SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

15 OCTOBER 2008 AT 9.30AM
IN ROOM 29,
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: **Mr. Trevor Reaney; Dr. Gareth McGrath; Mr. John Stewart; Mr. Richard Stewart; Mr. Stephen Welch;**

In attendance: **Mr. Hugh Widdis; (Agenda items 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, and 12)**
Mr. Tony Logue (Agenda items 5 and 10)
Mr Brian Moreland (Agenda item 6.1)
Mr David Johnston (Agenda items 6.2 and 6.3)
Mr Simon Burrowes (Agenda item 8.2)
Mr John Gibson (Agenda item 9.2)
Mr. Simon Kelly

1 APOLOGIES

1.1 No apologies were received.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

2.1 The minutes of the Secretariat Management Group (SMG) meeting held on 1 October 2008 were approved without amendment.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Issuing of papers to SMG

There was some discussion on the issuing of papers to Directors prior to SMG meetings to provide sufficient time to consider in advance. It was agreed that electronic versions of the papers would be circulated to SMG members once received by the Corporate Policy Unit. Hard copies would still be issued in the SMG packs two days prior to the relevant meeting.

ACTION: SIMON KELLY

3.2 Letter of Delegation

3.2.1 Trevor Reaney said that letters of delegation had been issued to all Directors. Further letters of delegation, relating to Procurement and Internal Audit, would be issued shortly.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

4 SMG ACTION POINTS

4.1 The SMG action points table was noted.

4.2 There was some discussion on the Assembly Dignity at Work policy. Richard Stewart and Hugh Widdis undertook to draft an explanatory note on the policy for Members. It was agreed that his note should be submitted to Commission for its consideration.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART/ HUGH WIDDIS

4.3 Richard Stewart undertook to liaise with Evan Hobson on the preparation of a paper on arrangements for support to the Pension Scheme Trustees.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

4.4 SMG members discussed current insurance cover arrangements in the Assembly. Richard Stewart undertook to prepare an overview paper on the subject for submission to SMG.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

4.5 Richard Stewart said that he would be submitting a paper on Value for Money arrangements to the SMG meeting on 26 November 2008.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

4.6 It was agreed that the next SMG meeting should be held in Annexe C.

ACTION: SIMON KELLY TO ARRANGE

4.7 Following some discussion on the Assembly security pass policy, Stephen Welch undertook to prepare a consolidated policy for the organisation.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

4.8 Trevor Reaney undertook to discuss the policy on “honorary” passes with the Speaker.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

4.9 There was some discussion on the staff magazine and it was noted that editorial control for the magazine will rest with the Press Office; the final draft of each edition will be submitted it the Clerk/ Director General for his approval.

4.10 Trevor Reaney undertook to liaise with Georgie Campbell, Head of Corporate Policy Unit, to discuss guidance for Directors on the content of the Core Brief.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

4.11 Richard Stewart reported that preparations were underway for the forthcoming Suppliers’ Event. He undertook to prepare a paper on success of the event for submission to the SMG meeting on 26 November 2008.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

4.12 John Stewart undertook to provide the Clerk/ Director General with a progress report on the group considering the administrative arrangements within the Assembly Secretariat for Devolution of Policing and Justice.

ACTION: JOHN STEWART

5 FUTURE SMG/COMMISSION BUSINESS

5.1 Tony Logue provided an overview to SMG members of agenda items for the Commission meeting of the 21 October, including:

- Equality Scheme Annual Report 2007 / 2008;
- SSRB update;
- Media Access;
- Provision of Procurement Services to NI Assembly;
- Engagement Strategy.

5.2 Tony Logue presented the Commission action points table to SMG members, and there was some discussion on the document.

6 GOVERNANCE ISSUES

6.1 Audit Update

6.1.1 Brian Moreland provided an overview to SMG of his Audit Update paper, which included information on:

- The recent Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) meeting;
- The Ormiston House project;
- The recent Risk Management workshop;
- The advertisements for non-executive SARC chairperson and member;
- Information assurance;
- Internal audit staffing arrangements.

6.1.2 Brian Moreland reported that he is organising an Inter-Parliamentary Audit Group meeting, which will be hosted at Parliament Buildings in December 2008. SMG were content for these plans to proceed.

6.1.3 Richard Stewart said that he had received the draft report on the Gifts and Hospitality review carried out by Internal Audit. He said that he would be issuing a response to the Head of Internal Audit by the end of October 2008. A draft Gifts and Hospitality policy will also be submitted to SMG for its consideration at this time. Richard Stewart said that there would be a number of corresponding issues in both documents.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

6.2 Risk Management Policy

6.2.1 SMG noted the draft risk management policy. David Johnston said that he had received a number of comments from Directors and fed them into the document.

6.2.2 Trevor Reaney reported that he would be meeting with Georgie Campbell and David Johnston to discuss the policy in detail, but asked for any comments on the document from SMG members.

6.2.3 There was some discussion on the policy and SMG member suggested a number of further amendments which David Johnston undertook to make.

ACTION: DAVID JOHNSTON

6.2.4 It was agreed that, once created, the Corporate Risk Register would be reviewed monthly by SMG.

ACTION: SIMON KELLY TO PLACE ON AGENDA

6.2.5 Trevor Reaney said that the amended Risk Management policy would be distributed to SMG members prior to the Risk Management workshop to be held on Thursday 23 October. Feedback on the second draft would then be given at the workshop.

6.2.6 It was agreed that all Directors should review their respective columns- re impact definitions- on page 10 of the Risk Management policy and return with comments at the Risk Management workshop.

ACTION: ALL DIRECTORS

6.3 Performance against Corporate Plan

6.3.1 SMG noted the table detailing Secretariat performance against the Assembly Corporate Plan as at September 2008.

6.3.2 There was some discussion on the meeting of deadlines and the co-ordination of actions in the Corporate Plan. It was agreed that this issue would be reviewed in more detail as a substantive agenda item at the next SMG meeting.

ACTION: SIMON KELLY TO PLACE ON AGENDA

7 OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT ISSUES

7.1 Outreach and Engagement strategy

7.1.1 Gareth McGrath provided SMG with an overview of his paper on the Outreach and Engagement Strategy.

7.1.2 It was noted that an earlier version of the Outreach and Engagement strategy had been approved by the Commission on 24 April 2008. Gareth McGrath said that his revised version would supercede the previous strategy document.

7.1.3 SMG discussed the content of the Outreach and Engagement Strategy and suggested a number of amendments, which Gareth McGrath undertook to make.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

7.1.4 Gareth McGrath undertook to produce a summary table of the Engagement Strategy recommendations, the proposed timetable and estimated costs.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

7.1.5 It was agreed that a copy of the strategy should be forwarded to Richard Good and Hugh Widdis for their consideration and comment.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

7.1.6 Gareth McGrath undertook to liaise with his Commission portfolio member to discuss the Engagement strategy. It was agreed that a presentation on the strategy should also be provided to the Commission at its meeting on 21 October 2008

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

7.2 Media Access

7.2.1 Gareth McGrath provided SMG with an overview of his paper on Media Access.

7.2.2 There was some discussion on the paper and a number of amendments were suggested, which Gareth McGrath undertook to make.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

7.2.3 It was agreed that, once amended, the paper should be submitted to the Commission for consideration at its meeting on 21 October 2008.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

8 HR ISSUES

8.1 Staff Briefing sessions

8.1.1 Trevor Reaney reported that he had made arrangements for two briefing sessions between staff and SMG members to be held on 22 and 24 October 2008 in the Long Gallery. He said that an email had been issued to staff inviting them to attend and detailing some of the issues that he intended to raise at the sessions.

8.1.2 SMG considered a number of other issues that could be discussed at the event, and arrangements for the sessions.

8.1.3 Trevor Reaney and Richard Stewart undertook to liaise with the Head of Personnel prior to the staff briefing sessions, to discuss a number of HR issues to be included in the briefing.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY/ RICHARD STEWART

8.1.4 SMG members outlined issues raised at recent Directorate team briefing sessions, including:

- First aiders in business areas;
- Assembly structures charts;
- New starts and leavers;
- Internal promotion.

8.1.5 There was some discussion on these issues and it was agreed that all line managers should make their staff aware of First Aiders in their business areas.

8.1.6 It was agreed that an updated organisation structures chart for the entire Secretariat should be produced and placed on AssISt.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.1.7 Richard Stewart and Gareth McGrath undertook to consider methods of informing staff of new starts and people leaving the Assembly. It was suggested that this could be done via a weekly email to all secretariat staff, or by placing the information on the AssISt homepage.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART/ GARETH MCGRATH

8.1.8 Richard Stewart reported that he has received a draft policy on Internal Promotion; he is currently considering the document, and will update SMG on its progress shortly.

8.2 Urgent/ Ad hoc communications

8.2.1 Simon Burrowes provided SMG with an overview of the Internal Communications Working Group's (ICWG) paper on Urgent/ Ad hoc communications, and the timetable for internal communications measures in the Assembly.

8.2.2 There was some discussion on the various tools available to communicate information to staff, other than via Team Briefing, the Clerk's Monthly Report to the Commission and the staff magazine.

8.2.3 It was agreed that there was an onus on line managers to deal with business-related rumours brought to their attention by staff members.

8.2.4 Simon Burrowes said that ICWG felt that that minutes of meetings held in the Assembly were written in a clear and unambiguous fashion.

8.2.5 It was agreed that the timetable for internal communications measures in the Assembly should be published on AssISt.

ACTION: SIMON BURROWES

8.2.6 Simon Burrowes undertook to draft a paragraph on Internal Communications for inclusion in the Clerk/Director General's address at the staff briefings on 22 and 24 October 2008.

ACTION: SIMON BURROWES

8.2.7 Simon Burrowes reported that he would be giving a presentation on internal communications at forthcoming induction sessions for new staff, week commencing 20 October 2008.

8.2.8 SMG agreed that this urgent ad/hoc communications paper should be incorporated into the other Assembly internal communications strategy documents.

ACTION: SIMON BURROWES

8.3 Proposed recruitment of Assembly Clerks and Assistant Clerks

8.3.1 Simon Kelly declared an interest and left the room for the duration of this agenda item.

8.3.2 SMG discussed John Stewart's paper on the proposed recruitment of Assembly Clerks (AC) and Assistant Assembly Clerks (AAC).

8.3.3 It was agreed that Richard Stewart would incorporate the AC and AAC competitions into the recruitment schedule and consider the potential impact on the timeframe of the schedule. He will then submit a revised recruitment schedule to SMG for discussion and approval. The additional competitions should have minimal impact on the schedule.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

9 PROCUREMENT ISSUES

9.1 Provision of Procurement services to NI Assembly

9.1.1 Richard Stewart gave an overview of his paper on the provision of procurement services to the NI Assembly and the retention of an in house source.

9.1.2 SMG noted the review of the NI Assembly's procurement arrangements by a team from the Welsh Assembly.

9.1.3 SMG accepted and agreed to the recommendations in Richard Stewart's paper and it was agreed that the document should be submitted to the Assembly Commission for consideration at its meeting on 21 October 2008.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

9.2 Procurement compliance report

9.2.1 John Gibson provided SMG with an overview of his Procurement Compliance report paper. He also provided SMG with a background to:

- The procurement database,
- AP1 forms;
- Plans for the implementation of a purchase order system; and
- The current sequencing for the procurement of services by the Assembly.

9.2.2 SMG noted that procurement non-compliance remains high. John Gibson said that he would soon be undertaking an assurance exercise for significant non-compliance in the Assembly.

ACTION: JOHN GIBSON

9.2.3 Trevor Reaney asked if it was possible to separate "actual" and "technical" instances of non-compliance in the next Procurement Compliance Report to SMG. John Gibson said that this would be possible and undertook to ensure that this would be done.

ACTION: JOHN GIBSON

9.2.4 There was some discussion on how non-compliance can be identified in each Directorate, and John Gibson undertook to provide Directorate-specific compliance reports.

ACTION: JOHN GIBSON

10 EQUALITY SCHEME ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2007-2008

10.1 Tony Logue provided an overview to SMG members of the Equality Scheme Annual Report for 2007/08.

10.2 Trevor Reaney noted that the Assembly's Equality Scheme for the Assembly was only approved in February 2008, and consequently the Annual Report was brief. It is hoped that a more substantive report can be delivered to the Equality Commission NI for the period 2008/09.

10.3 SMG noted the contents of the report and agreed that it should be submitted to the Assembly Commission for its approval, and then forwarded to the Equality Commission NI.

ACTION: TONY LOGUE

11 UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 It was agreed that, due to time constraints, discussion on this issue would be deferred to the next SMG meeting, on 12 November 2008 (subsequently brought forward to 6 November).

ACTION: SIMON KELLY TO PLACE ON AGENDA

12 CURRENT FOI REQUESTS

12.1 SMG noted the FOI requests received since its meeting on 17 September 2008.

13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

13.1 Eurest Pay Award

13.1.1 Stephen Welch provided SMG with an overview of the Eurest Pay award proposal, to be submitted to the Commission for consideration.

13.1.2 SMG members agreed that they supported the pay increase proposal in the context it had been provided, and that it should be submitted to the Commission for approval at its meeting on 21 October 2008.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

13.2 Christmas Staff Quiz

13.2.1 There was some discussion on arrangements for a Christmas staff quiz.

13.2.2 SMG members agreed to support the organisation of a Christmas staff quiz and that some prizes for the event would be supplied by SMG members.

ACTION: ALL DIRECTORS

14 FUTURE MEETINGS

To take place at 9.30am in Room 29 (unless stated otherwise) on:

- Thursday 6 November (at 1.30pm in Annexe C)
- Wednesday 26 November
- Wednesday 10 December (at 2.30pm)