

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

**FRIDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2023 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present:

**Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive
Steven Baxter, Director of Corporate Services
Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services
Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services**

In Attendance:

**Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support
(Items 5 and 6)
Dan Hull, Chair of the Internal Communications Group (Item 7)
Gary Browne, Senior Accountant (Item 8)
Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR (Items 9, 10 and 11)
Hugh Stewart, Acting Head of Building Services (Item 12)
Ken Eccles, Head of Usher Services/Security (Item 13)
Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Items 15
and 16)
Peter McCallion, Assembly Clerk (Item 17)
Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications (Items 18 and 19)
Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer (Item 18)**

The meeting commenced at 9.32 am.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies 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 11 August 2023 had been published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

SMT agreed that as the actions relating to alternative storage locations for furniture etc and the investigation of an accessibility issue were ongoing, it was content for them to be removed from the SMT Action Points and monitored at Directorate level.

Gareth McGrath advised of a revised target date of November 2023, for the completion of the action in relation to the development of an Assembly Commission IT Strategy to Support Hybrid Working.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.37 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg noted that staff remained ready to support the Assembly upon the resumption of normal business.

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
- Corporate Strategy 2023-2028
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Comprehensive Review of the Pioneer Phase of the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly
- Review of Security Arrangements for Members
- Centenary Stone

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.48 am.

Dan Hull joined the meeting at 9.48 am for agenda item 7.

7. Update on the work of the Internal Communications Group (ICG) April 2023 to September 2023

Dan Hull provided SMT with an update on the work of ICG from April 2023 to September 2023.

Dan reported on three main items, namely ICG's continued scrutiny of the outcome of the 2022 staff survey; the commencement of a series of focus groups with AG8 staff; and the re-development of the ICG pages on AsslSt.

In relation to the Staff Survey Action Plan, Dan was positive about a number of actions that had been progressed on the Staff Survey Action Plan. He

also referred to a number of actions that had not yet been concluded and Steven advised that this was due to the fact that some had longer term objectives.

Dan noted that ICG was very complimentary of the “Let’s Learn” Recruitment Application and Interview Skills sessions, and added that there was a suggestion from some members of ICG, that a greater degree of pastoral care and mentoring from line managers for staff who have not been successful in recruitment competitions would be helpful. Lesley noted that pastoral care was very important and that staff should be either seeking support from, or discussing this with, their line manager as part of their regular performance conversations.

A discussion followed regarding how suggestions and actions arising from ICG are taken forward; whether and how two-way feedback was taking place between ICG members and the business areas they were representing; and whether ICG members might be able to feedback suggestions relevant to their business areas.

SMT asked that ICG give some consideration as to how to take forward the issues raised.

Gareth referred to a recommendation within the paper, for steps to be taken to investigate ways in which MS Teams could be used more effectively by staff. To address this, in the first instance, he proposed that the Head of IT and the Learning and Development Manager be invited to the next ICG meeting.

Dan noted that on conclusion of the focus groups with AG8 staff, a summary report would be prepared by ICG for consideration by SMT.

Dan advised that, with the assistance of the Communications Office, the ICG pages on AssISt had been re-developed.

Dan also noted that work had commenced on designing the next staff survey. SMT considered the potential timing of the next staff survey and whether it should be reviewed and aligned with staff surveys in the Scottish Parliament and Senedd and asked ICG to explore this further.

Action: ICG to explore the possibility of aligning the next staff survey with staff surveys in the Scottish Parliament and Senedd and update SMT on its findings.

SMT thanked Dan for the detailed report.

Dan Hull left the meeting at 10.19 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Gary Browne joined the meeting at 10.19 am for agenda item 7.

8. Management Accounts

Gary Browne presented the Management Accounts for August 2023.

Gary noted that a Summer exercise, commissioned by the Department of Finance to gather information around the current budget requirement, was completed in August 2023.

SMT noted the current forecast outturn for Resource DEL and Capital against the Summer exercise position.

In relation to Members costs, Gary advised that the forecast for Constituency costs assumed that each member would fully utilise their annual allowance, and noted that this would continue to be monitored.

On reviewing the Capital Plan, Gary informed SMT of several projects which had not been included in the forecast, as they were not yet far enough advanced to be considered as bids, but may require funding in 2023/24, should the projects develop. In relation to two of the projects listed for Parliamentary Services, Gareth advised that it was unlikely that there would be expenditure against these in the current financial year and Lesley noted that some of the projects related to repairs, were not therefore capital expenditure and should be removed from the Plan.

Lesley highlighted the importance of reviewing those capital requirements in the Capital Plan that had been approved in principle, but were awaiting completion of a business case. She asked that a critical assessment of these projects be carried out at the next Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings, along with discussions on any other capital expenditure required in the current financial year. Following these discussions, Lesley requested that the Capital Plan be updated with more definitive completion timelines and costings.

Action: Directors to carry out a critical assessment of capital expenditure, including those projects listed on the Capital Plan, as having been approved in principle but awaiting completion of a business case, at the next DMT meetings and seek assurances that the expenditure will be incurred in the current financial year should the business cases be approved.

Action: Heads of Business to update the Capital Plan with more definitive completion timelines and costings, following discussion at the next DMT meeting.

Gary Browne left the meeting at 10.34 am.

Karen Martin joined the meeting at 10.40 am for agenda items 9, 10 and 11.

9. HR Management Information

Karen Martin provided the usual monthly HR Management Information in relation to staff complement/staff in post, temporary promotion/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments, as at 1 September 2023.

SMT considered two Complement Change Application Forms from the Director of Parliamentary Services, for the IS Office and the Office of the Official Report. In relation to the IS Office, SMT approved the request to increase the complement plus for the IS Office Scholarship Programme from 2 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to 3.4 FTE.

The request to further extend the complement plus posts within the Office of the Official Report, 1 x AG5 and 2 x AG6, from 30 September 2023 until 31 March 2024 was also approved, on the basis of a business need to maintain readiness on the resumption of normal Assembly business.

Karen referred to the Recruitment Schedule which currently detailed scheduled recruitment until October 2023, and advised that this would be revised for the next SMT meeting, to include recruitment scheduled until December 2023.

At the request of the Director of Corporate Services, Karen sought approval to schedule the recruitment competition for Assembly Usher (AG8) in the October to December quarter and this was approved. SMT also approved that the competition for Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk (Clerking) (AG5) should be scheduled for October to December.

10. Development of a Transgender Policy, Including Guidance on Assisting and Supporting Visitors and Other Users of Parliament Buildings

SMT considered and approved the outward facing element of the Transgender Policy, in relation to Guidance on Assisting and Supporting Visitors and Other Users of Parliament Buildings, which Karen noted had gone out for external consultation.

Karen referred SMT to the comments received to the external consultation exercise and the draft consultation responses. She advised that no changes were being proposed to the draft Guidance as a result of the consultation.

SMT approved the Guidance as presented and the consultation responses.

Action: Karen to arrange for the Guidance to be included in the Staff Handbook, and uploaded onto the Assembly's website along with the consultation responses.

11. Future Provision of the HR Service to Members

SMT considered the future provision of the HR Service to Members. Karen noted that there remained a programme of work to be delivered in relation to the HR Service to Members. SMT agreed with the recommendations within the paper in relation to future delivery of the Service.

Action: HR Senior Management Team to undertake a review of how the HR Service to Members is delivered going forward.

SMT noted that formal evaluation of the Service included a survey to Members.

Action: HR Office to inform Members of the findings from the survey and resulting actions to be taken.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 10.56 am.

Meeting suspended at 10.56 am and resumed at 11.06 am.

Hugh Stewart joined the meeting at 11.06 am for agenda item 12.

12. Building Services – 10 Year Life Cycle Property Plan and Equipment Upgrade / Replacement Plan

Hugh Stewart presented a schedule outlining the 10 Year Life Cycle Property, Plant and Equipment Upgrade / Replacement Plan for Building Services.

On reviewing the Plan, SMT agreed that it required some further updating, particularly in relation to costings and the prioritisation of work. The inclusion of some additional proposed upgrades was also discussed.

Tara Caul highlighted the importance of early contact with the Procurement Office, in relation to projects that require their input.

Action: Hugh to update the Life Cycle Plan as discussed.

SMT noted an issue with the renewable energy PV panels on the roof and requested that this be investigated, with a report prepared for consideration by SMT at its next meeting.

Action: Hugh to prepare a paper for presentation at the next SMT meeting on the renewable energy PV panels.

SMT highlighted the importance of linking the Life Cycle Plan with the Capital Plan and it was agreed that this would be included as a standing item on the agenda for future monthly Corporate Services Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings.

Action: Corporate Services to include a review of the Capital Plan, in line with the Building Services – 10 Year Life Cycle Property Plan and Equipment Upgrade / Replacement Plan, as a standing item on the agenda for future DMT meetings.

Hugh Stewart left the meeting at 11.38 am.

Ken Eccles joined the meeting at 11.38 am for agenda item 13.

13. Review of Security Arrangements for Members

Ken Eccles presented the findings of a review that had been undertaken in relation to security arrangements for Members, following a request by the Assembly Commission.

SMT considered potential additional measures outlined in the paper, outlined some further information that needed to be included, and agreed that a paper should be prepared for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Action: Ken to prepare a paper for consideration by the Assembly Commission at its next meeting incorporating the comments received from SMT.

Ken Eccles left the meeting at 11.58 am.

14. Corporate Strategy 2023-2028

Steven presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the draft Corporate Strategy 2023-2028.

SMT noted that the Equality Screening form was not attached to the draft paper, as it was being finalised and would be circulated by correspondence after the meeting.

Action: Steven to arrange for the Equality Screening form to be circulated to SMT via correspondence, once finalised.

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

Steven noted that SMT had met with Heads of Business, to discuss taking forward the development of the accompanying Corporate Plan.

SMT was very appreciative of the work undertaken by Jonathan McMillen and Paul Gill on developing the Corporate Strategy 2023-2028 and recorded their thanks.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark joined the meeting at 12.01 pm for agenda items 15 and 16.

15. Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Donna-Marie advised that she had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive, and Directors on 6 September 2023 to discuss the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) in detail.

SMT approved the CRR for September 2023.

16. Biennial Review of the Risk Management Strategy, including Mandatory Review of Risk Appetite

SMT noted that the Risk Management Strategy (RMS) and risk appetite had also been reviewed in detail at the meeting on 6 September 2023.

SMT approved the revised RMS and confirmed that other than aligning the risk categories with the new corporate priorities, no further amendments were required to the risk appetite.

Donna-Marie advised that the revised Risk Management Strategy would be presented to the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee (ACARC) in October 2023 and that the next biennial review would be undertaken in September 2025.

Donna-Marie Clark left the meeting at 12.04 pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Peter McCallion joined the meeting at 12.04 pm for agenda item 17.

17. Comprehensive Review of the Pioneer Phase of the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

Peter McCallion presented a draft Assembly Commission paper, which provided a comprehensive review of the Pioneer Phase of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

On considering a recommendation within the paper, to establish metrics from the Pioneer Phase against which to measure the second mandate, Lesley proposed that further consideration be given by the Youth Assembly Team to establishing metrics to measure attendance.

SMT thanked Peter and the Youth Assembly for all the work that went into carrying out the review and approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Peter McCallion left the meeting at 12.15 pm.

Michael Cairns joined the meeting at 12.29 pm for agenda items 18 and 19.

Liz Beaton joined the meeting at 12.29 pm for agenda item 18.

18. Internal Communications Update

SMT noted the internal communications update for the period May to September 2023, which highlighted achievements and milestones reached under the four underpinning themes of the Internal Communications Strategy.

Liz Beaton noted the high level of staff engagement in relation to the development of the draft Corporate Strategy 2023-2028, and that the Communications Office would be developing a Corporate Communications Strategy for the new Corporate Strategy.

Liz advised of some events that had been confirmed between now and the end of the year and a discussion took place in relation to dates for the next Directorate meetings (twice per annum) and contributors for future issues of the Staff Newsletter.

Liz Beaton left the meeting at 1.00 pm.

19. Communications Update

Michael Cairns advised that work had completed on producing a series of videos to highlight the work of the Assembly to the public; on reviewing the content of the Assembly website to inform the planned website re-design; and that work would be commencing to develop a Corporate Communications Strategy.

Michael Cairns left the meeting at 1.25 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

20. Papers Cleared by Correspondence

- Abridged Management Accounts for July 2023
- HR Management Information
- Revised Annual Environmental Management Review for 2022-2023
- Revised Office Resources Update

21. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

HR Office

Steven advised that consideration was being given to how the Investors in People work can be progressed.

Systems Review

Steven advised that positive progress had been made in relation to the Systems Review project over the summer.

Trade Union Side (TUS)

Steven highlighted that there had been no advance communication of the intended strike action, as previously agreed with TUS and it was noted that he would raise this at the next Employee Relations Group (ERG) meeting.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Litigation

Tara Caul updated SMT on ongoing litigation.

Research and Information Service (RaISe)

Tara informed SMT that a Working Group was being established to look at Artificial Intelligence (AI) issues.

Governance

Tara noted that the next meeting of ACARC is scheduled for 25 October 2023.

Information Standards

Tara updated SMT on a decision in relation to a recent Information Commissioner's Office complaint. She also advised that the revised Retention and Disposal Schedule was being submitted to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland for further consideration.

Procurement

SMT noted the ongoing procurement projects.

Parliamentary Services

Gareth provided a detailed account of the work undertaken by all business areas within the Parliamentary Services Directorate, since last reported at the SMT meeting on 28 June 2023.

22. AOB

There was no other business.

23. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 27 October 2023.

24. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Review of the Fraud Policy
- Biannual Review of Learning and Development Activities and Spend
- Blue Flax Refurbishment
- Renewable Energy Panels
- Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers
- Review of Information Assurance Policy
- Information Security Group Annual Report and Self-Assessment
- Business Case: AV Equipment Upgrade in the Long Gallery
- Visitor Experience
- Post Project Evaluation: Parliament Buildings Television System Replacement Project

The meeting ended at 1.39 pm.