SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)

WEDNESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2026 at 9.30 AM
ROOMS 23 AND 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 to the Clerk/Chief Executive
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support (Items 5 and 6)
Billy Mahoney, Deputy Head of Finance (Items 7 and 7.1)
Terri Quigley, Head of Facilities Management (Items 8 and 9)
Paula McClintock, Head of Finance (Item 10)
Mark McConnell, Executive Assistant to the Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services (Item 10)
Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services (Item 11)
Julie Davidson, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Item 11)
Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR (Item 13 and 13.1)
Richard Scott, Business Relationship Manager (Item 14)
Roisin Kelly, Assembly Clerk (Item 15)
Mary Kerr, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk (Item 15)
Lisa McElherron, Clerk Assistant (Item 16)
John Hart, Head of Communications (Items 17 and 18)
Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer (Item 17)
Dan Hull, Chairperson of the Internal Communications Group (Item 19)

The meeting commenced at 9.47 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 7 August 2026 were in the process of being published.

4. SLT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.48 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

SLT acknowledged the pressures in the run-up to the end of the mandate and recognised that many staff were working extended hours.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Proposed agenda items for the next Assembly Commission meeting were considered.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.06 am.

Billy Mahoney joined the meeting at 10.07 am for agenda items 7 and 7.1.

CORPORATE SERVICES

7. Management Accounts July 2026

SLT noted the Management Accounts for July 2026.

Billy Mahoney confirmed that there were no internal movements or approvals that required SLT approval in the July accounts.

7.1 Management Accounts August 2026

Billy presented the Management Accounts for August 2026.

SLT noted the forecast outturns for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (WFDSC) costs and that the August forecast had informed the wider review of the Assembly Commission's 2026-30 budget position, which is being considered separately.

Billy sought SLT approval for two Admin budget adjustments: an additional £12k for legislative drafting in the Bill Office and £45k for approved iTrent development work in HR.

In light of budget pressures, SLT rejected the requests for additional funding but agreed that the expenditure could proceed if met from existing business area or directorate budgets.

Tara advised that the litigation budget would be insufficient to cover costs for the remainder of the financial year and that additional funds would need to be identified.

Billy provided a summary of the capital projects in the 2026-27 Capital Plan and highlighted a forecast underspend of £30k against the opening Capital DEL budget.

In relation to Members' Costs, Billy advised that the Finance Office would urgently engage with Members to assess anticipated spending against constituency cost budgets and identify any funds that could be redirected to address forecast pressures.

In response to concerns raised by SLT at its July 2026 meeting about overdue, overspent or otherwise outstanding Decision Authorisation System (DAS) records, Billy confirmed that the Finance Office had completed a one-off review with the relevant Heads of Business (HoBs) and corrected the affected records.

Lesley questioned the decision to apply a 10% overspend tolerance to all DAS records, and Billy undertook to review it.

Action: Billy to review the application of a 10% overspend tolerance to all DAS records.

SLT thanked Billy for the reports and also for his assistance in preparing the recent Department of Finance budget return.

Billy Mahoney left the meeting at 10.23 am.

Terri Quigley joined the meeting at 10.24 am for agenda items 8 and 9.

8. Business Case for the Provision of Building Maintenance Services for 2026-27

Terri Quigley presented a retrospective business case which sought approval for the provision of building maintenance services for 2026-27.

Terri advised that the services were delivered through the Department of Finance Property Maintenance Pan-Government Framework Agreement 2024.

Terri stated that following approval of the business case for the development of a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) by SLT at its meeting on 7 August 2026, maintenance priorities had been reviewed and available resources reprioritised. She noted that some planned activities had therefore been deferred, reduced in scope or reprofiled, allowing funds

to be redirected to the CMP while remaining within the overall planned maintenance budget. Terri referred SLT to the detailed breakdown of the revised budget.

SLT raised significant concern about not being advised of the impact on the Maintenance Plan for Parliament Buildings when being asked to approve the CMP business case; that SLT had not been given all the necessary information in the CMP business case to make an informed decision; and that while the business case for the CMP highlighted the risks of not proceeding, it had not highlighted the risks of proceeding.

SLT raised further serious concerns that delays in the CMP; cleaning the façade of Parliament Buildings; and redecoration of the offices of the deputy First Minister, which were to be progressed in 2025-26, were having a devastating impact on the repairs and maintenance budget for the current year and causing projects to be deferred to the next financial year, which would have a similar knock-on-impact on the projects planned for that year and so on.

Terri acknowledged the financial pressures in the current year but advised that the position would improve next year and would not be repeated.

SLT also highlighted the need for flooring repairs throughout the building and expressed concern that Café Recess had been redecorated without prior discussion, while flooring on the first and fourth floors and several fourth-floor offices required more urgent attention; that the design of Café Recess and the Visitors' Restaurant was not in keeping with the Blue Flax; and asked that the works required in the fourth-floor offices be reviewed urgently.

Action: Terri to review the repair works required in the fourth-floor offices urgently.

SLT raised further concerns about how maintenance expenditure incurred since the start of the financial year had been authorised given that an approved business case was not in place, noting that this constituted a breach of governance processes.

Terri acknowledged that it was not ideal, stated that the objective was to deliver the ten-year CMP, and she considered the Assembly Commission was in a good place.

SLT disagreed, stating that, as custodians of Parliament Buildings, SLT should prioritise the urgent replacement of flooring and windows rather than diverting resources to the CMP and emphasised the significant financial pressure on the current-year budget.

Terri advised that she had incurred the expenditure because of health and safety reasons. SLT reiterated that governance processes had not been followed.

SLT noted that, following consultation with the Head of Procurement, several issues had been identified in the business case, including discrepancies between the figures presented and those recorded in the procurement pipeline.

SLT also noted that the Procurement Office was not listed as a consultee in the paper and emphasised the importance of consulting with the Procurement Office on papers of this nature; that, from a governance perspective, a Procurement Strategy was required for projects exceeding £50,000; and that the appropriate governance arrangements must be in place going forward.

SLT expressed concern about the increase in and control and management of professional fees; the need to both monitor professional fees and ensure value for money (VFM); and asked if Terri was content that VFM was being provided. Terri confirmed she was content. SLT requested a full explanation of the professional rates and fees and demonstration of how VFM is assured.

Action: Terri to provide SLT with a full explanation and breakdown of the professional fees and rates referenced in the business case for the provision of building maintenance services for 2026-27, along with a demonstration of how VFM is assured.

Given the issues identified, SLT did not approve the business case and requested that it be revised, that consultation take place with the Procurement Office and that it be resubmitted by 25 September 2026 given the significant governance and other concerns.

Action: Terri to consult with the Head of Procurement, revise the business case to address the issues identified by SLT, and resubmit it to SLT by 25 September 2026.

9. Supply of Natural Gas Business Justification

Terri presented and sought approval of a retrospective business justification and associated expenditure for the supply of natural gas to Parliament Buildings for the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029.

Gareth McGrath commented that whilst the business justification was largely an administrative requirement, there was no reason why it could not have been submitted to SLT in advance of the start of the 2026-27 financial year.

Following consideration, SLT approved the retrospective business justification and associated expenditure, noting again that the Assembly Commission's governance arrangements had not been followed.

Terri Quigley left the meeting at 11.15 am.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Paula McClintock and Mark McConnell joined the meeting at 11.15 am for agenda item 10.

10. Biennial Review of Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklist, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan

Tara presented a paper on the biennial review of the Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklist, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan.

Tara advised that, since the last review in September 2024, the Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists had been substantially redesigned and consolidated into a single integrated self-assessment, including a new evidence and assurance section. She thanked Paula McClintock, Mark McConnell and Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR, for producing the revised document.

Tara noted that each of the 57 self-assessment statements had been rated red, amber or green, highlighting the six rated red or amber. Following review, SLT agreed to change one red rating to amber and revised the wording of one Action Plan action.

In relation to the Bribery Risk Assessment, Tara confirmed that the risk appetite remained Averse and the scores were unchanged since the previous review.

SLT welcomed the streamlined approach and approved the updated Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklist, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan, subject to the minor amendments discussed.

Action: Tara to arrange for the Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklist, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan to be amended as requested by SLT.

Paula McClintock and Mark McConnell left the meeting at 11.32 am.

Jonathan McMillen and Julie Davidson joined the meeting at 11.32 am for agenda item 11.

11. Revised Data Protection Policy

Jonathan McMillen presented a paper on the revised Data Protection Policy.

Jonathan advised that the Data Protection Policy had been significantly revised since its last biannual review in July 2024, to reflect Internal Audit findings and key provisions of the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 that had since come into effect.

Tara thanked Jonathan and Julie Davidson for streamlining the policy and improving its accessibility.

Following consideration, SLT approved the revised policy and noted that it would be published on AssISt and communicated to staff.

Jonathan suggested reviewing the Assembly Commission's Complaints Policy, in light of the relevant provisions of the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025.

Action: Gareth to arrange for a review to be undertaken of the Assembly Commission's Complaints Policy, in light of the relevant provisions of the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 now in effect.

Jonathan McMillen and Julie Davidson left the meeting at 11.38 am.

12. Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Tara Caul presented the Corporate Risk Register for September 2026, noting that it had been reviewed in detail at a separate meeting and updated accordingly.

SLT noted the revisions and approved the CRR for publication on AssISt and presentation to the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee at its next meeting.

Steven Baxter proposed the inclusion of Artificial Intelligence as a standalone risk at the next quarterly review. SLT agreed this proposal.

The meeting was suspended at 11.41 am and resumed at 12.05 pm.

CORPORATE SERVICES (CONTINUED)

Karen Martin joined the meeting at 12.05 pm for agenda items 13 and 13.1.

13. HR Management Information as at 1 August 2026

SLT noted the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 August 2026.

Karen Martin sought approval of a Complement Change Request to transfer a System Administrator post from the Finance Office in the Corporate Services Directorate to the IS Office in the Parliamentary Services Directorate. SLT approved the request.

13.1 HR Management Information as at 1 September 2026

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 September 2026.

Karen advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 September 2026 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 396.7 FTE against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 415.9 FTE.

Karen sought approval of a Complement Change Request for a temporary 0.4 FTE increase in Complement Plus within the IS Office. SLT considered and approved the request on the basis that the associated costs would be met from the business area's existing budget.

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

Karen provided an update on recruitment activity, and SLT considered and agreed the priority of a number of competitions on the Recruitment Schedule. Karen referred to a previous request from SLT for the Recruitment Team to consider the apparent reduction in applicant numbers for recent recruitment competitions and if there was any potential link to the fact that vacancies were no longer advertised in newspapers.

Karen advised that the Recruitment Team had reviewed recruitment competitions advertised since the change in advertising approach in October 2025 and provided an analysis. Based on this information, SLT was content that the reduction in applicant numbers was not substantial and was unlikely to be related to advertising.

Sickness absence information was provided and SLT noted that during the period September 2025 to August 2026, the average number of working days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 9.9. Karen advised that this was lower than the corresponding figures recently published for the Northern Ireland Civil Service and local councils.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 12.23 pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Richard Scott joined the meeting at 12.23 pm for agenda item 14.

14. Business Case for the Renewal of Fully Resilient Internet Connectivity

Richard Scott presented and sought approval of a business case for the renewal of fully resilient internet connectivity.

Following consideration, SLT approved the recommended option to renew fully resilient internet connectivity for a four-year term.

Richard Scott left the meeting at 12.24 pm.

Roisin Kelly and Mary Kerr joined the meeting at 12.25 pm for agenda item 15.

15. Provision of Sign Language Interpretation Services

Mary Kerr and Roisin Kelly presented a paper which sought approval to procure a short-term contract for sign language interpretation services, commencing in April 2027, when the current arrangement expires.

Roisin confirmed that the proposed contract would provide an interim arrangement while officials considered longer-term sign language provision in line with the Sign Language Act.

Following consideration, SLT approved the proposed procurement of a short-term contract for sign language interpretation services.

SLT noted that the current provision was working well and thanked Mary and Roisin for successfully arranging and managing the contract.

Roisin Kelly and Mary Kerr left the meeting at 12.33 pm.

Lisa McElherron joined the meeting at 12.33 pm for agenda item 16.

16. Request from Kellie Armstrong MLA for Consideration of a Special School's Formal at Parliament Buildings

Lisa McElherron presented and sought approval of a draft Assembly Commission paper in relation to a request from Kellie Armstrong MLA for consideration of a special school's formal at Parliament Buildings.

Lisa advised that a request from a special school to hold a formal at Parliament Buildings had been declined in line with the Assembly Commission's Sponsored Events in Parliament Buildings Policy and that Ms Armstrong had subsequently written to the Speaker asking that the decision be reconsidered, and that an exception be made in relation to this request and for special schools in general.

Lisa noted that the draft paper being considered provided a recommended option for consideration by the Assembly Commission.

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

Lisa McElherron left the meeting at 12.41 pm.

The meeting was suspended at 12.41 pm and resumed at 2.10 pm.

John Hart joined the meeting at 2.10 pm for agenda items 17 and 18.

Liz Beaton joined the meeting at 2.10 pm for agenda item 17.

17. Internal Communications Quarterly Update

Liz Beaton provided an update on internal communications activity for the period June 2026 to mid-September 2026.

Liz highlighted activities such as the Summer Staff Briefing and launch of the Leadership Framework; wellbeing coaching call for expressions of interest; preparations for the recent launch of the 2026 Staff Survey; the September

Directorate meetings; and two staff webinars, which Liz stated were growing in popularity.

Liz also referred to a video made by the Internal Communications Group to raise awareness and highlight changes and progress since the last Staff Survey, and advised that the Good Ideas Group would also be producing a video to highlight some of the good ideas implemented.

Liz informed SLT that Lisa McElherron had recently taken over the role of Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Group.

Liz referred to key areas of focus for the next quarter, which included supporting the 2026 Staff Survey and communicating the Post-Survey Action Plan; supporting existing projects and new initiatives to enhance the Assembly's parliamentary culture; and using digital storytelling to highlight change.

SLT thanked Liz for her support at the recent Directorate meetings and welcomed the continued progress in internal communications.

Liz Beaton left the meeting at 2.35 pm.

18. Strategic Communications Update

John Hart provided SLT with a strategic communications update.

John Hart left the meeting at 2.48 pm.

OTHER

Dan Hull joined the meeting at 2.49 pm for agenda item 19.

19. Update on the Work of the Internal Communications Group (ICG) April to September 2026

Dan Hull updated SLT on ICG's activities from April to September 2026, which he stated had focused primarily on preparing for the launch of the 2026 Staff Survey.

Dan advised that he had liaised with business areas on various aspects of the Staff Survey and he provided the response rate to date.

Dan noted that, once the survey closed, ICG would review the findings and produce a report by the end of October. Dan advised that he and Catherine McIntosh, Organisational Development and Learning Manager, would then present a summary to SLT on 4 November 2026, and that each Director and HoB would receive a Results Pack.

SLT thanked Dan for his efforts to deliver the Staff Survey and asked him to convey its appreciation to the other members of ICG.

Dan Hull left the meeting at 2.53 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

20. SLT Papers Cleared via Correspondence

Update on Budget 2026-30.

Complement Plus Change Application from Parliamentary Services for a temporary Clerk post from 26 September 2026 to 31 March 2027.

21. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Steven provided an update on all business areas within the Corporate Services Directorate.

In particular, Steven updated SLT on the remedial works to the roof of Parliament Buildings; the current position with the installation of the Electronic Access Control (EAC) system; issues with the recently installed barriers at the lower east car park; and the Blue Flax evening offering and Coffee Lounge provision.

Lesley highlighted that it had been brought to her attention that the Coffee Lounge was operating on a purely self-service basis, and that she had called in herself and had been told the same thing. Steven advised that this should not have been the case and that it was agreed that both the self-service and traditional service offerings would be operating in parallel.

Action: Steven to arrange for a communication to issue to all building users outlining the Blue Flax evening offering and the new Coffee Lounge service options.

In relation to the roof, Steven reported that Phase 1 of the remedial roof works at Parliament Buildings had been completed successfully. SLT noted with significant concern the further delays in progressing Phase 2 and that it was not now expected to begin until 2029. Given this timescale, Steven advised that discussions were under way with Property Services Division to determine whether parts of the programme could be brought forward, such as replacing the guard rails and the repairs to Courtyard 8, which remained closed, and any other courtyards presenting an increased risk. He stated that he was therefore considering a potential Phase 2A to accelerate the necessary guard rail and courtyard works and would discuss this with the Roof Project Board and bring forward a paper to SLT.

Tara referred to the projects for the North, South and Goods lifts, which were on the procurement pipeline but for which Procurement Strategies had still not been produced. Lesley expressed concern at the delays in the lift projects as SLT had been informed in December 2025 and January 2026 that

the works were urgent and were a health and safety risk and that a business case for the South lift had not yet been presented to SLT.

SLT expressed serious concern about the governance issues arising in Building Services. SLT therefore agreed that an Internal Audit review of governance and project delivery in the business area should be commissioned as a matter of urgency.

Action: Steven to arrange for an Internal Audit review of governance and project delivery in Building Services to be commissioned as a matter of urgency.

Lesley also requested that the monthly Management Accounts include expenditure by project against business case and budget and apologised as she had meant to raise the issue under the Management Accounts section of the agenda.

Action: Steven and Lesley to meet to identify which projects should be included in the Management Accounts going forward.

Lesley asked about the status of the travel booking system and iTrent salary forecasting. Steven agreed to provide SLT with updates.

Action: Steven to provide SLT with updates on the travel booking system and iTrent salary forecasting.

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; FOI deadlines, work of the Examiner of Statutory Rules; participation in the Learning and Development pilot; the hosting by Research and Information Service (RaISe) of the Inter-Parliamentary Research and Information Network (IPRIN) 2026 Annual Conference; the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS); and ongoing procurement projects.

Tara informed SLT that the Head of Procurement had highlighted a number of projects requiring retrospective Procurement Strategies, which she noted was in breach of governance requirements.

Parliamentary Services

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

Gareth acknowledged the collaboration across all directorates in supporting the extended Monday and Tuesday sittings.

22. AOB

Steven advised that Trade Union Side had submitted a counter proposal in relation to the Pay Claim 2026-2029 and that a paper would be prepared for consideration by the Assembly Commission.

Steven also asked that SLT review the draft letter for the Audit Committee in relation to the Assembly Commission's budget for 2026-2030, which would be incorporated into a paper for Assembly Commission approval.

23. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 23 October 2026.

24. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Strategic Review of the Finance Office
- Pay Claim 2026-2029
- HR Policy Review
- Business Continuity Plan
- Update on the Electronic Access Control System
- Electronic Access Control Policy
- Blue Flax Refurbishment Post-Project Evaluation
- Annual Plan 2026-2027 Update 30 September 2026
- Progress of Remedial Works to the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Review of Decision Making Protocols
- Consideration of FOI Handbook
- Information Asset Owners Handbook
- Information Security Group Annual Report and Self-Assessment
- Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers
- Biennial Review of the National Audit Office Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan
- Limited Pilot for the Options of Extended Opening During Summer Recess 2027
- Broadcasting Contract Post-Project Evaluation
- Strategic Communications Update

The meeting ended at 3.48 pm.