

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

**TUESDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2024 at 2.00 PM
ROOM 29, 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)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 7 and 8)
Maria Bannon, Equality Manager (Item 7)
Paula McClintock, Head of Finance (Items 9 and 10)
Karen Steele, Deputy Head of Finance (Item 9)
David Lynn, Roof Project Manager (Item 11)
Alice McKelvey, Legal Adviser (Item 11)
Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications (Item 12)
Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IT (Item 13)
Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Item 14)**

The meeting commenced at 2.04 pm.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

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 29 November 2024 had been published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 2.07 pm for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg noted that the Democratic Consent motion was passed following debate in the Assembly Chamber on 10 December 2024.

SMT noted that an application for leave to apply for Judicial Review was heard in the High Court on 9 December 2024, seeking, inter alia, to prevent a vote on the motion for a democratic consent resolution which was due to be taken in the Assembly on 10 December 2024 and that Senior Counsel had been instructed to appear on behalf of the Assembly.

SMT noted that all three of the grounds in the Judicial Review had been dismissed by the High Court and Court of Appeal; that, in the course of oral arguments in the High Court, Mr Justice McAlinden observed that the applicant's request to the High Court to prevent the vote in the Assembly was repugnant to the separation of powers and that the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary must respect the separation of powers. SMT noted that it would be important to recall these comments in any future cases arising of a similar nature.

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey advised that the next meeting of the Assembly Commission had been scheduled for 15 January 2025.

Proposed items for the meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- The Assembly Members (Remuneration Board) Bill
- Potential Implications of the Increase in Employers' National Insurance for Funding Under the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2024
- Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Draft Public Engagement Strategy 2025-2028
- Request for the Assembly Commission to Display a Portrait of His Majesty The King
- Request 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 2.21 pm.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 2.21 pm for agenda items 7 and 8.

Maria Bannon joined the meeting at 2.21 pm for agenda item 7.

7. Disability Action Plan 2022-2025 and Good Relations Action Plan 2022-2025 Closure Reports and Audit of Inequalities Action Plan 2022-2026 Bi-annual Update

Maria Bannon presented the Closure Reports for the Disability and Good Relations Action Plans 2022-2025.

Maria stated that the Closure Reports had been prepared in advance of the 31 March 2025 Action Plan end dates as all actions had been completed, with the exception of one from each plan, which she advised would not be completed by March 2025 due to extenuating circumstances.

SMT considered both Closure Reports and approved them for presentation to the Assembly Commission in April.

Maria advised that public consultation on the new Disability and Good Relations Action Plans for 2025-2030 would conclude in February 2025.

Maria also presented the bi-annual update on the Audit of Inequalities (Aol) Action Plan 2022-2026.

Following consideration, SMT approved the Aol Action Plan for publication, subject to clarification on a small number of the outcomes.

Action: Maria to update the Aol Action Plan and re-circulate to SMT for final approval, prior to publication.

SMT acknowledged the work that had gone into completing the actions in all Plans and thanked Maria and the Equality Team for their efforts.

Maria Bannon left the meeting at 2.41 pm.

8. HR Management Information

Sinéad McDonnell presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 November 2024.

Sinéad advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 December 2024 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 373.5 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 388.5 FTE.

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

Sinéad updated SMT on recruitment activity.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period December 2023 to November 2024, the average sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 11.1 days, which represented a reduction of

4.5 days when compared to 15.6 days for the period December 2022 to November 2023.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 3.01 pm.

Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 3.04 pm for agenda items 9 and 10.

Karen Steele joined the meeting at 3.04 pm for agenda item 9.

9. Management Accounts November 2024 Including Proposal for January Monitoring to Department of Finance

Karen Steele presented the Management Accounts for November 2024.

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

As part of the January Monitoring exercise, Karen highlighted potential surrenders from within Resource DEL, Capital DEL and WFDSC costs.

On reviewing the capital plan, SMT considered and approved bids for projects, subject to the relevant business cases being prepared.

Following consideration, SMT approved the proposed surrenders for inclusion in the January Monitoring return, subject to clarification of some projected costs and final confirmation with Heads of Business.

Karen Steele left the meeting at 3.44 pm.

10. Review of Financial Implications for Parties on Increases to Employers' National Insurance Contributions

Paula McClintock presented and sought approval of a draft Assembly Commission paper on the financial implications for Parties on increases to Employers' National Insurance contributions.

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

Action: Paula to update the paper as proposed by SMT and re-circulate for final approval.

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 4.01 pm.

David Lynn and Alice McKelvey joined the meeting at 4.01 pm for agenda item 11.

11. Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings

David Lynn presented and sought approval of a draft Assembly Commission paper on the defects in the roof of Parliament Buildings.

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

Action: David to update the paper as proposed by SMT and re-circulate for final approval.

David Lynn and Alice McKelvey left the meeting at 4.36 pm.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Michael Cairns joined the meeting at 4.36 pm for agenda item 12.

12. Strategic Communications Update

SMT received a communications update from the Acting Head of Communications.

Michael Cairns left the meeting at 4.43 pm.

Mary-Ellen Nutt joined the meeting at 4.43 pm for agenda item 13.

13. Request to Add two Posts to the IS Office Complement

Mary-Ellen Nutt presented a paper which sought approval to add a permanent Information Technology Security Officer (ITSO), and a temporary Technical Project Coordinator to the IS Office complement.

Mary-Ellen outlined the requirement and role for each of the new posts and it was noted that part of the ITSO role would be to work with the Data Protection and Governance Officer.

Following discussion, SMT approved the request to add a permanent ITSO post and a temporary complement plus Technical Project Coordinator post to the IS Office Complement, subject to job evaluation.

SMT noted that the cost for the ITSO would be funded from within the Parliamentary Services Directorate budget and the temporary Technical Project Coordinator post would be funded from existing IS capital projects, given that the posts had not been included in the 2025-26 Budget.

Mary-Ellen Nutt left the meeting at 5.17 pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark joined the meeting at 5.17 pm for agenda item 14.

14. Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Donna-Marie Clark advised that the December review of the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) was ongoing and, it was agreed that once completed, a paper would be circulated to SMT for approval, prior to the January 2025 Assembly Commission meeting.

Action: Donna-Marie to circulate the December CRR to SMT for approval, prior to the January Assembly Commission meeting.

Donna-Marie left the meeting at 5.21 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

15. SMT Paper(s) Cleared via Correspondence

Final Business Case for the Refurbishment of the Audio and Video Systems in Assembly Committee Rooms.

16. Directors' Updates

SMT noted the work undertaken by business areas within the Corporate Services, Legal, Governance and Research Services and Parliamentary Services Directorates, since last reported at the SMT meeting on 29 November 2024.

17. AOB

There was no other business.

18. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 31 January 2025.

19. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Health and Safety Management Report 2024
- Annual Plan 2024-2025 Quarterly Update
- Review of Corporate Governance Framework
- Sensitivity Review
- Strategic Communications Update

The meeting ended at 5.38 pm.