

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

FRIDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2022 at 9.30 AM  
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

## APPROVED

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

**In Attendance:** Janet Hughes  
Billy Mahoney  
James McIlroy  
Sinéad McDonnell  
Maria Bannon  
Donna-Marie Clark  
Dan Hull  
Susie Brown  
Debra Savage  
Brian Devlin  
John Gibson

### Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.32 am.

#### 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 28 January 2022 were in the process of being published.

#### 4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

## **5. Political Update**

SMG acknowledged and was very appreciative of the long hours being worked by Assembly Commission staff, in what was an extremely busy period in the run up to the end of the Mandate.

Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, advised it was anticipated that Election Planning Guidance would be issued to MLAs and Assembly Commission staff the following week.

## **CORPORATE SUPPORT**

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

It was noted that the date for the next Assembly Commission meeting had yet to be agreed.

Proposed items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- The Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 Closure Report
- Constituency Office Broadband Services

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Billy Mahoney, Senior Accountant – Secretariat, and James McIlroy, Senior Accountant, joined the meeting at 9:52 am for agenda item 7.*

### **7. Management Accounts**

Billy Mahoney presented the Management Accounts for January 2022, highlighting the forecast level of underspend against the January Monitoring position.

Billy advised that the recent increases in utility costs had resulted in a forecasted overspend for Administration Costs. He stated that an estimated further £70k would be required in the gas budget and £8k in the electricity budget, if current prices and usage were maintained. It was noted that this potential overspend would be offset by surpluses within the Administration and Salaries budgets.

Billy confirmed that the Finance Office would be asking budget managers, to review their remaining budgets and report any further potential underspends, in order to alleviate any further pressures should they arise.

In relation to Members expenses, Richard stated that the Finance Office would be contacting Members to remind them of the requirement to

submit all claims relating to the 2021/22 financial year to the Finance Office, no later than April 2022.

On consideration of the Capital Plan, Billy advised that following the bids and surrenders previously approved by SMG, there was a £13k underspend in the Capital budget from the January Monitoring figure.

SMG considered and approved a bid for £8k for electric car charging points in the Lower East car park, along with £500 for a new security monitor.

Billy advised that on reviewing a decision published by the International Financial Reporting Standards Interpretations Committee in relation to the accounting treatment for Software-as-a-Services (SaaS), the costs associated with the Corporate Systems Review Project should be expensed rather than capitalised and that the approved capital budget was in fact now required in General Administration Expenses (GAE).

Billy stated that it was not possible at this point in the financial year to seek to transfer the budget, and that consideration would need to be given to carrying out a technical transfer of the budget from Capital to GAE in the new financial year.

Lesley highlighted the importance of assessing any project expenditure bids, to determine whether the expenditure was GAE or Capital and it was agreed that updated guidance would be issued to budget managers. Lesley also asked that an update be provided to SMG to explain how the different accounting treatment came about and that this update should be retained in the project documentation for the Systems Review Project.

**Action:** Billy to arrange for updated guidance to issue to budget managers in relation to assessing bids for GAE and Capital.

**Action:** Karen Steele to provide an update on the change to the accounting treatment for SaaS costs associated with the Systems Review Project.

On reviewing the Decision Authorisation System (DAS), it was noted that a number of DAS references would expire on 31 March 2022. Billy highlighted the importance of budget managers reviewing these as soon as possible, to ensure that any necessary approvals were obtained for any variations that were required, or that new records were created and approved before expiry if necessary.

*Billy Mahoney and James McIlroy left the meeting at 10.20 am.*

*Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, joined the meeting at 10.20 am for agenda items 8, 9, 10 and 11.*

## **8. Investors in People Framework and Maturity Model**

Sinéad McDonnell noted that SMG had approved the Assembly Commission's Learning and Development Strategy and associated Action Plan in June 2021, and that one of the actions in the Action Plan was to develop a Maturity Model as a continuous improvement tool.

Sinéad advised that following consideration of a Maturity Model that best suited the Assembly Commission, she recommended that SMG adopt the Investors in People Framework and its associated Maturity Model.

Sinéad advised that the Investors in People Framework had nine indicators, each of which had three criteria. She said that an organisation was assessed against the twenty-seven criteria to determine its level of maturity. Sinéad explained that there were four stages of maturity, which correlated its four levels of accreditation that could be obtained.

Sinéad stated that all twenty-seven criteria must be met to achieve the minimum level of accreditation. She also explained the benefits of accreditation and the cost of being assessed by Investors in People.

SMG sought reassurance that if approved, the Assembly Commission's focus would remain on real, meaningful actions to improve learning and development within the organisation, rather than simply focusing on actions that would achieve accreditation. Sinéad confirmed that this was the case.

Following consideration, SMG supported the proposal and approved the adoption of the Investors in People Framework, the associated Maturity Model and the cost and time of assessment.

SMG thanked Sinéad and her HR colleagues for all the work involved in bringing forward the proposal for consideration.

## **9. HR Management Information**

Sinéad presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 February 2022.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 February 2022 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 352.4 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 391.6 FTE.

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

Sinéad informed SMG that the Recruitment Schedule presented, still set out the position in relation to recruitment activity at 7 February 2022; that

this was being updated following a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 10 February 2022; and that the revised Schedule would be provided to SMG in March 2022.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period February 2021 to January 2022, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 8.6 days, compared with an average of 7.0 days during the period February 2020 to January 2021.

## **10. Equal Pay Review 2021**

Sinéad presented the Equal Pay Review 2021 Report and stated that there were no particular areas of concern.

SMG noted the content of the Report and agreed that there was nothing highlighted that required any further action. Given that this was a similar outcome to previous reviews, SMG agreed to change the frequency of future reviews to a three-year cycle.

**Action:** Sinéad to arrange for a copy of Equal Pay Review 2021 Report to be forwarded to Trade Union Side.

## **11. Resource for Recruitment Activity**

It was noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive, Directors and representatives from the HR Office had previously discussed the staff resources required to progress recruitment activity at the meeting on 10 February 2022.

Sinéad therefore sought approval from SMG for 2xAG6 and 2xAG7 for a six-month period.

SMG approved the additional temporary resource as requested.

*Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 10.53 am.*

*Meeting suspended at 10.53 am until 11.03 am.*

*Maria Bannon, Equality and Good Relations Manager, joined the meeting at 11.03 am for agenda items 12 and 13.*

## **12. The Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 Closure Report**

Maria Bannon presented the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 Closure Report.

Maria advised, of the 41 actions within the Plan, 33 were completed, 4 were not completed and 4 were suspended.

SMG noted the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 Closure Report and approved it for review by the Assembly Commission at its next meeting,

subject to some minor amendments, including clarification of the period covered by the Report given the extension of the Action Plan.

**Action:** Maria to amend the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 Closure Report, as agreed by SMG, for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

### **13. Transgender Policy and Guidance**

Maria presented a revised draft Transgender Policy and Guidance which she noted had been updated following a consultation exercise undertaken in October 2021, with Assembly Commission staff and a number of targeted external organisations.

SMG noted the consultation responses and subsequent proposed revisions to the Policy and Guidance. However, Lesley stated that as the paper was quite detailed and had only been received by SMG the day before, that additional time was required to consider the proposed revised Transgender Policy and accompanying documentation.

**Action:** SMG to review the revised Transgender Policy and accompanying documentation and forward any comments to Maria.

Based on the comments provided to Maria, a separate meeting to discuss the policy further will be arranged, if necessary.

*Maria Bannon left the meeting at 11.21 am.*

### **14. Review of Building Maintenance**

The paper was deferred to the next SMG meeting.

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

*Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 11.26 am for agenda items 15 and 16.*

### **15. Review of Retention and Disposal Schedule**

Donna-Marie Clark presented the Retention and Disposal Schedule which had been revised following detailed discussion with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors.

Following consideration, SMG approved the revised Retention and Disposal Schedule, in principle, subject to a final review by Richard.

**Action:** Richard to review the Retention and Disposal Schedule, and advise Donna-Marie if he is content or provide any further comments.

## 16. Review of Records Management Policy and Guidance

Donna-Marie presented a revised draft Records Management Policy and Guidance, which had been updated in line with applicable guidance.

It was also noted that minor structural and formatting changes had been made to aid ease of reference for staff.

Following consideration, SMG approved the revised Policy and Guidance, subject to some further minor amendments.

**Action:** Donna-Marie to update the Records Management Policy and Guidance as agreed by SMG and arrange for it to be issued to staff.

SMG was very appreciative of the work that had gone in to revising the Policy and Guidance and thanked Donna-Marie and Karl Hedley for their efforts.

*Donna-Marie Clark left the meeting at 11.31 am.*

*Change to agenda running order.*

## 18. Review of Timescales in Relation to Project Staff Resource Requirements in the Procurement Office

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, presented a detailed programme plan, identifying Procurement Office staff resource requirements for 2022, which had been prepared by the Head of Procurement, following a request at the SMG meeting on 24 June 2021.

SMG noted the estimated staff resource requirements in the Procurement Office for procurement projects in 2022. Lesley stated that it would be beneficial to have the value of each contract added to the programme plan.

**Action:** Head of Procurement to add the value of each contract to the Procurement Office Staff Resource Requirement Programme Plan.

Tara stated that the estimated staff resource requirements presented would be further refined over time, but that broadly speaking they were indicative of the times required for procurement competitions.

Tara emphasised the importance of business areas working closely with the Procurement Office on the timely development of procurement strategies for each competition.

It was noted that the Head of Procurement was retiring and that steps were being taken to fill the post.

*Dan Hull, Senior Researcher, joined the meeting at 11.55 am for agenda item 17.*

## **17. Provision of Library Electronic Resources and Journals**

Dan Hull presented a paper, seeking approval to purchase library electronic resources and journals.

Richard sought clarification that the resources were available for use for all staff. Dan confirmed that most staff had access to them.

Following consideration, SMG approved the purchase of library electronic resources and journals covering the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2024, as set out in the paper.

*Dan Hull left the meeting at 12.00 pm.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

*Susie Brown, Head of Communications and Debra Savage, Communications Officer, joined the meeting at 12.01 pm for agenda item 19.*

## **19. Draft Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Style Guide**

It was noted that a first draft of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Style Guide had been considered by SMG at its meeting on 22 October 2021, when it was agreed that it should go out to staff consultation.

Susie Brown presented a further draft of the Style Guide, which had been updated to reflect consultation responses. Susie noted that generally feedback was positive, but that there were some comments about it being too long. She confirmed that this would be addressed by replacing some text with hyperlinks.

Following review, SMG approved the revised Style Guide, subject to some minor amendments. It was noted that consideration would be given on how best to roll it out to staff.

**Action:** Susie to amend the Style Guide as proposed by SMG.

SMG thanked Susie and Debra for the excellent work done in revising the Style Guide.

*Susie Brown and Debra Savage left the meeting at 12.18 pm.*

*Brian Devlin, Head of IS, joined the meeting at 12.25 pm for agenda items 24 and 25.*



## **24. Business Case for Renewal of Microsoft Enterprise Agreement 2022**

Brian Devlin presented the Business Case for Renewal of the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement 2022.

Brian advised that the only change in the proposed new agreement from the current agreement was the licensing solutions partner. He stated that the recommended option outlined in the business case, provided the best value for money and would ensure that the Assembly could benefit from ongoing access to the latest Microsoft tools and technologies.

Richard enquired whether the Enterprise agreement had any impact on the number of Office 365 accounts. Brian confirmed that it would not as Office 365 accounts are already held for all staff and Members (they are used when accessing MS Teams, for example).

Following consideration, SMG approved the recommended option as outlined in the business case.

## **25. Constituency Office Broadband Services**

Brian presented a paper outlining options for the provision of broadband services to constituency offices, following expiry of the current contract in September 2022.

SMG noted the options and agreed that a paper should be prepared for consideration by the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

**Action:** Brian to prepare a paper on the provision of constituency office broadband services, for consideration by the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

*Brian Devlin left the meeting at 1.01 pm.*

*John Gibson, Head of Procurement, joined the meeting at 1.06 pm for a further discussion on agenda item 18.*

## **18. Review of Timescales in Relation to Project Staff Resource Requirements in the Procurement Office**

John Gibson stated that it was difficult to estimate the staff resources required for procurement projects, as these could be heavily influenced by a number of factors, hence the paper set out a range of estimated resource days for the various types of procurement competitions.

SMG wished John well on his imminent retirement and thanked him for his long and valued contribution to the Assembly.

*John Gibson left the meeting at 1.17pm.*

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

- Budget 2022-25 Motion
- Assembly Commission Budget Setting Process: In-year Thresholds and Changes to Standing Orders
- Business Case for the Retendering of the Support Services Contract 2022
- Pay Claim 2021
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings and Investigation of Potential Liability
- Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots
- Recommendations of the Working Group Report on the Review of the Display of Artefacts in Parliament Buildings – Confirmation of Approval to Proceed with Revised Display of Items and Images
- Maternity and Adoption Financial Support for MLAs' Constituency Offices
- Review of Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Designated Days for Flying the Union Flag at Parliament Buildings

## **27. Directors' Updates**

### **Parliamentary Services**

SMG noted the work undertaken by the Parliamentary Services Directorate, since last reported at the SMG meeting on 28 January 2022.

### **Corporate Services**

#### **Building Services**

Richard provided an update on actions to resolve the defects in the roof of Parliament Buildings.

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

#### **Internal Audit**

Tara provided an update on the Internal Audit Reviews for:

- Youth Assembly
- Recruitment and Selection
- Accounts Payable
- Members Expenses (2021/22)
- Business Office
- Information Assurance
- Freedom of Information Compliance

- Broadcasting Infrastructure

## **28. AOB**

Lesley noted, that in light of the recent revocation of the Coronavirus Regulations, the Assembly Commission would be reviewing the COVID-19 mitigations in Parliament Buildings.

## **29. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 1 April 2022.

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

- Review of Building Maintenance
- Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25: Public Consultation
- Staff Complement Changes Arising from the Systems Review Project
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Internal Audit Plan 2022-23
- Litigation Update
- Office of the Official Report (Hansard): Temporary Increase in Complement
- EU Affairs Staffing Support

The meeting ended at 1.37 pm.