

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

**FRIDAY, 28 MARCH 2023 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 29, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present:

**Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive
Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services
Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services**

In Attendance:

**Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Paula McClintock, Head of Finance (Items 7 and 8)
Gary Browne, Senior Accountant (Item 7)
Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR (Items 9, 10 and 11)
Hugh Stewart, Acting Head of Building Services (Item 12)
Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services (Item 13)
Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Item 14)
Dan Hull, Chair of Internal Communications Group (Item 15)**

The meeting commenced at 9.35 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 meeting on 28 February 2023 had been published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg noted that Assembly Commission officials were considering the implications for the Assembly of the Windsor Framework (Democratic Scrutiny) Regulations 2023, published on 27 February 2023.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

SMT noted that the date of the next Assembly Commission meeting had yet to be set.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Review of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme ('FAPP Scheme') 2016
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Pay Claim 2023
- Five-Year Review of the Disability Action Plan 2018-2023
- Gender Action Plan 2019-2023 Closure Report

CORPORATE SERVICES

Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 9.57 am for agenda items 7 and 8.

Gary Browne joined the meeting at 9.57 am for agenda item 7.

7. Management Accounts for February 2023

Gary Browne presented the Management Accounts for February 2023.

SMT noted the current forecast outturn for Resource DEL and Capital.

Gary advised that, despite budgets being reprofiled in January, a large number of variances had arisen in the February Management Accounts. The importance of accurate profiling and forecasting for budgetary control and decision-making purposes was noted and SMT agreed that this should be an area of focus in 2023/24, particularly in light of potential financial constraints with the 2023/24 budget.

Action: Directors to emphasise the importance of regular budget monitoring to ensure more accurate profiling and forecasting with Heads of Business (HoBs).

Gareth McGrath noted that HoBs meet every six weeks and he suggested that Finance Office staff use this forum to highlight the importance of accurate budget profiling. Lesley proposed that it would also be useful for Finance Office staff to attend future Directorate team meetings to keep the focus on accurate profiling. Paula McClintock stated that she would raise the issue at the HoB meeting and that Finance Office staff would be happy to attend Directorate team meetings.

It was also agreed that a meeting would be arranged with HoBs to discuss the implications of the ongoing political situation and that consideration would be given at that meeting to the budget for 2023/24.

Action: Clerk/Chief Executive's Office to set up a meeting with Directors and HoBs to discuss the implications of the ongoing political situation.

Gary Browne left the meeting at 10.22 am.

8. Annual Insurance Policy Renewal and Update

Paula provided SMT with an update on the existing insurance policies currently held by the Assembly Commission, the cover provided and the proposed renewal premiums.

SMT noted that it had been agreed at the last insurance policy update on 1 April 2022 that consideration would be given to the possibility of increasing the term at the next renewal. Paula confirmed that consideration had been given to a multi-year renewal, but that this had not proved feasible.

Paula advised that the level of indemnity offered under the combined Employers' and Public Liability policy had also been reviewed.

Following discussion, SMT agreed to proceed with the renewals as outlined in the paper, but asked that clarification be sought in relation to an element of cover provided within the combined Employers' and Public Liability policy.

Action: Paula to seek clarification on an element of cover within the combined Employers' and Public Liability policy and report back to SMT.

SMT noted additional services offered by the insurance broker in relation to Cyber Liability. Paula advised that the insurance broker had offered to provide a free one-hour consultation with a Cyber specialist, and she confirmed that the Head of IT was making arrangements to take this forward.

Paula also provided SMT with an update on existing insurance claims.

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 10.34 am.

Karen Martin joined the meeting at 10.37 am for agenda items 9, 10 and 11.

9. HR Management Information

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 March 2023.

SMT noted that the Staff in Post (SiP) figure on 1 March 2023 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 327.7 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against an agreed staff complement (including complement plus) of 375 FTE.

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

Karen updated SMT on recruitment activity.

Tara Caul advised that a large number of research requests had been received by the Health and Education Research and Information Service (RaISe) team and that significant staff shortages within this research portfolio were making it impossible to meet demands. In light of this, she asked that the competition for Research Officers be moved into the prioritised section and requested approval to seek two temporary Research Officers through agency.

SMT noted the staff resourcing pressures within RaISe and agreed that the competition for the recruitment of permanent Research Officers be prioritised, with temporary agency support in the form of two Research Officers put in place in the interim. Karen agreed to take this forward.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period March 2022 to February 2023, the average sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 13.1 days, compared with an average of 9.4 days during the period March 2021 to February 2022.

SMT also considered a Staff Complement Change Application Form from the Director of Parliamentary Services and agreed this in principle.

10. Draft Menopause Guidance for Staff and Managers

Karen presented the draft Menopause Guidance for Staff and Managers, which she noted had been subject to formal consultation with staff and Trade Union Side (TUS), following approval by SMT at its meeting on 15 December 2022.

Karen advised that no comments had been received through the formal consultation process, however, one had been received by the HR Office outside of the formal consultation and as a result, a minor change was proposed to the draft Guidance to include reference to the Assembly Commission's Employee Assistance Programme.

Following consideration, SMT approved the draft Guidance, as presented, for issue to staff and thanked Karen and the team for all their input into its creation. Karen noted that the HR Office would be arranging appropriate learning and development activities to support its roll out.

11. Gender Action Plan 2019 – 2023 Closure Report

Karen presented the draft Gender Action Plan 2019-2023 Closure Report.

Karen stated that of the 14 actions within the Plan, 13 had been fully achieved and that the one outstanding action, which related to providing training to staff on transgender issues was progressing with the HR Office.

Karen noted that at the SMT meeting on 2 November 2022, SMT agreed that sufficient progress had been made through the Gender Action Plan 2019-23; that gender issues would continue to be progressed and monitored through the Assembly Commission's other equality plans; and that a further Action Plan was not needed.

Following consideration, SMT approved the draft Gender Action Plan 2019-2023 Closure Report, for presentation to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

SMT thanked Karen and the Gender Action Plan Implementation Group for the excellent work that they had carried out over the last six years, in relation to the monitoring and implementation of the actions in the Plan. SMT noted that the fact that no further Plan was needed was testament to the work carried out by the Group.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 10.53 am.

Meeting suspended at 10.53 am and resumed at 11.02 am.

Hugh Stewart joined the meeting at 11.02 am for agenda item 12.

12. Provision of Building Maintenance and Minor Capital Works Projects

Hugh Stewart presented a business case in relation to the provision of building maintenance and minor capital works projects for Parliament Buildings for 2023-24.

Hugh noted that the maintenance requirements for Parliament Buildings were currently delivered using a Department of Finance framework agreement and stated that following a review of maintenance and related services in 2022, he recommended that the Assembly Commission continue to avail of the services of the Property Maintenance Pan Government Framework Agreement for the provision of property maintenance services in Parliament Buildings for 2023-24.

Hugh also advised that short and long-term programmes of property maintenance for Parliament Buildings were being developed.

Following consideration, SMT approved the recommendation as proposed.

Hugh Stewart left the meeting at 11.10 am.

Change in agenda running order.

OTHER ITEMS

17. Directors' Updates

Parliamentary Services

IS Office

Gareth noted that the new Head of IT had taken up post on 20 March 2023.

Communications Office

Gareth advised that the Head of Communications post had recently been temporary filled with an agency assignment and that one of the Deputy Communications Officers had moved to the Public Engagement team to take up a new role as Participation and Outreach Manager.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Procurement Office

Tara noted the ongoing significant staff resourcing pressures within the Procurement Office. She advised that a new permanent AG5 Procurement Manager had taken up post, however, temporary cover for two further AG5 Procurement Managers posts was still being sought.

In light of these ongoing pressures, it was agreed that the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors would meet with the Head of Procurement to review the prioritisation of procurement projects again.

Action: Head of Procurement to arrange a meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors to review the prioritisation of procurement projects.

RalSe

Tara highlighted the achievement of Eileen Regan, a Senior Research Officer, who had secured Fellowship funding for a Research Officer in Academic Engagement/Knowledge Exchange in RalSe, for four days per week, for two years from Autumn 2023. SMT congratulated Eileen on this achievement.

Corporate Services

Office Resources

Lesley noted the challenges that had arisen in awarding the new stationery contract and advised that a review of the process would be undertaken to identify any lessons learned.

Usher Services

Lesley acknowledged the success of the Parliament Buildings Security System project and recorded her thanks to the Project Team for its excellent project management.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Jonathan McMillen joined the meeting at 11.23 am for agenda item 13.

13. Litigation Update

Jonathan McMillen provided SMT with an update on litigation to which the Assembly Commission is currently a named party.

Jonathan McMillen left the meeting at 11.33 am.

Donna-Marie Clark joined the meeting at 11.33 am for agenda item 14.

14. Biennial Review of the Data Breach Management Plan

Donna-Marie Clark presented the Data Breach Management Plan, the contents of which she advised had been updated following a separate meeting with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 14 March 2023.

SMT approved the revised plan for publication on AssISt and for sharing with Information Asset Owners, subject to a further minor amendment.

Action: Donna-Marie to update the Plan as proposed by SMT and arrange for it to be published on AssISt.

Donna-Marie left the meeting at 11.37 am.

OTHER ITEMS CONTINUED

Dan Hull joined the meeting at 11.37 am for agenda item 15.

15. Update on the Work of the Internal Communications Group (ICG) October 2022 to March 2023

Dan Hull provided SMT with an update on the work of ICG from October 2022 to March 2023.

Dan reported on three main items, namely ICG scrutiny of the outcomes of the 2022 staff survey; a review of ICG's membership and remit; and re-designing the ICG AsslSt pages so that they are more visible to staff.

Dan advised that ICG had met with Sinéad McDonnell for a progress update on the implementation of the actions in the Staff Survey Action Plan and to provide some feedback. Dan noted that ICG was encouraged by the actions being taken and outlined the feedback and suggestions that had been provided to Sinead on a range of issues.

Dan noted that the group had looked at some of the negative results within the last staff survey to see if anything else beyond what was being done in the Staff Survey Action Plan could be done to address these going forward. Lesley stated that she had concerns about how some of the results from the last staff survey had been presented, as she felt that some were not equally balanced and that greater consideration would need to be given to how results were interpreted following the next staff survey.

Dan provided SMT with a copy of a research paper which had been commissioned from RaISe, to assess if ICG was representative of the staff body, in terms of both business area and grade. Dan noted that the paper concluded that the group was broadly representative of Assembly staff as a whole, but that the group would continue to monitor this.

Dan advised that ICG had noted that its Terms of Reference was quite broad and did not indicate how resources were to be deployed in the periods in between staff surveys. To address this, he provided a list of tasks that ICG proposed could be carried out.

SMT considered the list and agreed that in the intervening period the group should work with and support the Internal Communications Officer (ICO) in terms of general internal communications. SMT also discussed distribution of information by business area and HoBs and noted that SMT did not necessarily need to be the main channel of communication. It was agreed that more thought could be given to this when compiling the questions for the next staff survey.

Dan sought clarification from SMT on the timing of the next staff survey. Following discussion, SMT agreed that the next staff survey should be undertaken in the Spring of 2024.

Dan informed SMT that ICG was working with the Communications Office to re-design the ICG pages on AsslSt, with the intention of making the group more accessible to staff and communicating its work more effectively.

Lesley commented on and thanked Dan for the work that had been done this far to the AsslSt pages, which she stated was excellent.

Dan informed SMT of some ideas for improving internal communications which had been shared by the ICO following meetings with internal communications colleagues in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Dan noted that ICG had expressed support for some of the ideas and SMT agreed to give these some further consideration.

SMT thanked ICG for the work undertaken over the last six months and noted its appreciation to Dan for taking on the role of Chairperson.

Dan Hull left the meeting at 12.20 pm.

16. Items Cleared by Correspondence

SMT Register of Interests – reviewed and updated March 2023.

A paper on a 'Variation to the Outline Business Case for the Procurement of Replacement Laptops, approved by SMT on 2 November 2022', was issued to and approved by SMT on 27 March 2023.

18. AOB

There was no other business.

19. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 3 May 2023.

20. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Pay Claim 2023
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Biannual Review of Directorate Risk Registers
- Internal Communications Quarterly Update
- Renewal of Microsoft Enterprise Agreement 2022 Post Project Evaluation
- Cyber Security Risk

The meeting ended at 12.28 pm.