

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

**FRIDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2024 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
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support
(Items 5 and 6)
Billy Mahoney, Interim Deputy Head of Finance (Item 7)
Gary Browne, Senior Accountant (Item 7)
Diane Lamont, Senior HR Manager (Items 8, 9 and 10)
Cathy McGowan, Learning Administration Manager (Item 9)
Ken Eccles, Head of Usher Services (Item 11)
Terri Quigley, Head of Facilities Management (Item 11)
Stephanie Mallon, Clerk Assistant (Item 12)
Clare Maguire, Public Engagement Manager (Item 12)
Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications (Item 13)
Gillian Kane, Senior Researcher (Item 14)
Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Items 15,
16 and 17)**

The meeting commenced at 9.31 am.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

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 26 September 2024 had been published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.35 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg noted that Halloween recess would be commencing on 26 October.

Lesley noted that the Democratic Consent Process was due to take place before the end of the year.

Lesley stated that she, along with Steven Baxter, would be presenting the Assembly Commission's 2025-26 budget to the Audit Committee on 13 November 2024, following approval by the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 16 October 2024.

SMT noted the increasing number of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests, Assembly Commission written questions and media enquiries over the last few weeks.

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey advised that an Assembly Commission meeting had been scheduled for 20 November 2024, to enable the Assembly Commission to conclude its consideration of the paper on 'Matters Arising from the Ernst and Young Internal Audit of Corporate Governance Arrangements', initially considered at its previous meeting on 16 October 2024.

Robin noted that officials were reviewing dates for the next full meeting of the Assembly Commission and proposed items for the meeting:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Request for the Assembly Commission to Display a Portrait of His Majesty The King
- Draft Northern Ireland Assembly Public Engagement Strategy
- Consideration of a Proposal from Stewart Dickson MLA for the Northern Ireland Assembly to Host a Meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, in Belfast, in July 2025.

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.52 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Billy Mahoney and Gary Browne joined the meeting at 9.52 am for agenda item 7.

7. Management Accounts September 2024

Gary Browne presented the Management Accounts for September 2024.

Gary advised SMT of the outturn forecasts for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (WFDSC) costs, against the June monitoring position.

Gary highlighted the forecast outturn positions for Staff Salaries, Administration (Admin) costs and Members costs. Lesley queried the assumption made regarding vacant WFDSC posts and it was agreed that this would be amended as the posts would be filled in year.

On reviewing the Capital Budget, SMT noted the budget position in relation to expenditure as at 1 October 2024 and the fact that only just over 25% of the budget had been spent. In light of this, SMT reviewed the progress on a number of projects listed on the Capital Plan that were approved in principle, but subject to approval of the relevant business case, and discussed the likelihood of them being delivered within the financial year. Directors were asked to clarify whether these projects could be delivered in this financial year, following approval of the relevant business case.

Billy Mahoney referred to the October Monitoring return due to the Department of Finance by close of play and, as the figures presented in the paper would inform this exercise, he asked SMT to consider whether any funds should be surrendered at this time.

Following discussion, SMT agreed to surrender funds from within the budget for Resource DEL and WFDSC costs and that Billy would circulate a summary of the funds to be resurrendered after the meeting.

Action: Billy to prepare a summary of the funds to be resurrendered from Resource DEL and WFDSC costs and circulate to SMT.

In relation to the Capital budget, SMT agreed to review the position again at January Monitoring.

Action: Directors to speak with their Heads of Business (HoBs) to establish if there are any capital projects that could be brought forward into 2024-25, should surplus funds be available.

Billy Mahoney and Gary Browne left the meeting at 10.24 am.

Diane Lamont joined the meeting at 10.24 am for agenda items 8, 9 and 10.

Cathy McGowan joined the meeting at 10.24 am for agenda item 9.

Change to agenda running order.

9. Bi-annual Review of Learning and Development Activities

Cathy McGowan provided SMT with an update on the progress made from April 2024 to September 2024, in relation to the implementation of corporate learning and development activities for staff.

Cathy noted that 481.43 training days had been delivered in the period, which equated to an average of 1.24 days per staff member.

Cathy informed SMT of the spend against budget as at 30 September 2024, and the anticipated expenditure over the next six months, against each of the three priorities within the Learning and Development Strategy.

Cathy noted that although only around a quarter of the budget had been spent as at 30 September 2024, there had been significant expenditure in October 2024 which had yet to be accounted for.

Cathy referred to upcoming changes within the Learning and Development Team in relation to the formation of a new Organisational Development (OD) and Learning Team and the appointment of an OD and Learning Manager and Training Manager.

SMT noted the learning and development activities that had been undertaken; the level of spend to date; and the anticipated budget for the remaining six months of the financial year.

Lesley highlighted the level of remaining budget for Directorate training and it was agreed that Directors would review requirements for the remainder of the financial year.

Action: Directors to review Directorate training budget requirements for the remainder of the financial year.

In relation to the remaining Corporate Learning and Development budget, it was agreed that Cathy would review it further, in advance of the January Monitoring Round, and surrender any monies not required.

Action: Cathy to further review the Corporate Learning and Development budget, in advance of the January Monitoring Round.

SMT thanked Cathy and the Learning and Development Team for their efforts in providing such a range of learning and development opportunities over the last six months.

Cathy McGowan left the meeting at 10.38 am.

8. HR Management Information

Diane Lamont presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 October 2024.

Diane advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 October 2024 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 372 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 388.5 FTE.

Diane noted that SMT had, at its meeting in March 2024, considered and agreed to re-visit a request for a temporary increase in complement within the Committee for Communities, to support the Committee with the passage of the Sign Language Bill through Committee Stage. As there was now a clearer position on the timing of the Sign Language Bill, Diane asked SMT if it was content to approve the temporary increase in staff complement.

Following consideration, SMT approved in principle, a temporary six-month position within the Committee for Communities, on a complement plus basis and it was agreed that Gareth McGrath would provide the HR Office with details of when the post should be filled.

Diane updated SMT on recruitment activity and noted that the Recruitment Schedule had been updated following review at the SMT meeting on 26 September 2024.

Diane sought and obtained approval of a request, from the Director of Parliamentary Services, to add a competition for the Head of Communications and Broadcasting to the Recruitment Schedule.

SMT considered and endorsed the process for managing merit lists by the HR Office, to ensure equity and fairness.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period October 2023 to September 2024, the average sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 10.9 days, which represented a reduction of 4.9 days when compared to 15.8 days for the period October 2022 to September 2023.

SMT also noted case management activity since 1 May 2024.

10. Draft Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Security Clearance Policy

Diane presented a draft Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and revised Security Clearance Policy, both of which she stated had been updated following consideration by SMT at its meeting in July 2024.

Diane advised that following formal consultation, Trade Union Side had agreed both policies and she noted that the Learning and Development Team was working to identify training for Designated Safeguarding Officers

and Senior Designated Safeguarding Officers, to support implementation of the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

SMT noted that the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and revised Security Clearance Policy had been comprehensively reviewed and, following further consideration, approved both for issuing to staff and inclusion in the Staff Handbook, subject to some minor amendments. SMT noted that the HR Office would now implement any actions arising from these policies, including ensuring that appropriate training is provided.

SMT however queried the application of the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy in respect of non-staff passholders and contractors and asked the HR Office to consider this, including reviewing how other parliaments address safe-guarding for these individuals.

Action: HR Office to consider the application of the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy in respect of non-staff passholders and contractors, including reviewing how other parliaments address safeguarding for these individuals.

It was agreed that the HR Office would arrange for the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy to be published on the Assembly's website.

SMT noted that it would consider further enhancements to the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy once the HR Office had completed its review.

Diane Lamont left the meeting at 11.10 am.

Ken Eccles and Terri Quigley joined the meeting at 11.10 am for agenda item 11.

11. Final Business Case for Installation of a Partial Electronic Access Control System at Parliament Buildings

Ken Eccles presented the final business case in relation to the installation of a partial electronic access control system at Parliament Buildings.

Ken referred to the revised estimated costs provided by the Department of Finance's Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) unit in relation to the procurement, installation and commissioning of a non-biometric partial EAC system at Parliament Buildings.

SMT considered the revised costs, noting that they had increased considerably from the estimated costs provided in the outline business case presented to SMT at its meeting on 1 March 2024; queried how these had been assessed as realistic given the lack of reference to market sounding in the paper; and therefore sought assurance regarding Value for Money (VFM).

Terri Quigley advised that she had undertaken a detailed review of the breakdown of all elements and component costs and carried out market analysis against same. She then provided SMT with the necessary

reassurance that VFM had been considered and that the proposed costs were in line with expectations.

Ken also advised SMT of three possible options going forward, with a recommendation to proceed with option 2, i.e. to continue with CPD.

Following discussion, SMT approved the business case and recommendation within, to use the services of the CPD unit to take the project forward, subject to a review of some of the costs with CPD to ensure that all unnecessary costs were removed.

Action: Ken and Terri to further review the costs with CPD.

Steven advised that he did not consider it necessary to establish a Project Board to oversee the Project and that it would be managed by his Directorate Management Team.

Ken Eccles and Terri Quigley left the meeting at 11.41 am.

Meeting suspended at 11.41 am and resumed at 11.50 am.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Stephanie Mallon and Clare Maguire joined the meeting at 11.50 am for agenda item 12.

12. Draft Northern Ireland Assembly Public Engagement Strategy 2024-2027

Clare Maguire presented the draft Northern Ireland Assembly Public Engagement Strategy 2024-2027, which she noted had been designed to support the Corporate Strategy 2023-2028.

Clare advised that the draft Strategy was underpinned by three pillars, namely, Increasing Awareness; Improving Understanding; and Enabling Participation and she outlined the anticipated deliverables.

Following consideration, SMT approved, subject to some amendments, the draft Northern Ireland Assembly Public Engagement Strategy for consultation with HoBs and staff. Given the timing of the Strategy, SMT proposed that the timeframe be amended to 2025-2028.

SMT noted that following consultation with HoBs and staff, Assembly Commission approval of the draft Strategy would be sought.

SMT was very impressed with the draft Strategy and thanked Clare and Stephanie for all the work that had gone in to producing it.

Stephanie Mallon and Clare Maguire left the meeting at 12.05 pm.

Michael Cairns joined the meeting at 12.05 pm for agenda item 13.

13. Strategic Communications Update

SMT received a communications update from the Acting Head of Communications. Michael Cairns thanked teams across numerous Business Areas for their support over the previous period.

Michael Cairns left the meeting at 12.24 pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Gillian Kane joined the meeting at 12.24 pm for agenda item 14.

14. Renewal of the Concordat Between Land and Property Services (LPS) and the Assembly Commission in Relation to a Geographical Information Specialist

Gillian Kane sought SMT approval to renew the Concordat between LPS and the Assembly Commission, to enable the continued provision of a mapping service for Members, the Assembly and the Assembly Commission.

Following consideration, SMT approved the renewal of the Concordat and agreed, as this was a long-established arrangement, to delegate approval of further renewals to the Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, with referral to SMT only in the event of any significant changes to the arrangement.

Gillian Kane left the meeting at 12.28 pm.

Donna-Marie Clark joined the meeting at 12.28 pm for agenda items 15, 16 and 17.

15. Biannual Review of the Directorate Risk Registers (DDRs)

SMT reviewed the September 2024 DDRs for Corporate Services, Legal, Governance and Research Services and Parliamentary Services.

Donna-Marie Clark noted that the scores in Legal, Governance and Research Services, Directorate Risk (DR) 4 'Errors or Omissions in Equality, Governance or Regulatory Requirements', had been increased due to legislative changes under the Procurement Act 2023.

Donna-Marie advised that Corporate Services had not replaced the former risks outlined at DR 3 'Information Breach', DR4 'Fraudulent Behaviour' and DR6 'Major Errors or Omissions in Governance and Compliance', as the Director of Corporate Services considered these to be captured as routine business practices and intended to review the position regarding these

matters further, in particular in relation to the Fraud Prevention and Anti-Bribery Policy.

SMT considered emerging Risk Clusters and agreed that no further Directorate risks required escalation to the Corporate Risk Register at this time.

16. Report and Self-Assessment of the Information Security Group (ISG)

Donna-Marie presented the Annual Report and Self-Assessment of ISG for the year to September 2024.

SMT noted the work undertaken by ISG during the reporting period and its planned future actions.

SMT recorded its thanks to the members of ISG for their continued involvement with the group over the last year and for the preparation of such a comprehensive report.

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

Donna-Marie presented an updated NAO Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan, for consideration by SMT.

Donna-Marie advised that it had last been reviewed and approved by SMT in September 2021 and noted by the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee (ACARC) at its meeting in October 2021, with the Action Plan monitored at each of its meetings to date.

Donna-Marie noted that in October 2021 the NAO had updated its Good Practice Guide to Cyber and Information Security. She advised that the questions in the Self-Assessment had been updated significantly and extended in line with the updated Good Practice Guide.

Donna-Marie noted that the Self-Assessment narrative had been updated in line with current policies as at 4 October 2024, with a red, amber and green status applied to each question in the Self-Assessment.

Donna-Marie stated that the biennial review should have been carried out in 2023, but that it had been postponed pending the outcome of the Assembly Commission's Cyber Security Assurance Review.

Following consideration, SMT approved the NAO Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment, Checklist and Action Plan, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: Donna-Marie to update the NAO Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment, Checklist and Action Plan, as proposed by SMT.

Donna-Marie advised that the NAO Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment, Checklist and Action Plan would be presented to ACARC at its meeting scheduled for November 2024.

SMT recorded its thanks to Donna-Marie and the Head of IS for updating the NAO Cyber Security and Information Risk Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan in line with the NAO's updated Good Practice Guide.

Donna-Marie Clark left the meeting at 12.44 pm.

18. SMT/Assembly Commission Papers Cleared via Correspondence/Meeting

- Resourcing of the Function of the Examiner of Statutory Rules
- Assembly Commission Budget 2025-26
- Pay Claim 2024
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- The Assembly Members (Remuneration Board) Bill
- Review of Simultaneous Interpretation of Assembly Business in Irish and Ulster Scots
- Matters Arising from the Ernst and Young Internal Audit of Corporate Governance Arrangements
- Revised Annual Environmental Management Review 2023-2024

OTHER ITEMS

19. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Pay Claim 2024

Steven advised that the 2024 Pay Claim had been voted on and accepted by NIPSA Members. Finance are hoping to process the claim in the November pay run.

National Protective Security Authority

Steven noted that the Head of Usher Services had been approached by the National Protective Security Authority (NPSA) in relation to offering a free assessment of the Assembly Commission's security arrangements against the NPSA Personnel Security Maturity Model.

Steven noted that the Head of Usher Services was working with NPSA on this and he advised that he would bring any recommendations following the review to SMT for consideration.

Lesley queried why it was proposed that only two pillars would be reviewed and Steven agreed to follow-up.

Action: Steven to follow-up on why only two pillars were proposed for review.

Finance Office

Steven confirmed that the independent review of the staffing and structure of the Finance Office had commenced.

Usher Services – Business Continuity Plan (BCP)

Steven noted that a BCP event was planned for 14 November 2024.

Project Status – Facilities Management

Steven provided an update on the status of a number of projects being undertaken within Facilities Management.

Systems Review Project Update

Steven advised that an Options paper had been considered by the Systems Review Project Team.

Internal Audit Status Update

Steven provided status updates on the Internal Audits being carried out within the Corporate Services Directorate.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Legal Services Office

Tara Caul provided a litigation update.

Governance

Tara advised that the next ACARC meeting was scheduled for 20 November 2024.

Information Standards

Tara noted a significant increase in the number of FoI requests.

Tara advised that a further eight files had been approved by SMT for transfer to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

Tara stated that an audit of the Sensitivity Review and retention and disposal arrangements operated by the Assembly Commission had commenced.

Research and Information Services (RaISe)

Tara advised that RaISe would soon have its full complement of staff.

Tara advised that discussions had taken place in relation to the resumption of the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series in 2025.

Procurement

Tara updated SMT on the ongoing procurement projects.

Parliamentary Services

SMT noted the work undertaken by all business areas within the Parliamentary Services Directorate, since last reported at the SMT meeting on 26 September 2024.

20. AOB

SMT discussed potential dates for a meeting of the Assembly Leadership Team.

21. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 29 November 2024.

22. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Draft Assembly Commission Paper on the Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Proposed Revisions to Ancillary Payroll Calculations
- Sensitivity Review
- Revised Business Case for the Procurement of Interpretation, Translation and Transcription Services
- Consideration of a Proposal from Stewart Dickson MLA for the Northern Ireland Assembly to Host a Meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, in Belfast, in July 2025
- Internal Communications Quarterly Update
- Strategic Communications Update
- Staff Survey 2024

The meeting ended at 1.23 pm.

