SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

18 DECEMBER 2008 AT 2.30PM
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 1 to 9; 12 to 16);**
Mr. Tony Logue (agenda items 5, 6 and 14);
Ms. Georgie Campbell (agenda items 7, 10 and 11);
Mr. Simon Burrowes (agenda item 7);
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 26 November 2008 were approved, subject to a number of amendments.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 There was some discussion on the issuing of SMG papers. It was agreed that:

- All papers should be cleared by the Clerk/ Director General before being submitted for SMG consideration;
- The secretary to SMG should be made aware of the papers;
- All papers should have a relevant covering note;
- Further consideration will be given to the advance circulation of SMG papers to senior staff.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

4 SMG ACTION POINTS

4.1 The SMG action points table was noted and some amendments were suggested, which Simon Kelly undertook to make.

ACTION: SIMON KELLY

5 FUTURE SMG/COMMISSION BUSINESS

5.1 Tony Logue provided an overview to SMG members of agenda items for the Commission meeting of the 13 January 2009, including:

- SSRB;
- Recruitment programme;
- Media Access;
- Engagement strategy- next steps.

5.2 There was some discussion on Assembly questions due for imminent answer by the Commission.

6 EQUALITY SCHEME TRAINING PLAN

6.1 Tony Logue provided an overview of the paper on the Equality Scheme Training Plan, including a timetable for equality training for all Secretariat staff.

6.2 SMG were content that this training plan should be taken forward, and agreed that all staff should avail of the training.

6.3 Tony Logue undertook to review the scheduling for the training due to take place in early January 2009. It was agreed that the duration and content of the course should also be appropriately tailored for each session.

ACTION: TONY LOGUE

6.4 It was agreed that SMG members would undergo the equality training in a joint session, to be co-ordinated by the Commission Office and Simon Kelly.

ACTION: TONY LOGUE/ SIMON KELLY

7 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

7.1 Simon Burrowes, chairperson of the Internal Communications Working Group (ICWG) provided SMG with an update on internal communications activities in the NI Assembly.

7.2 He reported that ICWG had met most recently on 16 December 2008. Agenda items for discussion had included: a review of the NI Assembly Internal Communications Strategy; and team briefing feedback.

7.3 Simon Burrowes highlighted other recent internal communications activities in the NI Assembly, including:

- Two team briefing exercises;
- Staff briefing sessions with the Clerk/ Director General and Directors;
- The production of two editions of the new staff magazine;
- The Clerk's Monthly Report to the Commission for November 2008;
- A briefing for seconded staff in the Long Gallery.

7.4 Simon Burrowes paid particular tribute to Stephanie Mallon and other Press Office staff for their hard work in producing the staff magazine. He said that an exercise to review the magazine would be carried out in June 2009.

ACTION: SIMON BURROWES/ GEORGIE CAMPBELL

7.5 Team Briefing

7.5.1 There was some discussion on Team Briefing in the NI Assembly. It was noted that not all Team Briefing sessions were being delivered within the specified timescales. SMG noted the need to carry out Team Briefings promptly, and the importance of face-to-face communications.

7.5.2 The need for the prompt return of Team Briefing feedback form to the Corporate Policy Unit was also highlighted. It was agreed that a Team Briefing "issues raised" section should be established on AssISt.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

7.5.3 Georgie Campbell provided an overview of plans to update the Internal Communications page on AssISt.

7.5.4 Simon Burrowes reported that a review of the Team Briefing process would be carried out in June 2009, and may be done in conjunction with the review of the staff magazine.

ACTION: SIMON BURROWES/ GEORGIE CAMPBELL

7.6 Internal communications strategy

7.6.1 Simon Burrowes provided an overview of progress on the implementation of the NI Assembly Communications strategy. He reported that the implementation of all 23 actions of the strategy is progressing well; however, he highlighted some issues of note relating to six of the actions:

- Timelines for the main steps in relation to the separation project in 2010 remain outstanding. Richard Stewart undertook to consider this issue.

  ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

- Some staff had raised the issue of visibility of senior management. All SMG members agreed to give consideration to any activities to ensure good visibility of senior management.

  ACTION: ALL SMG MEMBERS

- The new NI Assembly corporate identity is due to agreed by June 2009. Gareth McGrath reported that he is currently considering this issue, and will discuss it with SMG at its meeting in January 2009.

  ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH/ SIMON KELLY TO PLACE ON AGENDA

- Internal communications training is due to be provided to all managers by the end of September 2009. Richard Stewart undertook to review progress on the provision of this training.

  ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

- The review of the website is underway, but the deadline for completion of the review in September 2009, as outlined in the Internal Communications Strategy, will not be met.

- The current Internal Communications Strategy runs until September 2010, and consideration should be given to carrying out an Internal Communications audit prior to this date to inform a new strategy.

7.7 Simon Burrowes stressed that there will be a lot of demand for information on human resources (HR) issues related to the separation project in 2010. He said that the regularity of communication of information on these issues will be an important issue for ICWG to address.

7.8 Trevor Reaney said that he would be holding another round of staff briefing sessions in the Long Gallery in January 2009, to update staff on HR and other issues. There was some discussion on other issues that might be raised at these briefings. It was agreed that the next set of Team Briefing feedback forms will help to inform what issues should be discussed.

7.9 It was agreed that a representative from the Central Personnel Group should be present at the next briefing for seconded staff.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART TO NOTE

8 HR ISSUES

8.1 Internal promotion/lateral movement

8.1.1 Richard Stewart provided an overview of his paper on internal promotion/lateral movement in the NI Assembly. He said that the paper related to how vacancies were filled in the Assembly, either via internal and external recruitment competitions, or by lateral movement of staff.

8.1.2 Richard Stewart highlighted the recommendation in the paper that the potential for internal promotions in all future competitions be considered on a case by case basis.

8.1.3 There was some discussion on the chart at appendix A which outlined the process for filling vacancies in the Assembly. A number of amendments were suggested, which Richard Stewart undertook to make.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.1.4 It was agreed that the Head of Resources should proceed to develop procedures to give effect to the decision made by the Commission to agree, in principle, to a mixed economy of internal promotion and open recruitment.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.1.5 Hugh Widdis provided legal advice on the matter.

8.1.6 SMG agreed that the maximum opportunity should be provided to staff for promotion and development within the constraints of equality legislation and good practice.

8.1.7 There was some discussion on the different types of lateral move that may be available. It was agreed that they would be either:

- Management initiated vacancies, dictated by business need; or
- A staff initiated request.

8.1.8 It was agreed that the procedure for handling individual staff requests for lateral movement should be covered either in this policy, or in a separate document.

8.1.9 SMG suggested some further amendments to the paper which Richard Stewart undertook to make. He will then consult with the Employees Relations Group on the document and come back to SMG with a final draft.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.2 Work Life Balance

8.2.1 Richard Stewart provided an overview of the paper on Work Life Balance. He said that an earlier draft of this paper had been submitted to the Interim Management Board (IMB) for consideration in June 2008. Following discussion by IMB, a number of amendments had been made, and this paper was the revised version arising from that discussion.

8.2.2 There was some discussion on the following issues, as detailed in the paper:

- Long hours culture;
- Work patterns;
- Caring responsibilities;
- Staff morale; and
- Compliance.

8.2.3 A number of amendments were suggest to the paper, including:

- The unique nature of NI Assembly business should be highlighted at the start of the policy;
- The title of the document should be amended to reflect its broader application beyond work life balance.

Richard Stewart undertook to make these amendments.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.2.4 There was some discussion on staff sickness absence levels and targets. The current level of 11.1 days annual sick absence was noted. It was suggested that a target of nine days be adopted.

8.2.5 SMG agreed the principle of taking a more active positive approach to the link between work-life balance and the efficiency, effectiveness and health of the NI Assembly workforce.

8.2.6 It was agreed that the “mid-term actions” in Appendix D of the paper would be incorporated into the NI Assembly-specific terms and conditions as part of the separation project in 2010.

8.2.7 It was agreed that progress any “immediate actions” in Appendix D should now be commenced.

8.2.8 Richard Stewart undertook to consult with the Employee Relations Group on this issue.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.3 Recruitment schedule- update

8.3.1 SMG noted the revised recruitment schedule. There was some discussion on the schedule. The following amendments were suggested and agreed, which Richard Stewart undertook to make:

- A “status” column should be added to the schedule;
- The dates for Head of Support Services (Properties), Head of Security Services and Head of Property services dates should be amended;
- The Education Officer post will now be advertised in the second week of February 2009;
- The commencement of the deputy Head of Finance competition will be deferred;
- A deputy Head of Procurement competition should be added;
- A Good Relations Officer competition should be added, to commence in February 2009.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.3.2 It was agreed that the revised recruitment schedule would be placed on AssISt.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

8.4 Recruitment competition reserve lists

8.4.1 SMG discussed the issue of reserve lists for recruitment competitions in the NI Assembly. It was agreed that future reserve lists will be retained for 12 months.

9 GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY POLICY

9.5 Richard Stewart provided SMG with an overview of the draft Gifts and Hospitality policy, and the management response to the Internal Audit review of Gifts and Hospitality policy compliance in the NI Assembly.

9.6 There was some discussion on the documents and a number of amendments were suggested, which Richard Stewart undertook to make.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

9.7 It was agreed that the management response should be issued to the Head of Internal Audit, subject to a number of amendments, and then to the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee for information.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

9.8 The draft Gifts and Hospitality policy for all Secretariat staff was approved by SMG. Trevor Reaney said that he will inform the Commission of the approval of this policy in his Monthly Report in January 2009.

9.9 It was further agreed that a gifts and hospitality policy relating to office holders will also be produced and forwarded to the Commission in due course.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

The meeting reconvened at 9.30 am on Friday 19 December with Georgie Campbell substituting for Simon Kelly. All SMG members were present.

10 PROPERTIES ISSUES

10.1 Security Pass Policy

This draft policy was approved subject to:

- A reference to the policy in relation to the use of mobile phones being included in the title;
- Legal advice in respect of an issue related to mobile phones.

It was noted that the Clerk/Director General had considered the issue of honorary passes in discussion with the Speaker and they agreed that this practice should cease. The Assembly Commission will be notified of this in the next Monthly Report.

ACTION: SIMON KELLY TO NOTE

10.2 Review of Security Issues

SMG members considered the recommendations in this paper and it was agreed that the Clerk/DG would meet with TUS early in the New Year to address their concerns and establish a way forward.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH TO ARRANGE MEETING WITH TUS

11 ENGAGEMENT ISSUES

11.1 Media Access

It was agreed that the proposals contained in this draft paper would be submitted to the Assembly Commission subject to the arrangements for parking described in paragraph 26 being agreed with the Director of Properties.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH/ GARETH MCGRATH TO DISCUSS

11.2 Engagement Strategy: Next Steps

The draft paper was approved for submission to the Assembly Commission subject to the timetable at Table A being updated.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

11.3 Protocol for communicating urgent issues

It was agreed that the protocol proposed in this paper be implemented and that the Head of Legal Services should be added to the list of post holders to be involved in the consideration of urgent issues at paragraph 5.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

11.4 Assembly Website Projects

It was agreed that the Commission and the SMG members should attend a demonstration of the new website homepage. It was suggested that this is arranged to take place at a future Commission meeting.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

12 UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 The implementation of Review recommendations table was noted.

12.2 Trevor Reaney explained that any review recommendations that have not been achieved by March 2009 will be mainstreamed into the revised NI Assembly Corporate Plan for 2008/11.

13 TEAM BRIEFING FEEDBACK

14. This issue was discussed at agenda item seven.

14 CURRENT FOI REQUESTS

14.1 SMG noted the FOI requests received since its meeting on 26 November 2008.

15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

15.1 Simon Kelly updated the group on forthcoming deadlines for submissions for the next SMG agenda, Core Brief returns, and the Clerk's Monthly Report to the Commission.

15.2 Supplier Risk

15.2.1 Richard Stewart provided of the paper on supplier risk in the current economic conditions.

15.2.2 It was agreed that all Directors should identity their key contracts and suppliers, and liaise with the head of Procurement to review supplier stability.

ACTION: ALL SMG MEMBERS

16 FUTURE MEETINGS

17.1 To take place at 10.00am in Room 29 (unless stated otherwise) on:

- Wednesday 21 January 2009;
- Wednesday 4 February;
- Wednesday 18 February;
- Wednesday 4 March;
- Wednesday 18 March;
- Wednesday 1 April.