

# SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

TUESDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2019 at 9.30AM  
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

## APPROVED

**Present:** Lesley Hogg  
Tara Caul  
Gareth McGrath  
Richard Stewart

**In Attendance:** Frances Leneghan  
Janet Hughes  
Robin Ramsey  
Paula McClintock  
Sinéad McDonnell  
Ashleigh Mitford  
Clairita Frazer  
Martina Dalton  
Brian Devlin  
Paul Gill  
Simon Burrowes

### Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.34am.

#### 1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

#### 2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes and unrestricted papers from the meeting on 20 November 2019 were published on 12 December 2019.

#### 4. SMG Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

*Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.37am for agenda item 5.*

## **5. Political Update**

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive noted that political talks had recommenced and the possibility of the resumption of normal Assembly business by 13 January 2020 meant that careful consideration needed to be given to preparations for staffing. SMG agreed that contact should be made with all temporarily redeployed staff and their host organisations advising that there may be a requirement to recall staff at short notice early in the New Year.

**Action:** HR to write to temporarily redeployed staff and their host organisations advising them of the possible recall of Assembly staff early in the New Year.

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services advised SMG that consideration would need to be given to the delivery of committee packs on resumption of normal Assembly business, as the electronic tablets previously used by Members and Secretariat staff prior to suspension of the Assembly were technically obsolete and used an operating system which was no longer supported.

Lesley requested a paper on the options available to address this problem.

**Action:** Gareth to prepare an updated business case for the replacement of tablet devices for consideration by SMG and the Assembly Commission.

**Action:** Gareth to identify options and costs for the printing of paper committee packs.

*Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services joined the meeting at 9.44am.*

Richard raised the issue of the post-EU exit implications for the Independent Financial Review Panel's 2016 Determination, which had previously been considered by SMG and the Assembly Commission in June 2019. It was agreed that the Speaker should be advised that it might be wise to write again to the Secretary of State (SoS) highlighting this issue and that a further paper be prepared for the next SMG and Assembly Commission meetings.

**Action:** Speaker to be asked to write again to the SoS on the issue of post EU-exit implications.

**Action:** Richard to prepare a further paper on post-EU exit implications for the next SMG and Assembly Commission meetings.

## **CORPORATE SUPPORT UNIT**

Robin Ramsey updated SMG on work done in relation to readiness to resume normal business.

He stated that work was continuing on corporate planning guidance for 2020/21 and that a provisional date for the corporate staff event in June 2020 was being finalised.

*Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.06am.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Paula McClintock, Head of Finance joined the meeting at 10.06am for agenda item 7.*

### **6. Management Accounts**

Paula McClintock presented the Management Accounts for November 2019.

Paula confirmed that the formal Monitoring exercise commissioned by the Department of Finance (DoF) had been completed and SMG noted the current forecast outturn figures for 2019/20.

Paula advised that the January Monitoring exercise was carried out in two phases. She confirmed that the first phase was complete. It covered surrenders and internal re-allocations and will be used to establish the Spring Supplementary Estimate position for the Assembly Commission.

Paula explained that the forecasts had been prepared on the basis that there would be no return to normal Assembly business during the remainder of this financial year. She stated that it was important to note that the renewed focus on restoring the Executive meant that there was a greater likelihood that there would be a return to normal Assembly business in the last quarter of this year, which would have an impact on the resources required.

It was noted that the deadline for submission of the second phase of the Monitoring exercise to the Department of Finance was 2 January 2020.

Paula stated that the second phase would include any bids for resources for the remainder of the year. In light of the recent renewed focus on restoring the Executive, SMG agreed that forecasts for both the resumption of normal Assembly business and an Assembly election occurring before the end of the financial year should be prepared before the second stage of the Monitoring exercise was completed.

**Action:** Paula to prepare budget projections for both the resumption of normal Assembly business and an Assembly election occurring before the end of the financial year.

Gareth advised that £150k should be included in the capital bid for Surface Pro tablets should normal Assembly business be resumed. SMG considered and approved an additional capital bid of £3k for office furniture and also noted a further proposed bid to establish a dedicated Learning and Development Room. Further scoping work to be carried out in relation to the cost of the room with a detailed breakdown of the overall cost to be provided to SMG for consideration.

**Action:** Detailed costings to be provided to SMG to establish a dedicated Learning and Development Room.

Paula stated that a number of Decision Authorisation System (DAS) records had passed their required end date and that Heads of Business (HoBs) would be contacted to provide explanations of variances.

**Action:** Paula to contact HoBs, requesting that they check their end of year DAS records.

*Paula McClintock left the meeting at 10.38am.*

*Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR joined the meeting at 10.38am for agenda item 7.*

## **7. HR Management Information**

Sinéad McDonnell presented the monthly HR Management Information.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 December (including agency and seconded staff) was 305.5 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 353.4 FTE.

Sinéad provided SMG with copies of the latest temporary redeployment table for review.

Lesley asked that the appendix to the paper on agency staff be updated going forward to reflect their FTE status.

SMG reviewed the Recruitment Schedule and agreed a few minor amendments, namely, to remove records of completed competitions from the report and amend the AG5 Procurement Manager post from one to two.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period December 2018 to November 2019, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 11.5 days, which did not compare favourably with the same period last year when the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 9.2 days.

**Action:** Sinéad to amend the Agency Staff appendix to include FTEs.

*Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 10.48am.*

*The meeting was suspended until 11.11am.*

*Change to agenda running order.*

*Sebastien Mingout, Support Services Manager joined the meeting at 11.11am for agenda item 9.*

## **9. Scope of Public Catering Services**

Following discussion at the November 2019 SMG meeting, Sebastien Mingout provided SMG with a report on the revenue generated to date since the commencement of the afternoon tea service in Parliament Buildings.

Sebastien stated that the recommendation within his report was to maintain the provision of the afternoon tea service, whilst continuing to monitor and consider alternative ways to promote it.

Following consideration of the report, SMG agreed that the afternoon tea service should continue but be reviewed again by SMG in September 2020 and that in the meantime the viability of the service should continue to be monitored and opportunities to maximise sales explored.

**Action:** Sebastien to present a further report on the provision of the afternoon tea service to SMG in September 2020.

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

*Ashleigh Mitford, Governance Officer and Clairita Frazer Incoming Governance Officer joined the meeting at 11.42am for agenda items 10 and 11.*

## **10. Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register**

SMG considered the latest draft of the Corporate Risk Register, which will be reviewed by SMG again in March 2020 and by the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) in February 2020.

SMG agreed the contents of the current draft subject to a few minor amendments.

**Action:** Ashleigh Mitford to update Corporate Risk 2 as agreed by SMG.

## **11. Review of Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists, Risk Assessment and Action Plan**

Ashleigh presented the revised Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan. Following discussion, SMG approved the documents subject to a few minor amendments to the Checklist and Bribery Risk Assessment.

**Action:** Ashleigh to update the Self-Assessment Checklist and Bribery Risk Assessment as agreed by SMG.

**Action:** Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services to seek clarification from the acting Head of Internal Audit on the arrangements in place for securing fraud investigation expertise from an outside organisation.

In relation to carrying out the self-assessment exercise, Ashleigh proposed changing the frequency to every two years due to the high level of compliance, SMG approved this request. Next review to be presented to SMG in December 2021.

As this was Ashleigh's last attendance at SMG as Governance Officer, Lesley thanked her on behalf of SMG for the excellent job done over the last 16 months and wished her well for the future. SMG also welcomed Clarita into her new role.

*Ashleigh Mitford and Clairita Frazer left the meeting at 12.13pm.*

*Martina Dalton, Information Standards and Data Protection Officer joined the meeting at 12.13pm for agenda item 12.*

## **12. Revised Data Protection Policy**

It was noted that a separate meeting had been held with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to enable the proposed revisions to the current Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Data Protection Policy to be discussed in detail.

Martina Dalton then summarised the proposed revisions to the current Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Data Protection Policy.

In particular, SMG noted revisions to section 8 of the policy: 'Disclosure of Personal Data', which included greater detail regarding routine and non-routine requests for disclosure and the procedures to follow in such instances. SMG considered the authorisation required for non-routine requests for sharing personal data externally and where the Assembly Commission initiates external information sharing.

Gareth enquired about the policy being equality screened. Martina confirmed that the original policy had been screened and that she would

review the screening document in line with the changes made to the policy.

**Action:** Martina to review the existing Equality Screening document and update as necessary.

SMG approved the revised policy for publishing on AsslSt and issuing to staff.

*Martina Dalton left the meeting at 12.22pm.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

*Brian Devlin, Head of IS joined the meeting at 12.22pm for agenda item 13.*

### **13. Post-Project Evaluation Update – Renewal of Microsoft Enterprise Agreement 2019**

Brian Devlin provided a post-project evaluation update on the renewal of the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement 2019.

Brian outlined the project objectives and subsequent achievement of these. He also highlighted the project benefits, what went well and the lessons learned.

Lesley referred to the earlier discussion on the existing electronic tablets being no longer fit for purpose. Following discussion, it was proposed that Brian purchase one Surface Pro version 6 to enable the IS Office to and carry out and test a system build in readiness for the potential purchase of new tablets at short notice should the Assembly resume normal business early in the new year. It was also agreed that Brian should liaise with the Head of Procurement regarding the potential purchase of additional tablets.

*Brian Devlin left the meeting at 12.50pm.*

*Paul Gill, Clerk Assistant joined the meeting at 12.50pm for agenda item 14.*

### **14. Bill Office staffing**

It was noted that a separate meeting had been held with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to enable the issue of Bill Office staffing to be discussed in detail.

Paul Gill presented this paper following a previous meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors.

Paul highlighted the likely increased pressures in the Bill Office should the Assembly resume normal business on 13 January 2020, and sought approval to temporarily increase the staff complement of the office, in

order to manage the usual end of mandate pressures resulting from the traditional high volume of Executive legislation and to meet the anticipated demand for support in developing non-Executive Bills, should normal business be resumed.

Paul advised that it would be the role of the Committee on Procedures to review the procedures and system for supporting Private Members' Bills (PMBs). In addition to the resource pressures on the Bill Office, it was also noted that there would be significant resource pressures on plenary time, the workload of committees and clerking staff, RaISe and Legal Services. Paul stated that in developing its report to the Assembly it would be essential for the Committee on Procedures to consider the full cost and impact of the services provided by the Assembly Commission to support members and Committees bringing forward non-Executive Bills.

Following consideration, SMG was supportive of the proposal to temporarily increase the staff complement within the Bill Office by five posts and agreed that due to the significant cost including Bill drafting, that a paper should be prepared and presented to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

**Action:** Paper to be prepared and presented to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

*Paul Gill left the meeting at 1pm.*

## **OTHER**

*Simon Burrowes, Acting Chair of the Internal Communications Group joined the meeting at 1pm for agenda item 15.*

### **15. Staff Survey 2019: Headline Results**

Simon Burrowes presented headline results from the recent Staff Survey.

SMG noted a 79% response rate and that initial results appeared to show some positive improvement in a number of areas since the last survey in 2017.

Simon advised that RaISe would need to consider the results in more detail, following which a final report and findings would be presented to SMG in the next few months.

**Action:** Simon to present a final report on the results of the 2019 Staff Survey to SMG in the next few months.

SMG appreciated the prompt receipt of these initial results and thanked Simon and all those involved for their efforts.

*Simon Burrowes left the meeting at 1.12pm.*



## **CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED**

### **8. Development of a Transgender Policy**

Richard outlined and sought SMG's approval of the key principles for the development of a Transgender Policy by the Equality and Good Relations Unit and Human Resources Office.

SMG noted that the aim of the policy was to provide support, advice and guidance for both staff and line managers and following consideration of the proposed key principles, requested clarification on the current legal position.

**Action:** Richard to request advice from Legal Services.

## **DIRECTORATE UPDATES**

### **16. Directors' Updates**

SMG noted the Directorate updates.

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

Tara informed SMG that Clairita Frazer would be taking over the role of Governance Officer and that Trevor Allen would be temporarily taking over the role of Information Standards and Data Protection Officer in January.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

### **17. Commission paper cleared by correspondence**

Pay Claim 2019

### **18. AOB**

It was noted that Sinéad McDonnell presented a paper to SMG on 20 November 2019, relating to an updated Administration Agreement for the Northern Ireland Assembly Members Pension Scheme as a result of the General Data Protection Regulation.

Following that meeting, Sinéad became aware that two activities had been removed from Schedule C, which involved the administration services that the Assembly Commission carries out for the Trustees. These activities related to:

- Transfers In – which 'the Administrator' now carry out; and
- Contracted out Members – which is not relevant as there are no longer 'contracted out' pension schemes.

Both activities were removed in agreement between the Legal Services Office and the Trustee's legal advisors.

It was noted that Richard had asked Sinéad to update the SMG paper that was presented to the meeting on 20 November to reflect these changes and that this had been circulated to SMG members.

## **19. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 22 January 2020.

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

- Visitors Survey Results
- Sustainable Development Office Annual Environmental Management Report
- Health and Safety Report
- Post-Project Evaluation Updates
- Internal Audit Strategy
- Information Systems Review
- Retention and Disposal Schedule
- Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Publication Scheme
- Updated Business Case for Tablet Devices

The meeting ended at 1.30pm.