

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

**WEDNESDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2022 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106**

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Karen Martin
Maria Bannon
Hugh Stewart
Donna-Marie Clark
Karl Hedley
Louise Close
Trevor Steenson

The meeting commenced at 9.35 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 from the meeting on 29 September 2022 had been published.

4. SMT 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 9.38 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, noted that following the May 2022 election, the period for filling Ministerial offices had expired on 28 October 2022 and confirmed that the Assembly was awaiting an announcement from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the next course of action.

Lesley noted that the Assembly's Election Planning Group had reformed and was considering the necessary measures to be put in place in the event of an election being called. Lesley stated that business areas should also be working to maintain a state of readiness should there be a return to normal Assembly business.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey advised that the date of the next Assembly Commission meeting had yet to be agreed.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Allocation of Accommodation for Political Parties in Parliament Buildings following the May 2022 Election
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Review of the Sign Language Pilot
- Advice Paper on a Request from Mrs Cameron MLA for Funding for Sign Language Interpretation for Meetings Organised by MLAs

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.55 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

7. Management Accounts

It was noted that due to staff shortages within the Finance Office, the Management Accounts for September 2022 had not yet been finalised and it was therefore agreed that they would be considered at a separate meeting.

Action: Head of Finance to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to consider the September 2022 Management Accounts, once finalised.

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 9.55 am for agenda items 8 and 9.

8. HR Management Information

Karen Martin, presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 October 2022.

Karen advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 October 2022 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 331.9 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 375 FTE.

SMT noted the temporary promotions/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place. In relation to the Temporary Workers' contract, Karen advised that expenditure to date against the contract was higher than anticipated. It was noted that spend should reduce as recruitment competitions are completed. It was agreed that the HR Office would continue to monitor contract spend and provide updates to SMT every six months.

On reviewing the Recruitment Schedule, Karen sought approval to schedule the Parliamentary Reporter (AG7) competition into the period January to March 2023. Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, noted that the merit list for Clerical Supervisor (AG7) expires in February 2023 and sought approval to schedule the Clerical Supervisor competition into the period January to March 2023. SMT approved both requests.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period October 2021 to September 2022, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 12.2 days, compared with an average of 5.6 days during the period October 2020 to September 2021.

SMT asked to be notified of any staff resignations or retirements as soon as the HR Office was made aware of them.

9. Development of a Policy on Inappropriate Behaviour towards Assembly Commission Staff by Visitors or Members of the Public

Karen presented a draft policy on Inappropriate Behaviours towards Assembly Commission Staff by Visitors or Members of the Public.

Karen noted that SMT and the Assembly Commission had approved the draft policy in December 2020 for consultation with Trade Union Side (TUS).

Karen apologised for the delay in bringing the policy back to SMT but confirmed that TUS was content with the draft policy, as presented.

Following consideration, SMT proposed some further minor amendments to the draft policy and Karen agreed to re-circulate the revised draft to SMT for final approval, prior to inclusion in the Staff Handbook.

Action: Karen to amend the draft Policy on Inappropriate Behaviour towards Assembly Commission Staff by Visitors or Members of the Public, as requested by SMT and re-circulate for final approval.

SMT was mindful that the policy did not apply to contractor staff working at the Assembly, and agreed that although contractors had their own procedures for dealing with inappropriate behaviour against their staff, a short guidance document should be produced, advising contractors of the process for reporting inappropriate behaviour against their staff to the Assembly Commission, if desired. Karen agreed to take this forward.

Action: Karen to produce a short guidance document for contractors to refer to should they wish to report to the Assembly Commission any cases of inappropriate behaviour towards their staff by visitors or members of the public.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 10.29 am.

Maria Bannon, Equality and Good Relations Manager, joined the meeting at 10.29 am for agenda item 10.

10. Gender Action Plan: October 2022 Six-Monthly Update

Maria provided a progress update on the Gender Action Plan 2019-23, for the six-month reporting period ending October 2022.

Maria advised that of the 14 actions in the plan, 11 had been completed and three were overdue.

SMT noted that two of the overdue actions related to the development of a Transgender Policy and Maria confirmed that a draft policy would be presented at the November SMT meeting. In relation to the other overdue action, on the development of a Menopause Policy, Maria confirmed that a draft policy would be presented at the December SMT meeting.

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

SMT also enquired about the necessity of preparing a further Gender Action Plan at the end of the current Plan in 2023. It was noted that the work on the preparation of the Audit of Inequalities had not identified concerns relating to gender issues. That being the case, the view was that sufficient progress had been made through the Gender Action Plan 2019-23 and that a further Action Plan would not be needed.

Maria Bannon left the meeting at 10.36 am.

Hugh Stewart, Building Services Manager, joined the meeting at 10.36 am for agenda item 11.

11. Phase Inverters and Battery Support Replacement

Hugh Stewart presented a business case recommending the replacement of two emergency lighting phase inverters and one bank of batteries.

SMT noted that funding for this project was included in the Capital Plan for 2022/23 and subsequently approved the expenditure as set out in the business case.

Hugh Stewart left the meeting at 10.40 am.

Meeting suspended at 10.41 am until 10.57 am.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer, and Karl Hedley, Clerical Supervisor, joined the meeting at 10.57 am for agenda items 12 and 13.

12. Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers

SMT reviewed the contents of the September 2022 Directorate Risk Registers for Corporate Services, Legal, Governance and Research Services and Parliamentary Services.

Donna-Marie Clark noted that since last reviewed by SMT on May 2022, the inherent risk score in relation to the COVID-19 Pandemic had been reduced for each Directorate and that there had been an increase to the inherent risk score in the Parliamentary Services Directorate Risk Register, in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff within the Information Systems (IS) Office. SMT agreed that the loss of skills and knowledge, particularly in the areas of finance, IT and procurement required close monitoring.

SMT also considered emerging Risk Clusters and agreed that there were no further risks that required escalation to the Corporate Risk Register.

13. Report and Self-Assessment of the Information Security Group (ISG)

Donna-Marie presented the Annual Report and Self-Assessment of ISG for the year to September 2022.

SMT noted the work undertaken by the ISG during the reporting period and its planned future actions.

Donna-Marie advised that ISG's Terms of Reference (ToRs) had been revised to reflect changes to the internal audit function within the Assembly, which was now to be carried out by an external service provider. Following review, SMT agreed some further revisions, the main one being that any significant recommendations from the external service provider in relation to information security or information

governance should be highlighted to ISG by the Senior Information Risk Owner and the Data Protection and Governance Officer.

Action: Donna-Marie to amend ISG's ToRs as requested by SMT and re-circulate for information.

Tara Caul, in her role as Chair of ISG, recorded her thanks to the members of the Group for the important work undertaken over the last year.

SMT thanked Donna-Marie and Karl for a comprehensive report and recorded its appreciation and thanks to ISG for its ongoing work.

Donna-Marie Clark and Karl Hedley left the meeting at 11.15 am.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Louise Close, Engagement Manager, joined the meeting at 11.15 am for agenda item 14.

14. Public Engagement Activity: Biannual Report (May to October 2022)

Louise Close presented the biannual report of public engagement activity undertaken by the Engagement Team during the period May 2022 to October 2022.

Louise updated SMT on the Committee, Public and Parliamentary engagement and Assembly Projects that the Engagement Team had supported in the last six months.

Louise advised that although Committee engagement had been impacted by the fact that the Assembly was not carrying out normal business, the Engagement Team had continued to work with two working groups; Citizen Space Working Group and the Working Group on Collaborative Working in order to develop community engagement with committees, which she noted had been very constructive.

In relation to Public engagement, Louise advised that presentations had been delivered to over 400 people and she highlighted the events held for World Sight Day and Deaf Awareness Week, which she noted provided a great opportunity to co-design accessible presentations and tours for those audiences.

It was noted that the Engagement Team had hosted inward visits from 23 delegations from other Parliaments.

Louise updated SMT on Assembly engagement projects, noting the continuing work with representatives from the Pensioners' Parliament, the Disability Parliament and the Women's Parliament. Louise also informed SMT that the Engagement Team had been working with 'Stronger Together' to develop an Ethnic Minority Parliament.

SMT recorded its thanks to the Engagement Team for their efforts over the last six months and wished Louise every success in her new job, thanking her for all her hard work over the years, and her valued contribution to the work of the Assembly.

Louise Close left the meeting at 11.32 am.

Trevor Steenson, Head of IS, joined the meeting at 11.33 am for agenda items 15, 16 and 17.

Change to agenda running order.

17. Post Project Evaluation Report: Internet Connection 2021

Trevor Steenson presented the Post Project Evaluation (PPE) for Internet Connection 2021.

Trevor noted that the main objective of the project, to continue to have access to a high-speed resilient internet connection from Parliament Buildings, had been met and he confirmed that the project had also been delivered well within the available budget.

SMT recorded its thanks to David Perry, ICT Infrastructure Manager, for preparing the comprehensive PPE Report, as presented by Trevor.

15. Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Procurement of a New Secure Remote Access (SRA) Solution

Trevor presented an OBC for the procurement of a new SRA solution.

Trevor informed SMT that the introduction of hybrid working had increased the need for a new modern and efficient SRA solution, that would enable MLAs, their support staff and Assembly Commission staff to access the key resources and systems to allow them to effectively carry out their duties regardless of their location.

Following consideration, SMT approved the business case for a new SRA solution, in line with the preferred option as recommended.

SMT thanked Trevor and Stuart Porter, Infrastructure Analyst, for the comprehensive and well-presented paper.

16. Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Procurement of Replacement Laptops

Trevor presented an OBC for the procurement of replacement laptops to support hybrid working.

It was noted that there were approximately 350 end-of-life laptops that needed to be replaced and Trevor confirmed that funding for this project had been provisionally allocated in the capital budget for 2023-24.

Following consideration, SMT approved, subject to consultation with the Assembly Commission, the OBC for the procurement of replacement laptops for hybrid working, but stated that detailed consideration was to be given to the specification needs of staff.

Action: Assembly Commission to be consulted, in line with the Clerk/Chief Executive's Letter of Delegation.

Trevor Steenson left the meeting at 12.14 pm.

18. Review of the Sign Language Pilot

Gareth presented the findings of a review of the Sign Language Pilot, which ran from November 2021 to March 2022 and provided live sign language interpretation of Question Time to the Executive Office Ministers.

Gareth informed SMT that the pilot had been successful, but noted that the scope of the pilot had changed following the resignation of the First Minister in February 2022, as Question time to the Executive Office could not continue.

Gareth outlined a number of issues identified during the pilot, namely a shortage of sign language interpreters, ISL in particular, the expectations of the deaf community, suitable studio space for broadcasting and the significant staff resources required to manage the provision of sign language interpretation.

Taking account of the findings of the review, Gareth proposed:

- An increase in the provision of sign language interpretation to 2.5 hours of plenary and/or committee business each sitting week, to be prioritised on the basis of likely interest to the deaf community; and
- that certain special events such as the first sittings in a new mandate, tributes such as that to Her Late Majesty, VIP addresses to the Assembly, etc. are sign language interpreted.

SMT was content for the proposals as outlined to be presented to the Assembly Commission for consideration.

Action: Gareth to prepare a paper on the Review of the Sign language Pilot, for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

19. Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Installation of a Studio for Sign Language Interpretation of Assembly Business and Consultancy Business Case for the 'Discovery Phase' of the Website Redevelopment Project

Gareth presented an OBC seeking approval for the installation of a studio for sign language interpretation of Assembly business.

Gareth stated that the review of the sign language pilot scheme had identified the need for a more suitable studio space for broadcasting sign language interpretation of Assembly business. He confirmed that a suitable room had been identified and that the funds required to set up the room with the necessary equipment had been included in the capital plan for this financial year.

Following consideration, SMT approved the OBC for the installation of a studio for sign language interpretation of Assembly business.

Gareth subsequently presented a consultancy business case for the 'Discovery Phase' of the website redevelopment project.

Gareth stated that the existing website had been in place for at least ten years and was at the end of its useful life.

Following consideration, SMT approved in principle, the business case for consultancy services for the 'Discovery Phase' of the website redevelopment project, subject to approval being sought from the Speaker, as the estimated cost of consultancy exceeds the Clerk/Chief Executive's Letter of Delegation.

Action: Gareth to prepare a submission seeking the Speaker's approval to procure consultancy services for the 'Discovery Phase' of the website redevelopment project.

20. Post Project Evaluation (PPE) for the Broadcasting and Related Services Contract (July 2016 to July 2022)

Gareth presented the PPE for the Broadcasting and Related Services Contract.

Gareth stated that delivery of the contract had been very challenging as it had to be varied on a number of occasions due the Assembly not carrying out normal business.

SMT noted that of the four main objectives of the project, three had been met.

Gareth advised that the objective that had not been met related to the development of a strategic technical delivery plan to provide a framework for decision making and business planning for broadcast equipment refreshes and changes. Gareth stated that this work was compromised by the political hiatus, with the contract not operating as specified between January 2017 and January 2020. However, he did confirm that in lieu of the plan, and as a condition of one of the contract variations, that a high-level paper with strategic development

options and potential ways forward for the Assembly had been provided by the supplier.

Lesley noted that although the PPE was detailed it did not include a section on Lessons Learned as outlined in 'Guidance on the use of PRINCE2 project management methodology in the Northern Ireland Assembly' which was important for future learning. Lesley also noted that a view had not been sought from senior management on the decision not to progress a key contract deliverable and that in future such a view should be sought. She asked that this be included in the Lessons Learned report.

Action: Gareth to arrange for a Lessons Learned report to be prepared, circulated to SMT for information and uploaded to the PPE Registry.

21. Addition of Equipment and Services to the Ongoing Chamber and Committee Refurbishment Projects to Support Remote Contributions (Change Request)

Gareth presented a paper, seeking SMT approval of changes to the previously agreed Chamber and Committee refurbishment designs, to allow for the installation of additional hardware to support remote contributions.

Gareth advised SMT that the software company that the Assembly Commission had been using for remote access contributions had gone into administration and a replacement system was now required.

Gareth proposed amending the current designs to allow for the installation of hardware to support remote contributions for both the Chamber and Committee refurbishment projects. He stated that this would allow the Assembly flexibility in the choice of video conferencing services and avoid being in a similar position again in the future. Gareth advised that half of the expenditure for this hardware could be funded from the original approved budget and he subsequently sought approval of a bid for the additional capital for the Chamber portion of the installation.

Following consideration, SMT approved in principle, the bid for the purchase of additional hardware as requested, subject to the availability of the required capital funds.

22. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Usher Services

Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, updated SMT on the contract for the Parliament Buildings Security System.

Building Services

Richard stated that a business case on Partial Electronic Access Control was in development and might be ready for presentation at the next SMT meeting.

It was noted that almost 80% of the registered file review exercise had been completed, and Richard asked that Directors liaise with their Heads of Business (HoBs) with a view to getting this exercise finalised as soon as possible.

Action: Directors to liaise with their HoBs with a view to finalising the registered file review exercise, as soon as possible.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Litigation

Ongoing litigation was noted.

Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR)

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, noted that even though the Assembly was not carrying out normal business, the ESR continued to receive statutory rules which were subject to Assembly procedure and laid before the Assembly.

Procurement

SMT noted the procurement projects currently being dealt with by the Procurement Office.

Tara asked that business areas make the Procurement Office aware of any projects that require procurement input before Christmas, as soon as possible.

Action: Directors to ensure that the Procurement Office is made aware of any projects within their Directorate that require procurement input before Christmas, as soon as possible.

Parliamentary Services

Gareth provided a detailed account of the work undertaken by Clerking, the Communications Office, the Information Systems Office and Public Engagement, since last reported at the SMT meeting on 29 September 2022.

23. Assembly Commission Papers Cleared by Correspondence

Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2016.

Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots.

Hosting of 'Silent Testimony' Exhibition in The Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings During the Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in April 2023.

24. AOB

There was no other business.

25. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 30 November 2022.

26. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Fixed Assets
- Draft Transgender Policy
- Disability Action Plan Six-Monthly Update
- Section 75 Good Relations and Disability Visitors Survey
- Business Case for Partial Electronic Access Control
- Review of the Corporate Governance Framework
- Review of the Retention and Disposal Schedule
- Communications Office Business Cases
- Provision of a Managed Print Service
- Development of an Assembly Commission IT Strategy to Support Hybrid Working

The meeting ended at 1.11 pm.