SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2011 at 10.07am
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present:	**Trevor Reaney** **Suzie Brown (deputy for Gareth McGrath)** **Damien Martin** **John Stewart** **Richard Stewart** **Hugh Widdis**
In attendance:	**Jim Beatty** **Tony Logue (Agenda item 6, 7, 8, 9)** **James Gilsenan (Agenda items 8, 9)** **Martina Daly (Agenda items 11)** **Nuala Dunwoody (Agenda item 12)** **Peter McCallion (Agenda item 13)** **Karen Martin (Agenda item 14)** **Brian Moreland (Agenda item 16(c))**

Damien Martin was welcomed to SMG in his role as acting Director of Facilities during Stephen Welch's absence. SMG wished Stephen Welch well during his absence.

1 Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Gareth McGrath. Suzie Brown deputised in Mr McGrath's absence.

2 Declaration of Interests

2.1 No interests were declared.

3 Minutes of Previous Meetings

3.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 25 August 2011 were approved subject to some amendments..

4 Matters Arising

4.1 All issues within Matters Arising will be dealt with through the Action Points or discussed as substantive agenda items.

5 SMG Action Points

5.1 The Action Points were reviewed and updated. Members were asked to advise Jim Beatty of further amendments.

ACTION: JIM BEATTY

6 Future Commission/SMG Business

6.1 Tony Logue joined the meeting at 10.34am. The Commission's next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 27 September 2011. The draft agenda was considered:-

- Clerk/DG's Report
- Valuations of Constituency Offices Rentals
- Equality Commission for NI Annual Progress Report 2010/11
- Standards of Conduct Policy
- Travel Mileage - Secretariat
- Members' Consumables – related issues
- Budget and Vacancy Management
- Industrial Relations – Referral under Joint Agreement

6.2 It was agreed that all papers for the Commission should be cleared by no later than the Wednesday preceding the meeting and issued on the Thursday. The Speaker's pre-brief meeting would in future take place before the papers issued.

7 Assembly Questions

Tony Logue advised SMG of the latest questions. These were noted.

8 Employment Equality Plan - Update

8.1 James Gilsenan joined the meeting at 11.07am. The EEP, approved by SMG in July 2010, establishes a programme of activities that seek to promote and support equality of opportunity, both internal and community facing.

8.2 SMG considered the update for the period 1 July 2010 to 31 March 2011 and identified the need for some amendments, eg, the reference to recruitment fairs. It was also agreed to amend the HR Management Information report to SMG to include details of any complaints within the Working Environment section of Annex A to the report.

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9.2 The update was noted.

9 ECNI Annual Progress Report

9.1 Tony Logue spoke to his paper on this topic. The report covers the 2010/11 period and complies with the requirement for the Commission to submit an annual review to the Equality Commission detailing the progress achieved against implementation of statutory targets.

9.2 SMG considered the report and while recognising what has been achieved, expressed some concerns regarding the screening of policies and completion of equality impact assessments (EQIA). It was stated that fewer EQIAs were required following screening but it was accepted that this may not be accurately reflected within the report. It was agreed that the report would be amended.

9.3 James Gilsenan said that business areas may require further training on completion of EQIAs and this was planned for the future.

9.4 There was some concern that this report may be late in going to the Equality Commission and it was agreed that Tony Logue would prepare a note on this for Trevor Reaney.

ACTION: TONY LOGUE

10 Draft Retention and Disposal Schedule

10.1 Martina Dalton joined the meeting at 11.40am and spoke to this paper. The Commission had previously approved a Records Management Policy and the development and implementation of a retention and disposal schedule is key to the success of the policy

10.2 SMG was told that the schedule had been prepared following an Information Audit and in consultation with PRONI. If this paper is agreed, a further paper will be delivered on implementation of the policy. It is planned to complete the clearance of our current records by the end of December 2011

10.3 SMG was concerned at the process before the records could be cleared as this detailed a role for DCAL and the laying of papers in the Assembly's Business Office. If followed, this may result in additional work for the Business Office within a short timescale. While it is considered that the process complies with the legislation, it was agreed that John Stewart would consult with others in looking at the process.

10.4 Within the detail of the schedule, it was questioned as to why the records of SMG meetings would be permanently preserved. Martina Dalton will check the need for this.

10.5 John Stewart asked about the need for the development of a Relational Database Management System to reduce the number of paper records. It was acknowledged that significant changes were needed to what and how records are stored to prevent this becoming a long term resource issue.

10.6 In approving the paper, it was agreed that individuals would forward any comments directly to Martina Dalton.

11 Corporate Risk Register

11.1 Trevor Reaney advised SMG that Internal Audit had recently reduced the overall level of assurance from Satisfactory to Limited with issues that needed to be addressed. It was important that outstanding recommendations were reviewed and a report on their implementation to be sent to Trevor Reaney by 30 September 2011.

11.2 SMG reviewed the current Risk Register and agreed a number of amendments. Individual members will forward comments to Hugh Widdis.

ACTION: ALL DIRECTORS

12 Business Efficiency Project Update

12.1 Peter McCallion joined the meeting at 12.35pm and spoke to his paper on this topic which set out the steps for the review of the creation and management of contracts.

12.2 Thematic workshops had been held in June 2011 and more were planned for October 2011.

12.3 Given that the Secretariat manages 5 large and/or complex contracts, the BEP Project board agreed on 30 June 2011 that in taking forward a review of the creation and management of contracts, the Project Team did not have the required skillset to conduct a specialised review and that an independent and external resource would be required.

12.4 SMG discussed the need for and costs of an external review. While recognising the lack of some skills, it was considered that the Heads of Business, Assembly Procurement and the BE Project Team could look at the contracted services and their delivery but the design and development of contracts may be best done by external specialists.

12.5 It was agreed that more consideration needed to be given to the development of Terms of Reference for a ‘hybrid’ model involving both internal and external resources.

13 Election Planning Review

13.1 Nuala Dunwoody joined the meeting at 1.15pm and spoke to her paper on this topic. A cross-Directorate project team had been set up to take forward preparations for the May 2011 elections. It was agreed from the outset that the project must be member-led and while it was difficult to identify a suitable forum on occasions, very useful contacts were made with a number of support staff. This led to the Reception Day for new members being held on Tuesday which enabled party support staff to come in to the building on the Monday to set up their systems in advance of the members.

13.2 The review of the entire process not only highlighted the many successes of the team but also some areas which could be improved when dealing with future elections.

13.3 The work of the project team was commended.

14 Performance Management System

14.1 Karen Martin joined the meeting at 1.23pm and spoke to the paper on this topic. This item was last before SMG on 5 July 2011 when the HR Office was asked to review its paper in light of SMG comments and further research from other organisations.

14.2 SMG considered the revised paper and agreed a number of key principles and that the new PMS would be in place for 2012/13.

14.3 HR will develop the relevant PMS documentation based on these decisions and return to SMG at a future date.

15 Updates

(a) Effectiveness of Assembly

Hugh Widdis spoke to the paper on this topic. A briefing session on relevant work streams had been held on 15 June 2011 and this paper provided a summary of the briefings and the agreed next steps. SMG noted the contents and the resources necessary to continue the progress to date. SMG asked for an update on each work area for January 2012.

(b) Internal Audit

Brian Moreland joined the meeting at 1.40pm. The overall level of assurance reported to the recent SARC meeting was Limited – this reduction from Satisfactory was due to the balance of assurance levels within four final reports. However, further reports are due soon and it is expected that the overall assurance level will revert to Satisfactory. SMG was told that SARC has asked for a report on those recommendations 'in progress', some dated prior to 2009. The need to move on the recommendations was emphasised.

17 AOB

17.1 Richard Stewart introduced a paper on Staff Travel Rates which included a proposal to raise the current 40p rate per mile to 45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles.

17.2 This increase arose from the 2011 Budget Statement and will not impact on the rate paid to MLAs. Based on travel within 2010/11, the increase would cost approximately £1,100.

17.3 SMG agreed that a paper should be brought to the Commission for consideration.

18 Date of Next Meeting

Friday, 30 September 2011 at 10.00am in Room 29

The meeting adjourned at 1.50pm.