

# **SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)**

**FRIDAY, 2 MAY 2025 at 9.30 AM  
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**APPROVED**

## **Present:**

**Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive  
Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services  
Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services  
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (deputised for Steven Baxter, Director of Corporate Services)**

## **In Attendance:**

**Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor  
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support (Items 5 and 6)  
Maria Bannon, Equality Manager (Items 7 and 8)  
Karen Steele, Deputy Head of Finance (Item 12)  
Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Items 13, 14 and 15)  
Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IT (Item 15)  
Adam Leitch, Legal Adviser (Item 16)  
Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services (Item 16)**

The meeting commenced at 9.33 am.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Steven Baxter, Sinéad McDonnell deputised.

### **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 28 March 2025 had been published.

### **4. SMT Action Points**

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

*Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.35 am for agenda items 5 and 6.*

## **5. Political Update**

SMT noted the continuing low level of Executive business and the potentially detrimental impact that this may have on scrutiny, and workloads (both Members and Assembly Commission staff) towards the end of the mandate.

## **6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda**

Robin Ramsey advised that the next Assembly Commission meeting had been scheduled for 6 May 2025.

Items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Review of the Financial Implications for Parties with Increased Employers' National Insurance Contributions Effective from 1 April 2025
- Review of the Use of Certain Members' Allowances – Implementation of Recommendations
- The Northern Ireland Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (2016) Annual Report and Accounts and Triennial Actuarial Valuation Report
- Annual Plan 2024-2025 Status at 31 December 2024
- Temporary Agency Worker Contract – Proposed Increase to Contract Value
- Appointment of a Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards
- Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland Salary Arrangements
- Amendments of Assembly Commission Handbook – Closed Sessions
- Correspondence from the Executive Office on a Memorial to Victims of Historical Institutional Abuse
- Relocation of Official Portraits
- Request for the Assembly Commission to Display a Portrait of His Majesty The King

Robin also noted that Assembly Commission Member availability to attend a further meeting was being sought.

Proposed items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Pay Claim 2025
- Annual Plan 2024-2025 Year-End Report
- Reports Summarising the Results of the 2024 Staff Survey and Next Steps
- Review of the Portraits Policy

- Disability Action Plan Reports
- Good Relations Action Plan Reports
- Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 2024-2025
- Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy and Procedures Report for 2024-2025
- Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

*Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.44 am.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Maria Bannon joined the meeting at 9.44 am for agenda items 7 and 8.*

### **7. Disability Action Plan Reports**

Maria Bannon presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Disability Action Plan, which included the Five-Year Review/Closure Report (agreed review period 2023-2025), the 2025-2030 Public Consultation Outcome Report and the draft Action Plan 2025-2030.

Maria advised that 90% of the actions had been completed and updated SMT on the outcomes of the public consultation for the 2025-2030 Action Plan.

Following consideration, SMT approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission, subject to an update to the status of one of the actions recorded in the Five-Year Review/Closure Report.

**Action:** Maria to update the paper as requested by SMT.

### **8. Good Relations Action Plan Reports**

Maria presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Good Relations Action Plan, which included the Action Plan 2022-2025 Closure Report, the 2025-2030 Public Consultation Outcome Report and the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2030.

Maria advised that 82% of the actions for 2022-2025 had been completed and updated SMT on the outcomes of the public consultation for the 2025-2030 Action Plan.

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

SMT thanked Maria and the Equality Team for their work in preparing the comprehensive reports on Disability and Good Relations.

*Maria Bannon left the meeting at 9.59 am.*

## **9. HR Management Information**

Sinéad presented the HR Management Information as at 1 April 2025.

Sinéad advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 April 2025 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 374.2 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 399 FTE.

Sinéad referred to a staff complement change request from the Head of Usher Services, which sought approval to recruit for a new post of Deputy Head of Usher Services. Sinéad noted that the proposed increase in staff complement was cost neutral.

Following consideration, SMT agreed to add a competition for a Deputy Head of Usher Services to the Recruitment Schedule.

SMT noted the temporary promotion/deputising arrangements and agency worker assignments currently in place.

Sinéad updated SMT on recruitment activity.

On reviewing the Recruitment Schedule, SMT agreed the changes including the addition of an Apprentice Solicitor (subject to discussion of a proposal at agenda item 16).

SMT noted, and was pleased to see, a reduction in the sickness absence figures for the period April 2024 – March 2025 when compared with the period April 2023 – March 2024.

## **10. Reports Summarising the Results of the 2024 Staff Survey and Next Steps**

Sinéad presented a draft Assembly Commission paper, outlining the findings of the 2024 Staff Survey and the work that is being taken forward.

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

## **11. Pay Claim 2025**

Sinéad presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Pay Claim 2025.

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

SMT thanked Sinéad for all the work that had gone into preparing the paper.

*Karen Steele joined the meeting at 10.28 am for agenda item 12.*

## **12. Threshold for Prepayments**

Karen Steele presented a paper, outlining a proposal to increase the threshold above which expenditure for future periods are prepaid.

Karen highlighted the benefits of increasing the threshold for prepayments to £10,000.

Following discussion, Lesley Hogg proposed increasing the threshold further to £25,000, to take effect from the 2025-2026 financial year, Directors were content with this.

*Karen Steele left the meeting at 10.33 am.*

*Meeting suspended at 10.33 am and resumed at 10.45 am.*

## **LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES**

*Donna-Marie Clark joined the meeting at 10.45 am for agenda items 13, 14 and 15.*

## **13. Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers**

Donna-Marie Clark presented the Directorate Risk Registers (DRRs) and cluster analysis as at March 2025.

Donna-Marie noted that the cluster analysis had been updated to reflect the changes made to the Corporate Risk Register following a zero-base review in December 2024.

SMT reviewed the 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.

## **14. Sensitivity Review 2004 to 2005 Release**

Donna-Marie presented a paper, which sought approval to release five 2004/2005 files to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

Donna-Marie noted that a further six 2004/2005 files would be actioned for transfer to PRONI during the summer.

Following consideration, SMT approved the five 2004/2005 files for transfer to PRONI.

*Mary-Ellen Nutt joined the meeting at 11.07 am for agenda item 15.*

## **15. High Level Summary of Business Case Options on Implementing an Electronic Document Records Management (EDRM) System**

Donna-Marie and Mary-Ellen Nutt presented a paper outlining proposed high-level options for an EDRM system for the Assembly Commission.

Donna-Marie advised that a formal business case, appraising all options in detail would be prepared for presentation at the June 2025 SMT meeting.

Tara Caul noted the requirement for a robust value for money analysis.

Lesley highlighted the importance of consulting with business areas to ensure that the system introduced is fit for purpose and fully meets the needs of users.

SMT thanked Donna-Marie and Mary-Ellen for the progress made thus far.

*Donna-Marie Clark and Mary-Ellen Nutt left the meeting at 11.18 am.*

*Adam Leitch and Jonathan McMillen joined the meeting at 11.18 am for agenda item 16.*

## **16. Solicitor Apprenticeship in the Legal Services Office**

Adam Leitch and Jonathan McMillen presented a paper, seeking SMT approval to recruit an Apprentice Solicitor.

Adam provided background on the role of an Apprentice Solicitor, outlining the benefits for both the Apprentice and the Assembly Commission.

SMT noted proposed adjustments to the staff complement within the Legal Service Office (LSO) which would enable the apprenticeship to be funded from within the current LSO salary budget.

Adam also sought SMT approval to make a 25% contribution towards the academic fees of the Apprentice Solicitor.

Following consideration, SMT approved an adjustment to the staff complement of the LSO and the recruitment of an Apprentice Solicitor with a 50% contribution towards the academic fees.

*Adam Leitch and Jonathan McMillen left the meeting at 11.34 am.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

### **17. Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy and Procedures Report for 2024-25**

Gareth McGrath presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the

Complaints Policy and Procedures Report for 2024-2025, advising of one admissible complaint during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

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

## **18. Strategic Communications Update**

SMT noted a communications update produced by the Acting Head of Communications.

Gareth noted that two members of the Digital Production Unit were now in post and that the former BBC studio within Parliament Buildings had been repurposed for use as an Assembly communications suite.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

### **19. SMT/Assembly Commission Papers Cleared via Correspondence**

- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Temporary Agency Worker Contract – Proposed Increase to Contract Value
- Renewal of Microsoft Strategic Partnership Agreement
- Amendment of Assembly Commission Handbook – Closed Sessions
- Correspondence from the Executive Office on a Memorial to Victims of Historical Institutional Abuse
- Relocation of Official Portraits
- Assembly Arrangements to Mark the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VE Day
- Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland Salary Arrangements
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings (SMT Paper)

## **20. Directors' Updates**

### **Corporate Services**

Sinéad provided an update on the work undertaken by all business areas within the Corporate Services Directorate and, in particular, highlighted the update on the National Protective Security Authority survey. SMT requested a report be provided outlining the findings of the survey along with any conclusions and recommendations for consideration.

**Action:** Steven Baxter to request a report from the National Protective Security Authority, setting out the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the recent survey.

### **Legal, Governance and Research Services**

Tara provided an update on all business areas within the Legal, Governance and Research Services Directorate.

In particular, Tara noted current litigation; the ongoing procurement projects and the ACARC meeting scheduled for 16 May 2025.

### **Parliamentary Services**

SMT noted the work undertaken by all business areas within the Parliamentary Services Directorate, since last reported at the SMT meeting on 28 March 2025.

## **21. AOB**

### **Blue Flax Refurbishment Options**

SMT considered a paper detailing the outcome of the tender competition for the Blue Flax Refurbishment and following consideration, approved cost options as recommended, to enable refurbishment to proceed.

Lesley advised that she had sought clarification on the micro-market and had asked the Support Services Manager to provide SMT with details on the micro-market and the facilities it will incorporate.

### **Addendum to Support Services Business Case (Capital Expenditure)**

SMT considered and approved an addendum to the Support Services business case in relation to the capital expenditure associated with the Support Services contract.

## **22. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 28 May 2025 or 4 June 2025.

## **23. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

- Review of the Portraits Policy
- Disability Access Audit
- Annual Environmental Management Review 2024-2025
- Annual Plan 2024-2025 Year-End Report
- Internal Communications Quarterly Update
- Strategic Communications Update

The meeting ended at 12.03 pm.