

# **SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)**

**TUESDAY, 31 JANUARY 2023 at 9.30 AM  
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**APPROVED**

**Present:**

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

**In Attendance:**

**Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor  
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support  
(Items 5 and 6)  
Billy Mahoney, Deputy Head of Finance – Secretariat (Item 7)  
Gary Browne, Senior Accountant (item 7)  
Richard Anderson, Clerical Supervisor (Item 8)  
Hugh Stewart, Acting Head of Building Services (Item 8)  
David Lynn, Roof Project Manager (Item 9)  
Alice McKelvey, Legal Adviser (Item 9)  
Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR (Item 11)  
Roisin Kelly, Chairperson of the Supporting Personal Resilience  
Working Group (Item 14)  
Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer (Item 16)**

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 15 December 2022 had been published.

#### **4. SMT Action Points**

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

*Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.35 am for agenda items 5 and 6.*

#### **5. Political Update**

Lesley Hogg noted that a state of readiness was being maintained to resume normal Assembly business at short notice.

Richard Stewart confirmed that in the event of an election, the Election Planning Group had reviewed the necessary documentation, as far as was possible.

### **CORPORATE SUPPORT**

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

Robin Ramsey advised that the next Assembly Commission meeting was scheduled for 13 February 2023.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Review of the Sign Language Pilot
- Request for Sign Language Provision
- Transferring the Assets of Politics Plus to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission
- Programme of Events to Mark the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and of the First Sitting of the Assembly
- Agreement of an Initial Assembly Commission Position for The Executive Office on a Memorial to Victims of Historical Institutional Abuse
- Annual Plan 2022-23: In-year Review to 30 November 2022
- Approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Equality Scheme 2022-26, Audit of Inequalities Report and Action Plan 2022-26 and Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 following Public Consultation

Robin recorded his thanks and appreciation to all who contributed and took part in the Christmas charity fund raising event, which had raised over £2,500 for the St Vincent de Paul and Salvation Army Family Appeal.

*Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.49 am.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Billy Mahoney and Gary Browne joined the meeting at 9.50 am for agenda item 7.*

### **7. Management Accounts for December 2022**

Billy Mahoney introduced Gary Browne who had recently joined the Finance Office Team.

Richard noted that the Secretary of State had introduced the Northern Ireland Budget Bill 2023 and that this was progressing through its various stages in Westminster.

Billy presented the Management Accounts for December 2022. He stated that there were no monthly or year-to-date variances as all budgets had been re-profiled in December, following the completion of the Main Estimate.

Billy advised that the forecasted Outturn figures assumed a resumption of normal Assembly business from February 2023. He then highlighted the movements in the reported forecasts for Resource DEL against the Main Estimate and sought approval to reflect the forecast in the monthly Forecast Outturn report to the Department of Finance (DoF). SMT was content that DoF be advised of the easements highlighted, but requested that the return be caveated in relation to the possibility of additional expenditure against Members' Costs.

In relation to the Capital Plan, Billy provided SMT with a summary of the adjustments to the budget against the Main Estimate and sought approval of a number of bids and surrenders. Gareth McGrath advised of some additional expenditure in this financial year, in relation to the laptop replacement project which he stated was being brought forward from 2023/24.

Following consideration, SMT approved the bids and surrenders as detailed in the paper, as well as the bid for replacement laptops, but noted that the surrender of substantial monies against the Electronic Access Control project was coming very late in the year and that there was no provision for this expenditure in the 2023/24 budget.

*Billy Mahoney and Gary Browne left the meeting at 10.16 am.*

*Richard Anderson and Hugh Stewart joined the meeting at 10.16 am for agenda item 8.*

### **8. Health and Safety Management Report 2022**

Richard Anderson presented the Health and Safety Management Report, providing SMT with a detailed account on accidents, other health and safety issues and training undertaken during 2022.

Richard informed SMT that there were currently 28 trained first aiders, a panel of trained mental health first aiders and that the five defibrillators in Parliament Buildings had been replaced with modern Lifepack CR2 models.

Richard confirmed that Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Risk Assessments had been carried out throughout 2022 within Parliament Buildings, and that assistance had been provided to staff with display screen equipment for hybrid working. He also provided an update on the development of an online DSE self-assessment questionnaire.

Richard advised that a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) of Parliament Buildings had been completed in March 2022 and provided a summary of the recommendations and their status. In relation to the recommendation regarding the storage of furniture in the basement, Lesley agreed that it was not acceptable to continue to store furniture, etc. at this location and asked that a critical assessment be undertaken of what was being stored, and alternative storage solutions sought.

**Action:** Hugh Stewart and Richard to provide alternative storage solutions for furniture, etc. currently stored in the basement, for consideration by the Clerk/Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services.

Richard stated that hybrid working was causing difficulties in ensuring that there were enough trained fire wardens available on any given day and sought advice from SMT on how to manage fire warden cover. SMT suggested that Richard liaise with Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer, with a view to reaching out to staff for additional volunteers.

Lesley noted that the FRA referenced a missing fire blanket and water extinguisher from two locations in the building, and asked Richard to ensure that fire safety checks were always based on the latest version of the fire safety plan.

Richard raised an accessibility issue that had recently been brought to his attention and it was agreed that this would be assessed and investigated by Hugh.

**Action:** Hugh to investigate an accessibility issue raised by Richard and report back to the Director of Corporate Services.

SMT thanked Richard and Hugh for a very comprehensive report.

*Richard Anderson and Hugh Stewart left the meeting at 10.47 am.*

*David Lynn and Alice McKelvey joined the meeting at 10.47am for agenda item 9.*

## **9. Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings**

David Lynn presented a draft Assembly Commission paper, which provided an update on the current position in relation to the defects in the roof of Parliament Buildings.

SMT noted the update and approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to the inclusion of some additional information.

SMT requested that all costs associated with ensuring the ongoing health and safety of building users from issues arising from the roof, were separately recorded along with any potential legal costs.

**Action:** David to liaise with the Finance Office to establish a new account code to record costs associated with the Roof Project.

*David Lynn and Alice McKelvey left the meeting at 11.07 am.*

*Meeting suspended at 11.07 am until 11.20 am.*

*Change to agenda running order.*

*Karen Martin joined the meeting at 11.20 am for agenda item 11.*

## **11. HR Management Information**

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 January 2023.

SMT noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 January 2023 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 329.3 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 375 FTE.

SMT noted the temporary promotions/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place. SMT agreed to extend a deputising arrangement currently in place within the Communications Office until 28 February 2023. Karen advised SMT of an extension to an agency assignment in the Finance Office until 31 March 2023, which had been approved after the paper had been prepared.

Karen updated SMT on recent recruitment activity.

Karen sought approval to extend the AG6 and AG7 recruitment related Complement Plus posts within the HR Office by six months to 31 October 2023 due to the ongoing significant programme of recruitment activity. SMT approved the six-month extension.

Following a review of the Recruitment Schedule, SMT agreed to re-schedule the competition for the Head of Building Services into the period April to June 2023.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period January 2022 to December 2022, the average sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 12.2 days, compared with an average of 8.2 days during the period January 2021 to December 2021. SMT noted the increase in sickness absence and the requirement for continued close monitoring.

*Karen Martin left the meeting at 11.53 am.*

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

*Roisin Kelly joined the meeting at 11.53 am for agenda item 14.*

### **14. Emerging Findings and Recommendations for Additional Measures from the Supporting Personal Resilience Working Group**

Roisin Kelly presented the draft report of the Supporting Personal Resilience Working Group.

Roisin recorded her thanks to Tara Caul and Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, for their support and input to the draft Report.

Roisin advised SMT of the key considerations of the Working Group when producing the draft Report and of the five recommendations made.

Roisin stated that if SMT was content with the draft Report and recommendations contained within, it would be published in order to seek feedback from staff. She also stated that a copy of the final Report would be forwarded to the relevant business areas for implementation of the recommendations, and that liaison with the chairpersons of the other working groups would take place, to share learning and identify any points of collaboration and synergy.

Following consideration, SMT proposed some minor amendments to the draft Report, prior to publication.

**Action:** Roisin to amend the Report as proposed by SMT, prior to publication.

SMT recorded its thanks to Roisin, the other members of the Working Group and the Researchers, for the work that had gone in to producing such a comprehensive Report.

*Roisin Kelly left the meeting at 12.36 pm.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

*Liz Beaton joined the meeting at 12.36 pm for agenda item 15.*

## 15. Internal Communications Quarterly Update

Liz Beaton presented a paper on the internal communications activity that had taken place since the last update provided to SMT on 29 September 2022.

Liz highlighted the achievements and milestones reached under the four themes of the Internal Communications Strategy, namely, 'Listening to your views', 'Understanding how we communicate', 'Improving our communications channels and platforms' and 'Developing meaningful and authentic content'.

Liz advised that a number of engagement initiatives had been held to listen to staff views, by way of the consultations on the Staff Survey and the All Staff Event planned for 31 March 2023.

Liz noted the corporate events that had taken place, namely the Winter Staff Briefing and Christmas Charity Quiz, Directorate Meetings and various Let's Talk/Meet/Learn Sessions.

Liz also referred to the updated Communications Office pages on AsslSt and the new 2023 Staff Engagement Calendar which published in December 2022.

SMT noted the quarterly internal communications update and draft plans for the period January to June 2023, and thanked Liz for her efforts.

*Liz Beaton left the meeting at 1.06 pm.*

*Meeting suspended at 1.06 pm and resumed at 2.01 pm.*

## 16. Transferring the Assets and Liabilities of Politics Plus to the Assembly Commission

Gareth McGrath presented a draft Assembly Commission paper, outlining the proposed methodology for transferring the assets and liabilities of Politics Plus to the Assembly Commission.

Following consideration, SMT approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to some minor amendments.

**Action:** Gareth to update the draft Assembly Commission paper as proposed.

## **CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED**

### **10. Annual Plan 2022-23: In-year Review to 30 November 2022**

Richard presented a progress update on the actions within the Annual Plan 2022-23 to 30 November 2022.

SMT reviewed the progress on the actions and it was agreed that Gareth and Tara would provide Richard with revised updates on the status of some of the actions.

**Action:** Gareth and Tara to provide updates to some Outcomes in the Annual Plan. Richard to then update the Annual Plan 2022-23: In-year Review as agreed by SMT and prepare a paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

### **12. Request for Sign Language Provision**

Richard presented a draft Assembly Commission paper, setting out a response to a request for the provision of funding for sign language interpretation services for Members.

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

### **13. Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016**

Richard noted that SMT had considered a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Review of the FAPP Scheme 2016, at its meeting on 15 December 2022, and agreed that it should be revised to include some additional information.

Richard therefore presented an updated paper which, following consideration, was approved by SMT for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

### **17. Directors' Updates**

#### **Corporate Services**

#### **Usher Services**

Richard referred to 'Martyn's Law' which sets out proposed legislation that is likely to be introduced in early 2023 and is aimed at improving security in public places/buildings. It was noted that this could impact on operations at



Parliament Buildings and Richard confirmed that any necessary steps would be taken on introduction.

Richard also advised that new Control Room Operators had been recruited.

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

### **Governance**

Tara informed SMT that the Data Protection and Governance Officer had created a Risk Management training presentation, which would be delivered to key staff in February 2023.

### **Research and Information Service (RaISe)**

Tara noted that staff from RaISe were carrying out work for other legislatures.

Tara informed SMT of vacant Researcher posts within the Health, Education and Criminal Justice portfolios. She asked that SMT consider a request from the Head of RaISe for permission to recruit a temporary agency worker to cover both the Health and Education portfolios in the interim, as there was currently no contingency cover for these portfolios available within RaISe. Following consideration, SMT proposed that in the first instance, the Head of RaISe liaise with the Clerk Assistants to assess whether any staff were available to fill the post temporarily from within Clerking, before appointing a new agency worker.

### **Procurement Office**

Tara advised of significant staffing pressures within the Procurement Office which may require SMT to prioritise procurement projects.

SMT noted the ongoing procurement projects.

## **Parliamentary Services**

### **Clerking – Committees**

Gareth advised that all the committee teams were engaged in work to support other legislatures, whilst continuing to ensure they are ready for a resumption of normal business at short notice.

### **Communications Office**

Gareth advised that the Chamber and Committee Rooms upgrade and refurbishment work was ongoing but progressing well.

Staffing levels within the Communications Office were noted.

## **IS Office**

Gareth informed SMT that the IS Office telephone helpdesk service had resumed.

### **18. AOB**

There was no other business.

### **19. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 28 February 2023.

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

- Post Project Evaluation on the Provision of Tests and Assessment Exercises for Recruitment Competitions
- Draft Transgender Policy and Guidance
- Five-Year Review of the Disability Action Plan
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Update on the Systems Review Project
- Cyber Security Risk

The meeting ended at 3.44 pm.