SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

WEDNESDAY, 13 APRIL 2011 at 2.05pm
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present:	**Gareth McGrath** **Stephen Welch** **John Stewart** **Richard Stewart** **Hugh Widdis**
In attendance:	**Jim Beatty** **Sebastian Mingout (Agenda items 8, 9)** **Sinead McDonnell (Agenda items 11, 12, 13)**

1 Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Trevor Reaney. In Mr Reaney's absence, Mr McGrath chaired the meeting.

2 Declaration of Interests

2.1 No interests were declared.

3 Minutes of Previous Meetings

3.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 30 March 2011 were approved subject to some minor 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 The Action Points were reviewed and updated.

ACTION: JIM BEATTY

6 SMG Forward Work Plan

6.1 The SMG Forward Work Plan was noted.

7 Current FOI Requests

7.1 The current FOI requests were noted.

8 Retendering of Support Services Contract

8.1 Stephen Welch introduced this paper. The current contract for services is due for renewal from 4 March 2012 and following a meeting with the Clerk/DG, it was decided to bring forward consideration of the contract and to examine the market trends, especially in catering.

8.2 The paper before SMG included six options in relation to how contracts may be awarded and it was important to choose the option which would incentivise the contractor to increase sales and thus the operating margins which would lead to a reduction in the amount provided by the Assembly.

Sebastian Mingout joined the meeting at 2.25pm.

8.3 Sebastian explained the six contract options and highlighted that which was likely to be the basis for the new contract. It was anticipated that prices would rise but this would increase the return to the Assembly.

8.4 In order to facilitate the possibility of a handover to a new contractor, the contract would be awarded in December 2011.

8.5 SMG noted the paper and the likelihood of adopting a hybrid version of the contract option. The matter was referred to Facilities to take forward. A Project Board will be set up for mid May 2011 to address the development of a business case.

9 Registered Files in NI Assembly

9.1 Stephen Welch said that since 1998 over 18,000 files have been registered within the Assembly. There are 7,195 closed files in Annexe C and it is vital that the need for each of these files is reviewed before moving any files to Parliament Buildings and vacating Annexe C,

9.2 Hugh Widdis raised the need for a comprehensive Information Strategy and file management as part of that strategy. It was agreed that CSCU needed to take the development of an Information Strategy forward as soon as possible but that this would not be achieved within the timeframe of vacating Annexe C.

9.3 It was accepted that those who opened the files would be best placed to decide on the continuing need for the files. While there may be competing priorities over the coming months, it was agreed that before moving the files to Room 34, Facilities will provide each directorate with a list of their files and that each will do what was possible to review these lists. It was also agreed that CSCU would progress an Information Strategy as a matter of urgency.

AP: STEPHEN WELCH
TREVOR REANEY

10 Committee Rooms/Requirements

10.1 John Stewart referred to the paper from Stella McArdle which set out a number of assumptions and subsequent options in respect of the need for Committee rooms.

10.2 Stephen Welch said that the need for Committee rooms had been the subject of discussions when he had met with John Stewart and Gareth McGrath. The brasserie room was now available but the Commission had designated that as a multi-function meeting room. There may be a range of problems in temporarily using this room as a Committee room but if it was permanently fitted out as a Committee room, it would no longer meet the Commission's designation.

10.3 At the SMG meeting on 30 March 2011, an accommodation plan had been agreed which entailed changing rooms 135 and 144 to offices. These could be used as Committee rooms up to the summer recess but would need to be fitted out after that for staff use. Other long-term options may be available.

10.4 Hugh Widdis said that if the work of the Committees required additional rooms, then these should be provided, even if it meant amending the accommodation plan. It was probable that these would only be needed for the period of the next mandate.

10.5 After discussion, it was agreed that the matter would be raised at the forthcoming Director's meeting with the Clerk/DG. John Stewart agreed to provide a further paper for a future SMG meeting with more detailed figures and information on the needs of the Committees.

AP: JOHN STEWART

11 Managing Attendance Policy

11.1 Sinead McDonnell joined the meeting at 4.05pm and spoke to the paper on this issue. SMG had considered a previous paper at its meeting on 9 February 2011and asked for some amendments and consultation with the Heads of Branches. Only two Heads of Branches had commented and the paper has been amended.

11.2 Sinead McDonnell emphasised that the paper set out the key principles which, if accepted, would lead to the development of the appropriate policies. She said that the Carecall draft report contains references to staff absences not being reported and that while there may be concerns about the introduction of a weekly absence return, HR was convinced that this would serve a purpose. It was also intended to change the approach to warnings in that alerts would be issued to the line manager and staff before the trigger points for further action were reached. It was also planned to take other factors into account when deciding what action to take.

11.3 John Stewart said that he saw no evidence that a problem existed with the current procedures that had to be addressed. He saw no case for reviewing the trigger points or introducing new alerts. In his opinion, the current procedures were fit for purpose.

11.4 Stephen Welch questioned whether the paper only set out the key, high level principles or was the framework of the new policies. He was concerned that approving the recommendations may result in polices being developed which SMG may question in several months time.

11.5 After discussion, the concerns of SMG were noted and the paper was approved.

12 Performance Management System

12.1 Sinead McDonnell explained that HR was not seeking the views of SMG at this time but approval to proceed with a consultation exercise.

12.2 It was the view of SMG that there had been insufficient time for proper consideration of the proposals within what was a significant number of papers. It was recognised that consultation was vital and that any delay to the process could result in the introduction of a new PMS being deferred to April 2012.

12.3 Sinead McDonnell said that there were three key issues within the papers, namely, a new PMS system which did not differ significantly with the current system, a revised approach to probationers and revised procedures for dealing with those staff who performance is considered as unsatisfactory. If the introduction of the new PMS was deferred, progress could be made on the latter issues.

12.4 It was agreed to raise the issue at the Director's meeting the Clerk/DG on 14 April 20011 and, if required, to refer a further paper to the next SMG meeting.

AP: RICHARD STEWART

13 Job Evaluation

13.1 Sinead McDonnell explained that as an outcome of the recent pay and grading project, grade boundaries had been determined for each grade within the Secretariat. A policy for the grading/regrading of posts had been agreed in 2009 and it was planned to use the defined numerical boundaries to identify where a proposed post lay. TUS had been consulted and was in broad agreement.

13.3 There was a discussion on the methodology used in determining the numerical boundaries from of the evaluation interviews and Richard Stewart explained the mathematical process. It was agreed that an upper limit was required for the AG2 grade and that the PWC paper would be copied to all directors.

13.4 SMG noted the process for future job evaluations and agreed the proposed grade boundaries, subject to amendment.

AP: RICHARD STEWART

Stephen Welch left the meeting at 4.55pm.

14 Updates

14.1 John Stewart said that the Business Efficiency Review Project Board had held a second meeting and had agreed a draft methodology paper for consultation with TUS/staff. Separate meetings had been held with TUS. The Election Planning team continued to meet.

14.2 Hugh Widdis said that the Attorney General is to refer the Asbestos Damages Bill to the Supreme Court. The Attorney General is to meet with the Speaker tomorrow to discuss this. There is likely to be some media interest and Tara Caul will speak to staff from Engagement.

14.3 Richard Stewart said that budget holders will need to begin profiling for the coming year. There is likely to be some reallocation of budgets.

14.4 Gareth McGrath said that it had been decided to exhaust current stocks of cream stationery and to replace this with white stationery.

15 AOB

15.1 John Stewart provided a verbal update on the investigations into the leak of a draft PAC report. He referred to the use of ICT, version control of draft documents and guidance on protective marking. John Stewart asked for a SMG discussion on the development of an information strategy and consideration of procurement of an electronic document management system.

15.2 Hugh Widdis said that he wished to begin the recruitment of a senior legal advisor and questioned the current moratorium on recruitment. A meeting has been planned for next week to discuss 'ideal complements' and SIP and it was agreed to include recruitment on the agenda.

16 Date of Next Meeting

Friday 6 May 2011 at 9.30am in Room 106.

The meeting adjourned at 5.10pm.