

**SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)
(Formerly known as the Secretariat Management Group (SMG))**

**FRIDAY, 5 AUGUST 2022 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106**

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Billy Mahoney
Sinéad McDonnell
Christine Watts
Ken Eccles
Frank Geddis
Barbara Love

The meeting commenced at 9.31 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 21 June 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 9.39 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, noted that a Speaker had not been elected following a second recall sitting of the Assembly on Wednesday 3 August 2022 and that the Assembly was therefore still not conducting normal business.

The formation of an Official Opposition by the SDLP was noted.

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
- Pay Claim 2022
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Support Services Contract
- Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) Determination
- Outline Business Case for the Procurement of New Legislative Drafting Software

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.54 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Billy Mahoney, Deputy Head of Finance – Secretariat, joined the meeting at 10.54 am for agenda item 7.

7. Abridged Management Accounts June 2022

It was noted that due to ongoing staff resourcing issues within the Finance Office, an abridged version of the management accounts for June 2022 was being presented to SMT, which focussed on the current forecast outturn position, and did not include the usual analysis of performance against profiled budgets. It was also noted that an updated forecast for Members' costs and staff salaries had not, as yet, been fully completed.

Billy Mahoney informed SMT of the current outturn forecast for 2022/23 for Non Ring-Fenced Resource DEL and the bids and surrenders received from budget holders in relation to General Administrative Expenses (GAE). Billy highlighted a significant surrender from the Bill Office in relation to the costs associated with Private Members' Bills and printing and also a bid for

funds for the Corporate Systems Review project, the majority of which had initially been expected to become payable later in the project.

Lesley queried the additional bid for the Corporate Systems Review project (over and above the transfer from Capital to Admin). She highlighted the importance of profiling the costs of any new contracts at the point of award, to ensure sufficient funds are available within the budget.

SMT noted the bids and surrenders, however, in light of current significant budget pressures, approval was only given for the bids in relation to gas, electricity and rates. It was agreed that the other bids would be reviewed again in September.

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, queried the accuracy of the closing forecast outturn figure provided, particularly in relation to the salary costs. Following discussion, it was agreed that in order to assess if any easements could be identified, Directors would review their respective budgets and that these would be reviewed in detail along with the salary forecast at a finance meeting to be arranged for September 2022. It was noted that the overall GAE and capital budget forecasts would also be reviewed in detail at the meeting.

Action: Meeting to be arranged for September 2022 with SMT and the Head of Finance to review budget forecasts in detail.

Action: Directors to review their respective budgets to see if any easements can be identified, prior to the September budget review meeting.

In relation to Members' costs, Billy stated that an analysis up until the end of May had been undertaken and the current position in relation to the various areas of budget expenditure was presented. Billy highlighted a significant forecasted increase in Members' constituency office costs, which he advised was due to a failure to include the impact of an increase to the allowance for support staff salaries or the cost of support staff during the winding up periods for Members as a result of the election. Lesley noted that this was indeed a significant increase, and asked that reference to this be captured along with anything any other issues that had arisen following the end of the Mandate, in a Lessons Learned report.

Action: Billy to arrange for an end of Mandate Lessons Learned report to be prepared capturing details of costs not factored into the budget forecast along with any other issues that had arisen following the end of the Mandate.

On reviewing the Capital Plan, Billy advised that there were still several projects which had been accrued at the end of 2021/22, that had not yet been invoiced, and he stated that if the invoicing differed from the accrual raised that this would need to be factored in to this year's Capital Plan.

Billy sought SMT approval for a number of capital bids.

Following consideration, SMT approved the bid for replacement defibrillators and agreed to review the other requests, following a detailed review of the budget forecast at a meeting in September.

Richard proposed amending Appendix 1 of future Finance Reports to include details of current month and year to date capital expenditure.

Action: Billy to update future SMT Management Accounts Finance Reports, to include details of current month and year to date capital expenditure.

Lesley thanked Billy, especially in light of staff shortages within the Finance Office, for the extensive work undertaken in preparing the Assembly Commission's Annual Report and Accounts, and other end of year activities.

Billy Mahoney left the meeting at 10.48 am.

Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, joined the meeting at 10.48 am for agenda items 8, 9 and 10 and 11.

8. HR Management Information

Sinéad McDonnell provided the usual monthly HR Management Information in relation to staff complement/staff in post, temporary promotion/deputising arrangements and agency workers assignments, as at 1 July 2022.

Sinéad updated SMT on the progress of recent recruitment exercises. The priority of competitions on the Recruitment Schedule was considered by SMT and revisions agreed.

Action: Sinéad to update the Recruitment Schedule as agreed by SMT.

Sinéad sought approval to increase the AG5 staff complement within the HR Office from 1.9 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to 2 FTE.

Following consideration, SMT approved the increase in the HR Office staff complement at AG5, as requested.

9. Human Resources (HR) Policy Review – Special Leave Policy, Career Break Policy, Secondment Policy

Sinéad noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors had met with her on 18 May 2022, to discuss in detail, proposed changes to the Special Leave, Career Break and Secondment Policies. She then presented the proposed revised policies for approval.

Following consideration, SMT approved the revised Special Leave and Secondment Policies and the proposed new standalone Career Break Policy, subject to some further minor amendments.

10. Human Resources (HR) Policy Review – Job Evaluation Policy

Sinéad noted that proposed revisions to the Job Evaluation Policy had been considered in detail at the meeting on 18 May 2022, as referenced at agenda item 9.

Sinéad advised that she had consulted with TUS on the proposed removal of the job evaluation questionnaire, but that TUS considered it should be retained.

SMT noted TUS's response, but felt that a job evaluation questionnaire was unnecessary given the new job evaluation methodology.

Following consideration, SMT approved the revised Job Evaluation Policy, subject to some minor amendments.

11. Post Project Evaluation (PPE) for the Project to Develop the Learning and Development Strategy and Action Plan

SMT noted and was content with the PPE for the Project to Develop the Learning and Development Strategy and Action Plan.

Sinéad advised that she would arrange for the PPE to be uploaded to the PPE Registry.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 11.54 am.

Meeting suspended at 11.54 am until 12.01 pm.

Christine Watts, Environment and Health and Safety Manager, joined the meeting at 12.01 pm for agenda item 12.

12. Annual Environmental Management Review

Christine Watts advised SMT that the ISO audit for 2022-23 had recently been carried out, with a recommendation for continued certification.

Christine then presented the annual Environmental Management Review for 2021-22.

SMG noted the progress made on the Continuous Improvement Action Plan and the environmental objectives, targets and management programmes for 2021-22.

Christine subsequently presented the proposed initiatives for the Continuous Improvement Action Plan and targets for 2022-23.

Following consideration, SMT proposed some minor amendments to the Environmental Management Review for 2021-22, the proposed Action Plan for

2022-23 and the environmental objectives, targets and management programmes for 2022-23.

SMT referred to the use of 2008-09 as the base year against which to monitor progress against environmental targets and asked that this be re-based when considering the targets for 2023-24. Christine agreed to review this.

Action: Christine to update the Environmental Management Review for 2021-22, the proposed Action Plan for 2022-23 and the environmental objectives, targets and management programmes for 2022-23, as requested by SMT and re-circulate via correspondence for final approval.

Christine Watts left the meeting at 12.23 pm.

Ken Eccles, Head of Security, joined the meeting at 12.23 pm for agenda item 13.

13. Proposal for an Increase in the Control Room Operator (CRO) Staff Complement

Ken Eccles presented a paper, outlining the staff model within the CRO and stated that it no longer met business and operational needs.

Ken therefore sought approval to increase the CRO staff complement by two full time equivalent (FTE) AG8 posts with a corresponding decrease of two FTE posts in the Usher complement.

Following consideration, SMT approved the proposed increase in the CRO staff complement and corresponding reduction in the Usher staff complement.

Ken Eccles left the meeting at 12.34 pm.

Change to agenda running order.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Frank Geddis, Clerk Assistant, and Barbara Love, Bill Office Clerk, joined the meeting at 12.34 pm for agenda item 17.

17. Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Procurement of New Legislative Drafting Software

Frank Geddis presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on an Outline Business Case for the procurement of new legislative drafting software. Lesley queried why the necessary expenditure had not been included in the 2022-25 budget proposals and highlighted the importance of forward planning.

Following consideration of the draft paper and options, as outlined by Barbara Love, SMT proposed some minor amendments and, given that there is no budget provision, requested some additional information in relation to the potential extension of support under the existing contract. It was agreed that on receipt of this information, SMT would re-assess the options going forward.

Action: Frank and Barbara to amend the draft Assembly Commission paper as proposed by SMT and obtain additional information in relation to the existing contract, as discussed, to allow further consideration by SMT.

Frank Geddis and Barbara Love left the meeting at 1.49 pm.

Meeting suspended at 1.49 pm until 4.25 pm.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

14. Staff Complement Plus Request to Assist with Roll-out of New HR, Payroll, Finance and Procurement Solution

Richard presented a paper seeking approval of a two-year fixed term AG7 Complement Plus position, to assist with the implementation and roll-out of the new HR, Payroll, Finance and Procurement Solution.

Following consideration, and in light of other budget pressures, SMT agreed to give the request further consideration when reviewing the overall budget position in September.

15. Annual Plan 2022-23: In-Year Review to 30 June 2022

Richard presented a progress update on the actions within the Annual Plan 2022-23 for the quarter ended 30 June 2022.

SMT noted the lack of progress made on actions being taken forward by two of the four Strategy Steering Groups (SSGs) and proposed that contact be made with the chairs of the relevant working groups, in order to discuss the recommencement of work.

Action: Tara and Gareth to speak with the chairs of the SSGs on 'Taking a Cold, Hard Look at Returns' and a 'Happy Healthy Workplace', respectively regarding recommencement of work.

Lesley asked that AssISt be reviewed to ensure the content in relation to the Annual Plan was up to date.

Action: Richard to review the content of AssISt in relation to the Annual Plan and update as required.

SMT also agreed that updates on the Annual Plan should be provided to the Assembly Commission on a six-monthly basis, as at 30 September 2022 and 31 March 2023.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

16. Internal Audit Function

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, noted that a paper on the Internal Audit Function had been considered in detail, by the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors at a meeting on 2 August 2022.

On consideration of the options presented for the future of the Internal Audit function, SMT agreed Option Three, however, it was noted that Tara favoured Option One, for reasons as outlined in the paper.

It was noted that Lesley and Tara would meet with the Head of HR to discuss the implementation of the agreed option.

18. Papers Cleared by Correspondence/Meeting

Continuation of Support Services Contract

SMT agreed to a further extension (as permitted within the existing contract) from 13 August 2022 to 7 January 2023.

19. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

HR Office

Richard advised that the extension to the MidlandHR contract had been agreed with the supplier.

Finance Office

In light of ongoing staffing shortages within the Finance Office, it was agreed that a review would be undertaken to assess whether any resources in other business areas could be made available to assist with some of the administrative duties within the Finance Office, given that the Assembly was not conducting normal business.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Information Standards

Tara advised that the Assembly Commission's Retention and Disposal Schedule was currently being reviewed by the Data Protection and

Governance Officer, in line with comments received from the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland.

Research and Information Service (RaISe)

Tara noted that two new Assistant Librarians had taken up post.

Procurement Office

Tara informed SMT that while it did not apply to the Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Executive had approved a policy which mandated that tenders must include a minimum of 10% of the total award criteria to social value. In light of this, Tara advised that the Procurement Office was currently preparing a paper for consideration by SMT and the Assembly Commission, regarding whether a similar policy should be adopted by the Assembly Commission.

20. AOB

Richard provided a progress update on the Support Services Contract. He noted that an award had not been made following the recent tender exercise; that an extension to the existing contract had been agreed; and that the specification and terms and conditions for a further tender exercise were being reviewed.

21. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 29 September 2022.

22. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Corporate Strategy 2023-2028
- Stationery and IT Consumables Post Project Evaluation and Business Case for New Contract
- Support Services Contract
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Internal Communications Quarterly Update
- Virtualisation Solution (Hyper-V) Upgrade Post Project Evaluation
- Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Post Project Evaluation
- Broadcasting Post Project Evaluation
- Youth Assembly/Assembly Commission Memorandum of Understanding

The meeting ended at 5.23 pm.