

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

**THURSDAY, 30 APRIL 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 and 6)
Paula McClintock, Head of Finance (Items 7, 8 and 9)
Suzanne Murphy, Deputy Head of Finance (Item 9)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 10 and 11)
Clare Maguire, Deputy Head of Public Engagement (Item 14)
Stephanie Mallon, Clerk Assistant (Items 14 and 15)
Lisa McElherron, Clerk Assistant (Items 14 and 15)
Mary Kerr, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk (Item 15)
John Hart, Head of Communications (Item 16)
Nathan Lynch, Clerical Supervisor (Item 19)**

The meeting commenced at 9.31 am.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

It was noted that the minutes from the meeting on 27 March 2026 had been published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.32 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg noted that there would be a lot of activity in the lead up to summer recess.

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.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.47 am.

Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 9.48 am for agenda items 7, 8 and 9.

CORPORATE SERVICES

7. Management Accounts March 2026

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for March 2026.

SMT noted the provisional outturn for the financial year 2025-26 in relation to Resource DEL, Capital DEL and the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (WFDSC) costs.

Paula referred to an underspend in Staff Salaries, outlining the reasons for same. Lesley noted that she had previously highlighted that the forecast appeared very high compared with the spend to date, but had received an assurance that it was accurate. Steven Baxter advised that the Deputy Head of Finance, Suzanne Murphy, was reviewing how the Finance Office model staff salaries, with a view to implementing changes in the next couple of months.

Lesley expressed significant concerns regarding the non-delivery of a number of Building Services projects that SMT had been assured would be delivered by the end of the financial year. She noted that this would increase pressures on the 2026-27 budget, which is already subject to considerable constraints. Steven noted that he had communicated similar concerns to the business area.

Paula advised of bids from the IS Office and the HR Office, which were considered and approved by SMT.

SMT noted an underspend in Members' Costs and Paula stated that budget planning assumes that all Members will fully utilise their available allowances within the financial year. Lesley stated that consideration needed to be given to this approach in relation to future financial planning.

Paula highlighted an underspend in projects within the Capital Plan for 2025-26, noting that if all proposed projects were to proceed, their costs would need to be accommodated within the 2026-27 budget, which is already facing constraints. To mitigate this issue, Paula proposed removing several projects from the 2026-27 Capital Plan that were either unlikely to progress during that period or were no longer necessary, thereby releasing the associated budget; and asked that SMT approve, subject to the relevant business cases being approved, bids for a number of capital projects totalling £991.4k in the 2026-27 Capital Plan.

In relation to the proposal to remove a number of projects from the Capital Plan, SMT agreed that those capital projects that had been identified as being no longer required or had been delivered via an alternative mechanism, namely, the fire detection system, the boiler flues, TV recordings and the Microsoft Cloud partner could be removed but stated that the others required further consideration and a re-prioritisation of all remaining capital requirements would need to be undertaken.

On reviewing the DAS report, Lesley noted that a number of DAS approvals were shown as overspent and asked that these be reviewed by business areas.

Action: Heads of Business (HoBs) to review the DAS report, to ensure that expenditure against projects within their business area is within the DAS approved limit, and if not, arrange for the DAS record to be updated accordingly.

SMT acknowledged that year end was a particularly busy period for the Finance Office and recorded its thanks to Paula and the Finance Office team for all their hard work.

8. Renewal of the Licence for PECOS P2P Software

Paula presented and sought approval of a business case to renew the Accounts Payable P2P System PECOS software package.

SMT considered and approved the business case.

Suzanne Murphy joined the meeting at 10.34 am for agenda item 9.

9. The Northern Ireland Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (2016) Annual Report and Accounts

Suzanne Muphy presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Northern Ireland Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (2016) Annual Report and Accounts.

SMT noted the Report and Accounts and approved the draft paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission.

Paula McClintock and Suzanne Murphy left the meeting at 10.37 am.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 10.39 am for agenda items 10 and 11.

10. HR Management Information

Sinéad McDonnell presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 April 2026.

SMT noted the Staff in Post (SIP) figure as at 1 April 2026 and the temporary promotion/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place.

Sinéad sought approval of a complement change application from the Clerking and Member Support Office (CAMS) for a complement plus Clerical Officer for the financial year 2026-27, to support the new approach to scrutinising and tracking of delegated legislation. SMT approved the application, noting that provision for the cost associated with the request was included in the budget for 2026-27.

Sinéad provided an update on recruitment activity and, following discussion, SMT agreed some changes to the Recruitment Schedule.

11. Assembly Commission's Leadership Framework

Sinéad presented the final version of the Assembly Commission's Leadership Framework, which she noted had been tweaked following consideration by SMT at its meeting on 24 October 2025.

Sinéad subsequently presented the Leadership Strengths Matrix and Guidance which, following consideration, were approved by SMT.

Sinéad advised that the Leadership Framework would be officially launched to staff in July 2026 at which point SMT would change its name to 'Senior Leadership Team' (SLT).

SMT thanked Sinéad and the HR Team for the excellent work that had gone in to producing the Framework and accompanying documentation.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 10.52 am.

12. Annual Plan 2025-2026 End of Year Performance Report

Steven presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Annual Plan 2025-2026 End of Year Performance Report.

Steven recorded his thanks to Directors and HoBs for providing updates to the Annual Plan within such a tight deadline.

SMT noted the Report and approved the draft paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission.

SMT recorded its thanks to Directors and HoBs for the effort they had put in to delivering the activities in the Annual Plan.

The meeting suspended at 10.58 am and resumed at 11:11 am.

13. Finance and HR System Replacement (Systems Review) FUSION Project

Paper deferred.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Clare Maguire joined the meeting at 11.11 am for agenda item 14.

Stephanie Mallon and Lisa McElherron joined the meeting at 11.11 am for agenda items 14 and 15.

14. Staff Resource in the Visitor Experience Team (VET)

Clare Maguire presented a paper which sought approval for a permanent increase in the staff complement of the VET by 1.5 FTE Visitor Experience Officers and 1 FTE Visitor Experience Supervisor, as well as a seasonal increase of 1 FTE Visitor Experience Officer, to cover demands from October to December (equivalent to 0.25 annual FTE).

SMT noted that provision for the cost associated with these posts was included in the budget for 2026-27 to 2028-29.

Steven acknowledged the case for increased VET capacity but noted that the paper did not assess consequential impacts on Facilities Management or Usher Services arising from higher visitor numbers, more events, and out of hours activity.

Steven also noted that there was limited articulation within the paper of how Value for Money (VFM) would be measured, including reduction in overtime and service improvements.

Lesley raised concerns around the level of overtime and impact on staff and it was agreed that this would be kept under review.

Gareth McGrath acknowledged that an interim review was needed, and he stated that this would provide an opportunity to address the concerns raised.

Whilst raising some concerns, SMT noted the significant increase in the number of events and tours being held in Parliament Buildings and was content to approve the requested permanent 2.5 FTE increase and 1 FTE seasonal increase in VET staffing.

Clare Maguire left the meeting at 11.27 am.

Mary Kerr joined the meeting at 11.27 am for agenda item 15.

15. Report of the Task and Finish Group on Members' Experience of Abuse

Mary Kerr presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Report of the Task and Finish Group on Members' Experience of Abuse.

Mary stated that the Task and Finish Group Report included input from a range of business areas, as well as information gathered from the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru, the Houses of the Oireachtas, the PSNI and the Electoral Commission.

Mary presented the Group's findings, conclusions and recommendations as set out in the Report Addressing the Abuse and Intimidation of MLAs: A Programme of Action.

Mary outlined the recommendations detailed in the Report, noting that they had been informed by the Members' Survey and comparative analysis of approaches across other parliaments. Mary also noted that the recommendations had been broken down into actions to be delivered in the short term (by end of summer recess), medium term (by end of the mandate), and long term (by end of first year of the mandate).

Mary stated that the recommendations had been designed, as far as possible, to work within the current resource constraints and that the responsibility for delivery of these actions mainly sat with Usher Services. However, she noted that it was recognised that some actions would be difficult to deliver with existing staff resources within the short time frame allocated.

SMT noted the recommendation to establish a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in the Usher Services/Security team and that for the remaining period of the mandate, it was recommended that the Head of Security/Usher Services act as the SPOC.

Tara Caul stated that she was broadly satisfied with the recommendations, and emphasised the importance of recognising the changing nature of abuse and the importance of the SPOC proposal.

Steven welcomed the work carried out to date but raised significant concerns about ownership, capacity, and organisational resilience. He noted that, although both himself and Usher Services were consulted, their views were only briefly reflected in the cover paper.

In relation to the proposed SPOC, Steven said that, in his view, it is not a security function, but a Member support role spanning welfare, communications, online abuse, and cross directorate coordination and he expressed concern that locating the SPOC in Usher Services risked

misalignment of skills and accountability, and would draw resource from a service already under significant pressure.

Steven also cautioned against relying on comparisons with other parliaments that operate with materially different structures and resourcing, risking unrealistic delivery expectations.

Steven highlighted the significant upstream corporate workload the proposal would generate (SMT/Commission papers, communications, Member engagement, FOIs/AQs), with no clarity on ownership or what work would be deprioritised, and emphasised that the proposal relied on goodwill and temporary arrangements rather than a funded, resilient operating model.

Steven stated his preference for the function to be led through CAMS, with defined specialist inputs from Usher Services, IS and Communications, and that SMT should scope, agree and fund any SPOC capacity before any internal or external commitments are made.

Steven concluded by saying that there is a reputational risk if ownership and capacity are not resolved, and that further work on organisational readiness and VFM is required before proceeding.

Gareth noted that implementing the recommendations would cause major resourcing challenges, but stated that the SPOC is necessary and, in his view, was not a CAMS function.

Lesley said that as far as she was aware the SPOC sat with the Head of Security/Security in other legislatures.

SMT noted the Task and Finish Group Report Addressing the Abuse and Intimidation of MLAs and agreed to give further consideration to the Report recommendations, prior to presenting a paper to the Assembly Commission.

Action: Meeting to be arranged for SMT to consider the recommendations within the Task and Finish Group Report in more detail, prior to presenting a paper to the Assembly Commission.

SMT commended the Group on its excellent Report and the timeframe within which it was prepared.

Stephanie Mallon, Lisa McElherron and Mary Kerr left the meeting at 11.46 am.

John Hart joined the meeting at 11.50 am for agenda item 16.

16. Strategic Communications Update

John Hart provided SMT with a revised version of the Communications Strategy which had been updated following discussion at the SMT meeting on 27 February 2026.

SMT noted that some comments from the previous meeting had been reflected in the revised Strategy e.g. new branding messages but stated that it still lacked specific deliverables, and that normally a Strategy would be accompanied by a Strategic Communications Plan. John confirmed that specific targets would be developed and that those of a more strategic nature would be included in the Annual Plan.

SMT was content with the revised Strategy and the approach outlined in relation to deliverables, given that there was a need to establish a baseline position from which to work forward.

John provided SMT with a strategic communications update.

John Hart left the meeting at 12.10 pm.

17. Delivery Against Parliamentary Services Directorate Corporate Plan Milestones 2025-26

Gareth provided SMT with an update on the progress against the Parliamentary Services Directorate Annual Plan milestones for 2025-26.

SMT thanked Gareth for the update and welcomed the assurance regarding delivery of the Annual Plan.

18. Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy and Procedures Report 2025-2026

Gareth presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy and Procedures Report 2025-2026, noting that no admissible complaints had been received during the reporting period.

SMT approved the draft paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Nathan Lynch joined the meeting at 12.31 pm for agenda item 19.

19. Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers

Tara presented the Directorate Risk Registers (DRRs) and cluster analysis as at March 2026.

Tara thanked Nathan Lynch for the additional work he was undertaking in the absence of a Data Protection and Governance Officer.

Tara outlined the changes made to the DRRs since last reviewed in October 2025.

SMT reviewed the updated DRRs and emerging Risk Clusters and agreed that no further Directorate risks required escalation to the Corporate Risk Register at this time.

Lesley highlighted some observations for consideration by Directors.

Nathan Lynch left the meeting at 12.44 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

20. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Steven provided an update on the work undertaken by all business areas within the Corporate Services Directorate and, in particular, highlighted concerns raised by Members and staff about service levels in the Members' Bar; and major capacity issues within the Finance Office team.

Lesley referenced the recent fire drill and inquired whether any concerns were identified that needed reported to SMT. Steven indicated that the exercise revealed insufficient two-way communication and suggested that appropriate measures would need to be implemented. Lesley requested that the findings be documented in the next Corporate Services Directorate update for SMT and that, going forward, SMT is apprised on any concerns or lessons learned following future drills.

Action: Steven to ensure the findings of the recent fire drill are included in the next Corporate Services Directorate update for SMT and that, going forward, SMT is apprised on any concerns or lessons learned following future drills.

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.

In particular, Tara highlighted ongoing litigation cases; the successful re-launch of the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS); the number of responses received thus far in relation to the 2026 Members' Survey; and the current procurement projects.

Tara noted that the next Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee meeting was scheduled for 13 May 2026.

Parliamentary Services

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

SMT recognised and commended the efforts of those staff involved with

introducing the new approach to enhance the scrutiny of delegated legislation, noting it as a significant step forward.

On reviewing the Modernisation Project Progress Report, Lesley noted some risks had been identified and queried whether there was anything that needed considered by SMT. Gareth stated that the Project Board would be meeting in due course and that he did not think that there was anything that needed to be brought to the attention of SMT.

21. AOB

There was no other business.

22. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 27 May 2026.

23. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Further Consideration of a Proposal to Display a Portrait of His Majesty The King in Parliament Buildings
- Correspondence from Assembly and Executive Review Committee re Citizen Engagement Exercise
- Legislative Change Relating to the Appointment and Tenure of the Comptroller and Auditor General
- Annual Plan 2026-2027
- National Protective Security Authority Review – Follow up on Recommendations
- Pay Claim 2026-2029
- Provision of Restroom Facilities in Parliament Buildings
- Blue Flax Refurbishment Post-Project Evaluation
- Annual Environmental Management Review 2025-2026
- Options for the Provision of a Visitor and Engagement Centre
- Business Case for the Provision of Building Maintenance Work for 2026-2027
- Progress of Remedial Works to the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Seeking Approval to Establish Project FUSION to Deliver Replacement Finance, Payroll and HR Systems
- Litigation Update
- Review of the Data Protection Policy
- Induction 2027
- Broadcasting Contract Post-Project Evaluation
- Strategic Communications Update
- Cyber Security Assurance Review – Annual Update
- IS Office Lifecycle Plan from 2026-2027
- Information Security Incident Management
- Business Case for Microsoft Unified Support Renewal

The meeting ended at 1.06 pm.