

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP

**FRIDAY, 11 APRIL 2014 AT 9.32AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present: Trevor Reaney
Simon Burrowes
Brian Moreland
John Stewart
Richard Stewart
Stephen Welch

In Attendance: Jim Beatty
David Johnston
Brian Devlin
Robert Barry
Barbara Love
Karen Martin
John Gibson
Tony Logue
Robin Ramsey
Michael Cochrane

1 Opening/Review

(a) Apologies

Apologies were received from Gareth McGrath and Hugh Widdis. Simon Burrowes attended on behalf of Mr McGrath and Brian Moreland attended on behalf of Mr Widdis.

(b) Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

(c) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of 7 March 2014 had been approved and were published on 19 March 2014.

(d) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

2 Action Points

- 2.1 The Action Points list was reviewed. Members were asked to advise Jim Beatty of any further updates/amendments.

3 Business Plans 2013/14

- 3.1 Directors are currently reviewing annual performance against Business Plans for 2013/14. The completed proformas will be brought to the next SMG meeting

4 Strategic Work Strands and Groups

(a) Review of Strategic Work Strands 2013/14

SMG noted the progress on each of the Strategic Work Strands at the end of 2013/14.

(b) Proposed Strategic Work Strands 2014/15

Work is ongoing and proposals are near completion.

(c) Financial Management Group

The outturn of 2013/14 is currently being assessed and is expected to be within the agreed targets.

5 Corporate Risk Register

- 5.1 David Johnston joined the meeting at 9.45am and said that he had been notified of some changes to the register which had yet to be amended. After a discussion, some further changes to the Register were identified. David will make the required amendments.
- 5.2 It was agreed that it was an opportune time to review all of the risks on the Register and the risk ownership concept.

ACTION: HUGH WIDDIS

6 Roof Project Update

- 6.1 Stephen Welch told SMG that Tracey Bros, the appointed contractor, had begun to make preparations to start the work which will include siting a crane in the work area to the rear of Parliament Buildings.

- 6.2 SMG acknowledged not only the excellent work of the Project Team but all of those who had helped including the ISO and Facilities. In particular, the informative and regular communications were appreciated.

7 Review of Clerk/CE 'Financial Guidance' Memo of June 2011

- 7.1 John Stewart said that this paper had been produced after consultation and a review of the guidance within the 2011 memo. There were a number of changes recommended to the guidance and these were discussed by SMG.
- 7.2 The issue of staff attendance at conferences was discussed and the need for and benefits of post-attendance reports was emphasised.
- 7.3 SMG agreed the recommendations within the report and a revised memo will be issued.

ACTION: TREVOR REANEY

8 Post Project Evaluation

- 8.1 John Stewart spoke to this paper. When considering the Business Efficiency Programme Evaluation Report on 14 February 2014, SMG noted the recommendation relating to post project evaluations and asked for a specific paper on the issue.
- 8.2 The need for a consistent approach to all projects was identified as a key issue and the paper recommended that PRINCE2 (Projects IN Controlled Environments) methodology should be applied to all projects. This methodology is widely used throughout UK Government Departments.
- 8.3 It was agreed that a single methodology should be used for all projects although there would need to be further consideration of how/when this would fully apply, eg, some projects valued at less than £25,000 may be of significantly high importance/impact. The need for full and proper training was also recognised.
- 8.4 It was agreed that John Stewart, in consultation with others, would consider the issues discussed and bring back a further paper to SMG.

ACTION: JOHN STEWART

9. Replacement of Assembly Laptops – Business Case

- 9.1 Brian Devlin joined the meeting at 10.42am and spoke to this paper.
- 9.2 In 2007 laptops were issued to MLAs, political parties and Assembly Staff, a total of 235. These are now considered obsolete and need to be replaced. It was proposed that new laptops (using Windows 8) are bought and the obsolete units are replaced on a one for one basis. Sustainable Development Branch will manage the disposal of the old units. The required capital expenditure has been provided for within this year's budget.
- 9.3 SMG considered the proposal and approved the business case.

10 Members Survey

- 10.1 Robert Barry and Barbara Love joined the meeting at 11.00am and spoke to this paper on behalf of the project team taking this issue forward.
- 10.2 It is hoped that a two method approach will increase the response rate. The first will be a quantitative online survey via Survey Monkey which will be issued to all MLAs. There will be follow-up action to encourage MLAs to complete the questionnaire. The second action will involve a qualitative survey to be undertaken by staff who will contact 36 MLAs on a random basis for interview.
- 10.3 It is planned to begin the survey in May/June, to analyse the results over the Summer and to bring a further paper back to SMG in September.
- 10.4 SMG considered the plans and the draft questionnaire. Some other issues were identified and will be taken forward by the project team. SMG noted and approved the survey.

11 Internal Communications Action Plan

- 11.1 Karen Martin joined the meeting at 11.12am and spoke to this paper.
- 11.2 Responsibility for internal communications passed to the HR Office from 1 March 2014. The HR Office has since reviewed the Action Plan and developed a revised plan for SMG's approval. The key themes from the former plan have been retained but some actions have been amended or deleted. After discussion, it was agreed the all Directors should ensure that regular briefings with their staff are incorporated within Directorate Business Plans.

ACTION: ALL DIRECTORS

- 11.3 A key strand of internal communications has been the staff briefings provided by the Clerk/CE. The number attending the briefings was low and the Clerk/CE asked Directors to encourage attendance in the future. As an alternative, the Clerk/CE will consider attending Directorate meetings if these can be organised within a short period.
- 11.4 The number of questions/suggestions to the Clerk/CE has dropped significantly since the ability to submit these anonymously was removed. It was agreed that in light of the few hard copy submissions received via the boxes around the building, HR Office will consider removing them.
- 11.5 The Action Plan was approved and will be sent to all staff.

12. Drugs and Alcohol Policy

- 12.1 SMG had approved a draft policy for consultation on 13 December 2013. Consultation had been completed and the amended draft policy was back with SMG for approval.
- 12.2 In considering the draft, SMG recognised the sensitivities surrounding these issues and how they should be dealt with by managers. SMG was reassured that the HR Office would always provide support and advice to staff and managers. The need for proper training was also discussed.
- 12.3 SMG approved the policy.

13 Social Media Policy

- 13.1 SMG had approved a draft policy for consultation and this had been completed. The revised draft was back with SMG for approval.
- 13.2 SMG discussed the proposed policy. It was agreed that there would always be areas difficult to specifically address but this policy made significant progress in this area.
- 13.3 Some amendments to the policy were identified and the HR Office will make the required changes to the policy. A final draft will be cleared by correspondence to SMG members.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART/KAREN MARTIN

14 People Service Plan

- 14.1 A People Service Plan had been agreed by SMG in June 2012 and this paper provided a review of the plan to date and set out an updated plan for 2014/16.
- 14.2 In reviewing the 2012/14 plan, SMG agreed that good progress had been made in a wide range of areas, for example, the development and promotion of the Employer Supported Volunteer Programme.
- 14.3 It was agreed that 2014/16 plan was challenging and it was pleasing to note the use of learning and development to support the achievement of Corporate Objectives. SMG discussed the need to provide more opportunities for mentoring.
- 14.4 SMG noted the progress to date and approved the plan for 2014/16.

15 HR Management Information

- 15.1 Karen Martin spoke to the paper on this issue. A Corporate Strategy objective is to have an average of three days training per member of staff per year. The current figure completed is 2.96 days. It is believed that some staff complete training, particularly informal, without updating the online register and Directors were again urged to encourage their staff to record all training.
- 15.2 In 2010, SMG agreed an absence benchmark of 7.5 average working days lost per annum per employee. The cumulative average working days lost per employee for the period March 2013 – February 2014 was 8.6 days, which represents a decrease of 2.1 days compared with the March 2012 – February 2013 figure of 10.7 days. Trevor Reaney acknowledged the efforts of all involved in improving the absence levels.
- 15.3 SMG noted that 380.7 staff are currently working within the Secretariat of which 363.8 are permanent staff.

16 Use of Business Cases

- 16.1 John Gibson joined the meeting at 12.10pm and spoke to this paper.
- 16.2 The Secretariat presently operates two business case templates, one of which is for above £25k requirements and the other for those occurring below this threshold. In addition, the Finance Office has recently introduced a business case template for the utilisation of consultants.

- 16.3 The Clerk /CE requested a review of the Assembly Secretariat's use of business cases, with the objective of establishing a clear policy to be finalised by end May 2014. This task was delegated to the Head of Procurement for completion. The review was prompted by observations of the Assembly Secretariat's use of business cases as contained in various reports referred to Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) by Internal and External Audit and the Review of Contract Creation and Management.
- 16.4 SMG agreed on the key issues of consistency, openness and clarity to address any future challenges to decisions. However, this had to be combined with a flexible and appropriate approach. While agreeing with the majority of proposals, SMG identified the need for some further changes.
- 16.5 The paper will be amended to take account of the changes proposed by SMG and returned to a future meeting.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART/JOHN GIBSON

17 Good Relations Monitoring

- 17.1 Tony Logue joined the meeting at 12.20pm and spoke to this paper.
- 17.2 The 2012-2016 Good Relations Strategy and associated Action Plan was approved by the Commission at their meeting held on 25 September 2012 and the 6 monthly monitoring report (September 2013-March 2014) provided SMG with an update on the progression of actions undertaken across each of the Directorates.
- 17.3 The Good Relations Action Plan Monitoring Report recorded 20 completed actions, 32 on-going actions and 2 marked as not complete.
- 17.4 SMG noted the excellent progress to date.

18 Commission/SMG Business

- 18.1 Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 12.25pm. Tony Logue presented the agenda for the Commission meeting planned for 13 May 2014. The agreed items are:-
- Clerk/CE's Update
 - Commission Governance Arrangements
 - Employer's Public Liability Insurance
 - Laptop Replacement Business Case
 - Members Survey
 - Committee for Standards and Privileges – Consultation

- Pay Remit 2014

18.2 SMG noted the Forward Work Plan to July 2014.

19 Distribution, Training and Familiarisation of ACER Tablet Computers

19.1 Brian Devlin and Michael Cochrane joined the meeting at 12.45pm. Some Directors had already received and were using the new tablet computers.

19.2 Michael Cochrane explained that the first tranche of releases had begun and others were planned for the following week. Training for Directors would be provided on a one-to-one basis if required. Meeting packs will be similar to those already provided for e-committee packs and will be stored centrally on Sharepoint where there will also be access to previous packs.

20 Election May 2014

20.1 Trevor Reaney reminded Directors of the impending elections on 22 May 2014 and the need to plan for the potential impact on business.

21. Directors' Updates

21.1 Brian Moreland said that there had been a meeting of the SARC on 10 April 2014. No issues of concern were raised.

21.2 Stephen Welch said that there has been a slight delay in implementing the new mobile phone contract. Work will begin next week to repair the East lift.

21.3 John Stewart briefed colleagues on the appointment of a consultant to improve how staff upload information to the Assembly's website and an external IT problem that caused some problems in relation to the Electronic Committee Pack Project. He said that new rules on Assembly information on non-Assembly smartphones would be issued by the IS Office in order to make further improvements to information security. John said that the Assembly would submit evidence to the House of Commons Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy.

21.4 The Clerk/CE said that John Stewart had taken a leading role in planning for next week's Directors' off-site meeting and asked everyone to check for receipt of their papers.

22 Items cleared by correspondence

- 22.1 SMG noted that no items had been cleared by correspondence since the last meeting.

23 AOB

- 23.1 Stephen Welch asked about the vetting arrangements for articles for Life on the Hill.

24 Request to Re-Evaluate Post

- 24.1 Brian Moreland and Simon Burrowes left the meeting. SMG discussed and agreed the request to re-evaluate a post.

25 Next Meeting

- 25.1 The next meeting will be held on Thursday, 8 May 2014 at 9.30am in Room 106.

The meeting adjourned at 1 10am.