SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

MONDAY, 6 JULY 2026 at 9.30 AM
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Scarlett Healey, Executive Assistant
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support (Items 5 and 6)
Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR (Items 7 and 8)
Maria Bannon, Equality and Good Relations Manager (Item 7)
Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IS (Items 9 and 16)
Paula McClintock, Head of Finance (Item 9)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Item 9)
Suzanne Murphy, Deputy Head of Finance (Item 10)
Sebastien Mingout, Support Services Manager (Item 11)
Darren McKinstry, Head of Research and Information Service (Item 14)
Gillian Kane, Senior Research Officer (Item 14)
Frank Geddis, Clerk Assistant (Item 15)
Liz Marsh, Bill Clerk (Item 15)
John Hart, Head of Communications (Items 16, 17, 18 and 19)
Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer (Item 17)

The meeting commenced at 9.32 am.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

It was noted that the minutes from the meeting on 27 May 2026 were in the process of being published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Lesley Hogg expressed concern about delays in progressing some actions within the Corporate Services Directorate, noting that these were beginning to create reputational and financial risks.

Steven Baxter acknowledged Lesley's concerns and provided an update on the relevant actions, including the reasons for the delays.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.38 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

SMT noted that a large volume of legislation had been received before summer recess which commenced on 4 July 2026.

Lesley noted that, following a recent meeting between some members of the Executive and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, no agreement had been reached on the budget and that it would therefore be necessary to continue operating within the Assembly Commission's opening 2025-26 budget allocation.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Proposed agenda items for the next Assembly Commission meeting were considered.

Robin Ramsay left the meeting at 9.47am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Karen Martin joined the meeting at 9.47 am for agenda items 7 and 8.

Maria Bannon joined the meeting at 9.47 am for agenda item 7.

7. Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 2025-2026

Maria Bannon presented a draft Assembly Commission paper, reporting on the implementation of statutory equality, good relations and disability duties for 2025-2026.

SMT noted that good progress had been made against the actions in the Disability Action Plan (DAP) and the Good Relations Action Plan (GRAP), with only five of the 36 actions across both Plans not achieved.

Maria referred to requests from business areas to amend the completion target dates for one action within the DAP 2025-2030 and two within the GRAP 2025-2030. SMT acknowledged the challenges faced in progressing these actions and agreed to the requested extensions.

Following consideration, SMT approved, subject to minor amendments, the draft paper on the 2025-2026 Annual Equality Progress Report for circulation to the Assembly Commission via correspondence, prior to its submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in August 2026.

SMT thanked Maria for her comprehensive update and acknowledged the significant effort made by the relevant business areas and the Equality Unit to deliver actions and collate progress against targets throughout the reporting year.

Maria Bannon left the meeting at 9.55 am.

8. HR Management Information

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 June 2026

Karen advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 June 2026 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 394.7 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 414.9 FTE.

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

Karen provided an update on recruitment activity, and following discussion, SMT agreed to the inclusion of recruitment competitions for Visitor Experience Officer and Visitor Experience Supervisor in the non-prioritised category within the Recruitment Schedule. SMT also agreed that a recruitment competition for Principal Usher (AG6) should be scheduled at the earliest opportunity.

Karen noted that there had been fewer applications submitted for recent recruitment competitions, citing the competition for Assembly Usher as an example. SMT asked that the Recruitment Team review application numbers for recent competitions, to identify trends and/or potential reasons for any reduction.

In relation to sickness absence, Karen advised that, during May 2026, the overall average number of days lost per FTE member of staff remained stable at 9.8.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 10.04 am.

Mary-Ellen Nutt, Paula McClintock and Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 10.07 am for agenda item 9.

9. Seeking Approval to Add Three Complement Plus Posts to the IS Office Complement to support the Replacement of the Finance, HR Payroll and Procurement Systems

Mary-Ellen Nutt presented a paper which sought SMT approval to create three temporary Senior Business Analyst, complement plus posts, within the IS Office to support a Pre-Market Engagement exercise, which she advised would contribute to the development of a business case for replacing the Finance, HR, Payroll and Procurement systems.

Sinéad McDonnell stated that it would not be possible to replace the Finance, HR and Payroll systems without the requested temporary staff resources, as there was insufficient staff capacity within HR or Finance to deliver the project.

Tara Caul referred to references to the Procurement system in the paper and asked that it be amended to provide greater clarity on how any new system would align with the new DELTA Procurement system, which is not being replaced.

Action: Mary-Ellen to arrange for the paper to be amended to clarify that the new DELTA Procurement system is not being replaced and to provide greater clarity on how any new system would align with DELTA and re-circulate to SMT for final review.

Gareth McGrath noted Mary-Ellen's wider work commitments and emphasised the need to ensure that her involvement in the project did not overstretch her capacity.

Steven emphasised that the HR and Finance systems were business-critical and the importance of progressing their replacement. He noted that prior reviews highlighted the importance of IS led projects utilising the new technology stack.

Lesley agreed that this was a business-critical piece of work and noted the importance of keeping it on schedule, with sufficient input from business areas. She also suggested that lessons learned from the previous Systems Review project should be taken into account.

Following consideration, SMT approved the requested temporary increase in staffing resource within the IS Office.

Mary-Ellen Nutt, Paula McClintock and Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 10.22 am.

Suzanne Murphy joined the meeting at 10.25 am for agenda item 10.

10. Management Accounts

Suzanne Murphy presented the Management Accounts for May 2026.

SMT noted the forecast outturns for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (WFDSC) costs.

Suzanne noted that the Department of Finance (DoF) had not scheduled any formal Monitoring rounds, as the Executive had yet to agree the overall 2026-27 budget and she informed SMT that DoF had advised that no budget increase should be assumed.

Suzanne highlighted a budget pressure in Members' costs following publication of the Independent Remuneration Board's Determination. She advised that DoF had been notified, but that it might be possible to manage the pressure within the current Members' budget envelope.

Suzanne referred to expenditure against staff salaries and admin costs.

Suzanne sought approval of two bids in relation to the Youth Assembly and the IS Office. SMT approved the bids on the basis that sufficient budget had been surrendered by the business areas from other budget lines.

Lesley stated that bids which had not received business case approval should not be included in the Management Accounts. Suzanne noted Lesley's comments and advised that she would give further consideration to the current process for identifying potential pressures in advance of business case approval and how these should be presented.

In reviewing the Capital Plan, Suzanne advised that the capital budget pressure had reduced following surrenders from three business areas. However, she also highlighted that a number of significant projects, which had approved business cases and required funding, had been due to complete in 2025-26 and therefore had not been included in the 2026-27 Capital Plan.

Lesley noted that the narrative provided by the relevant business area on the status of the East and West security huts was inaccurate and requested that it be reviewed for accuracy.

Action: Steven to liaise with the relevant business area to check the accuracy of the update provided on the East and West security huts.

In relation to the Decision Authorisation System (DAS), Suzanne advised that HoBs had been asked to review current DAS overspends; ensure any required variations were made; and provide narratives for expired DAS entries. Lesley stated that business areas should not be spending above DAS approval limits, asked that this be made clear to HoBs and requested that the DAS report be tidied up over the summer.

Action: Directors to remind HoBs that expenditure must not exceed DAS approval limits and, where necessary, ensure that appropriate variations are submitted for approval.

Suzanne Murphy left the meeting at 10.55 am.

The meeting suspended at 10.55 am and resumed at 11.10 am

Sebastian Mingout joined the meeting at 11.10 am for agenda item 11.

11. Support Services Contract Post-Project Evaluation and Contract Extension

Sebastien Mingout provided SMT with a Post-Project Evaluation (PPE) for the Support Services contract.

SMT made a number of comments regarding the contract and asked for these to be addressed.

SMT noted the PPE and following discussion endorsed the proposed approach to the available contract extension.

SMT thanked Sebastien for his effective management of the Support Services contract.

Sebastian Mingout left the meeting at 11.36 am.

12. Conservation Management Plan Business Case

Paper deferred to next meeting.

13. Business Case for the Provision of Building Maintenance Work for 2026-2027

Paper deferred to next meeting.

LEGAL GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Darren McKinstry and Gillian Kane joined the meeting at 11.37 am for agenda item 14.

14. 2026 Members' Survey: Survey Findings

Darren McKinstry presented a paper outlining the key findings of the 2026 Members' Survey.

Darren advised that the Survey had received a good response rate and that Lisa McElherron, Clerk Assistant, supported by Heads of Business (HoBs), had been tasked with developing an Action Plan in response to the findings, for SMT's future consideration and approval.

Darren also confirmed that Members would be updated on the Survey findings and associated Action Plan in due course.

SMT thanked Darren, Gillian Kane and Glenn Williams for all the work that had gone into preparing the Survey and reporting on its findings.

Darren McKinstry and Gillian Kane left the meeting at 11.46 am.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Frank Geddis and Liz Marsh joined the meeting at 11.47 am for agenda item 15.

15. Post-Project Evaluation of the Legislative Drafting Solution Project

Frank Geddis and Liz Marsh provided SMT with a PPE on the Legislative Drafting Solution Project.

Frank noted that the project had been highly successful and outlined the key factors that had contributed to its success.

Frank recorded his thanks to Liz Marsh, Aoibheann Baker, the Bill Office and the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC) project teams for their work on the project.

Liz Marsh highlighted that involving all users from the outset was key to the project's success.

SMT noted that the project had been excellent in terms of delivery and agreed that it would be beneficial to share information and lessons learned from the project with the Finance and HR Offices and Usher Services to assist with the delivery of their forthcoming projects.

Action: Frank and Liz to share information and lessons learned from the Legislative Drafting Solution Project with the Finance and HR Offices and Usher Services.

Frank Geddis and Liz Marsh left the meeting at 12.09 pm.

Mary-Ellen Nutt and John Hart joined the meeting at 12.09 pm for agenda item 16.

16. 10-Year Technology Lifecycle Plan for IS Office and Assembly Broadcasting

Mary-Ellen and John provided and overview of capital expenditure expected over the next 10 years in order to maintain secure, resilient and effective digital services and specialist broadcast infrastructure for the Assembly Commission.

SMT noted the 10-Year Technology Lifecycle Plans for both the IS Office and Assembly Broadcasting, including the indicative annual capital requirement for the period 2026-27 to 2035-36, and requested that an allowance for inflation be incorporated.

Action: Mary-Ellen and John to update their respective 10-Year Technology Lifecycle Plans to include an allowance for inflation.

Tara asked Mary-Ellen and John to continue to work closely with the Procurement Office on the implementation of the Lifecycle Plan.

Lesley noted that these were 10-year rolling Plans and that, going forward they should be considered as part of the annual budget-setting exercise.

SMT welcomed the Plans and thanked Mary-Ellen, John and all those involved for the work undertaken in producing them.

Mary-Ellen Nutt and John Hart left the meeting at 12.22 pm.

The meeting suspended at 12:22 pm and resumed at 1:46 pm.

John Hart joined the meeting at 1.46 pm for agenda items 17, 18 and 19.

Liz Beaton joined the meeting at 1.46 pm for agenda item 17.

17. Internal Communications Quarterly Update

Liz Beaton provided an update on internal communications activity for the period mid-February to mid-June 2026.

Liz highlighted activities such as the Directorate meetings; four staff webinars; the Men's Health Network online survey; and the work undertaken by the Internal Communications Group and the Charity Fundraising Group.

Liz also stated that the reporting period had included significant activity to support corporate priorities, including the Performance and Wellbeing Framework, Leadership Framework planning, the Digital, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Cyber Strategy, the Communications Strategy, parliamentary culture work, wellbeing initiatives; and the PILOT Good Ideas Event.

Liz referred to the Performance and Wellbeing Framework which launched in March and the successful Long Service event to celebrate staff with 20 years' service in May.

Liz informed SMT of key areas of focus for the next quarter, which included the launch of the Leadership Framework, parliamentary culture initiatives, and preparations for the 2026 joint Staff Survey.

SMT noted the comprehensive update and thanked Liz and all those involved in organising and supporting the numerous engagement and charitable events over the last quarter, including the Staff Summer Briefing and Raffle and Charity Fundraising Event in aid of MacMillan Cancer Support, the previous week, which raised an amazing £1,780.90.

Liz Beaton left the meeting at 2.17 pm.

18. Revised Media Handbook

John presented a paper highlighting revisions to the Media Handbook, advising that it had been revised to ensure it remained current, authoritative and operationally useful.

John noted that the revised Media Handbook would be implemented in line with the introduction of the Electronic Access Control system, in Autumn 2026.

SMT noted that the Communications Office would engage with members of the media to explain the changes arising from implementation of the revised Media Handbook.

19. Strategic Communications Update

John Hart provided SMT with a strategic communications update.

John Hart left the meeting at 2.29 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

20. SMT/Commission Papers Cleared via Correspondence/Meeting

The following papers were cleared via correspondence:

- Provision of Restroom Facilities in Parliament Buildings
- Legislative Change Relating to the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland
- Annual Plan 2026 – 2027
- Report of the Task and Finish Group on Members' Experience of Abuse
- Progress of Remedial Works to the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Correspondence from the Committee on Procedures re Publication of Assembly Commission Written Answers to Assembly Questions and Appointments to the Assembly Commission
- Outline Proposal to Seek Consensus on the Display of a Portrait of His Majesty The King in Parliament Buildings
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register – June 2026
- Correspondence from the Committee for Communities on the New Decade, New Approach Review of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

21. Directors' Updates

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Tara provided an update on the work undertaken by all business areas within the Legal, Governance and Research Services Directorate and, in particular, highlighted ongoing litigation; concern that a number of FoI response deadlines were not being met; concern that the procurement strategy for Phase 2 of the roof repair project had not yet been finalised; documents and articles published by the Research and Information Service (RaISe); the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS); and ongoing procurement projects.

Tara advised that a new Data Protection and Governance Officer had been appointed on a temporary basis.

Parliamentary Services

SMT noted the work undertaken by all business areas within the Parliamentary Services Directorate.

Lesley queried progress on AI training and asked that future Parliamentary Services Directorate updates include updates on AI.

Action: Gareth to arrange for an update on AI to be included in future Parliamentary Services Directorate updates to SMT.

Lesley also sought further clarification on the status and the Pilot of the Electronic Document Records Management (EDRM) system and when the Assembly Leadership Team (ALT) was going to receive an update given this project affected all business areas across the Assembly Commission.

Action: Gareth to arrange an Information and Update Session on the EDRM system.

Corporate Services

Steven provided an update on all business areas within the Corporate Services Directorate.

Steven noted that the remedial works to roof and the Electronic Access Control system were high-risk projects and highlighted a number of risks with regards to delivery.

Steven advised that the replacement Goods lifts and North lift were due to be installed over the summer.

In relation to the installation of a barrier at the lower east car park, Steven advised that the contractor required the car park to close for one week. SMT agreed to the closure and noted that staff could use the overflow car park while the work was carried out.

Tara asked about the risk associated with Courtyard 8, which was closed to staff due to health and safety issues but remained accessible for maintenance. Steven advised that he had requested further details and that additional mitigating measures had been put in place, with the risk being kept under review at the Roof Project Board meetings.

Lesley requested that future Corporate Services Directorate updates to SMT include more project information, including timelines, costs and other relevant delivery information.

Action: Steven to ensure that future Corporate Services Directorate updates to SMT include more detailed project information, including timelines, costs and other relevant delivery information.

22. AOB

There was no other business.

23. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 7 August 2026.

24. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- People and Culture Strategy – Annual Update on Progress
- Blue Flax Refurbishment Post-Project Evaluation
- Conservation Management Plan (10 Yr) Business Case
- Business Case for the Provision of Building Maintenance Work 2026-2027

The meeting ended at 3.03 pm.