SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP
9.30AM ON FRIDAY 10 JULY 2009
IN ROOM 29, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present:	**Mr. Trevor Reaney; Mr. Richard Stewart; Mr. Stephen Welch; *Ms Sheila McClelland; Mr. John Stewart.**
In attendance:	**Mr. Hugh Widdis; Mr. Tony Logue (agenda items 6, 7, 8 and 9); Ms Alison Ross (agenda item 11); Susie Brown (agenda item 10); Ms Georgie Campbell**
	*** deputising for Dr Gareth McGrath. Ms McClelland was not present for discussion of agenda item 14.3**

1 APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies were received from Gareth McGrath

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2.1 No interests were declared.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1 The minutes of the Secretariat Management Group (SMG) meeting held on 12 June 2009 were approved with the following amendment:

Paragraph 10.1
Amend to read "SMG noted the proposed format of the Log of Outstanding Audit Recommendations table."

4 MATTERS ARISING

4.1 These were dealt with during discussion of the relevant substantive agenda item.

5 SMG ACTION POINTS

5.1 The Clerk/DG asked Directors to notify Georgie Campbell of any updates to the list of Action Points.

ACTION: DIRECTORS

6 FUTURE COMMISSION BUSINESS

6.1 Tony Logue said that due to volume of business, there is likely to be a second Commission meeting in September possibly on 28/29 or 30 September.

6.2 SMG asked that the following issues be added to the Commission's current workplan for discussion at one of the September meetings:

- Annual Accounts and NI Audit Office Report to those charged with governance (including the NIAO recommendation that a non executive member should be appointed to the Assembly Commission)
- Litigation Update
- Space Management Policy
- Assembly Expo

ACTION: TONY LOGUE

As a consequence, the Assembly Expo should be added to the agenda for the first SMG meeting in September.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH AND SIMON KELLY TO NOTE

6.3 SMG also asked that the review of the Members' Financial Services Handbook be included as a single item agenda for the second September Commission meeting.

ACTION: TONY LOGUE

6.4 Tony Logue advised that he would be arranging induction for Ms Carmel Hanna who will replace Mr Alban Maginness as a Commission member. He will seek contributions/input from Directors.

ACTION: TONY LOGUE

6.5 Mr Logue undertook to confirm whether Ms Hanna will inherit the Directorate "shadowed" by Mr Maginness.

ACTION: TONY LOGUE

7 CURRENT FOI REQUESTS/ASSEMBLY QUESTIONS

7.1 Mr Logue reported that an Exemption on the grounds of future publication will be applied in relation to 72/09 about the Office Costs Allowances of the Speaker and Deputy Speakers. Responses are being prepared to FOI queries 71/09 and 72/09 as well as two recently received queries, one in relation to the Assistant Assembly Clerk competition and a second relating to the DEL Committee.

8 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY PLAN

(Taken with Agenda Item 9 below)

9 IMPLEMENTATION OF INFORMATION ASSURANCE POLICY

8/9.1 It was agreed that discussion of these papers should be deferred to allow for further consideration of the issues involved. The Clerk/DG said that he will meet with the Clerk to the Commission and the Information Standards Officer during the Summer Recess to discuss the proposals and that the Director of Engagement should attend this meeting. If necessary, he will convene a special meeting of SMG before the end of the Recess to discuss these papers.

ACTION: CLERK/DG
SIMON KELLY TO NOTE

8/9.2 Director of Legal Services highlighted the importance of recording any critical decisions which may have implications for future litigation. He undertook to produce a guidance note on this subject.

ACTION: HUGH WIDDIS

10 PREPARATION OF THE NI ASSEMBLY ANNUAL REPORT 2008/2009

10.1 The Head of Communications described proposals for the publication of an Annual Report in September.

10.2 The Clerk/DG said that the recent publication of the Annual Report and Accounts fulfilled the Assembly's statutory obligations. He said that consideration should be given to the purpose and content of a further document. It was agreed that the issues to be addressed should include:

- The need for such a publication in view of the fact that statutory obligations had been met.
- The purpose of the publication e.g. a description of the activities of the Secretariat or a report on the work of the Assembly as an institution or both.
- The “ownership” of the document and the approvals required. It was suggested that the Commission and Committee Chairs and Assembly Members should be asked to approve the document.
- The audience and the desired effect of the document.
- The format and size of the document. It was suggested that this should be in the form of a brief review of the parliamentary year.
- The content of the document. It was suggested that this should include the work of plenaries and of each Committee as well as the major activities of the Secretariat.
- The publication date. It was suggested that this should be in mid Autumn possibly at the planned Speaker’s Conference.

10.3 The Head of Communications was asked to submit proposals for the format and publication of a Review of the Parliamentary Year to the next meeting of SMG.

ACTION: HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS
SIMON KELLY TO NOTE

11 HR ISSUES

11.1 The Genesis Project

11.1.1 Highlight Report

Alison Ross reported on recent meetings with Direct Recruit Secondees (DRSs). Further communication will be issued once the feedback from DRSs has been fully considered.

11.1.2 Timeline

Alison Ross reported that there are currently no areas of concern in relation to the timetable for the project.

11.1.3 Project Board

It was agreed that the members of SMG together with the Director of Legal Services will act as the Project Board for the Genesis Project and that issues relating to the project will be discussed as a separate agenda item at SMG meetings. For the purpose of these discussions, SMG will be referred to as the Project Board. If necessary the Project Board will meet during the Summer Recess. All references in the Highlight Report to SMG should be amended to read “Project Board”.

ACTION: HEAD OF HR
SIMON KELLY TO NOTE

11.2 HR Circular HRC/07/09

11.2.1 It was agreed that this circular should be redrafted to make it clear that any institutional support to job applicants is prohibited for example formal and informal training events. The revised circular should emphasise that there is no prohibition on individuals, with the exception of panel members, helping other individuals on a personal basis in relation to job applications or interview techniques. The revised circular to be approved by SMG prior to issue.

ACTION: HEAD OF HR

11.2.2 It was agreed that all job applicants should receive advice in relation to the Competence Based Interview process via Recruitment documentation, the website etc.

ACTION: HEAD OF HR

11.3 Internal promotions/lateral transfers

SMG agreed the actions proposed in relation to drafting the policy. Further drafts of the Filling Vacancies and Deputising policies will be submitted to the September meeting of SMG.

ACTION: HEAD OF HR
SIMON KELLY TO NOTE

11.4 Annual Increments

The Clerk/DG stated that until separation is achieved, the Assembly Secretariat is tied to the NICS pay arrangements. Indications are that the 2009 Pay Award, which will be effective from 1 August 2009, may take some time to achieve. He proposed that given that the Secretariat has a well developed pay structure under the Interim Starting Pay Policy, the Performance Management System should be used to process annual increments by moving all fully satisfactory performers up one spine point. This will be an interim arrangement pending the outcome of the NICS Pay Award.

This proposal was agreed by SMG members. The Clerk/DG said subject to approval by TUS, he hoped that the incremental increases will be reflected in August salaries. The Clerk/DG will inform the Commission of this interim arrangement in September.

ACTION: CLERK/DG

11.5 Salary Scale Differentials

The Clerk/DG reported that in two of the salary scales, AG2 and AG7, there is less than the required 5% differential between the minimum of the scale and the maximum of the lower grade. The minimum points of both these scales are being adjusted to increase the differential to the required 5%.

11.6 Recruitment Competition for Assembly Clerks
John Stewart, Director of Clerking and Reporting said that there is a need for a further recruitment competition for Assembly Clerks. The reserve list has been exhausted and there are expected to be vacancies in the coming months. Mr Stewart will discuss the timing of the competition with Richard Stewart, Director of Resources.

ACTION: DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES TO ADD A COMPETITION FOR ASSEMBLY CLERKS TO THE RECRUITMENT SCHEDULE

11.7 Personal Secretary Competition
It was reported that the advertisements for Personal Secretary posts may appear in the press at the end of July/beginning of August. The job specification is currently with TUS for comments. The Director of Clerking and Reporting will chair the selection panel.

12 BUSINESS CASE TEMPLATE

12.1 It was agreed that the business case template proposed should be simplified. The first category should relate to expenditure up to £25K which can be approved by Directors rather than SMG. The business case template should include the following:

- The capability of electronic completion.
- Drop down help screens.
- A question which asks what the impact/risk will be if the proposed action is not implemented.

12.2 It was agreed that expenditure up to £100K will require a “medium” business case whilst a full business case will be required for expenditure over £100K. In both cases, SMG approval will be required.

12.2 The Director of Resources undertook to prepare a revised business case template for approval by SMG.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART
SIMON KELLY TO NOTE

13 REVIEW OF STATIONERY OFFICE: NEWSPAPERS

13.1 The proposals for the reduction in the number of newspapers purchased by the Assembly were agreed. It was also agreed that these should be further reviewed when the RSS feeds are installed.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

14.1 Business case for new Properties post
The Director of Properties submitted a case for a new post at Assembly Grade 6 level. The postholder will be responsible for ensuring compliance with all relevant legislation and for the management of contracts for maintenance work. The new post will reduce fees paid to CPD and improve the quality of service. This was agreed.

14.2 Directorate name change

14.2.1 The Director of Properties said that the current name of his Directorate does not reflect its role. He proposed the use of "Facilities" which is in line with the practice in other organisations. The Director said that he had consulted informally with individual Commission members who supported the change. It was agreed that the Directorate should be renamed the "Facilities Directorate".

14.2.2 The Director also proposed the return to the use of the title "Keeper of the House" which he said had also received the informal support of Commission members. This was agreed

14.2.3 The Clerk/DG asked for a note of the changes. He said that he will inform the Commission of these in September.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH
TREVOR REANEY

14.3 Special Bonus Scheme nominations
A discussion took place in relation to nominations under the Special Bonus Scheme. This is the subject of a separate note.

14.4 Engagement of additional resource
The Director of Resources reported that he will be reviewing the appointment to the Research Office of a seconded member of staff to deal with geographical information services in conjunction with the Director of Engagement.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

14.5 Manpower Planning

The Director of Resources said that he will bring a paper on Manpower Planning to SMG in September.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART
SIMON KELLY TO NOTE

14.6 Deputy for Clerk/DG during leave periods

The Clerk/DG said that it is not his intention to appoint a deputy to cover his absences (e.g. on annual leave). Instead issues should be dealt with by Directors on duty working together or by the appropriate Director as they arise.

15 FUTURE MEETINGS

15.1 Off site meeting

There will be an off site meeting of SMG on Tuesday 1 September. No secretarial support will be required.

15.2 Further meetings

Dates to be agreed.