Health and Safety Management Report for 2019, providing SMG with a detailed account on accidents and other health and safety issues, training and improvements made during the year.

Richard advised SMG that a Fire Risk Assessment carried out in August 2019, had identified a small number of minor issues that had since been addressed.

Richard also confirmed that work was ongoing in relation to improving evacuation procedures. He stated that the introduction of an intercom system/communication was being considered and that a paper on improvements to evacuation procedures would be presented to SMG at a future meeting.

Following consideration of the report, SMG requested that future Health and Safety Management Reports include details of key lessons learned and whether any resulting actions have been implemented.

**Action:** Richard to ensure that future Health and Safety Management Reports include details of key lessons learned and whether any resulting actions have been implemented.

SMG thanked Richard and his team for all their efforts over the reporting period.

*Richard Anderson left the meeting at 2.02pm.*

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

*Eddie Kelly, Acting Head of Internal Audit, joined the meeting at 2.02pm for agenda item 14.*

### **14. Draft Internal Audit Strategy 2020-21 – 2022-23**

Eddie Kelly presented the draft Internal Audit Strategy for the three years ending 2022/23.

Eddie advised that the new strategy had been developed in line with current guidance and aimed to increase transparency in the audit planning process and align audit activity more closely with corporate planning and risk identification.

Eddie highlighted the main developments and changes from the current strategy.

Following consideration of the draft strategy, SMG proposed some minor text changes and agreed that it should be updated to include the priority areas of work.

**Action:** Eddie to liaise with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors and update the draft Strategy as proposed by SMG and arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to agree the priority areas of work.

*Eddie Kelly left the meeting at 2.30pm.*

*John Gibson, Head of Procurement, joined the meeting at 2.30pm for agenda item 16.*

### **16. Increase in Procurement Office Staff Complement**

John Gibson presented this paper, seeking approval from SMG to increase the staff complement for an AG5 Procurement Manager post from 0.8 to 1FTE and seeking agreement on how to fill the post.

Following consideration, SMG agreed to increase the staff complement as requested and was content for the position to be advertised via an interchange opportunity and recruitment agency.

*John Gibson left the meeting at 2:45pm.*

## PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

*Brian Devlin, Head of IS Office, and Stuart Porter, Systems Analyst, joined the meeting at 2.45pm for agenda item 17.*

### **17. Business Case – Virtualisation Solution (Hyper-V) Upgrade**

Brian Devlin and Stuart Porter presented the business case for the replacement of the IT infrastructure that hosts the Northern Ireland Assembly virtualised IT services.

SMG noted that the current infrastructure needed to be replaced due to aging hardware and lack of support for the current storage system.

Following consideration of the options within the business case, SMG approved it for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to the inclusion of some additional information on costings and timeframes.

**Action:** Brian and Stuart to update the business case in line with the changes proposed by SMG and prepare a paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

SMG complemented Brian and Stuart on a very comprehensive and well-written paper.

*Brian Devlin and Stuart Porter left the meeting at 3.17pm.*

## CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

*David Lynn, Head of Building Services, joined the meeting at 3.18pm for agenda items 11 and 12.*

### **11. Post-Project Evaluation Stationery and IT Consumables Contract**

David Lynn presented a Post-Project Evaluation (PPE) for the stationery and IT consumables contract

Lesley queried how Value For Money (VFM) had been assessed and whether the views of staff and Members had been sought, particularly given the concerns regarding the quality of some of the items supplied. David said that this had not been evaluated. Lesley therefore queried how the PPE could be completed in the absence of this and requested that this be considered going forward.

**Action:** David to give consideration to including an assessment of VFM in any future evaluation of the stationery and IT consumables contract.

Following discussion, SMG requested that the costings section of the PPE be updated.

**Action:** David to update the costings section of the PPE as proposed by SMG and recirculate.

## **12. Post-Project Evaluation External Lighting Project**

David Lynn presented a Post-Project Evaluation (PPE) for the external lighting project.

SMG considered the lessons learned from this project and how these could be implemented in future projects.

Following detailed discussion, SMG requested that further detail be added to the Lessons Learned section of the PPE.

**Action:** David to update the Lessons Learned section of the PPE as proposed by SMG and recirculate.

*David Lynn left the meeting at 4.08pm.*

## **DIRECTORATE UPDATES**

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

### **18. Assembly Commission papers cleared by correspondence**

Updated Business Case for Tablet Devices

Nomination of Acting Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

### **19. AOB**

#### **Pay Award 2019**

Richard advised that the backdated pay award from 1 August 2019 would be included in the February salary payment.

#### **Data Protection and Information Standards Officer**

Tara asked SMG to note that the Data Protection and Information Standards Officer post would be vacant with effect from 25 January 2020

due to maternity leave and that she was actively seeking to temporarily fill the post.

**20. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, 21 February 2020.

**21. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

**Action:** Corporate Support Unit to liaise with Directors in relation to agenda items for the February SMG meeting.

The meeting ended at 4.11pm.