SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

WEDNESDAY, 27 MAY 2026 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present:

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive
Steven Baxter, Director of Corporate Services
Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services
Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services

In Attendance:

Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Scarlett Healey, Executive Assistant
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support (Items 5, 6 and 7)
Karen Steele, Deputy Head of Finance (Item 8)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 9, 10 and 11)
Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR (Items 9, 10 and 11)
Terri Quigley, Head of Facilities Management (Item 13)
Christine Watts, Environmental Services and Health and Safety Manager (Item 13)
Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services (Item 18)
Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IS (Items 19, 20 and 21)
Robert McCausland, IT Security Officer (Items 19, 20 and 21)
Lisa McElherron, Clerk Assistant (Item 22)
Roisin Kelly, Assembly Clerk (Item 22)
Pamela Carson, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk (Item 22)
John Hart, Head of Communications (Item 23)

The meeting commenced at 9.33 am.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Declaration of Interests

SMT declared an interest in agenda item 11, Pay Claim 2026-2029.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

It was noted that the minutes from the meeting on 30 April 2026 had been published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Lesley Hogg noted that the update on the action to prepare a Post-Project Evaluation for the Blue Flax restaurant required correction.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.37 am for agenda items 5, 6 and 7.

5. Political Update

SMT noted that Bill activity was expected to increase before the end of the mandate.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey advised that the next Assembly Commission meeting was scheduled for 17 June 2026 and proposed agenda items were considered.

7. Correspondence from Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) re Citizen Engagement Exercise

Robin presented a draft Assembly Commission paper for approval in response to AERC correspondence on conducting a citizen engagement exercise.

Following consideration, SMT approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.48 am.

Change to agenda running order.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Mary-Ellen Nutt and Robert McCausland joined the meeting at 9.53 am for agenda items 19, 20 and 21.

19. Cyber Security Assurance Review – Annual Update

Mary-Ellen Nutt presented a paper providing SMT with the second annual update on progress in implementing the recommendations from the findings of the Cyber Security Assurance Review

Mary-Ellen thanked Robert McCausland for his involvement in implementing the recommendations within a short timeframe.

SMT noted the update and recognised the positive progress made in implementing the review recommendations.

20. Information Security Incident Management

Mary-Ellen and Robert updated SMT on the incident management framework and sought approval of revised documents supporting Information Security Incident Management, specifically the Information Security Management Policy and the Information Security Incident Management Standard.

Robert advised that the revised documents replaced the interim arrangements agreed by SMT in December 2025 and reflected the addition of the Security Operations Centre and retained incident handling services to support the full incident management process.

Following consideration, SMT approved the revised Policy and proposed minor amendments to the Information Security Incident Management Standard.

Action: Robert to update the Information Security Incident Management Standard as agreed and re-circulate to SMT for final approval.

21. Business Case for Microsoft Unified Support Renewal

Mary-Ellen presented and sought approval of a business case for Microsoft Unified Support Renewal.

Mary-Ellen advised that the recommended option within the business case was to renew Microsoft Unified Support with proactive specialist support as outlined in the paper.

Following consideration, SMT approved the business case.

Mary-Ellen Nutt and Robert McCausland left the meeting at 10.24 am.

Roisin Kelly and Pamela Carson joined the meeting at 10.39 am for agenda item 22.

22. Induction 2027

Pamela Carson presented a paper on Induction 2027, which she explained was intended to ensure that Members are supported to undertake their scrutiny, legislative, and representational roles, effectively, from the outset of the 2027-32 Assembly mandate.

Lisa McElherron joined the meeting at 10.41 am.

Pamela highlighted the progress made to date and referred to the associated Induction 2027 Action Plan.

Pamela outlined the proposed strategic direction for the Development and Delivery phases which were endorsed by SMT. SMT noted that Induction 2027 is a corporate priority and resource-intensive, requiring coordinated input across business areas.

Pamela highlighted a number of risks and mitigations associated with the preparation and delivery of Induction 2027.

SMT noted that a further update on Induction 2027 would be brought back to SMT and to the Assembly Commission in the autumn.

Steven Baxter raised concerns about cross-directorate input and competing year-end pressures in the Finance Office, and emphasised the need for planning to ensure Business Areas are aware of their expected commitments.

Tara requested a few amendments to the programme and stated that any relevant issues raised in the 2026 Members' Survey should also be taken into account.

SMT thanked Pamela and Roisin for their work in progressing the project and producing a comprehensive plan.

Lisa McElherron, Roisin Kelly and Pamela Carson left the meeting at 10.57 am.

John Hart joined the meeting at 10.58 am for agenda item 23.

23. Strategic Communications Update

John Hart provided SMT with a strategic communications update.

John Hart left the meeting at 11.17 am.

The meeting suspended at 11.17 am and resumed at 11.28 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Terri Quigley and Christine Watts joined the meeting at 11.28 am for agenda item 13.

13. Annual Environmental Management Review 2025-2026

Christine Watts presented the Environmental Management Review for the period April 2025 to March 2026.

Christine advised that she had reviewed the Environmental Policy and the Sustainable Development Policy and no changes were required.

SMT reviewed and approved the draft Continuous Improvement Action Plan for 2026-2027, but noted that any proposal regarding the establishment of an Electric Car Scheme would require SMT approval.

SMT reviewed the progress against high level environmental objectives for 2025-2030 noting that, for the second year of the five year period, specific numerical targets could still not be considered pending receipt of the Sustainable Development Strategy and Climate Action Plan and sought update on the timeline for these. Terri Quigley advised that they were due to be presented to SMT in September 2026.

SMT thanked Christine and Terri for their work on environmental management over the past year and welcomed the development of an ambitious Sustainable Development Strategy and Climate Action Plan.

Terri Quigley and Christine Watts left the meeting at 11.36 am.

14. Blue Flax Refurbishment Post-Project Evaluation

The paper will be issued to SMT for consideration by correspondence.

15. Progress of Remedial Works to the Roof of Parliament Buildings

The paper will be issued to SMT for consideration via correspondence.

16. Options for the Provision of a Visitor and Engagement Centre

The paper will be issued to SMT for consideration via correspondence.

17. Business Case for the Provision of Building Maintenance Work for 2026-27

The paper will be issued to SMT for consideration via correspondence.

Sinéad McDonnell and Karen Martin joined the meeting at 11.43 am for agenda items 9, 10 and 11.

9. HR Management Information

Karen presented the HR Management Information as at 1 May 2026.

Karen advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 May 2026 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 395.6 Full Time Equivalents (FTE). SMT noted the temporary promotion/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place.

Karen updated SMT on recruitment activity.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that during the month of April 2026, the overall average days lost per FTE member of staff on sickness absence was 9.9 days, with short-term absence accounting for 3.3 days and long-term absence accounting for a total of 6.6 days.

Karen referred to the SMT meeting on 27 February 2026, when it was agreed that the HR Office would include annual comparative sickness absence data from other public sector organisations in the May management information paper. She advised, however, that no updated absence data had been published by comparator organisations since the Benchmark Review information presented to SMT in February.

SMT noted the annual equality information as at 1 May 2026.

SMT also noted case management activity since December 2025.

10. National Protective Security Authority Review – Follow up on Recommendations

Sinéad McDonnell presented a follow-up paper to the draft Personnel Security Policy paper considered by SMT at its meeting on 27 March 2026.

She noted that, following discussion at the 27 March SMT meeting, HR had consulted with Trade Union Side (TUS) and Heads of Business (HoBs) on the draft Policy.

Sinéad confirmed that TUS was content with the draft Policy following consultation, while HoBs suggested a number of comments and amendments. SMT considered the feedback and agreed revisions to the draft Policy. In response to one comment, SMT asked Sinéad to draft a Remote Working Security Checklist and circulate it to SMT and HoBs for comment.

Action: Sinéad to draft a Remote Working Security Checklist and circulate to SMT and HoBs for comment.

SMT thanked Sinéad and all who had contributed to the production of the draft Policy.

Sinéad also presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the National Protective Security Authority Review and sought approval to submit it to the Assembly Commission.

Following consideration, SMT approved the paper, subject to a minor amendment, for presentation to the Assembly Commission.

Action: Sinéad to update the draft Assembly Commission paper on the National Protective Security Authority Review as proposed by SMT.

11. Pay Claim 2026-2029

Sinéad presented and sought approval of a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Pay Claim 2026-2029.

Following consideration, SMT proposed some minor amendments to the draft paper and asked that it be re-circulated for final approval, prior to presentation to the Assembly Commission.

Action: Sinéad to update the draft Assembly Commission paper as proposed by SMT and re-circulate for final approval.

Sinéad McDonnell and Karen Martin left the meeting at 12.40 pm.

12. Provision of Restroom Facilities in Parliament Buildings

The paper will be issued to SMT for consideration by correspondence.

Karen Steele joined the meeting at 12.40 pm.

8. Management Accounts April 2026

Karen Steele presented the Management Accounts for April 2026. She noted that the normal full month-end processes had not been completed, due to prioritisation of year end accounts preparation, and that the figures were therefore estimated.

Karen advised that the paper provided an overview of the 2026-27 opening budget, with a high-level commentary on the comparison with provisional outturn for 2025-26, and a high-level estimate of the April 2026 Outturn.

Karen stated that as the Executive had not yet reached agreement on the overall budget it was unlikely that a monitoring round would be commissioned in June.

SMT noted the opening budget position for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (WFDSC) costs, compared with the 2025-26 Provisional Outturn, and the April 2026 Outturn.

Karen highlighted significant movements between the opening budget position and the provisional outturn for 2025-26 in relation to Admin costs.

Karen also referred SMT to the opening budget position and the funding shortfall for Member Salaries, noting that a bid would be required at the first formal monitoring exercise. Lesley observed that there was usually a significant underspend in Members' allowances and that SMT would need to consider the overall position before seeking additional funding.

On depreciation, Karen said the Finance Office was working to produce a more accurate forecast.

On profit/loss on disposal, SMT noted that a bid for disposal costs would be submitted next month.

In relation to Capital DEL, SMT noted a potential funding shortfall and the potential projects that could be paused or deferred to meet this pressure. SMT also noted that business cases had not yet been submitted for a number of the projects.

Karen Steele left the meeting at 12.54 pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Jonathan McMillen joined the meeting at 12.54 pm for agenda item 18.

18. Litigation Update

Jonathan McMillen provided SMT with an update on litigation to which the Assembly Commission is currently a named party.

Jonathan sought approval of expenditure for specialist legal advice fees, up to an agreed amount, noting that the funds were already included in the Legal Services budget for the current financial year. SMT approved the expenditure.

Jonathan McMillen left the meeting at 12.59 pm.

The meeting suspended at 12.59 pm and resumed at 2.13 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

24. Directors’ Updates

Corporate Services

Steven provided an update on all business areas within the Corporate Services Directorate and highlighted the current security threat levels at both a Northern Ireland and UK level.

In relation to the remedial work to the roof of Parliament Buildings and the updates provided for Phases 1 and 2, Lesley asked for further information on the timelines and costs to be included going forward for both phases and on any findings from Phase 1.

Action: SMT to be provided with information on the timelines and costs going forward for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the roof remediation works, along with any findings from Phase 1 in the Corporate Services Directorate Update.

Lesley queried the rationale for proposed changes to Electric Vehicle (EV) charging provision in the upper car park. She also asked for updates on the status of the new North lift, South lift and three goods lifts, as well as the installation of the barrier in the lower car park, all of which had been due for completion by 31 March 2026, and that updates on these be included in the Corporate Services Directorate Update Report going forward. Steven confirmed he would raise the queries with Building Services.

Action: Steven to update SMT on the status of the new North lift, South lift and three goods lifts, as well as the installation of the barrier in the lower car park in the Corporate Services Directorate Update Report.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Tara provided an update on the work undertaken by all business areas within the Legal, Governance and Research Services Directorate and, in particular, highlighted ongoing litigation; documents and articles published by the Research and Information Service (RaISe); the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS); and ongoing procurement projects.

Tara advised that a new apprentice solicitor had been appointed and would start in September.

SMT noted that the next Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee meeting was scheduled for 24 June 2026.

Parliamentary Services

SMT noted the work undertaken by all business areas within the Parliamentary Services Directorate.

Gareth McGrath highlighted bill activity between now and the summer recess.

25. AOB

There was no other business.

26. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 6 July 2026.

27. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Legislative Change Relating to the Appointment and Tenure of the Comptroller and Auditor General
- Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 2025-2026
- Seeking Approval to Establish Project FUSION to Deliver Replacement Finance, Payroll and HR Systems
- Strategic Review of the Finance Office
- Support Services Contract and Post-Project Evaluation
- 10-Year Maintenance Plan

- Blue Flax Refurbishment Post-Project Evaluation
- Progress of Remedial Works to the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Options for the Provision of a Visitor and Engagement Centre
- Business Case for the Provision of Building Maintenance Work for 2026-2027
- Annual Plan 2026/2027
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- 2026 Members’ Survey
- Lawmaker Project Evaluation
- 10-Year Technology (capital) Lifecycle Plan from 2026-27
- Internal Communications Quarterly Update
- Review of the Media Handbook
- Broadcasting Contract Post-Project Evaluation
- Strategic Communications Update

The meeting ended at 2.35 pm.