SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)

FRIDAY 23 OCTOBER 2026 at 1.00 PM
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
Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IT (deputised for Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services)

In Attendance:

Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Scarlett Healey, Executive Assistant to Clerk/Chief Executive
Suzanne Murphy, Deputy Head of Finance (Item 7)
Diane Lamont, Senior HR Manager (Items 8 and 9)
Johnny McGookin, Head of Security and Usher Services (Items 10 and 11)
Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services (Item 13)
Nathan Lynch, Clerical Supervisor (Items 14 and 15)
Robert McCausland, IT Security Officer (Item 14)
Lisa McElherron, Clerk Assistant (Item 17)
Clare Maguire, Deputy Head of Public Engagement (Item 17)
John Hart, Head of Communications (Item 19)

The meeting commenced at 1.01 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Gareth McGrath. Mary-Ellen Nutt deputised.

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

It was noted that the minutes from the meeting on 23 September 2026 were in the process of being published.

4. SLT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg noted that agreement on the budget had not yet been reached.

Tara Caul advised that the Northern Ireland Assembly (Minimum Period) (Amendment) Order 2026 had been laid before Parliament to come into force on 3 November 2026. SLT noted that if the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland directs that the polls at an election of the Assembly are to be taken together with the polls at one or more other elections, this would mean that the Assembly would be dissolved on 23 March 2027.

Lesley noted that Halloween recess would be commencing on 24 October 2026.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Lesley advised that the next Assembly Commission meeting was scheduled for 25 November 2026 and proposed agenda items were considered.

Suzanne Murphy joined the meeting at 1.13 pm for agenda item 7.

CORPORATE SERVICES

7. Management Accounts September 2026

Suzanne Murphy presented the Management Accounts for September 2026.

SLT noted the forecast outturns for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (WFDSC)

Suzanne sought SLT approval for three Admin budget adjustments: an additional £12.5k for Non-Executive Bill requirements; £45k for iTrent development; and £16k for additional legal costs. Suzanne noted that the relevant business areas had identified funding to meet each of these requirements from easements elsewhere in the 2026-27 budget. SLT approved the adjustments.

Suzanne advised that the current Resource DEL pressure had marginally reduced from the August 2026 position, mainly due to a reduction within Admin Costs and Staff Salaries.

SLT also noted that the Finance Office would be undertaking a further detailed analysis of projected costs.

Suzanne highlighted three capital projects whose delivery remained uncertain this financial year, namely the partial Electronic Access Control (EAC) System and the installation of the replacement Goods Lifts and North Lift.

SLT noted that the EAC system project was behind schedule, with several matters under discussion with Construction Procurement Delivery and the contractors.

Steven Baxter reported a slight delay to the replacement Goods Lifts but confirmed that installation was still expected before the financial year-end. However, in relation to the North Lift, Steven expressed concern, that it may not be installed within this financial year and that it was only intended to commence work once the Goods Lifts project had been completed. He stated that he had advised the Business Area that deferring installation to the next financial year was unacceptable due to the lack of capital budget in 2027-28.

Lesley queried the comment in the Capital Plan that it remained to be determined if fireproofing the North lift was feasible.

Lesley noted that almost a year had passed since SLT approved the North Lift replacement business case and that at the time SLT had been advised that the work was a high priority, posed a significant risk and would be completed in the 2025-26 financial year.

Lesley also asked for an update on the status of the business case and installation of a replacement South Lift, given that SLT had previously been informed of the need for the project in January 2026 and the Business Area's desire for the work to be completed in the 2025-26 financial year.

Action: Steven Baxter to confirm that the replacement North Lift will be installed in the current financial year and with fire rating as proposed in the business case. Update on the South Lift also to be provided.

In relation to Decision Authorisation System (DAS), Suzanne advised that the Finance Office had emailed all staff to remind them of their governance responsibilities in relation to DAS records.

Suzanne Murphy left the meeting at 1.28 pm.

Diane Lamont joined the meeting at 1.29 pm for agenda items 8 and 9.

8. HR Management Information

Diane Lamont presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 October 2026.

Diane advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 October 2026 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 405.4.x FTE against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 417.8 FTE.

SLT noted the temporary promotion/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place.

SLT was provided with an update on recruitment activity.

Sickness absence information was provided and SLT noted that during the period October 2025 to September 2026, the average number of working days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 10.2. Diane also provided statistics for comparator organisations.

9. HR Policy

Diane presented a paper which sought approval of proposed changes to the Probation Policy and Uniforms and Protective Clothing Policy.

Diane outlined the proposed changes to both Policies.

Following consideration, SLT approved the proposed changes to the Uniforms and Protective Clothing Policy, subject to further minor amendments and inclusion of Visitor Experience Team uniforms in the policy, and proposed additional amendments to the Probation Policy for the HR Office to take forward, including consultation with Trade Union Side (TUS).

SLT noted that an updated Probation Policy would be presented to SLT at a later date.

Diane Lamont left the meeting at 1.46 pm.

Change to agenda running order.

14. Annual Plan 2026-2027 Status at 30 September 2026

Steven presented and sought approval of a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Annual Plan 2026-2027 status update as at 30 September 2026.

Following consideration, SLT approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: Steven to arrange for the draft Assembly Commission paper to be updated as discussed.

SLT acknowledged the positive overall progress in implementing the Annual Plan's actions and recorded its appreciation to Heads of Business (HoBs) and their teams for their contributions.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

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

Tara presented the Annual Report and Self-Assessment of ISG for the year to September 2026.

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

SLT approved the ISG Annual Report and Self-Assessment and suggested considering closer alignment of future Self-Assessments with ISG's Terms of Reference.

SLT recorded its thanks to ISG for its work throughout the reporting period.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

Johnny McGookin joined the meeting at 1.57 pm for agenda items 10 and 11.

10. Business Continuity Management (BCM) – Policy, Framework and Incident Management Arrangements

SLT welcomed Johnny McGookin to his first SLT meeting.

Johnny presented a paper seeking approval of the BCM Policy and Framework and selected sections of the complementary draft BCM Strategic Guidance – Incident Identification and Management.

Johnny stated that the Policy and Framework are designed to embed BCM within everyday business processes and organisational culture, while providing a clear and consistent basis for assurance, monitoring and reporting.

Following consideration, SLT approved the BCM Policy and Framework and selected sections of the draft BCM Strategic Guidance – Incident Identification and Management, subject to some minor amendments.

11. Electronic Access Control Policy

Johnny presented a paper which sought approval of an Electronic Access Control Policy, subject to completion and approval of the Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) and incorporation of any consequential amendments.

SLT considered the draft Policy and proposed some amendments, which included clarification of the escalation procedure for queries concerning denied access to specific areas. However, SLT noted that the DPIA was ongoing and would be critical in informing the Policy. SLT therefore

requested that the Policy and DPIA be resubmitted for further consideration following completion of the assessment.

SLT was content with the proposal that the Head of Security and Usher Services would be the policy owner and that the Director of Corporate Services would be the Senior Responsible Officer.

Action: Johnny to incorporate SLT's proposed amendments and any further changes arising from the completed DPIA and resubmit a revised paper and DPIA to SLT for final consideration.

Johnny McGookin left the meeting at 2.31 pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES CONTINUED

Jonathan McMillen joined the meeting at 2.35 pm for agenda item 13.

13. Information Asset Owner Handbook

Jonathan McMillen presented a paper which sought approval of a proposed Information Asset Owner (IAO) Handbook.

Jonathan advised that an audit of the Information Standards Office carried out in the first quarter of the year had found significant issues with IAOs' understanding of their role, and a lack of support and oversight of the IAO role in Information Standards.

Jonathan explained that the Information Standards Office's management response to the audit findings included a commitment to produce an IAO Handbook, bringing together relevant information and outlining IAOs' functions.

SLT noted that the new IAO Handbook would complement consolidated guides on records management, freedom of information and data protection, which would be considered at its next meeting.

Following consideration, SLT approved the proposed IAO Handbook, subject to a minor amendment.

SLT recorded its thanks to IAOs for their valuable and business-critical role.

Jonathan McMillen left the meeting at 2.45 pm.

Nathan Lynch joined the meeting at 2.46 pm for agenda items 14 and 15.

Robert McCausland joined the meeting at 2.46 pm for agenda item 14.

14. Biennial Review of the National Audit Office (NAO) Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan

Nathan Lynch presented an updated NAO Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan, for consideration and approval by SLT.

Nathan advised that it had last been reviewed and approved by SLT in October 2024 and noted by the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee (ACARC) at its meeting in November 2024, with the Action Plan monitored at each of its meetings to date.

Nathan reported significant revisions to the Self-Assessment questions, with the narrative updated to reflect current policies as of 14 October 2026. SLT noted that each question had been assigned a red, amber or green status. Nathan confirmed that no responses were rated red, two were amber and the remaining 36 were green.

Following consideration, SLT approved the NAO Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment, Checklist and Action Plan.

SLT recorded its thanks to all staff involved in delivering the Plan's actions and welcomed the excellent progress.

Robert McCausland left the meeting at 2.50 pm.

15. Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers

Nathan presented the Directorate Risk Registers (DRRs) and cluster analysis as at September 2026.

Nathan highlighted changes in the DRRs since last reviewed by SLT in April 2026.

SLT reviewed the DRRs and emerging Risk Clusters and agreed that no further Directorate risks required escalation to the Corporate Risk Register at this time.

Lesley highlighted some observations for consideration by Directors.

Nathan Lynch left the meeting at 2.58 pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Lisa McElherron and Clare Maguire joined the meeting at 2.59 pm for agenda item 17.

17. Parliament Buildings Saturday Opening Pilot: Final Proposal

Lisa McElherron and Clare Maguire presented a paper which sought SLT approval of a pilot of Saturday public opening in 2027, comprising one designated Saturday in each of June, July, August and September.

Lisa explained that the proposed pilot aimed to support more targeted engagement.

Clare referred to the paper on the 'Feasibility of Opening Parliament Buildings Routinely on a Saturday for Public Tours' considered by SMT (Senior Management Team) on 27 March 2026, noting that a smaller scale pilot than originally outlined in the paper was being proposed now, owing to practical challenges with weekend access to the Stormont Estate.

Clare outlined the proposed pilot and confirmed that its costs could be met from existing budgets.

Following consideration, SLT approved the proposed pilot, and requested that unique selling points for the offering and target market be considered to maximise engagement.

Lisa McElherron and Clare Maguire left the meeting at 3.14 pm.

18. Post Project Evaluation (PPE) – Operation and Maintenance Contract for Broadcasting and Related Sound and Vision Services

Paper deferred to next meeting.

John Hart joined the meeting at 3.15 pm for agenda item 19.

19. Strategic Communications Update

John Hart provided SLT with a strategic communications update.

John Hart left the meeting at 3.22 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

20. SLT/Assembly Commission papers Cleared via Correspondence

Request from the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation for the Assembly to Display an Exhibition.

Publication of a Determination on Members' Salaries by the Independent Remuneration Board – Statutory Consultation with the Assembly Commission.

Update on Budget 2026-30.

Business Case for the Provision of Building Maintenance Services for 2026-27.

21. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Steven provided an update on all business areas within the Corporate Services Directorate.

In particular, Steven updated SLT on the Blue Flax evening offering; Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points; the FUSION Project; and remedial works to the roof of Parliament Buildings.

In relation to the Blue Flax, Steven presented indicative costs for extending the opening hours on sitting days. SLT agreed to a one-hour extension to 7pm, provided the additional cost did not exceed the value of the approved business case.

Steven reported that five of the six EV charging points in the upper car park had moved to a managed charging platform. SLT agreed they could become operational after Halloween recess, subject to the EV Charging Policy and procedure being updated as necessary and submitted to SLT for consideration.

Action: Steven to circulate the updated EV Charging Policy and procedure to SLT prior to the EV charging points becoming operational.

Steven noted that 24 December 2026 was a normal working day and that there had been discussions with TUS regarding utilisation of annual leave to close Parliament Buildings on that day. Steven advised that TUS had polled members on three options: closure on this basis; remaining open, with staff attending as normal; or no preference.

Steven reported a 68% response rate: 40% favoured closure, 35% favoured remaining open and 25% expressed no preference. In light of the poll responses, SLT agreed to close the building on 24 December 2026, with staff taking one day's leave subject to TUS agreement

Tara stated that the Legal, Governance and Research Directorate (DLGRS) was voluntarily participating in the Learning and Development pilot. She noted that the pilot includes a requirement on business areas to book and process payments themselves for conferences and seminars and this has necessitated the allocation of procurement cards to business areas in DLGRS for this purpose.

Tara highlighted that the guidance relating to the Learning and Development pilot does not align with the existing Procurement Card Policy as the guidance indicated that use of a procurement card is the default position for booking conferences etc. She stated that Purchase to Pay (PECOS) should be the default position, with procurement cards only being used as the exception when necessary, for example, for making payments to a one-off supplier and that the Learning and Development guidance is being amended.

Tara advised of a further issue regarding the Learning and Development pilot in relation to the transaction limits imposed by paragraph 6, bullet point 2 of the Procurement Card Policy:

"*Use by Secretariat staff authorised by a member of staff at Director level or above, for the purpose of miscellaneous, business-related items with a value of less than £500, or a collective value of less than £1000 (including VAT and delivery), excluding travel and subsistence costs*."

Tara asked SLT to suspend paragraph 6, bullet point 2 of the Procurement Card Policy for DLGRS solely for participants in the Learning and Development pilot, to enable the pilot to operate more effectively. SLT agreed that this would be recorded in the minutes as a temporary measure, until such times as the Procurement Card Policy can be comprehensively reviewed.

Lesley noted that there were some other elements of the Procurement Card Policy that needed reviewed.

Action: As agreed by SLT, Steven to arrange for paragraph 6, bullet point 2 of the Procurement Car Policy to be temporarily suspended for DLGRS participants in the Learning and Development pilot, pending a wider review.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Tara provided an update on the work undertaken by all business areas within DLGRS and, in particular, highlighted ongoing litigation; the work of the Examiner of Statutory Rules; the hosting of a very successful Inter-Parliamentary Research and Information Network (IPRIN) annual conference by Research and Information Service (RaISe); the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS); and ongoing procurement projects.

Tara also noted that three new interns had joined RaISe.

Parliamentary Services

SLT noted the work undertaken by all business areas within the Parliamentary Services Directorate.

Mary-Ellen highlighted the ongoing rollout of Digital Enablement Drop-In Learning Sessions for staff.

Mary-Ellen also advised that a Digital Newsletter would be launch shortly.

Lesley acknowledged the success of the recent Committee of the Regions meeting hosted by Parliamentary Services staff in Parliament Buildings.

22. AOB

There was no other business.

23. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 27 November 2026.

24. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Strategic Review of the Finance Office
- FUSION Project – Business Case
- Pay Claim 2026 – 2029
- Progress of Remedial Works to the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Update on the Electronic Access Control System
- Budget Process
- Blue Flax Refurbishment Post Project Evaluation
- FOI Handbook
- Records Management Handbook
- Data Protection Handbook
- Induction 2027 – Update
- Variation to the Operation and Maintenance Contract for Broadcasting and Related Sound and Vision Services
- Post Project Evaluation (PPE) – Operation and Maintenance Contract for Broadcasting and Related Sound and Vision Services
- Strategic Communications Update

The meeting ended at 4.05 pm.