# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

# (a) THURSDAY, 25 AUGUST 2011 at 09.40am
# (b) TUESDAY, 30 AUGUST 2011 at 10.05am
# ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

**APPROVED**

| | |
|---|---|
| **(a) Present:** | **Trevor Reaney**<br>**Gareth McGrath**<br>**John Stewart**<br>**Richard Stewart**<br>**Stephen Welch** |
| **In attendance:** | **Jim Beatty**<br>**Cathy McGowan (Agenda item 6)**<br>**James Gilsenan (Agenda items 7)**<br>**Sinead McDonnell (Agenda items 10, 11, 15(c))** |

## 1 Apologies

1.1 An apology was received from Hugh Widdis.

## 2 Declaration of Interests

2.1 No interests were declared.

## 3 Minutes of Previous Meetings

3.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 5 July 2011 were approved subject to a minor amendment.

## 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 Cathy McGowan joined the meeting at 9.54am. The Commission's next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 27 September 2011. The draft agenda was considered:-

- Clerk/DG's Report
- Equality Commission for NI Annual Progress Report 2010/11
- Internal Good Relations Audit – draft Report
- Standards of Conduct Policy
- Consumables – related issues
- Budget
- Vacancy Management

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.

# 7 Internal Good Relations Audit

7.1 James Gilsenan joined the meeting at 10.08am. At its meeting on 21 January 2010 the Commission approved an audit to measure the extent to which the Assembly is meeting the Good Relations Duty and to identify any actual or perceived barriers. Following a procurement exercise the contract for the audit was awarded to Holywell Consultancy and their report was now before SMG.

7.2 It was agreed that SMG would forward any comments on factual accuracy to James Gilsenan by 2 September 2011 who would discuss presentation to the Commission with Tony Logue on his return from holiday.

**ACTION: SMG**

# 8 Third Party Maintenance Support Contract

8.1 Gareth McGrath spoke to this paper. At its meeting on 22 February 2011 the Commission approved the use of the existing ICT desktop equipment for a further two years and the procurement of a third party maintenance support contract.

8.2 Following discussion, the business case for the maintenance contract was approved.

.

## 9 Budgets 2011/12

9.1 Richard Stewart said that this paper set out the results of the recent exercise to review staff salaries and GAE budgets for 2011/12 in light of the need to re-allocate resources. After allowing for some projected underspends, there was still likely to be an over-commitment of around £82k. It was agreed that the over-commitment be accepted in view of previous spending performance.

*Gareth McGrath left the meeting at 11.30am.*

9.2 Although DFP has deferred the September Monitoring Round to October, the Monitoring Round planned for December will have particular impact on future budget allocations. The revised GAE allocations were approved.

9.3 Capital funding will be difficult, especially as there is a carry-over of costs from 2010/11 which must be found within the 2011/12 budget. Directors were urged to review capital projects within their business areas and to surrender any surpluses for reallocation. It may be necessary to review all current contracts, their management and the monies committed.

## 10 Spending Review Project Team Report

10.1 The Spending Review Project Team was established in October 2010 'to ensure that SMG are fully aware of the cost savings options and that the implications of those options have been identified and quantified.'

10.2 Having completed its report, the team was asked to review the processes and outcomes so that future teams may benefit from their experiences.

10.3 The team considered that its work was too detailed and may have achieved more if it had limited its investigations to directorate level budgets only rather than relatively low level budgets. This would have allowed better quality information on which to base decisions.

10.4 SMG discussed the report and its recommendations. In recognising the value of the report, it was agreed that the Clerk/DG would respond to the Project Team to include what was being done to take forward the recommendations. It was also agreed that report should be passed to the Business Efficiency Project Board.

**ACTION: RICHARD STEWART**

## 11 Major Incident/Business Continuity Plan

11.1 Stephen Welch told SMG that following the desktop exercise in January 2011, more work had been done on developing the Continuity Plan and SMG approval was sought on a number of recommendations.

11.2 It was recognised that there is a lack of information on building users on any specified day, eg, visitors, NICS staff and party staff, and this needed to be addressed urgently.

11.3 While SMG did not accept the need of a rota for directors to be ‘on call’ at all times, Stephen Welch undertook to consider an alternative approach which would satisfy BCP requirements. The other recommendations were agreed.

*The meeting adjourned at 12.25pm.*

*The meeting reconvened at 10.05am on Tuesday, 30 August 2011.*

*Present - Trevor Reaney, Gareth McGrath, John Stewart, Richard Stewart, Stephen Welch, Hugh Widdis.*

## 12 Establishment of Core Management Group

12.1 John Stewart spoke to the paper on this topic. It was agreed that an additional project be added to the list relating to cross-directorate activities/budgets and that the Facilities Directorate should provide a project leader.

12.2 It was also agreed that a chairperson to CMG should be appointed. Trevor Reaney will then speak to the proposed chairperson and each project leader before the first plenary meeting is arranged. A Postmaster will be issued to staff.

**ACTION: TREVOR REANEY**

## 13 Draft Conduct Policy

13.1 Sinead McDonnell joined the meeting at 10.30am. This issue had been before SMG previously and had been referred for further consultation.

13.2 Following extensive consultation, three options on the way forward were considered by SMG. In recognising individual rights within Article 10 of the European Convention On Human Rights, SMG accepted Option Two which requires staff to seek permission to engage in local political activities. This is in line with the current policy and supported by TUS.

13.3 It was agreed to amend Paragraph 35 of the draft policy to state that permission to participate may be conditional on agreeing to either a redeployment of duties or redeployment within the Secretariat.

13.4 It was agreed that HR would prepare a paper on the issue for consideration by the Commission.

**ACTION: RICHARD STEWART**

# 14 Vacancy Management Policy

14.1 Sinead McDonnell explained that these policies were reviewed in light of budgetary constraints and the need to fill vacancies through internal recruitment. Following extensive consultation, approval of the policies was now sought from SMG.

14.2 SMG considered the revised policies and agreed a number of amendments including use of fixed term contracts. Issues surrounding career breaks and the use of agency staff were also discussed with the former referred to the newly created Vacancy Management Group.

14.3 Subject to the amendments SMG approved the policies. There was agreement that it was vital to convey these policies and their impact to staff and a comprehensive Postmaster will be issued. The Clerk/DG offered to organise lunchtime briefings, if necessary.

# 15 Updates

## (a) Directors

Stephen Welch said that 44 new car park spaces will be available in time for the first plenary. A revised Visitor Pass system will be introduced over the coming week.

Hugh Widdis said that the judicial review relating to recent asbestos legislation was proceeding – the NI Assembly was not involved. Recruitment of a chairperson for SARC was continuing.

Richard Stewart said that work was continuing on the constituency office valuation exercise.

Gareth McGrath updated SMG on a contractual matter which was ongoing.

John Stewart said that the Bill Template project and the introduction a Digital Audio System in Hansard were continuing. The latter should be in place by early October 2011. An internal competition for temporary AG4s had commenced.

Trevor Reaney said that the NI Audit Office draft report on the 2010/11 Annual Accounts had been received. Draft management responses were to be provided by 2 September 2011.

### (b) Business Plan 2011/12 Monitoring

SMG noted the return for q/e June 2011.

### (c) HR Management Information – Sick Absence Statistics

Sinead McDonnell said that HR had consulted with NISRA on the presentation of the information and it had been agreed to remove annual leave from the number of working days – this will now be 223 for the annual statistics. The average days lost from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011 was 7.9, slightly over the target of 7.5. Of the seven staff on long term absence, four have now returned to work. SMG approved the changes.

## 16 Staff Bonus Nominations

16.1 SMG considered a number of staff bonus nominations.

*John Stewart left the meeting at 11.47am.*

16.2 As part of the recent pay settlement, no further staff bonus nominations will be considered.

## 17 AOB

17.1 Stephen Welch said that NQA were in Parliament Buildings to assess suitability for ISO 14001-2004 accreditation. Staff may be challenged on their awareness/knowledge of sustainable issues.

17.2 It is planned to have all staff from Annexe C moved into Parliament Buildings by the end of next week. Rent will continue to be paid until the registered files are cleared. While progress has been made, a significant number still have to be actioned. PRONI has begun moving out some files but a Records Management Policy is required. It has been suggested that this will not be available until November 2011.

17.3 It was agreed that Gareth McGrath would investigate the position regarding the Records Management Policy and inform SMG.

**Action: GARETH MCGRATH**

## 18 Date of Next Meeting

Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 10.00am in Room 106

*The meeting adjourned at 12.04pm.*