SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2012 AT 10.12AM
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED
(AMENDED)

Present:	**Trevor Reaney** **Gareth McGrath** **John Stewart** **Richard Stewart** **Stephen Welch** **Hugh Widdis**
In attendance:	**Jim Beatty** **Peter McCallion (Agenda item 5.2)** **John Gibson (Agenda item 6)** **David Johnston (Agenda item 7.1)** **Brian Moreland (Agenda item 7.2)** **Karen Martin (Agenda items 8)** **Sebastian Mingout (Agenda item 10)** **Tony Logue (Agenda items 11, 12)** **Robin Ramsey (Agenda item 12)**

1 Apologies

1.1 None.

2 Declaration of Interests

2.1 No member declared an interest.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting/Matters Arising

3.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 12 January 2012 were approved subject to some amendments.

3.2 All issues within Matters Arising will be dealt with through the Action Points or discussed as substantive agenda items.

4 SMG Action Points

4.1 The outstanding Action Points were reviewed. Members were asked to advise Jim Beatty of further updates and amendments.

5 Corporate Plan/Strategy

5.1 Performance against 2011/12 Corporate Plan.

5.1.1 SMG reviewed the progress to 31 December 2011 and noted that the majority of planned outcomes had already been achieved or on schedule for completion. Trevor Reaney congratulated Directors and staff on their achievements to date.

5.1.2 Some minor amendments were agreed to the update and Trevor Reaney urged everyone to maintain their efforts on the outstanding outcomes.

5.1.3 It was noted that objectives in relation to HR and Information Management strategies required consideration at the next SMG meeting to ensure 31 March target date was met.

5.2 Business Efficiency Review Update

5.2.1 Peter McCallion joined the meeting at 10.38am and provided a verbal update on the project team's progress.

5.2.2 A briefing paper has been prepared for the Speaker and SMG members will update their respective portfolio members on the Commission. The BEP team will assist with queries.

5.2.3 Extensive consultation is planned on the Research and Information Service and the Security and Ushering Service reports and Gareth McGrath agreed to approach Internal Communications with a view to assisting in managing this exercise.

5.2.4 After the consultation, it is planned to refer the reports to the Clerk/DG for decision.

5.2.5 A BEP team member will return to the NIAO in April 2012 and SMG discussed future staffing for the team. It was agreed that the BEP team's request for assistance from the NIAO would take precedence.

5.2.6 Mr Reaney commended the team for the work done to date.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

6 Procurement

6.1 John Gibson joined the meeting at 11.13am.

6.2 Single Tender Action (STAs) and Use of Consultants

6.2.1 Revised guidance on the use of STAs, including an approval mechanism for consultancy contracts, was issued by the Central Procurement Directorate, DFP, in November 2011 and although it is not a requirement, the Assembly has agreed to consider this guidance when setting its own policies.

6.2.2 As well as revising STA actions in issues such as professional journals, the guidance introduces new levels of authorisation. The paper proposes that any use of consultancy services to a value greater than £10,000 must be approved in advance by the Clerk/DG and the Speaker. In all other STA cases, all proposals must be approved, in advance, by the Clerk/DG.

6.2.3 SMG discussed the proposals, especially the need to refer all proposed STAs to the Clerk/DG in advance. In support of good governance, it was agreed that all proposed STAs would be referred to the Clerk/DG. Specialist Advisors to Committees will be considered separately.

6.3 Purchase to Pay (P2P) Update

6.3.1 John Gibson provided an update on the end of the current stage within the scoping phase for this project.

6.3.2 During December/January the Project team met with a number of suppliers to establish what form the scoping should take, what information was required before going to tender, outline costs and process improvement approaches.

6.3.3 These meetings proved very beneficial and informative and while confirming the benefits and opportunities that P2P offers, they also highlighted the importance of proper process mapping. This will require inputs from all staff.

6.3.4 John Stewart suggested that process mapping work already done by the Business Efficiency Project Team may be of use and it was agreed that this would be made available to the P2P team.

7 Corporate Governance

7.1 Corporate Risk Register

7.1.1 David Johnston joined the meeting at 11.45am and updated SMG on the recent changes to the Risk Register.

7.1.2 SMG agreed the changes.

7.2 Internal Audit

7.2.1 Brian Moreland joined the meeting at 11.55am.

7.2.2 Internal Audit is currently working on a revised Internal Audit Strategy and will soon meet with Directors to discuss this. A draft Strategy will be presented to the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) in March 2012.

7.2.3 The audit of the Secretariat Payroll is nearing completion and a report will be issued soon. The annual audit of Members' expenses is progressing and site verification visits will begin next month.

7.2.4 Paul Jameson from Cookstown Council has recently joined the audit team on a six month interchange secondment.

7.2.5 Trevor Reaney confirmed that SARC meeting papers were circulated to all Directors prior to the meeting and that the rotation of Directors attending SARC meetings would continue.

8 Human Resources

8.1 Karen Martin joined the meeting at 12.08pm.

8.2 Equal Pay Review

8.2.1 The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has recently concluded an Equal Pay Review of salaries within the Secretariat.

8.2.2 NISRA identified three statistically significant gaps and these were subsequently investigated by HR who have concluded that these gaps are not because of any discriminatory practices.

8.2.3 Hugh Widdis queried some aspects of the report and its analysis. While SMG was content to note the report, it was agreed that HR would liaise with Legal Services on the findings of the report.

8.3 Capability Policy

8.3.1 This policy, relating to staff not performing to the required standards, was before SMG in April 2011 when it was approved for further consultation. The paper before SMG was developed during discussions with TUS.

8.3.2 SMG emphasised the need for staff to be managed within the Performance Management System before coming within the remit of this policy. However, SMG had some concerns about aspects of the proposed policy.

8.3.3 It was agreed that HR would review the draft policy in light of SMG's comments and bring a revised policy back to a future meeting.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.4 Employer Supported Volunteering Policy

8.4.1 On 19 December 2011 SMG had approved the key principles on which this policy should be developed. This policy will provide for staff to be supported in volunteering activities – it was proposed that staff should match this with an equal amount of their own time.

8.4.2 SMG discussed the proposals and amended that part relating to team activities so that time off – maximum one day - does not have to be matched. Subject to this change, the draft policy was approved for consultation.

8.5 Dignity At Work Policy

8.5.1 A draft policy had previously been approved by SMG and had been subject to extensive consultation. The paper before SMG was the final draft for approval.

8.5.2 SMG discussed the proposals and subject to amendments relating to confidentiality and further development of paragraph 7, the policy was approved.

8.6 Discipline Policy

8.6.1 A draft policy had previously been approved by SMG and had been subject to extensive consultation. The paper before SMG was the final draft for approval.

8.6.2 SMG had some concerns with aspects of the proposed policy and it was agreed that HR would review the draft policy in light of SMG's comments and bring a revised policy back to a future meeting.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.7 Grievance Policy

8.7.1 A draft policy had previously been approved by SMG and had been subject to extensive consultation. The paper before SMG was the final draft for approval.

8.7.2 Subject to some amendments in line with the Dignity at Work policy, this was approved.

8.7.3 SMG discussed the role of mediation as an informal means of resolving issues before commencing a formal investigation. In accepting that this would always be voluntary, it was agreed that more should be done to encourage usage of mediation. It was agreed that HR would provide more online advice on mediation.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.8 Data Gathering Exercise

8.8.1 The gathering of timekeeping data was done over the period from October 2010 to March 2011.

8.8.2 Richard Stewart said that the data confirmed much of what was already known although the exercise did reveal some issues about the 'carrying over' of excessive hours and the Assembly may have to adjust, eg, introduce a 12 month accounting period.

8.8.3 After discussions, SMG agreed that the possible implications of changes required more detailed consideration. It was agreed that HR would speak to directors individually and bring a revised paper back to a future SMG meeting.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.9 HR Management Information

8.9.1 SMG considered the absence information for October and November 2011. The trend to November 2011 was upwards - 8.7 days against a benchmark of 7.5 days.

8.9.2 In order to assist analysis, it was agreed that HR would provide longitudinal information using graphs over various periods.

The meeting adjourned at 1.12pm.
The meeting reconvened at 1.50pm.

9 Mobile Phone Interference with Assembly Broadcasting Facilities

9.1 Gareth McGrath explained that Members have raised this issue as mobile phones, if too close to a microphone, can cause interference with recording equipment. The problem increases with the use of IPads and other 3G enabled handsets.

9.2 Solutions are available and the paper before SMG offered 6 options for consideration.

9.3 After discussion, SMG agreed to refer the options paper to the Commission.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

10 Catering Tariff Setting Mechanism

10.1 Sebastian Mingout joined the meeting at 2.05pm.

10.2 When approving the business case for the 'Retendering of the Support Services Contract' in June 2011 the Commission approved the implementation of a tariff setting mechanism. At present the supplier advises the prices to be set.

10.3 As part of a benchmarking exercise, comparable facilities/businesses were asked about their prices for the top selling 25 items. From the information received a mean price was determined for each item.

10.4 SMG considered a number of options and agreed a price mechanism based on CPI + 1%.

10.5 It was agreed that a paper would be presented to the Commission with this recommendation.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

11 Review of Financial Assistance for Political Parties (FAPP)

11.1 Tony Logue joined the meeting at 2.44pm.

11.2 At its meeting on 25 January 2011 the Commission agreed that the FAPP Scheme 2007 should be reviewed in light of recommendations raised by the Assembly's Internal Audit and NIAO. The Scheme was reviewed in January 2012.

11.3 SMG discussed the three options offered and agreed that the outcome would result in improved governance arrangements. It was also agreed that account must be taken of the Spending Review budget settlement.

11.4 It was agreed that the paper should be amended in light of the SMG discussions and following further discussions with Legal Services, it should be referred to the Commission.

12. Future Commission/SMG Business

12.1 Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 3.12pm.

12.2 SMG considered the proposed agenda for the next Commission meeting:

- Clerk/DG's Key Update Report
- Review of FAPP Scheme 2007
- Corporate Strategic Implementation Framework
- Mobile Phone Interference with Broadcasting Equipment
- Setting Catering Tariff Mechanisms
- Relations with US

12.3 SMG noted the future workplans for the Commission and SMG.

13 Items approved by correspondence

13.1 Trevor Reaney told SMG that this would be a future standing item on the agenda as more papers should be cleared by this method and noted at the meeting.

13.2 It was noted the proposed Staff Survey paper had been cleared prior to the meeting.

14 Directors' Updates

14.1 Stephen Welch advised SMG of the following:-

- The Assembly has retained ISO 14001 after the recent audit;

- On-going discussions are being held with the PSNI about accommodation;

- Stage One of the Roof Project procurement process has begun with the PPQ for the Design Team circulated to industry. The PQ returns are due back with the Assembly by 8 March 2012;

- The PPQ for the new Integrated Workplace Management System are due to be sent out within the next two weeks;

- Stage One (PPQ) of the Support Service Contract retender is now complete and the second stage will commence shortly.

14.2 Gareth McGrath advised SMG that the Speaker would lead a small delegation to Kosovo in March 2012.

15 AOB

15.1 Tony Logue asked SMG to consider the inclusion of Good Relations within Directorate Business Plans for 2012/13. It was agreed that Richard Stewart and Tony Logue would discuss this further outside the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 3.40pm.

The meeting reconvened at 12.05pm on Wednesday, 15 February 2012.

Apologies – John Stewart

16. Corporate Strategy Implementation Framework

16.1 SMG reviewed the Corporate Strategy Implementation Framework, including the approach to business planning and the identified strategic work strands. In relation to BEP it was agreed that a BEP Team remain in place to complete all business efficiency reviews with the same methodology as under the initial phase. Subject to some amendments the paper would now be submitted to the Commission.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

17 Assembly Leadership Forum

17.1 SMG noted the report of the ALF meeting (formerly referred to as the Core Management Group) held on 9 December 2011 and agreed that points regarding values raised at Annex B paragraph 2 be addressed as follows:

- the Organisational Development Strategy would consider suggestions regarding the display of values by management and the "unpacking" values;

- the Performance Management System would consider the promotion of values through PPAs; and

- the action plan arising from the Staff Survey would consider suggestions regarding team briefing and Clerk/DG’s comments boxes.

17.2 ALF members would be advised of the SMG consideration of the points raised.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

18 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place at 10.00am on Friday, 9 March 2012 in Room 106.

The meeting adjourned at 12.35pm.