

SECRETARIAT MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

THURSDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2021 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 135, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Billy Mahoney
Karen Martin
Sebastien Mingout
Shauna Mageean
Kevin Pelan
Simon Burrowes
Louise Close
Julie Devlin
John Power
Ryan Fleming

Opening/Review

The meeting commenced at 9.45 am.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

It was noted that the minutes and unrestricted papers from the meeting on 24 June 2021 were published on 10 September 2021.

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 9.50 pm for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, sought an update from Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services, on election planning. Richard confirmed that an Election Planning Working Group was in the process of being formed. Lesley stated that she would be keen for a meeting of the Group to be convened as soon as possible.

Lesley noted the heavy legislative workload between now and the end of the mandate, particularly in relation to the large number of Bills due to be introduced.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, highlighted the need to monitor progress on the Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey noted that the date of the next Assembly Commission meeting had yet to be agreed, but proposed that it be held either just before or after the Halloween recess.

Proposed items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Review of the Financial Assistance to Political Parties Scheme 2016
- Budget 2022/23
- Annual Plan 2021/22 Outturn Update
- Annual Plan 2022/23
- Pay Claim 2021
- Support Services Contract Retendering – Business Case
- Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots
- Enhancing Accessibility of Assembly Proceedings to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities
- MLA III Health Retirement
- Comptroller and Auditor General Recruitment

Corporate Support Unit Update

Review of Artefacts

Robin advised that work was progressing on the review of artefacts project and he stated that the plan was to bring proposals to SMG for consideration during the week commencing 11 October.

Business Committee

Robin noted that the Business Committee had recently agreed a revised seating plan for the Assembly Chamber, taking account of easements in COVID-19 restrictions. He also stated that there had been discussion on the wearing of face coverings in the building, and it was agreed that Richard would issue a reminder to all building users of the need to wear a face covering in public areas within Parliament Buildings.

Action: Richard to issue a reminder to staff on the wearing of face coverings in Parliament Buildings.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.34 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Billy Mahoney, Senior Accountant, joined the meeting at 10.35 am for agenda item 7.

7. Management Accounts

Billy Mahoney presented the Management Accounts for August 2021.

SMG noted the current forecast outturn position and proposed surrenders / bids for each category of expenditure. Billy also advised that a full budget re-profiling exercise had been completed during August meaning no variances were reported for the month or for the year-to-date.

In relation to Admin costs, Billy informed SMG of a number of surrenders from various business areas and sought approval from SMG for some additional bids.

Following consideration, SMG approved the bids as set out in the paper, with the exception of the Support Services bid as it was noted that a paper had been prepared on this matter and would be considered by SMG later in the meeting under agenda item 9. Also, in relation to the bid from Building Services to cover legal fees in respect of the ongoing dispute around roof repairs, Lesley stated that budget provision should also be made for the roof structural survey and potential repair

costs as considered and approved by the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 9 September 2021.

Action: Billy to update next month's report with the cost for the roof structural survey and potential repair costs, as approved by the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 9 September 2021.

On consideration of the Capital Plan, SMG approved the bid for the keyboard, video, mouse, project (KVM). SMG also noted that the current capital expenditure forecast was now £345k less than the approved opening figure, due to the removal of the requirement of funds originally bid for in relation to a number of projects that would not now be completed in this financial year. Lesley noted her concern at the value of capital being surrendered for these projects, and stated that business areas would need to provide assurances that projects could be delivered when seeking a capital allocation from the 2022/23 budget with very clear delivery timelines and justifications for bids provided.

Going forward, Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, proposed moving towards the position of Outline Business Cases having to be prepared and considered by SMG prior to capital bids being included in future year budgets and this was agreed.

Action: Outline Business Cases to be considered by SMG prior to capital bids being included in future year budgets.

On reviewing the Decision Authorisation System (DAS) report, Lesley highlighted a few items that had exceeded their approved limit and asked that these be reviewed.

Action: Billy to speak with the relevant budget holders in relation to items on the DAS report that had exceeded their approved limit.

Billy Mahoney left the meeting at 11.15 am.

Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 11.22 am for agenda item 8.

8. HR Management Information

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 September 2021.

SMG noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 September 2021 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 345.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 397.3 FTE.

On reviewing the temporary promotions and deputising arrangements currently in place, Lesley asked that an amendment be made to the notes recorded in relation to the duration of a number of the temporary promotions, to reflect the actual duration agreed by SMG for complement plus posts.

Action: Karen to update the temporary promotions report.

Gareth raised the issue of the ongoing vacancies in the Parliamentary Services Directorate and acknowledged the significant challenges this created for staff and the pressures they were working under. Richard noted that as many of the temporary promotions were due to end at the end of the mandate, it was important to manage the transition as smoothly as possible.

In relation to the agency workers report, Karen highlighted an error in the details recorded for a staff member in Legal Services and confirmed that this would be corrected.

Karen updated SMG on recent recruitment activity.

Karen noted that for the period September 2020 to August 2021, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 5.1 compared with an average of 9.9 during the same period for 2019/20.

Karen also referred to the contract for the provision of an additional Occupational Health Adviser, which had been awarded for twelve months in November 2020 and sought approval from SMG to exercise a six-month extension option. Karen advised that the service provided during the COVID-19 pandemic had been beneficial and aided the HR Office in the management of sick absence cases.

SMG approved the contract extension for a further six months from 1 November 2021. Lesley proposed that the HR Office commence work immediately on a business case for a new contract, to come into effect on expiry of the six-month extension period.

SMG discussed the management and recording of COVID-19 related absences. It was noted that while most staff return to work promptly there was a potential for longer COVID related absences.

Following consideration, SMG agreed that, after 14 calendar days of COVID-19 related absence, HR Office should request that a GP fit note is provided. It was also agreed that the protected period of COVID-19 related absence which is not recorded on iTrent and does not count towards normal absence management and occupational sick pay, should be limited to 28 calendar days, after which normal sickness absence recording and provisions would apply.

These arrangements will be kept under review by SMG.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 12.03 pm.

The meeting suspended at 12.03 pm until 12.20 pm.

Sebastien Mingout, Support Services Manager, joined the meeting at 12.20 pm.

9. Support Services Contract Cost

Lesley noted that members of SMG had discussed the Support Services Contract in detail on a number of occasions recently.

Sebastien Mingout provided SMG with a breakdown of the actual costs to date of the Support Services Contract, highlighting the continuing impact of COVID-19.

SMG noted the performance of the contract to date and the increase in anticipated cost for the remainder of the financial year. In light of this and recent discussions regarding the contract, SMG approved an increase to the contract's budget for 2021/22 as outlined in the paper, but noted that consideration was to be given to any cost reduction measures that could be implemented immediately, based on proposals presented and agreed by the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 9 September 2021. It was agreed that the Assembly Commission would be informed of the increase to the contract's budget.

Action: Sebastien to consider cost reduction measures that could be implemented immediately, based on proposals presented and agreed by the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 9 September 2021.

Lesley also requested that any new contract should stipulate that records are kept in relation to the revenues and costs of the different catering outlets within Parliament Buildings, in order to better manage and minimise costs (i.e. a profit and loss account for each outlet).

Action: Richard to advise the Assembly Commission of the increase to the contract's costs for 2021/22 at the next Assembly Commission meeting.

Action: Sebastien to ensure that a future contract stipulates that records are available in relation to the revenues and costs of the different catering outlets within Parliament Buildings.

Sebastien Mingout left the meeting at 12.28 pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

10. Feedback on the Staff Consultation on the Draft Internal Communications Strategy

Paper deferred to next meeting.

11. Update to Procurement Approach in Relation to the Design, build and installation of a new committee room and additional capacity for concurrent broadcasting

Paper deferred to next meeting.

Change to agenda running order.

Shauna Mageean, EU Affairs Manager, joined the meeting at 12.29 pm for agenda item 14.

14. Quarterly Update on EU Exit

Shauna Mageean provided SMG with an update on the latest developments regarding EU Exit and related inter-parliamentary and inter-governmental relations.

SMG thanked Shauna for a very comprehensive update.

Shauna Mageean left the meeting at 12.52 pm.

Kevin Pelan, Clerk Assistant, joined the meeting at 12.52 pm for agenda item 15.

15. Enhancing Accessibility of Assembly Proceedings to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities

Kevin Pelan presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on Enhancing Accessibility of Assembly Proceedings to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities.

Kevin acknowledged the input provided to the paper from the Clerking and Member Support (CAMS) Office, Tracey Wilson (Information Officer) and the Engagement Unit.

Following consideration, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting and thanked Kevin and those staff from other business areas that had provided input on this issue.

Kevin Pelan left the meeting at 1.06 pm.

Louise Close, Outreach Manager, joined the meeting at 1.06 pm for agenda item 13.

Simon Burrowes, Head of Public Engagement/Chair of Internal Communications Group, joined the meeting at 1.06 pm for agenda items 13 and 12.

13. Public Engagement Activity: Biannual Report (January to September 2021)

Louise Close presented a biannual report of public engagement activity undertaken by the Engagement Unit during the period January to September 2021.

Louise informed SMG that the Engagement Unit had worked with Clerking to develop a framework that improved committee engagement outcomes. It was noted that this framework would be fully embedded in committee processes from the start of the new Assembly mandate in 2022.

The Engagement Unit work on the launch of the 'Assembly Connects' programme was also noted. Lesley was keen to learn more about Assembly Connects and asked Louise to provide more information on this in the next Engagement activity update. Lesley also requested that future updates include details of upcoming events.

Action: Louise to include additional information on 'Assembly Connects' in the next Engagement activity update and that details of upcoming events be included in future updates.

Louise informed SMG of a number of Parliamentary engagement events and Assembly projects that the Engagement Unit had supported in the last nine months.

Lesley acknowledged the enormous amount of work that had gone into hosting the recent very successful Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 50th British Island and Mediterranean Region Annual Conference, the extremely positive feedback received from delegates and thanked Louise and her team for their efforts.

Louise Close left the meeting at 1:29 pm.

OTHER

12. Staff Survey 2021

Simon Burrowes updated SMG on the work of the Internal Communications Group (ICG) in relation to the 2021 Staff Survey.

Simon referred to the indicative timeline and proposed methodology for the 2021 Staff Survey as outlined in the paper. It was noted, however, that ICG hoped to run the survey slightly earlier than the date proposed.

To assist with the content of the 2021 Staff Survey, Simon advised that comments in relation to the content of the 2019 Staff Survey had been sought from Heads of Business (HoBs) and the Assembly's Equality and

Good Relations Manager. Simon noted that feedback from SMG was also welcomed.

Simon confirmed that ICG had recently met and had an initial discussion on the content of the 2021 survey and that a further meeting was being arranged to discuss the survey in more detail with a view to producing a draft survey for consideration by SMG.

SMG considered and approved the recommendations within the paper in relation to the indicative timeline and proposed methodology.

SMG thanked Simon and the members of ICG for their continued work.

Simon Burrowes left the meeting at 1:46 pm.

The meeting suspended at 1.46 pm until 2.30 pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Julie Devlin, Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 2.30 pm for agenda items 17 and 18.

17. Quarterly Review of Corporate Risk Register

Julie Devlin presented the September 2021 Corporate Risk Register and it was noted that she had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 16 September 2021 to discuss it in detail.

SMG agreed the contents of the Corporate Risk Register.

18. Biennial Review of the National Audit Office (NAO) Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan

Julie presented an updated NAO Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan, for consideration by SMG. It was noted that it had last been reviewed and approved by SMG in October 2019.

Julie advised that an action in relation to adequate staffing being identified and allocated to the area of Cyber Security, had been carried over from the 2019 Plan, but confirmed that it would be completed by November 2021. She also highlighted two updated responses in relation to questions on Incident Management.

Gareth queried a reference in the updated response to question one of the Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist, and Julie confirmed that she would check this for accuracy with the Head of IS Office.

Following consideration, SMG approved the revised NAO Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan as presented, subject to Julie checking a reference made in the revised response to question one of the Checklist.

Action: Julie to check the response to question one of the Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist with the Head of IS Office, and update as necessary.

It was noted that the Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan would be presented to the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting on 13 October 2021.

Julie Devlin left the meeting at 2.38 pm.

John Power, Head of Research and Information Service (RaISe), joined the meeting at 2.43 pm for agenda item 19.

19. RaISe Management Staffing

John Power sought approval from SMG to run an AG4 (Senior Research Officer) temporary internal promotion exercise for a six-month period from October 2021 to March 2022, to cover a temporary shortfall within RaISe and the net increase in cost as outlined in the paper.

Following consideration, SMG approved the request.

John Power left the meeting at 2.51 pm.

Ryan Fleming, Data Protection and Information Standards Manager, joined the meeting at 2.55 pm for agenda items 20.

20. Sensitivity Review Guidance

Ryan Fleming presented draft Assembly Commission Sensitivity Review Guidance, which he noted had been prepared to assist staff with the review of registered files created 20 years ago, which had now reached the point whereby they needed to be considered for transfer to the Public Records Office for Northern Ireland (PRONI).

Ryan advised that only a small number of files required review this year (approximately 20) and it was noted that the Information Standards Office would trial the Guidance when this year's review was being carried out.

With regards next year's review, Ryan advised that this would involve a much larger number of files.

Following consideration, SMG approved the Guidance, subject to some minor amendments.

SMG also agreed that Information Assets Owners (IAO) should be trained on carrying out the reviews in line with the new Guidance.

Action: Ryan to amend the Sensitivity Review Guidance as proposed by SMG and issue to IAOs.

Ryan Fleming left the meeting at 3.19 pm.

21. Review of Information Assurance Policy

Paper deferred to next meeting.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES CONTINUED

16. Paper to the Assembly Commission on the Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots

Gareth presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots.

Following consideration, SMG approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

OTHER ITEMS

22. SMG Papers Cleared via Correspondence/Meeting

- Staff Complement Change - HR Services to Members
- HR Management Information (July 2021)
- Business Case for Procurement of a Resilient Internet Connection 2021
- Staffing Resource in the Bill Office During the Period Remaining in the Current Assembly Mandate
- HR Management Information (August 2021)

23. Assembly Commission papers cleared by SMG via correspondence

- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Support Services Contract – Contract Scope January 2022
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings and Investigation of Potential Liability

24. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Support Services

Richard noted the Support Services Contractor's initial response to the proposed four-month contract extension option.

Staffing

Richard advised of a staffing resource issue which presented a short-term risk to the work of the Finance Office.

Usher Services

Richard advised of a number of vacancies within Usher Services and noted that the Head of Usher Services had been in contact with the HR Office to discuss possible recruitment and options for Front of House staffing.

Parliamentary Services

IS Office

Gareth highlighted the ongoing staffing challenges within the IS Office.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Learning and Development

Tara advised that the Legal Services Office had hosted the annual Inter-Parliamentary Lawyers' Conference on 8 and 9 September 2021 virtually, and that it was a very successful event.

Internal Audit

Tara provided an update on the Internal Audit Reviews for:

- Examiner of Statutory Rules
- Risk Management
- Bill Office
- Hansard
- Corporate Procurement Cards
- Standing Committees
- Mobile Phones

Governance

Tara advised that the next meeting of the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee would be held in October 2021.

Information Standards

Tara also noted that significant work was required in relation to the review of the Records Management Policy and the revision of the Retention and Disposal Schedule, and that this required close monitoring.

Procurement Office

Tara advised of ongoing staffing resource issues within the Procurement Office.

25. AOB

Gareth referred SMG to a memo from the Head of IS Office, dated 22 September 2021, which outlined the need and sought SMG approval for the purchase of twelve printers for constituency offices.

SMG considered and approved the request.

26. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 22 October 2021.

27. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Assembly Members' Pension Scheme
- Biannual Review of Learning and Development Activities
- Standards of Conduct Policy: Political Activities
- Gender Action Plan – Monitoring Update
- Good Relations Action Plan – Monitoring Update
- Review of Building Maintenance
- Review of the Financial Assistance to Political Parties Scheme 2016
- Annual Plan 2021/22 Outturn Update
- Annual Plan 2022/23
- Budget 2022/23
- Pay Claim 2021
- Support Services Contract Retendering – Business Case
- MLA III Health Retirement
- Comptroller and Auditor General Recruitment
- Biannual Review of the Directorate Risk Registers
- Retention and Disposal Schedule
- Review of the Information Assurance Policy
- Information Security Group Annual Report and Self-Assessment

- Feedback on the Staff Consultation Strategy and Activity
- Update on the Internal Communications Strategy and Activity
- Update to Procurement Approach in Relation to the Design, Build and Installation of a New Committee Room and Additional Capacity for Concurrent Broadcasting
- Draft Editorial Style Guide

The meeting ended at 4.13 pm.