SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 12 MARCH 2010 AT 9.06am
ROOM 29, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present:	**Trevor Reaney** **Ken Eccles** **Gareth McGrath** **John Stewart** **Richard Stewart/John Gibson ***
In attendance:	**Hugh Widdis** **Jim Beatty** **Tony Logue (Agenda items 6, 7, 8, 9)** **Maria Bannon (Agenda item 8)** **Martina Dalton (Agenda item 9)** **Sinead Lappin (Agenda items 10, 11)** **Sebastian Mingout (Agenda item 13)** **David Lynn (Agenda item 14)** **Georgie Campbell (Agenda items 21, 22, 23)**
	*Richard Stewart left the meeting at 12.10pm. John Gibson attended for the remainder of the meeting on Richard's behalf.

1 APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Stephen Welch. Ken Eccles attended on Stephen's behalf.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (26 February 2010)

The minutes of the meeting of 26 February 2010 were approved.

4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

5 SMG ACTION POINTS

The Action points were reviewed and the list was updated.

ACTION: JIM BEATTY

6 FUTURE SMG/COMMISSION BUSINESS

The issues currently scheduled for the Commission meeting on 25 March are:

- Clerk’s Key Issues Update
- Corporate Business Plan 2010 – 2011
- Policy on Marriage Ceremonies and Wedding Receptions
- Draft Language Policy
- Update on Members’ Pay, Pensions and Financial Support
- Members’ Pension Scheme
- Draft Charities Policy
- Legislative Programme
- NIA/PSNI SLA
- Public Attitude Survey
- Accommodation Issues
- Business Continuity Policy Document

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY
TONY LOGUE

7 CURRENT FOI REQUESTS/ASSEMBLY QUESTIONS

These were noted.

8 DRAFT LANGUAGE POLICY

Maria Bannon explained the background to introducing this policy and identified a range of issues that are likely to need to be addressed, eg, signage, translations and information. In some instances, this policy will bring together existing practices.

SMG discussed the proposed policy and identified some amendments. It was agreed that the draft policy would be amended and issued to SMG members for consideration before referring the paper to the next Commission meeting.

ACTION: TONY LOGUE
MARIA BANNON

9 DRAFT DATA PROTECTION POLICY

Martina Dalton explained the need for a policy on data protection as the Assembly is required to properly and legally manage the personal data held throughout the organisation. There is an ongoing audit to identify the nature and location of data held.

SMG discussed the proposed policy, including the online training, and identified some amendments. Subject to these amendments, the draft policy was agreed.

10 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT DRAFT ACTION PLAN

Sinead Lappin explained that following SMG's approval of a Learning and Development Strategy in September 2009, a draft Action Plan had been developed. SMG had considered the draft Plan in January 2010 and suggested a number of amendments which had been incorporated into the paper before SMG today. The Clerking and Reporting Directorate already had a Learning and Development co-ordinator who was very effective in delivering the requirements for that Directorate. It was planned to roll this model out across all Directorates.

SMG discussed the draft Action Plan and identified some amendments. Subject to these amendments, the draft Action Plan was agreed.

11 DRAFT VETTING POLICY

Sinead Lappin said that SMG had considered a draft vetting policy in January 2010 but a number of amendments had been identified which were incorporated into this paper. While a basic check is carried out on all staff joining the Assembly, it was recognised that individual posts may require a higher level of check. It was also proposed to set up a Vetting Review Panel which would advise and decide on related issues.

SMG discussed the proposed policy and identified some further amendments. It was agreed that TUS should be consulted on the amended policy and the paper brought back to SMG before consideration by the Commission.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART
SINEAD LAPPIN

12 IT STRATEGY

Richard Stewart spoke to the draft Information Systems Strategy and draft Information & Communication Technology Strategic Exploitation documents. These documents derive from the 'The Assembly's Vision for Exploiting Information' (May 2000) and propose the way forward on a range of IS/IT issues.

It was agreed that SMG members would forward their comments on the documents to Richard Stewart. The May 2000 'Vision' would be updated and the various documents would then be brought together to include costs and other resources. An amended document would be brought back to a future SMG meeting.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

13 STATIONERY

Sebastian Mingout told SMG that recent changes to the Stationery Office procedures, such as linking costs with individual cost centres have produced savings and it was now proposed to devolve the budgets for stationery, totalling £125k, to individual budget holders. Purchasing would still be done centrally.

SMG discussed the proposal but considered that there would be insufficient benefits to justify the transfer of the budget for 2010/11. Further consideration should be given for 2011/12. It was agreed that levels of authorisation for stationery should be reviewed.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

14 ACCOMMODATION ISSUES

David Lynn updated SMG on the proposed accommodation work to be carried out over the Summer Recess. It is planned that this would provide additional committee rooms and offices.

While SMG was content with the proposals, there was a need to ensure that suitable accommodation would be available for those meetings currently held in the rooms to be changed. The paper would be amended as agreed and brought to the next Commission meeting.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

Richard Stewart left the meeting at 12.10pm. John Gibson replaced Richard for the remainder of the meeting.

15 BUILDING SECURITY

SMG discussed a number of measures which may be required to improve the security of the building. These could be escalated depending on the level of threat.

It was agreed that the paper should be amended as discussed and brought to the next Commission meeting.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

16 SECURITY RESOURCES

Ken Eccles told SMG that following the decision for responsibility for Front of House staff to be retained within the Facilities Directorate, a review of the resources required to carry out all of the roles, including reception in Parliament Buildings and Annexe C, had been completed. This review recommended that three additional staff would be required.

SMG considered the proposal and it was agreed that some further information regarding comparative costs and numbers of staff was required. A revised paper will be brought back to SMG.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

17 MAJOR INCIDENT/BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Ken Eccles explained that the draft policy had been before SMG previously and a number of amendments had been identified which were incorporated into this document.

SMG discussed the revised proposal and some further concerns were raised, eg, resources and levels of responsibility. It was agreed that, after amending, the paper should be brought back to SMG.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

18 MARRIAGE CEREMONIES AND RECEPTIONS IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Gareth McGrath told SMG that weddings involving a religious service are currently permitted within Parliament Buildings but civil marriages and partnerships cannot be held as this is not an approved location. If approval was obtained, it is likely that the building would be available to everyone. Wedding receptions are currently catered for within Parliament Buildings but not all costs are charged.

SMG discussed the recommendations within the paper and agreed, subject to some amendments, that the matter should be brought to the next Commission meeting.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

19 PUBLIC ATTITUDE SURVEY

SMG considered the preliminary findings of the Ipsos MORI survey which had been carried out as part of the Engagement Strategy. The findings would be used as a benchmark for future surveys.

It was agreed that the findings should be brought to the next Commission meeting.

ACTION: GARETH MCGRATH

20 GUIDANCE ON PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF VALUES

It was agreed to defer discussion on this item until the next SMG meeting when Richard Stewart was available to present the paper

ACTION: JIM BEATTY

21 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

SMG considered and updated the Register.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

22 DRAFT CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN 2010 – 2011

Georgie Campbell spoke to the recent amendments to the latest draft Plan. Subject to some further amendments, SMG agreed that the draft Plan should be brought to the next Commission meeting.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

23 DRAFT CORPORATE CORRESPONDENCE SERVICE STANDARDS

Georgie Campbell advised that one comment had been received from Heads of Business on the proposed guidance.

SMG considered the guidance and agreed that this should be issued to business areas other than committees on how to respond promptly and correctly with the corporate work of the Secretariat and Commission.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

24 PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Following on from the off-site meeting in September 2010, SMG considered an amended paper on future challenges. It was agreed to bring the paper as a discussion document to the Commission.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

25 ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ASSEMBLY

This issue arises from an objective within the Corporate Business Plan 2010/2011 to develop a methodology for assessing the effectiveness of the Assembly. Hugh Widdis spoke to his paper on the way forward. It was agreed that the Inter-Parliamentary Union standards, amended to the Assembly's particular needs, would be the preferred methodology. SMG will consider the issue again at a future meeting and then forward to the Commission, perhaps at an off-site meeting.

ACTION: HUGH WIDDIS

26 UPDATES

(a) Directorates

Gareth McGrath said that the Red Bull Formula 1 racing team and car would be visiting the Stormont Estate on Saturday 20 March 2010.

(b) Financial Report

Richard Stewart reported that there had been a 6.1% underspend at the end of February which exceeded the target of 5%. However, March is traditionally a month with significant expenditure which should result in a reduced underspend.

(c) Legislation Programme

John Stewart said that two new Executive Bills had been introduced in the past month with another five to seven bills likely by the end of April/early May. A further eighteen bills may be introduced before the summer recess but any slippage could see committees unable to complete consultation exercises during the recess period. All statutory committees, except for the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure are now actively engaged in pre-legislative and/or stage scrutiny. There remains uncertainty in relation to the timing and progress of bills associated with RPA and education. One Private Member's Bill was introduced in March and it is expected that two further bills will have been introduced by the end of April. In addition, the Bill Office will be working with members to develop seven to nine PMBs. There is likely to be a bill in the autumn to establish an independent parliamentary body. Business cases are currently being finalised regarding resources for the Bill Office.`

(d) Website Development

Gareth McGrath reported that progress was continuing satisfactorily and responses to tender were being considered.

(e) Information Management

Gareth McGrath reported that work on this project was ongoing and satisfactory progress had been made to date.

27 AOB

No issues were raised.

28 NEXT MEETING

The next SMG meeting will take place in Room 29 at 9.30am on Friday, 16 April 2010.