

**SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)
FRIDAY, 29 MAY 2020 at 9.30AM
(VIRTUAL MEETING VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS)**

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Paula McClintock
Karen Martin
Sinéad McDonnell
Sebastien Mingout
John Power
Fionnuala Casey
Julie Devlin
Shauna Mageean
Tracey Wilson
Brian Devlin

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.35am.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

It was noted that the minutes and unrestricted papers from the meeting on 30 April 2020 had been published on 27 May 2020.

4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.41am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

SMG noted the ongoing work of the COVID-19 Response Group and the measures taken to prevent risks to the health and safety of staff in order to support the continued operation of the Assembly.

SMG noted that the Executive had issued its 5-step approach to decision making and recovery and that the measures taken to date were being reviewed in light of this and in light of easements as they occurred.

SMG noted that the Business Committee had amended its principles on the management of Assembly business during the public health crisis, to take account of the Executive's recovery plan, and consequently the volume of Assembly business was likely to increase in the coming weeks with more staff coming in to the Building.

SMG noted that the Assembly Commission had agreed that the Building would continue to remain closed to the public.

SMG also noted that the Business Committee was considering summer recess dates, and that the Assembly Commission would need to consider any implications in relation to staff and support services if these were amended.

Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, advised SMG that staff would be able to avail of the Department of Health's expansion of its COVID-19 testing programme for essential workers and that notification would issue to staff imminently.

Action: Richard to issue an email to staff informing them that they can avail of the COVID-19 testing programme.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, informed SMG that the next Assembly Commission meeting would be held in June.

SMG noted that currently, proposed items for the meeting included the Clerk/Chief Executive's Report and a further paper on the Independent Financial Review Panel.

Corporate Support Unit Directorate Update

Robin informed SMG that a working group had been considering options for the first of two staff events to be held in 2020. It was proposed that the event would be held at the end of June and Robin confirmed that, in light of the Coronavirus pandemic and social distancing regulations, alternative methods of carrying out this event were being considered.

Some initial thoughts from the working group on a possible event were discussed and it was agreed that options would be further explored and that Robin would bring a more detailed proposal to SMG for consideration and approval in due course.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.17am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Paula McClintock, Head of Finance, joined the meeting at 10.18am for agenda items 7 and 8.

7. Management Accounts

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for April 2020.

Paula stated that the final outturn for the previous financial year, would usually be presented as part of the April report, however, it was noted that these figures were not yet available, due to the extension period given to Members to submit claims for the 2019/20 financial year. She informed SMG that she hoped to be in a position to report on this at the next SMG meeting.

SMG noted the current outturn position and proposed surrenders/bids for each category of expenditure.

Paula advised that the Coronavirus pandemic had impacted many of the planning assumptions used in February's opening budget exercise in relation to recruitment and the filling of vacant posts. In light of this, she stated that a substantial piece of work now needed to be carried out in relation to the salary forecast and she confirmed that this would be completed as part of the May management accounts reporting cycle and in preparation for the forthcoming formal Monitoring Round.

It was agreed that Paula would arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors, to consider any potential bids and surrenders in preparation for the formal Monitoring exercise.

Action: Paula to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to consider any potential bids and surrenders in preparation for the formal Monitoring exercise.

Paula advised that the Finance Office had recently been notified of a new pressure within the HR Office budget, in relation to the provision of services for recruitment and assessment exercises. It was noted that the business case for the procurement of these services had been approved by SMG via written procedure, within the last few days.

Approval was now sought from SMG to a proposal to offset the additional costs of these services, with a surrender recorded by the HR

Office in this month's report, topped up by a surrender from Salaries next month. SMG was content with this proposal.

In relation to capital expenditure, Paula confirmed that a meeting had taken place on 18 May 2020 with SMG and budget managers who had proposed capital expenditure, to agree and finalise the Capital Plan for the year. It was noted that a further £64k of expenditure had been identified as being required, which was in excess of the budget envelope voted to the Assembly Commission, however, Paula stated that at this early stage in the financial year there was no proposal to bid for these potential additional funds.

SMG considered the opening Capital Plan for 2020/21 as presented. Paula asked SMG to consider two further changes to the plan, that the Finance Office had just recently been notified of. She advised that these were in relation to, the transfer of consultancy costs for the Parliament Buildings Security System Project from capital to admin costs and an increase of £4.3k to the existing bid of £3k in the plan for replacement fryers in the basement restaurant. SMG was content to approve the additional amendments to the Capital Plan as outlined.

Lesley recorded the need for Heads of Business to regularly review and update the Capital Plan in relation to the status capital expenditure within their business areas.

Action: Directors to remind Heads of Business of the need to ensure that the status of expenditure in the Capital Plan is reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

Meeting suspended at 10:30am and resumed at 11:07am.

8. Revised Travel Policy

It was noted that Paula McClintock had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 27 April and 20 May 2020 to discuss revisions to the Travel Policy in detail.

In light of these discussions, Paula presented the revised Travel Policy for final consideration and approval by SMG.

It was noted that the revised travel claim form was still being worked on and would be finalised shortly.

On discussing revisions to the accommodation rates, SMG agreed to maintain the current accommodation rate for Europe (including the Republic of Ireland).

SMG also agreed that the travel claim form, once finalised, should not be included as an annex to the policy but instead be accessed via a hyperlink within the policy document.

Subject to these minor amendments, SMG approved the revised Travel Policy for consideration by Trade Union Side (TUS).

Action: Paula to update the Travel Policy in line with changes proposed by SMG and forward to TUS for consideration.

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 11.38am.

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 11.38am for agenda item 9.

9. HR Management Information

Karen Martin advised SMG that the HR Management Information also included the biannual update on case management and the annual equality information in relation to community background, gender and age of Assembly Commission staff.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 May 2020 (including agency and seconded staff) was 325.8 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 377.3 FTE.

On reviewing the breakdown of staff complement information, SMG asked for some minor amendments to be made.

Action: Karen to amend the staff complement figures as requested by SMG.

Temporary promotions/deputising arrangements currently in place were noted, as well as agency worker assignments, which had remained unchanged since last reported to SMG.

Karen informed SMG of the updated position in relation to the Recruitment Schedule.

It was noted that the recruitment competition for two Software Developer posts was advertised during week beginning 25 May 2020.

Karen sought approval to re-advertise the AG7 Senior Service Desk Analyst post, following a request from the Head of Information Systems Office. She informed SMG that this post was first advertised in January 2020 but that no successful applicant had been identified. SMG was content for the post to be re-advertised.

Action: HR Office to liaise with the Head of Information Systems Office to agree a date to run a competition for a Senior Service Desk Analyst.

Karen also informed SMG of a request from the Head of Finance for a temporary promotion competition to be carried out for a Payroll Manager

(AG6), as a priority, to cover a permanent vacancy. SMG was content for this competition to be added to the Recruitment Schedule.

Action: HR Office to liaise with the Head of Finance to agree a date to run a competition for a temporary Payroll Manager.

Karen informed SMG that sift meetings had taken place for the Research Officer competitions and that work was progressing with the selection panel for the Clerk Assistant competition.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period May 2019 to April 2020, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 10.6 which did not compare favourably with the period May 2018 to April 2019 figure of 9 days.

Karen updated SMG on the services of the Occupational Health Service (OHS) following discussion at the last SMG meeting. She advised that the referral process had still not yet resumed but that discussions with OHS had indicated that progress was being made on this issue. Karen confirmed that regular contact would be maintained with OHS with a view to getting the referral process back up and running again as soon as possible.

SMG reviewed the annual equality information and noted the case management activity during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 12:07pm

Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, joined the meeting at 12.07pm for agenda item 10.

10. Health and Wellbeing

Sinéad McDonnell presented this paper.

SMG noted the 'close down' report for the Health and Wellbeing Action Plan (July 2019 – March 2020).

SMG also considered the revised Wellbeing Strategy as presented and activities that might be included in a future Wellbeing Action Plan.

SMG indicated that the timeframes for the Wellbeing Strategy should be aligned to the timeframes set out in the Corporate Plan 2019-23, that it should link to other relevant actions in the Corporate Plan, that it should reflect the context of the Assembly's working environment and that consultation should include the 'Investing in the development, expertise and wellbeing of people' Strategy Steering Group.

Following an in-depth discussion, SMG agreed that a separate meeting should be arranged with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and the Head of HR to further develop the Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan, prior to consultation with stakeholders.

Action: Sinéad to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to further develop the Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan, prior to consultation with stakeholders.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 1.00pm.

Meeting suspended at 1.00pm and resumed at 1.32pm.

Sebastien Mingout, Support Services Manager, joined the meeting at 1.32pm for agenda item 11.

11. Post-Project Evaluation – Support Services Contract

Sebastien Mingout presented the Post Project Evaluation (PPE) for the Support Services contract.

Sebastien provided some background to the contract and highlighted what went well and what could be improved in the lessons learned section of the PPE. It was noted that early engagement and constructive collaboration with the Procurement Office was key to achieving a successful procurement outcome. It was also noted that early engagement with Legal Services Office had been helpful for this contract.

SMG discussed a ‘hiatus in the normal functioning of the Assembly’ clause that used to be included in past contracts and proposed, in light of recent events, that consideration should be given to adding a similar clause in any new contracts going forward.

SMG requested some minor amendments to the PPE.

Action: Sebastien to amend the PPE as proposed by SMG and re-issue to the Corporate Support Unit.

Sebastien Mingout left the meeting at 1.59pm.

LEGAL GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

John Power, Head of Research and Information Service and Fionnuala Casey, E-Services Librarian, joined the meeting at 2.00pm for agenda item 12.

12. Subscription to Lexis Legal Library and Lexis News

John Power and Fionnuala Casey presented this paper, outlining the business requirement and seeking approval from SMG to renew the Library’s subscription with Lexis Legal Library and Lexis News for a further two years.

Following consideration of the business requirement and options presented, SMG was content to approve the option, as recommended, to

renew the Library's subscription with Lexis Legal Library and Lexis News for a further two years.

SMG thanked John and Fionnuala for the work undertaken to produce this comprehensive paper.

John Power and Fionnuala Casey left the meeting at 2.04pm.

Julie Devlin, Acting Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 2.05pm for agenda items 13 and 14.

13. Annual Review of the Risk Management Strategy

Julie Devlin advised that the Risk Management Strategy (RMS) was last reviewed at the SMG meeting on 16 April 2019 and that she had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and the Acting Head of Internal Audit on 13 May 2020 for initial discussions in relation to the 2020 review. At this meeting a number of revisions were proposed to the RMS.

Julie presented the updated RMS and sought formal approval from SMG to the revisions made following discussion on 13 May. SMG approved the revisions as outlined, subject to some further minor amendments.

SMG confirmed that it was content with the risk appetite table, as contained within the RMS.

SMG also agreed to incorporate some of the questions listed in the Treasury's 'The Orange Book, Management of Risk – Principles and Concepts' into a new risk management self-assessment exercise, to be undertaken in the Autumn.

Action: Julie to update the RMS as agreed by SMG and forward a revised paper to the Corporate Support Unit.

Julie confirmed that the revised RMS would be presented to the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee at its July 2020 meeting.

14. Corporate Risk Register Update

Julie sought approval from SMG to the updates to the Corporate Risk Register in respect of COVID-19.

Following review, SMG approved the proposed changes to the register, subject to some further minor amendments.

Action: Julie to amend the Corporate Risk Register as agreed by SMG and forward a revised paper to the Corporate Support Unit.

It was noted that the next quarterly review of the Corporate Risk Register would be carried out at the June 2020 SMG meeting.

Julie Devlin left the meeting at 2.21pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Shauna Mageean, EU Affairs Manager, joined the meeting at 2.22pm for agenda item 15.

15. Update on EU Exit

Shauna Mageean presented an update on EU Exit, incorporating the latest news and developments up to 20 May 2020.

Shauna also provided SMG with information on the potential establishment of an EU Exit Scrutiny Committee.

It was agreed that quarterly EU Exit updates would be provided to SMG going forward.

Action: The provision of quarterly updates to SMG on EU Exit, to be added to the SMG Forward Work Plan, with effect from September 2020.

SMG thanked Shauna for a very detailed and comprehensive report.

Shauna Mageean left the meeting at 2.37pm.

16. Resourcing Support for Member Development

Gareth McGrath presented this paper, asking SMG to give consideration to the establishment of a new post (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk, AG5) to support Member development.

Gareth advised that for a number of years support for Member development had been split between the Clerking and Member Support (CAMS) office and Politics Plus, with CAMS responsible for the preparation of the Member Development Programme and Politics Plus for the delivery of the programme.

It was noted that, following the decision of the Board of Trustees of Politics Plus to commence the process of winding-up its activities, responsibility for Member development had transitioned to the Assembly Commission with effect from 1 April 2020, and that the establishment of a new AG5 post within Parliamentary Services was being proposed to support this new area of activity.

Following discussion, SMG approved the establishment of a new AG5 post to support Member development along with the removal of a 'complement plus' post at AG7. SMG also suggested some amendments to the proposed consultation process for the development and review and evaluation of the Member Development Programme, as outlined in the paper.

Action: Gareth to update the paper as discussed and re-circulate to SMG.

Meeting suspended at 2.49pm and resumed at 3.06pm.

Tracey Wilson, Information Officer, joined the meeting at 3.06pm for agenda item 17.

17. Proposed Extension of the Contract for Assembly Broadcasting, Associated Equipment Maintenance and Related Services

Gareth presented this paper, seeking approval from SMG to an extension of the contract for Assembly Broadcasting, Associated Equipment Maintenance and Related Services, for a period of 24-months from 10 July 2020.

Gareth stated that since the establishment of the Assembly in 1998, broadcasting of its proceedings has been considered to be business critical and that the current contract was awarded in July 2016 for four years, with a 24-months extension option.

Gareth highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the contractor and the Assembly Commission during the contract extension. Lesley sought confirmation that the contract cost would include the contractor's own time and costs in relation to the broadcasting refresh and associated project feasibility studies etc., and that additional costs would not be charged in relation to those where that was already provided for within the contract.

Gareth confirmed that the contractor's own time and costs were included and that additional contractor costs would only be incurred in relation to specialist, third party assistance which would be agreed by the contractor and the Assembly Commission, as part of a business case, in advance of them being incurred.

Lesley also noted that the value of procurement of minor projects in the contract had increased and sought clarification of the rationale for that.

SMG noted that the cost of the contract over the two-year extension period was affordable within the original business case approved by the Assembly Commission in October 2015 and with the available budget in the current financial year.

Gareth also advised SMG that work would commence on a programme of business critical equipment replacement this summer and that a number of business cases for various projects of work were being progressed for SMG approval and implementation by July 2022.

Following consideration, SMG approved the extension of the contract for 24 months from 10 July 2020.

Tracey Wilson left the meeting at 3.49pm.

Brian Devlin, Head of IS, joined the meeting at 3.50pm for agenda item 18.

18. Business Case for the Renewal of Microsoft Premier Support 2020

Brian Devlin presented a business case for the Renewal of the Microsoft Premier Support 2020 agreement.

Brian outlined two options for consideration by SMG on expiry of the current contract on 29 June 2020, namely;

Option 1- do nothing; or

Option 2 - Renew Premier Support Agreement with Microsoft for a period of 3 years.

Brian explained that Option 1 would leave the Assembly's IS Office with no guaranteed access to Microsoft product experts, instead relying on a basic Microsoft Helpdesk service, at a fixed rate per incident. He said that additional time would also be required to engage a Microsoft service delivery manager to take ownership of incidents, which might occur out of normal working hours and that there could also be issues with the availability of senior staff to approve any incident response expenditure, which all added to a delay in accessing support.

Brian advised that Option 2, which was recommended, would give the Assembly Commission continued access to urgent reactive and planned proactive technical support; access to fast, expert resolution of technical issues for all Microsoft products on a 24x7 basis; specialist focused training workshops, seminars and workshops on current and emerging technologies and direct and regular access to a Technical Account Manager. He explained that the renewal of this contract would also provide quick, efficient access to Microsoft experts should any major incident or outages occur over the next three years.

Following discussion, SMG approved the recommended Option 2 - to renew the Microsoft Premier Support Agreement for a further three years.

Brian Devlin left the meeting at 4.01pm.

OTHER ITEMS

19. Directorate Updates

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Examiner of Statutory Rules

Tara advised SMG that a large number of COVID-19 regulations were being dealt with by the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

Internal Audit

It was noted that Internal Audit were working on finalising a number of audits as well as carrying out various follow-up reviews.

Information Management

Tara advised that the meeting due to be held on 27 May 2020 with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Temporary Information Standards and Data Protection Officer, to discuss the review of the Information Management Systems had been deferred to 3 June 2020. She explained that following this meeting a paper would be presented at the next SMG meeting.

Research and Information Service (RaISe)

Tara acknowledged the work undertaken by RaISe in the last few months. It was noted that RaISe published a number of new articles on Research Matters throughout April 2020 and that in May six new articles were published.

Corporate Services

Building Services

Richard informed SMG that the Assembly bees had been temporarily rehomed.

Richard also confirmed that two staff from Building Services had attended a seminar on Risk Assessments, which it was noted would be very helpful when more people start to come back into the building.

Parliamentary Services

Clerking

Gareth advised SMG that staff in Clerking were servicing a lot of Assembly business and that the volume of business in respect of committees was almost back to normal.

Gareth also updated SMG on Starleaf. He confirmed that it had been installed a week ago, that testing was being carried out and that it was planned to use it for the first time for the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights the following week.

20. Items cleared by correspondence

Business case for the procurement of the provision of tests and assessment exercises for recruitment competitions - **Approved**

21. AOB

There was no other business.

22. Date of next meeting

Next meeting to take place on Friday, 26 June 2020.

23. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Review of Financial Reporting Processes
- Further Insurance Policy Update
- Support Services Contract Costs
- Corporate Risk Register
- Review of Information Management Systems
- Methodology for progressing a peer review of the Assembly against the benchmarks set out in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's 'Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures'
- Business Case for Replacement Router Matrix

The meeting ended at 4.21pm.