

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

WEDNESDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2022 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Billy Mahoney
Donna-Marie Clark
David Perry
Karen Martin

The meeting commenced at 9.30 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 2 November 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 9.35 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, noted that the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Bill had had its second reading in the House of Commons on 29 November 2022.

Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, advised that in the event of an election, the necessary documentation had been prepared by the Election Planning Group, as far as was possible.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey advised that the date of the next Assembly Commission meeting had yet to be agreed, but was likely to be mid-January 2023.

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 9.47 am.

Change to agenda running order.

OTHER ITEMS

14. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Update to SMT on Forecast Expenditure for 2022-23
- Draft Menopause Policy
- New Audit of Inequalities, Good Relations Action Plan and Equality Scheme (for final approval) and Post Consultation Report
- Technologies to Support General Visitor Feedback via Organisational Surveys and Approval of the Section 75 (Good Relations and Disability) Visitors Survey
- Business Case for Partial Electronic Access Control
- Draft Assembly Commission Paper on Funding for Sign Language Interpretation for Meetings Organised by MLAs
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Allocation of Accommodation for Political Parties in Parliament Buildings Following the May 2022 Election
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register

CORPORATE SERVICES

Billy Mahoney, Deputy Head of Finance – Secretariat, joined the meeting at 9.54 am for agenda item 7.

7. Review of Fixed Assets Policy

Billy Mahoney advised that the Assembly Commission's Fixed Assets Policy had been reviewed and he presented two proposals for consideration by SMT.

Billy explained that the first proposal was a change in accounting estimate to amend the method used for valuing all fixed assets, other than heritage assets and land and buildings, from Modified Historical Cost Accounting (MHCA) to Historic Cost (HC). Billy stated that the use of MHCA for these assets was manual and time-consuming and effectively nugatory work, since the net book value of these assets was only around one percent of the total asset value. Billy also proposed that the asset register is reviewed by asset owners on a bi-annual basis to allow for the revaluation and impairment of assets.

Following consideration, SMT approved the change to HC valuation for all fixed assets, other than heritage assets and land and buildings, but considered that an annual review by asset owners should suffice.

Billy explained that the second proposal was a change in accounting policy and was to increase the threshold for capitalisation of fixed assets from £500 to £1,000 for IT equipment, and from £1,000 to £5,000 for all other assets.

Following discussion, SMT agreed that the threshold for capitalisation should be increased to £5,000 for both IT equipment and all other assets, subject to consultation with the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee (ACARC) because it was a change in accounting policy. SMT noted that a valuable assets register should be maintained for high value, portable assets below £5,000.

Action: Finance Office to prepare a paper on the proposed increase to the capitalisation threshold of fixed assets, for consultation with ACARC at its next meeting.

Action: Finance Office to advise Heads of Business of the new arrangements in due course.

Billy Mahoney left the meeting at 10.25 am.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 10.27 am for agenda items 8 and 9.

8. Biennial Review of Corporate Governance Framework

Donna-Marie Clark presented the latest version of the Corporate Governance Framework (CFG), which had been revised following its biennial review.

Following consideration, SMG approved the contents of the CFG for publishing on AssISt and presentation to ACARC at its next meeting.

9. Review of the Retention and Disposal Schedule

Donna-Marie noted that a draft revised Retention and Disposal Schedule had been approved by SMG (now SMT) at its meeting on 25 February 2022 and submitted to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) in April 2022.

Donna-Marie subsequently presented a further revised Schedule for approval by SMT, which had been updated to incorporate comments and feedback provided by PRONI.

Following review, SMT approved the revised Schedule for presentation to PRONI for sign off.

It was noted that before the revised Schedule could become operational, it would need to be approved by the Minister for Communities and laid before the Assembly. Given the fact that Ministers are not currently in post and the Assembly is not conducting normal business, it was agreed that Donna-Marie would liaise with PRONI to ascertain whether a formal interim arrangement could be agreed, which would allow the Assembly Commission to work to the new Retention and Disposal Schedule from an agreed date.

Action: Donna-Marie to liaise with PRONI to ascertain whether a formal interim arrangement could be agreed, which would allow the Assembly Commission to work to the new Retention and Disposal Schedule from an agreed date.

SMT recorded its thanks to Donna-Marie and Karl Hedley for all the hard work undertaken to produce the revised Schedule.

Donna-Marie Clark left the meeting at 10.34 am.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

David Perry, ICT Infrastructure Manager, joined the meeting at 10.34 am for agenda item 10 and 11.

10. Development of an Assembly Commission IT Strategy to Support Hybrid Working

David Perry presented a paper which highlighted the need to develop an Assembly Commission IT Strategy to support hybrid working.

David stated that the current IT Infrastructure and connected devices were primarily designed for staff working at Parliament Buildings and did not fully address hybrid working. It was noted that any proposed Strategy will aim to maximise the business benefits and minimise the risks associated with hybrid working and would involve consultation with other business areas.

Richard highlighted that the Strategy would need to take account of and align with systems in the various business areas. He also stated the importance of establishing a Project Team, as early as possible.

Following consideration, it was agreed that the IS Office would develop a Terms of Reference for developing an IT Strategy to support hybrid working.

Action: IS Office to develop a Terms of Reference for developing an IT Strategy to support hybrid working, for agreement by SMT at a future meeting.

11. Replacement of Assembly Commission Printer Fleet

David advised that the Assembly Commission's printer fleet was beyond its expected life expectancy and required increasing levels of support.

In light of this, he proposed that the IS Office prepare a business case for the replacement of the printer fleet, for consideration by SMT at a future meeting.

SMT was content with the proposal, but highlighted the importance of engaging with all categories of users regarding their needs. Early engagement with the Procurement Office was also advised.

David Perry left the meeting at 10.53 am.

Meeting suspended at 10.53 am until 11.04 am.

OTHER ITEMS

12. Directors' Updates

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Legal Services

Tara Caul, Director of Legal Governance and Research Services, noted ongoing litigation cases.

Information Standards

Tara advised that guidance on the Records Management Sensitivity Review was on AssISt and had been communicated to Information Asset Owners. She also advised that a discussion session had taken place with Clerking staff.

Research and Information Service (RaISe)

Tara noted the work undertaken by RaISe since the last SMT meeting.

Procurement

Tara updated SMT on staff recruitment within the Procurement Office and the status of current procurement projects.

Parliamentary Services

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, referred to the two staff 'Let's Talk Parliamentary Culture' sessions, the first of which had taken place on 29 November with the second due to take place on 8 December. He noted that the first session had been well supported.

Corporate Services

Systems Review Project

Richard updated SMT on a delay with the design stage of the Systems Review Project. He advised that he was awaiting an updated plan from the supplier and that he would provide an update paper to SMT once that was received.

Action: Richard to prepare an update paper on the Systems Review Project for consideration by SMT, once an updated plan has been received from the supplier.

13. SMT Papers Cleared by Separate Meeting

Management Accounts October 2022.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 11.20 am for agenda items 15, 16 and 17.

15. HR Management Information

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

Karen advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 November 2022 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 329.6 Full Time Equivalentents (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.

Karen sought approval to extend the Equality Unit part-time AG6 agency assignment by three months to 31 March 2023. Following discussion, SMT requested information on the business need for such an extension in order to consider it.

Action: Karen to provide information on the business need for a three-month extension of the agency part-time AG6 Equality Unit post.

In relation to recruitment, Karen updated SMT on the progress of recent competitions.

Karen advised SMT of a particular matter in relation to a partial retirement application. SMT sought further information in order to consider the matter.

Action: Karen to provide SMT with further information in relation to a partial retirement application.

On reviewing the Recruitment Schedule, Gareth sought approval to replace the Outreach Officer (AG6) currently in the schedule for the period October to December 2022 with that of an Outreach Manger (AG5) competition, and to re-schedule the Outreach Officer into the period January to March 2023. SMT approved the request.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period November 2021 to October 2022, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 12.3 days, compared with an average of 6.4 days during the period November 2020 to October 2021.

16. Bi-annual Review of Learning and Development Activities

Karen provided SMT with an update on the progress made from April 2022 to September 2022, in relation to the implementation of Corporate Learning and Development activities for staff.

SMT noted the learning and development activities that had been undertaken and approved the corresponding budget for the remainder of the 2022/23 financial year.

SMT recorded its thanks to the Learning and Development team for the work undertaken in the reporting period and the comprehensive report.

17. Disability Action Plan 2022-25 - November 2022 Six-Monthly Update

Karen presented a progress update on the actions in the Disability Action Plan 2022-25, for the six-month reporting period.

Karen proposed merging actions 4.1 and 4.2 in the Outreach and Education section in relation to video production and to revise the timeframe for completion to November 2023. SMT approved the proposal.

SMT also noted that action 6.2 in the Awards and Accreditations section, regarding maintaining Louder than Words Charter accreditation had now been superseded as such accreditation was no longer offered; and agreed that the desired outcome of showing commitment to improved access to Parliament

Buildings for people with deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss would be addressed as part of normal operational business.

Gareth was not content with the updates provided for two actions within the sections on Public Life and Communication, Consultation and Engagement, and requested that these be revised by the relevant business areas. He also advised that an action marked as overdue within the section on Outreach and Education had been completed and requested that it be updated.

Going forward, SMT agreed that further reporting should be on an exception basis with explanations provided for overdue or incomplete actions.

SMT noted that once the above changes had been actioned 100% of the actions were marked as complete, ongoing or not yet due.

SMT approved the six-monthly update for publication on the Assembly website, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: Karen to update the Plan as proposed by SMT and forward a revised copy to Janet Hughes, Clerk/Chief Executive's Office.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 12.18 pm.

18. Technologies to Support General Visitor Feedback via Organisational Surveys and Approval of the Section 75 Good Relations and Disability) Visitors Survey

This paper was deferred to the December SMT meeting.

19. AOB

There was no other business.

20. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 15 December 2022.

The meeting ended at 12.19 pm.