

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

THURSDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2022 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106

APPROVED

Present: Lesley Hogg
Tara Caul
Gareth McGrath
Richard Stewart

In Attendance: Janet Hughes
Robin Ramsey
Billy Mahoney
Sinéad McDonnell
Karen Martin
Sebastien Mingout
Donna-Marie Clark
Liz Beaton
Trevor Steenson
Rick Scott
Frank Geddis
Barbara Love
Louise Close

The meeting commenced at 9.34 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 from the meetings on 25 May 2022 and 5 August 2022 had been published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

In relation to an action on capital bids, Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive, reminded Directors of the requirement for Outline Business Cases (OBCs) to be

prepared and considered by SMT. It was agreed that the submission date for OBCs be extended to 31 October 2022.

Regarding an action on recommencing the work of the Corporate Plan Working Groups, it was further agreed that it would be beneficial for Lesley to meet with the Chairpersons of all four Working Groups, to outline group expectations going forward.

Action: Lesley to meet with the Chairpersons of the Corporate Plan Working Groups.

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support, joined the meeting at 9.43 am for agenda items 5, 6 and 7.

5. Political Update

Lesley noted the recent appointment of a new Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Lesley referred to the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill which was due to go through the House of Lords during the week commencing 12 October 2022.

SMT noted and appreciated the significant work undertaken by staff in relation to marking the passing of Her Majesty The Queen.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey advised that the date of the next Assembly Commission meeting had yet to be agreed.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Pay Claim 2022 and Update on Industrial Action
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Business Case for Retendering of the Support Services Contract 2023
- Outline Business Case for the Procurement of New Legislative Drafting Software
- Overview of the Assembly Commission Events to Mark Decade of Centenaries 2012-2022
- Proposal for a Memorandum of Understanding between the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly
- Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots

7. Overview of Assembly Commission Events to Mark Decade of Centenaries 2021-2022

Robin presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on an Overview of the Assembly Commission Events to Mark the Decade of Centenaries 2012-2022.

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

Robin highlighted that approaches had been made to the Assembly Commission in relation to marking the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement in 2023, and advised that these would be followed up as appropriate.

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, recorded her thanks to all the staff involved in the production of the excellent artefacts exhibition launched in Parliament Buildings earlier in the year.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 10.19 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Billy Mahoney, Deputy Head of Finance – Secretariat, joined the meeting at 10.19 am for agenda item 8.

8. Management Accounts

Billy Mahoney presented the Management Accounts for August 2022.

Billy noted that both he and the Head of Finance had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 20 September 2022, to discuss in detail the remaining budget for 2022/2023. Billy advised that since the meeting, budget holders had notified the Finance Office of some additional bids and surrenders in relation to General Administration and Capital expenditure, which following consideration were subsequently approved by SMT.

In relation to the salaries budget, SMT noted that a number of vacancies would not be filled until the Assembly resumed normal business.

Billy also advised that a budget re-profiling exercise would be undertaken in October.

Billy Mahoney left the meeting at 10.35 am.

Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR and Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR, joined the meeting at 10.43 am for agenda item 9.

9. HR Management Information

Karen Martin, presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 September 2022.

Karen advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 September 2022 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 335 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 386.9 FTE.

Karen noted that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors had met on 5 August 2022 to review complement and complement plus vacancies. Karen subsequently presented a vacancy report for each Directorate based on the outcome of the August discussion. SMT approved the vacancy report.

Requests to extend the Complement Plus posts for the temporary AG5 Procurement Manager and three Irish Translator/Interpreter posts (1 x AG5 and 2 x AG6) until 31 December 2023 and 31 March 2023 respectively, were considered and approved along with a new Complement Plus post for a Systems Review Administrator AG7, for a two-year period.

Action: Karen to update the Complement Plus records in relation to the AG5 Procurement Manager, three Irish Translator/Interpreter posts (1 x AG5 and 2 x AG6) and the Systems Review Administrator (AG7), as agreed by SMT.

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

Sinéad McDonnell advised that the HR Office was currently reviewing the cost of agency worker assignments, and that the findings of the review would be presented at the next SMT meeting.

Karen informed SMT of the updated position in relation to the Recruitment Schedule. Karen advised that there had been slippage in relation to some competitions and that re-work on the order of recruitments was required. A request from Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services, to bring forward a competition for Assistant Assembly Clerk (AG6) to the schedule was noted.

Action: Karen to bring forward the Assistant Assembly Clerk (AG6) competition on the Recruitment Schedule.

SMT also approved the inclusion of an internal temporary promotion competition for a Clerk Assistant (AG3) in the Recruitment Schedule, to cover a sickness absence.

Action: HR Office to progress the Clerk Assistant (AG3) internal temporary promotion competition with the Director of Parliamentary Services.

Richard proposed that consideration be given to changing the format of the job specification documentation and it was agreed that the HR Office would take this forward.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period September 2021 to August 2022, the average days lost to sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 12 days, compared with an average of 5.1 days during the period September 2020 to August 2021.

10. Human Resources (HR) Policy Work: Development of a Hybrid Working Policy and Revision to the Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures

SMT formally signed off on the Hybrid Working Policy, as presented.

Sinéad proposed some revisions to the Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures, which were approved by SMT. It was noted that the revised procedures would be uploaded to the Staff Handbook and communicated to staff.

Sinéad McDonnell and Karen Martin left the meeting at 11.32 am.

Meeting suspended at 11.32 am until 11.41 am.

Sebastien Mingout, Support Services Manager, joined the meeting at 11.41 am for agenda items 11 and 12.

11. Business Case for Retendering of the Support Services Contract 2023

Sebastien Mingout presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on a Business Case for the Retendering of the Support Services Contract 2023.

Following a detailed discussion, SMT proposed some revisions to the paper.

Action: Sebastien to update the draft Assembly Commission paper as requested by SMT and recirculate for final approval, prior to presentation at the next Assembly Commission meeting.

12. Post Project Evaluation (PPE) and Outline Business Case for Stationery and IT Consumables Contract

Richard presented the PPE for the Stationery and IT Consumables Contract.

Richard advised that the Stationery and IT Consumables contract had expired in August 2021 and that temporary arrangements had been in place since then, which were due to finish in February 2023. He also noted that a delay had occurred at the end of the previous contract and he apologised to Lesley, as Accounting Officer, and fellow SMT members for this.

It was noted that a new contract should have been put in place in 2021 instead of the temporary arrangements and Lesley sought assurance, which Richard provided, that changes would be made to ensure that this did not happen again.

SMT subsequently considered and approved the business case for a new Stationery and IT Consumables Contract, in line with the preferred option as recommended.

*Sebastien Mingout left the meeting at 1.25 pm.
Meeting suspended at 1.25 pm until 2.17 pm.*

Change to agenda running order.

Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer, joined the meeting at 2.17 pm for agenda item 15.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

15. Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Donna-Marie noted that she had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 20 September 2022 to discuss the Corporate Risk Register in detail.

SMT subsequently approved the Corporate Risk Register for September 2022.

Tara reminded Directors of the need to update their respective Directorate Risk Registers in relation to the sections on COVID-19.

Donna-Marie Clark left the meeting at 2.17 pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer, joined the meeting at 2.17 pm for agenda item 16.

16. Internal Communications Quarterly Update

Liz Beaton presented a paper on the internal communications activity that had taken place since the last update provided to SMG on 25 May 2022.

Liz highlighted the achievements and milestones reached under the four themes of the Internal Communications Strategy, namely, 'Listening to your views', 'Understanding how we communicate', 'Improving our communications channels and platforms' and 'Developing meaningful and authentic content'.

SMT noted the quarterly internal communications update and praised Liz on the level of activity that was taking place.

Liz Beaton left the meeting at 2.42 pm.

Trevor Steenson, Head of IS, joined the meeting at 2.42 pm for agenda item 17.

17. Post Project Evaluation (PPE) Report: Virtualisation Solution - Hyper-V Upgrade

Trevor Steenson presented a PPE for the Virtualisation Solution – Hyper-V Upgrade.

Trevor advised that all of the objectives for the project had been achieved within budget.

SMT congratulated the IS Team on the success of the upgrade project which was well executed and documented in the PPE.

Trevor Steenson left the meeting at 2.55 pm.

Rick Scott, Business Relationship Manager, joined the meeting at 2.55 pm for agenda item 18.

18. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Telephony Project Post Project Evaluation

Rick Scott presented a PPE for the VoIP Telephony Project.

Rick outlined the main drivers of the project and recorded his thanks to the all those involved with the project.

The lessons learned on completion of the project were also noted and SMT congratulated the VoIP team on delivering a very successful project.

Rick Scott left the meeting at 3.06 pm.

Frank Geddis, Clerk Assistant, and Barbara Love, Bill Office Clerk, joined the meeting at 3.06 pm for agenda item 20.

20. Procurement of New Legislative Drafting Software – Project Update

Frank Geddis provided SMT with an update on the project to procure new legislative drafting software, following initial discussion at the SMT meeting on 5 August 2022.

Barbara Love confirmed that she was working closely with the Procurement Office and that the specification for the new contract was at an advanced stage.

Following consideration, SMT approved the draft Assembly Commission paper and OBC for the Procurement of New Legislative Drafting Software for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting

SMT thanked Frank and Barbara for their continuing work on the project.

Frank Geddis and Barbara Love left the meeting at 3.26 pm.

Louise Close, Engagement Manager, joined the meeting at 3.26 pm for agenda item 21.

21. Comparative Research on Public Engagement Surveys carried out in Other Legislatures

Louise Close presented a paper outlining the findings of a comparative study of public engagement surveys carried out in other legislatures.

Louise noted that research had been undertaken in line with an objective within the Corporate Plan 2019-23, to gauge the public's awareness and understanding of the Northern Ireland Assembly and its services by conducting regular surveys.

SMT noted the comparative research that had been undertaken into similar surveys conducted by other legislatures and the next steps that would be undertaken with regards conducting an Assembly survey.

Louise Close left the meeting at 3.47 pm.

19. Proposal for a Memorandum of Understanding between the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

Gareth presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on a Proposal for a Memorandum of Understanding between the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.

Following consideration, SMT approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: Gareth to update the draft Assembly Commission paper as proposed by SMT.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

13. Corporate Strategy 2023 Development

Richard presented a paper outlining a plan to develop the successor Corporate Strategy to the current Strategy, which was due to end on 31 March 2023.

Richard proposed that the structure of the process that was used for the current Corporate Strategy should be used again, but more streamlined. The importance of comprehensive staff consultation and engagement was noted.

Richard referred SMT to the steps that were undertaken for the development of the Corporate Strategy 2018-23 and, following discussion, SMT agreed an outline approach, namely:

- Workshop with Directors and Heads of Business;
- Engagement with staff;
- Production of first draft;
- Consultation on first draft with TUS and staff;
- Collation and review of consultation responses and feedback; and
- Final draft to Assembly Commission etc.

SMT considered the allocation of internal resources to deliver the development of the new Strategy during the period when the Assembly is not carrying out its normal functions. It was agreed that two staff at AG3 level would lead the project with some administration support provided at AG7/8 level.

Lesley also highlighted the need to identify a new Chair for the Internal Communications Group.

14. Pay Claim 2022 and Update on Industrial Action

SMT noted a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Pay Claim 2022 and Update on Industrial Action and agreed that it required further consideration at a separate meeting, prior to presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

22. Papers Cleared by Correspondence

HR Management Information August 2022.

Annual Environmental Management Review.

23. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Building Services

Richard advised that the new temporary Head of Building Services would be taking up post on 4 October 2022.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Legal Services

Tara provided an update on litigation.

Information Standards

Tara advised that two complaints had been made to the Information Commissioner's Office.

Parliamentary Services

IS Office

Gareth advised that a business case would be brought to the next SMT meeting for replacement laptops for remote access.

Gareth informed SMT that the Network Communication Replacement Project in the Capital Plan for 2023/24 was being deferred to the 2024/25 financial year. SMT noted that this would have budget implications which would need to be considered.

24. AOB

There was no other business.

25. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 2 November 2022.

26. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Draft Transgender Policy
- Business Case for Phase Inverters
- Business Case for Electronic Access Control
- Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers
- Review of the Retention and Disposal Schedule
- Information Security Group Annual Report and Self-Assessment
- Broadcasting Contract Post Project Evaluation
- Public Engagement Activity: Biannual Report
- Outline Business Cases for the Communications Office and IS Office for all 2022-23 Capital Projects
- Procurement of Resilient Internet Connection - Post Project Evaluation

The meeting ended at 4.55 pm.