

# **SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)**

**THURSDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2021 at 9.30 AM  
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**AND**

**FRIDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2021 at 9.30 AM  
ROOM 29, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

## **APPROVED**

**Present:** Lesley Hogg  
Tara Caul  
Richard Stewart (18 November 2021)  
Gareth McGrath (26 November 2021)  
Sinéad McDonnell (deputised for R Stewart on 26  
November 2021)

**In Attendance:** Janet Hughes  
Robin Ramsey  
Frances Leneghan  
Susie Brown  
Tracey Wilson  
Maria Bannon  
Sinéad McDonnell  
Dan Hull  
Karen McCallion  
Liz Beaton  
Billy Mahoney  
Suzanne Murphy  
Aine Kerr  
Cathy McGowan  
Diane Lamont

### **Opening/Review**

The meeting commenced at 9.38 am.

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services for 18 November 2021 and from Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services for 26 November 2021. Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR deputised for Richard.

## **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 22 October 2021 were in the process of being published.

## **4. SMG Action Points**

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

In relation to the status update for the ongoing action from the SMG meeting on 24 June 2021, and the provision for more specific estimated timescales for project resource requirements in the Procurement Project Plan, Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, queried when this information would be available and stated that the procurement team should be able to update the Plan on the basis of their experience and knowledge.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, confirmed that data was being collected by the team on the time taken for each procurement and agreed to speak with the Head of Procurement in relation to having the Plan updated with this information and presented to the SMG meeting in January 2022.

*Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.39 am for agenda items 5,6,7 and 8.*

## **5. Political Update**

It was noted that the Speaker had been engaging with Parties and Members in relation to the potential end of mandate legislative pressures.

## **CORPORATE SUPPORT**

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

SMG noted that the next Assembly Commission meeting was scheduled for 24 November 2021.

Proposed items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Update on the Recommendations of the Working Group on the Review of the Display of Artefacts in Parliament Buildings
- Formalising the Assembly Commission Policy on the Commissioning of Official Portraits
- Exhibition on One Hundred Years of Women in Parliament

- Assembly Commission Annual Plan 2021-22: In-Year Review as at 30 September 2021
- Draft Assembly Commission Annual Plan 2022-23
- Pay Claim 2021
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Standards of Conduct Policy: Political Activities
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings and Investigation of Potential Liability
- Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots
- Enhancing Accessibility of Assembly Proceedings to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities
- Approval of the Outline Business Case to Upgrade the Audio and Video Systems in the Assembly Chamber
- The Disability Action Plan 2016-2021: Closure Report and Final Six-Monthly Monitoring Return

*Frances Leneghan, Private Secretary to the Speaker, joined the meeting at 9.53 am for agenda item 7.*

## **7. Formalising Assembly Commission Policy on the Commissioning of Official Portraits**

Robin Ramsey presented a draft Assembly Commission paper in relation to the formalising of a policy on the commissioning of official portraits, along with a draft policy.

Following consideration, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

*Robin Ramsey and Frances Leneghan left the meeting at 10.08 am.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

*Susie Brown, Head of Communications and Tracey Wilson, Information Officer, joined the meeting at 10.08 am for agenda item 8.*

## **8. Approval of the Outline Business Case to Upgrade the Audio and Video Systems in the Assembly Chamber**

Susie Brown presented a draft Assembly Commission paper setting out the initial requirements and estimated cost to upgrade the audio and video systems in the Assembly Chamber.

Susie noted that SMG had approved the outline business case for the design, build and installation of a new committee room in Room 21 at its meeting on 25 June 2021 and that the outline business case presented related to the next stage of the broadcast refurbishment project.

Susie advised that pre-market engagement for the full range of planned broadcasting projects had concluded in July 2021 and that the work proposed would be procured through the new Broadcasting, Design and Installation Framework. SMG noted the indicative cost including contingency of the proposed work and that this was the preferred option of the Project Board.

Following consideration, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to a minor amendment.

**Action:** Susie to amend the draft paper as requested by SMG for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

*Susie Brown and Tracey Wilson left the meeting at 10.26 am.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **9. Assembly Commission Annual Plan 2021-22: In-Year Review as at 30 September 2021**

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper, detailing the progress that has been made on the actions contained in the Annual Plan 2021-22 as at 30 September 2021.

Lesley noted her disappointment that, after only three months of the plan being approved, there were ten outcomes which were not expected to be fully completed by 31 March 2022. She also stated that going forward any proposed changes to completion dates would require a rigorous process for approval by SMG.

Following consideration, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

### **10. Draft Assembly Commission Annual Plan 2022-23**

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Annual Plan 2022-23, which brought together the actions originally scheduled for 2022-23 in the Corporate Plan 2019-23, with the actions anticipated to be brought forward from the 2021-22 Annual Plan.

Richard noted that three actions from the Corporate Plan had not been included in the 2021-22 Annual Plan and that consideration would need to be given on whether they should be included in the Annual Plan 2022-23. It was agreed that Richard would seek the views of the relevant Strategic Steering Group Chairs in relation to the inclusion of these actions and report back to SMG.

SMG also noted that completion dates were missing from some of the actions in the Plan and that a few actions needed to be more detailed and specific.

SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to the inclusion of the additional information as noted.

**Action:** Richard to amend the draft paper as requested by SMG for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

## **11. Pay Claim 2021**

Richard noted that a paper on the Pay Claim 2021 had been considered at the last Assembly Commission meeting on 20 October 2021, at which time additional information was requested in relation to pay settlements by other public sector bodies.

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Pay Claim 2021, which contained the additional information requested.

Following consideration, SMG approved the draft paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

*The meeting suspended at 11.12 am until 11.22 am.*

*Maria Bannon, Equality and Good Relations Manager, joined the meeting at 11.22 am for agenda item 12.*

## **12. The Disability Action Plan 2016-21 Closure Report and Final Six-Monthly Monitoring Return**

Maria Bannon presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Disability Action Plan 2016-21 Closure Report and Final Six-Monthly Monitoring Return, for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Maria advised that of the 54 actions within the plan, 49 had been completed, 4 had not been completed and 1 had been suspended.

SMG agreed that the actions in relation to committee witness training and supporting the Assembly Charity of the Year, should be recorded as 'suspended' rather than 'not completed'.

**Action:** Maria to update the draft paper as requested by SMG for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

*Maria Bannon left the meeting at 11.39 am.*

### **13. Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings and Investigation of Potential Liability**

It was noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors had considered a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings and Investigation of Potential Liability, at a separate meeting on 22 November 2021 and approved it for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

*Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, joined the meeting at 11.39 am for agenda item 14.*

### **14. Standards of Conduct Policy – Political Activities**

Sinéad McDonnell presented a draft Assembly Commission paper outlining proposed changes to the Standards of Conduct Policy.

SMG noted concern at the fact that data from the findings of the Section 75 Staff Monitoring Survey had been used in the Equality Screening Form for the paper presented, particularly in relation to the percentages recorded; that SMG had not received any feedback on the survey findings; and that the percentages recorded provided no indication of the survey response rates and therefore, how representative the survey findings were.

**Action:** SMG to be provided with a paper on the Section 75 Staff Monitoring Survey findings, at its next meeting.

**Action:** Consideration to be given as to how data is presented in the Equality Screening Form.

Following consideration of the proposed changes, SMG approved the draft paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to some further minor amendments.

*Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 12.00 pm.*

*Change to agenda running order.*

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

*Dan Hull, Senior Research Officer, and Karen McCallion, Research Officer, joined the meeting at 12.02 pm for agenda item 16.*

### **16. Exhibition on One Hundred Years of Women in Parliament**

Dan Hull and Karen McCallion presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on an Exhibition on One Hundred Years of Women in Parliament.

SMG considered and agreed each of the proposed exhibition panels, subject to some minor amendments.

**Action:** Dan and Karen to amend the draft paper as requested by SMG for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

SMG also stated that ongoing consideration should be given to possible opportunities to display some or all of the exhibition where appropriate, following the end of the planned exhibition period.

*Dan Hull and Karen McCallion left the meeting at 12.47 pm.*

## **15. Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016**

Richard noted that a paper on the Review of the FAPP Scheme 2016 had been considered by the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 9 September 2021, at which time it was agreed that final decisions on the Scheme would be taken after consideration of any recommendations made by the Assembly and Executive Review Committee in Plenary.

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the FAPP Scheme 2016, which reflected the decisions taken by the Assembly in Plenary on 9 November 2021 regarding funding for Opposition parties.

Following consideration, SMG approved the draft paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to some further minor amendments.

**Action:** Richard to amend the draft paper as requested by SMG for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES CONTINUED**

### **17. Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots**

Lesley noted that a draft Assembly Commission paper on Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots had previously been considered and approved by SMG at its meeting on 23 September 2021.

Lesley advised that following initial discussion with the Speaker, officials had given further consideration to the interpretation of "appropriate demand" and that the draft Assembly Commission paper had been updated accordingly.

Following consideration, SMG approved the revised draft paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

*The meeting suspended at 1.18 pm until 9.34 am on Friday 26 November 2021.*

*Susie Brown, Head of Communications, joined the meeting at 9.34 am for agenda items 18 and 19.*

*Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer, joined the meeting at 9.34 am for agenda item 18.*

## **18. Revised Internal Communications Strategy**

Susie Brown presented the revised Internal Communications Strategy for 2021-23, draft Action Plan and draft Values Plan.

Susie noted that SMG had considered and agreed a draft Internal Communications Strategy for consultation with TUS and staff at its meeting on 23 October 2020 and confirmed that the findings of the consultation exercises had informed the revised Strategy presented.

Susie also outlined four themes that had emerged from the consultation that had helped to shape the revised Strategy.

Liz Beaton presented the draft Action Plan for events and initiatives planned during 2021-22.

Susie presented the draft Values Plan which outlined the approach to promoting and embedding the Assembly's values in everyday working life.

Following consideration of the documents presented, SMG approved, in principle, the revised Internal Communications Strategy, Action Plan and Values Plan, subject to some further refinement and consultation with Heads of Business (HoBs) on actions.

**Action:** Susie to update the Internal Communications Strategy, Action Plan and Values Plan as proposed by SMG and re-circulate to SMG for final approval.

*Liz Beaton left the meeting at 10.20 am.*

*Tracey Wilson, Information Officer, joined the meeting at 10.20 am for agenda item 19.*

## **19. Update to Sequencing of Proposed Broadcasting Projects 2021-24**

Susie noted that SMG had approved the sequencing of a number of major broadcasting projects to be undertaken between 2021 and 2024, at its meeting on 17 December 2020. She stated that, following detailed



engagement with the recently appointed Technical Adviser, the Head of Procurement and the Broadcasting Projects Project Board, she proposed re-sequencing the broadcasting projects in relation to upgrading Room 21, Chamber video, Room 29, Chamber audio, Room 30 and the Senate Chamber and explained the rationale for doing so.

Following consideration, SMG approved the proposed re-sequencing of the broadcasting projects as set out in the paper.

*Susie Brown and Tracey Wilson left the meeting at 10.27 am.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Maria Bannon, Equality and Good Relations Manager, joined the meeting at 10.27 am for agenda items 20, 21, 22 and 23.*

### **20. Gender Action Plan: October 2021 Update**

Maria provided a progress update on the Gender Action Plan 2019-23, for the six-month reporting period ending October 2021.

Maria advised that of the 14 actions in the plan, 10 had been completed, 1 was in progress and 3 were overdue.

Following review, SMG approved the Action Plan monitoring update for publishing on the Assembly's website.

**Action:** Maria to arrange for the Gender Action Plan monitoring update to be published on the Assembly's website.

### **21. Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21: October 2021 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 ending October 2021.

Maria advised that of the 41 actions in the plan, 31 had been completed, 4 were progressing/ongoing, 2 were partially achieved, 1 was overdue and 3 had been suspended.

Following review, SMG approved the Action Plan monitoring update for publishing on the Assembly's website, subject to a minor amendment to the 'progress update' for one of the actions.

**Action:** Maria to amend the Good Relations Action Plan monitoring update as requested by SMG and arrange for it to be published on the Assembly's website.

It was noted that the next six-monthly monitoring update on the Good Relations Action Plan would be a closure report.

## **22. Audit of Inequalities Action Plan 2016-21: November 2021 Update**

Maria provided an update on the progress of actions within the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan 2016-21 for the six-month reporting period ending November 2021.

Maria advised that of the 27 actions in the Plan, 20 had been completed, 4 were progressing, 2 were partially achieved and 1 had been suspended.

Following review, SMG approved the Action Plan monitoring update for publishing on the Assembly's website.

**Action:** Maria to arrange for the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan monitoring update to be published on the Assembly's website.

## **23. Development of an Audit of Inequalities and Audit of Inequalities Action Plan – Key Principles (2021-2026)**

SMG noted the key principles and processes proposed in relation to the development of the Audit of Inequalities and Audit of Inequalities Action Plan 2022-2026.

SMG discussed the proposed Action Plan themes and agreed that they required further consideration. Lesley asked that Tara consider the legal position in relation to the application of the obligations under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 on the Assembly Commission in the context of the Audit of Inequalities and clarify this with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Equality and Good Relations Manager at a separate meeting.

**Action:** Further meeting to be arranged to consider the proposed themes within the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan, following clarification of the legal position.

On reviewing the proposed layout of the Action Plan, SMG requested that it be amended to align with the Assembly Commission Corporate Plan 2019-23.

*Maria Bannon left the meeting at 11.11 am.*

*Billy Mahoney, Senior Accountant – Secretariat and Suzanne Murphy, Senior Accountant – Members, joined the meeting at 11.20 am for agenda item 24.*

## **24. Management Accounts**

Billy Mahoney presented the Management Accounts for October 2021.

SMG noted the current outturn forecast for 2021/22 in respect of Resource DEL and Capital.

Billy noted that since the October Monitoring exercise, further surrenders had been made in relation to salaries and admin costs and stated that budget holders would be contacted, regarding any further amendments to be made in the January Monitoring exercise. Billy advised that following finalisation of the January Monitoring return, budget holders would be asked to review and update their profiling of expenditure for the rest of the financial year.

Billy advised that some of the recent surrenders should have been known earlier in the year and reminded SMG that surplus funds should be surrendered at the earliest opportunity.

The forecast in relation to constituency costs was reviewed and Lesley requested that the Finance Office write to Members to seek an indication of their expected year-end outturn.

**Action:** Finance Office to write to Members to seek an indication of their expected year-end outturn.

On consideration of the Capital Plan, SMG approved two further bids in relation to webcams and laptops. Billy also advised of three recent capital surrenders. Lesley highlighted that the Capital budget for the next 3 years had been agreed and submitted to the Department of Finance. She advised that capital projects that were not now going to be completed within the current financial year, could not be deferred into subsequent years as they were not included in the Capital budgets for 2022-25 and asked that HoBs be made aware of this.

**Action:** Billy to advise HoBs that capital projects that are not going to be completed within the current financial year, can not be deferred into subsequent years as they are not included in the Capital budgets for 2022-25.

On reviewing the Decision Authorisation System (DAS) report, Lesley highlighted the importance of reviewing the end dates recorded against DAS references, and asked that Directors remind HoBs of the need to review contract expiry dates and ensure that any necessary procurement processes are started in good time.

**Action:** Directors to remind HoBs of the need to review contract expiry dates and ensure that any necessary procurement processes are started in good time.

*Billy Mahoney and Suzanne Murphy left the meeting at 11.44 am.*

*Aine Kerr, Senior HR Manager, joined the meeting at 11.45 am for agenda item 25.*

## 25. HR Management Information

Aine Kerr presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 November 2021.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 November 2021 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 349.2 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 392.3 FTE.

SMG noted the temporary promotions/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place.

Aine updated SMG on recent recruitment activity and it was noted that staff from the HR Office had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 17 November 2021, to review the priority of recruitment competitions. Following further discussion, it was agreed that Directors would review the updated Recruitment Schedule and clarify any outstanding queries with Aine.

**Action:** Directors to review the updated Recruitment Schedule and clarify any outstanding queries with Aine.

Aine notified SMG that Trade Union Side (TUS) had raised the issue of the Assembly not circulating any Interchange Opportunities to staff. Given current work and resourcing pressures and the fact that these were anticipated to continue through to the end of the current Mandate, SMG agreed to re-visit the arrangements for Interchange Opportunities at the start of the new Mandate.

**Action:** SMG to re-visit the arrangements for Interchange Opportunities at the start of the new Mandate.

Sickness absence information was provided, and it was noted that while short term absence was lower than for the comparative time for the previous year, there had been a slight increase in long term absence since last reported.

Aine advised that the contract for the provision of an additional Occupational Health provider had been extended from 1 November 2021 until 30 April 2022.

The management of COVID-19 sickness absence was discussed in light of recent revisions to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) COVID-19 Guidance. SMG agreed that the first 10 calendar days of COVID-19 sickness absence would be recorded as 'special leave' and thereafter in line with normal sickness arrangements. It was also agreed that any member of staff required to self-isolate and who cannot work from home, must provide evidence of their notification to self-isolate to support their request for COVID-19 paid special leave. SMG stated that the same approach would apply to temporary agency workers.

**Action:** Sinéad McDonnell to arrange for the COVID-19 Guidance in respect of sickness absence to be updated as agreed and circulated to SMG for sign-off.

Aine provided SMG with performance management conversation statistics for the 6 months to 31 October 2021. It was noted that compliance was low across the organisation and that the HR Office had held meetings with those business areas which had low compliance to discuss ways to address this.

Tara Caul expressed concern, that some of the low figures presented may be due to the fact that performance conversations must be closed on the new Portal in order for them to be properly recorded.

**Action:** HR to advise staff of the need to close performance conversations on the new Portal in order for them to be properly recorded.

*Aine Kerr left the meeting at 12.20 pm.*

*Cathy McGowan, Learning and Development Manager joined the meeting at 12.20 pm for agenda item 26.*

*Diane Lamont, Senior HR Manager, joined the meeting at 12.20 pm for agenda items 26, 27 and 28.*

## **26. Biannual Review of Learning and Development Activities**

Cathy McGowan provided SMG with an update on the progress made from April 2021 to September 2021, in relation to the implementation of Corporate Learning and Development (L&D) activities for Secretariat staff.

On consideration of the proposed Corporate Learning and Development budget for the remainder of the 2021/22 financial year, SMG asked for some figures to be reviewed in light of likely expenditure and any further surplus to be surrendered as soon as possible.

**Action:** Cathy to review the proposed Corporate Learning and Development budget for the remainder of the financial year and surrender funds unlikely to be spent, as soon as possible.

On reviewing expenditure against the Directorate Learning and Development budgets, which are managed locally, a significant underspend was noted as at 31 August 2021 and Lesley asked that Directors highlight this with HoBs for further consideration.

**Action:** Directors to review Directorate Learning and Development budgets with HoBs and consider whether forecasts require any further amendment.

SMG considered the proposed draft 4-year Implementation Plan for the new Learning and Development Strategy, and agreed that further discussion was required on this, prior to approval.

**Action:** Meeting to be arranged with the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and Learning and Development Manager to consider the 4-year Implementation Plan in more detail.

*Cathy McGowan left the meeting at 12.42 pm.*

## **27. Closure Report for the Review of Recruitment, Selection and Induction**

SMG noted the comprehensive Closure Report for the Review of Recruitment, Selection and Induction and recorded their thanks to the HR Team for all their hard work in developing and implementing the new process.

Gareth stated that feedback from recently recruited staff within Parliamentary Services, in relation to the recruitment, selection and induction process had been very positive. Tara thanked HR for the excellent support provided in a number of recent competitions she had chaired.

SMG highlighted the importance of the Buddy Scheme; that the HR Office should continue to encourage line managers to use it; that the HR Office should work with line managers to ensure that proper time and consideration is given to preparing and implementing their local on-boarding arrangements; and proposed that the HR Office check-in with new staff on a regular basis, to ensure that the Buddy Scheme and local on-boarding arrangements are operating as intended.

The low survey response rate for the Getting On-Board Programme was noted and SMG asked that the HR Office consider other ways to obtain feedback.

**Action:** HR Office to consider other ways of obtaining feedback from staff in relation to the Getting On-Board Programme.

Lesley also asked that one of the questions in the Applicant Survey be removed as it was not a matter for applicants.

**Action:** HR Office to remove one of the questions in the Applicant Survey as requested.

## **28. Personal Data Breaches – Lessons Learned**

Sinéad provided SMG with details of the personal data breaches that had been reported by the Human Resources Office over the last 5 years.

SMG noted its concern at the number and frequency of personal data breaches from within the HR Office over the last 5 years and sought assurance from Sinéad that the matter was being rigorously addressed with staff. Sinéad assured SMG that the breaches were being taken very seriously and advised of the action undertaken as a result of the lessons learned.

*Diane Lamont left the meeting at 1.02 pm.*

*The meeting suspended at 1.02 pm until 1.41 pm.*

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

### **29. Biennial Review of Fraud and Bribery Self- Assessment Checklists, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan**

Tara Caul presented the Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan, which she noted had last been reviewed and approved by SMG at its meeting on 17 December 2019.

Tara advised that as part of the biennial cycle, staff were required to undergo fraud and bribery training and that because there were a small number of staff who hadn't completed their training on time, three responses in the Self-Assessment Checklist were recorded as amber.

Following discussion, SMG agreed that as the majority of staff had completed the required training, and HR were following up those that were outstanding, the three responses should be recorded as completed, as in its view the thrust of the question was not seeking confirmation that all staff had completed the training, but rather that training was provided to all staff. SMG also requested that the three training questions be consolidated into one question going forward as they were basically the same.

In relation to the Bribery Risk Assessment, Tara advised that no new root causes had been added, nor had there been any changes to scores.

SMG approved the documents presented, subject to a few minor amendments to the Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists.

**Action:** Tara to arrange for the Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists to be amended as requested by SMG.

### **30. Biennial Review of the Risk Management Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan**

Tara presented the Risk Management Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan.

Tara advised that two areas within the Self-Assessment Checklist, namely business continuity and risk management training had been reported as red.

Following consideration, SMG agreed that as business continuity arrangements were in place for a number of business areas and the remainder were in progress, this area should be amended to amber.

In relation to risk management training, Tara advised that work had commenced on adapting the NICS LINKS training programme to reflect the Assembly Commission's policies and procedures and that draft content would be prepared by January 2022.

SMG approved the Risk Management Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan, subject to a minor amendment.

**Action:** Tara to arrange for the Risk Management Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan to be amended as agreed by SMG.

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

### **31. Office of Official Report (Hansard): Temporary Increase in Complement**

Gareth presented a request for a temporary change to staffing resources within the Office of the Official Report (Hansard) to enable work to begin in relation to the provision of a simultaneous interpretation service.

Following consideration, SMG approved the temporary increase in staff complement within the office of the Official Report (Hansard) by 1 AG6.

### **32. Outline Business Case (OBC) for a Replacement Digital Audio System on the Office of the Official Report (Hansard)**

Gareth sought SMG approval of an OBC for a replacement digital audio system in the Office of the Official Report (Hansard). He advised that the system was last replaced 10 years ago and support would no longer be available after 2022.

Tara requested more time to consider the OBC and agreed to provide a response by email as soon as possible following the meeting. Tara subsequently confirmed that she was content.

Lesley was content with the proposal to replace the system as outlined in the OBC.



### **33. Formal Launch of Assembly Connects**

Gareth advised SMG that following a review of the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Trust and Assembly Community Connect, a revised engagement programme called Assembly Connects had been developed and he sought SMG approval to formally launch this new initiative.

Following consideration, SMG approved the proposal to formally launch Assembly Connects in January/February 2022.

## **OTHER**

### **34. SMG Papers Cleared via Correspondence/Meeting**

Provision of Building Maintenance and Minor Capital Works Projects

### **35. Assembly Commission Papers Cleared by SMG via Correspondence/Meeting**

Update on the Recommendations of the Working Group on the Review of the Display of Artefacts in Parliament Buildings

### **36. Directors' Updates**

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

##### **Internal Audit**

Tara provided an update on the Internal Audit Reviews for:

- Standing Committees
- Delegated Procurement
- Administration of Mobile Phones
- Overtime Payments
- Establishment of the Youth Assembly
- Recruitment and Selection

##### **Freedom of Information (Fol) Requests**

Tara advised that the change to the timeframe for responses to Fol requests from business areas to 10 days had improved the overall response process.

##### **Procurement Office**

It was noted that the Procurement Office continued to experience significant resourcing pressures to deliver on all requests for support.

## **Research and Information Service (RaISe)**

Lesley noted her concern that staff within RaISe were having hardware and APortal issues whilst working from home, that these were adversely impacting work delivery and asked Tara to submit a request to the IS Office for the purchase of additional tablets/laptops as required. Sinéad said that some staff within the Corporate Services Directorate were facing similar problems.

**Action:** Directors to review their IT requirements for home-working with their staff and submit a request to the IS Office for the purchase of additional tablets/laptops if necessary.

### **37. AOB**

Tara advised that following consideration of the Information Assurance Policy by SMG at its meeting on 22 October, a further revised policy had been circulated to SMG for final approval.

### **38. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting has been scheduled for 16 December 2021.

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

- Post-Project Evaluation – Recruitment Testing and Assessment Contract
- Draft Disability Action Plan 2021-2025
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Examiner of Statutory Rules Resources
- Quarterly Update on EU Exit
- Outline Business Case for Retendering the Print Contract
- Assembly Members' Pension Scheme

The meeting ended at 2.55 pm.