SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

FRIDAY 3 DECEMBER 2010 at 9.40am
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present:	**Trevor Reaney (from 11.45am)** **Gareth McGrath** **John Stewart** **Richard Stewart** **Stephen Welch**
Apologies:	**Hugh Widdis**
In attendance:	**Jim Beatty** **Tony Logue (Agenda items 6 and 7)** **Sinead McDonnell (Agenda items 12, 13 and 14)** **Georgie Campbell (Agenda Items 15 and 16)** **Brian Moreland (Agenda item 17 (b))**

(Note - John Stewart chaired the meeting until 11.45am.)

1 Apologies

1.1 Hugh Widdis sent his apologies.

2 Declaration of Interests

2.1 No interests were declared.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting (12 November 2010)

3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 12 November 2010 were approved with some amendments.

4 Matters Arising

4.1 Outstanding matters arising will be dealt with through the Action Points or discussed within today's items.

5 SMG Action Points

5.1 Directors were asked to send updates on the list of Action Points to Jim Beatty.

ACTION: DIRECTORS

6 Future SMG/Commission Business

6.1 Tony Logue joined the meeting and told SMG that the business to be discussed at the Commission meeting on 7 December 2010 will be as follows:-

- Spending Review 2010
- Pay Issues
- Commission Report – Financial Support and Pensions
- IFRP Bill
- OFMDFM Committee correspondence
- Employment and Learning Committee correspondence
- NIA Members Pension Scheme
- Clerk/DG's Update
- NICCY correspondence

7 Current FOI Requests/Assembly Questions

7.1 The FOI requests and Assembly Questions were noted.

8 Implementation of Environmental Management System

8.1 Stephen Welch spoke of the need to have a quality assurance scheme in place in order to achieve ISO 14001, the international standard for Environmental Monitoring Systems. Subject to approval of the paper before SMG today, it is hoped to achieve the standard by March 2011. It is intended to hold a Management Review Team meeting shortly and this will be followed by awareness training for all staff.

8.2 It was agreed that HoBs would be consulted on the arrangements for the awareness training.

8.3 The paper was approved.

ACTION: STEPHEN WELCH

9 BCP Training

9.1 Stephen Welch explained that following the development of a Major Incident/Business Continuity plan, Bray Leino had been asked to provide both a desk top exercise to facilitate a test of the plan and formal training for key staff.

9.2 The desk top exercise will now be supported by Belfast Resilience in January 2011 at no cost to the Assembly.

9.3 Bray Leino had sourced three providers for the staff training and the preferred option was for Emergency Planning Solutions Ltd (ESPL) which proposed a half day course for the Gold Team and a two day course for the Silver Team at a cost of £6.9k.

9.4 Following discussion, it was agreed that the half day training would be of little value and not all of the objectives for the two day course were considered relevant.

9.5 In approving the EPSL course, it was agreed that Directors would review the objectives for the two day course and provide comments to Stephen Welch who would go back to Bray Leino to seek appropriate amendments to the course.

ACTION: (a) DIRECTORS
(b) STEPHEN WELCH

10 Election Planning

10.1 John Stewart said that dissolution would occur at the end of March 2011 and an election would be held on 5 May 2011. An election planning team has been set up and each directorate has prepared individual plans. The Chairperson’s Liaison Group has been consulted.

10.2 It is planned to hold a reception day in the Long Gallery for newly elected members in the week after the elections and secretariat staff will be encouraged to become involved in delivering this. The Clerk/DG will write to members after the election to advise them of the arrangements.

10.3 It is not known yet when the new Assembly will sit for the first time to allow the members to sign the Roll.

11 Legislative Programme

11.1 John Stewart stated that it will be very challenging to complete the 33 ‘live’ bills currently with the Assembly and the impact of a significant Planning Bill has yet to be considered.

11.2 With just 20 plenary sittings scheduled before dissolution and around 50 bill stage debates, it is likely that extra and longer sittings will be required.

12 Wellbeing Strategy

12.1 Sinead McDonnell joined the meeting and explained that this strategy arose from other strategies and policies and aims to create new initiatives to take forward the key principles of the strategy.

12.2 SMG broadly supported the strategy but concerns were expressed about costs. It was accepted that careful consideration will need to be given in the light of the spending review but it was recognised that initiatives can be taken forward at minimal or no cost.

12.3 SMG approved the key principles and agreed that HR should develop a draft Health and Wellbeing strategy and action plan and consult with TUS. A further paper will be brought back to SMG in the future.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

13 Staff Absences

13.1 Sinead McDonnell spoke to the tables with details of absences for the quarter ending 30 September 2010. A table showing details of staff with no sick absences in the last year was also provided. Based on the Assembly’s past statistics and the attendance targets of other organisations, it was recommended that SMG agree an attendance target of 7.5 days per employee per annum.

13.2 SMG discussed the paper and tables and although the figure of 7.5 days was agreed, it was felt that the word ‘benchmark’ was more appropriate than ‘target’. It was also agreed that the reasons for absences should not be provided unless specifically requested or required.

14 Learning and Development

14.1 Sinead McDonnell updated SMG on Learning and Development issues since the last presentation on 24 September 2010.

14.2 Bray Leino had taken forward the development and delivery of a number of core skills courses and these were currently being rolled out, for example, Presentation Skills, Report Writing and Proof Reading.

14.3 An online booking system is currently being piloted and it was hoped that this would be available in early January 2011. It was agreed that where a member of staff cancels a course within 7 days prior to the start date and it has not been possible to fill the space, the business area will be charged as if the individual had attended.

14.4 Bray Leino has developed 3 strands for a management development programme to meet the needs of secretariat managers – Management Essential for grades 7 – 8, Preparing to Lead for grades 5 – 6 and the Leadership Academy for grade 4 and above. Subject to agreement, it is planned to run pilot courses in January 2011.

14.4 SMG discussed the proposals but felt that more time was needed to consider them. It was agreed that any comments should be submitted to HR by Friday 10 December 2010.

ACTION: DIRECTORS

15 Members Survey 2011

15.1 Georgie Campbell joined the meeting and spoke to her paper on the Members Survey 2011. Following the last survey in August 2009, it had been agreed that another survey would be done before the end of the mandate. It was considered that the last week in January 2011 would be the most appropriate time.

15.2 SMG discussed the matter and while there were may have been changes in both members and staff, it was decided that January 2011 would be the last opportunity for some time in which to carry out a survey.

15.3 It was agreed that Georgie Campbell would amend the survey questionnaire as agreed and circulate to SMG for comments.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

16 Policy Development

16.1 Georgie Campbell explained that there were no guidelines at present for those involved in policy development and while this guidance may not meet all needs, it does set out the key principles and steps.

16.2 SMG viewed this as a very helpful and comprehensive guide and approved the paper.

17 Updates

(a) Directors

Gareth McGrath said that a decision on the funding of the Political Leadership Programme was due next week. If agreed, it was planned to create a separate trust with up to 9 members.

Stephen Welch told SMG that the Assembly was seeking accreditation for the Chartermark ‘Louder Than Words’ for those with hearing difficulties. Following Customer Care courses for the entire directorate, an action plan was being developed to take forward best practice. An estate agent has been appointed for the sale of Ormiston House which should be marketed in January 2011. In support of the Marie Curie Cancer Fund, it has been provisionally agreed that the exterior of Parliament Buildings will be yellow on 1 March 2011- it is likely that this will be achieved by lighting.

John Stewart said that committees are still very busy dealing with a significant number of bills and ongoing inquiries. The Digital Audio tender has closed and there were 4 tenders received.

(b) Audit Recommendations

Brian Moreland joined the meeting and spoke to his paper on the outstanding audit recommendations. It was acknowledged that significant work had been done since SARC drew attention to the number outstanding. The Engagement Directorate had appointed a liaison officer as the single point of contact with Internal Audit and this had contributed to reducing the outstanding recommendations. It was agreed that all directorates would appoint a liaison officer.

ACTION – DIRECTORS

(c) ICWG

It was agreed to defer this item to the next meeting.

Trevor Reaney joined the meeting at 11.45am and took over as Chairperson.

18 Procurement Issues – Internal Audit Report

18.1 Trevor Reaney explained that a major focus of SARC was on procurement following the Internal Audit report which made a total of 14 recommendations. A copy of the Internal Audit review and a summary of the pertinent findings were provided for SMG.

18.2 SMG had previously agreed to the introduction of Delegated Procurement Model but as this tends to be a post-event check, it was questioned if this was the best way to manage risk.

18.3 During a discussion, concerns were raised about the need to change processes in light of so few findings/problems and it was felt that the paper failed to differentiate between minor purchases and contracts.

18.4 Having considered the paper, SMG noted the extent of the findings in terms of risk and restated the responsibilities of individual directors to manage that risk within the delegated procurement model. It was agreed that a wider discussion on procurement policies and procedures was required and this would be arranged at a future date.

19 SMG Terms of Reference

19.1 SMG noted the issues and will take these forward within a wider review.

20 AOB

20.1 Trevor Reaney spoke about the number of outstanding Staff Performance Reports. It was agreed that all directors with outstanding reports would provide the Clerk/DG with an update in relation to their directorates by Friday, 10 December 2010.

ACTION: ALL DIRECTORS (excluding S Welch)

21. Staff Bonus Nominations

In order to ensure uniformity of approach, it was agreed to defer discussion on staff bonus nominations until the next SMG meeting.

20 Date of Next Meeting

20.1 Monday, 20 December 2010 at 9.30am in Room 106.
The meeting was adjourned at 12.45pm.