

## **SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)**

**FRIDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 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, Senior Accountant (Item 7)  
Karen Steele, Deputy Head of Finance (Item 7)  
Diane Lamont, Senior HR Manager (Item 8)  
Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications (Items 9 and 10)  
Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer (Item 9)  
Stephanie Mallon, Clerk Assistant (Items 11 and 12)  
Roisin Kelly, Assembly Clerk (Item 11)  
Clare Maguire, Public Engagement Manager (Item 12)  
Dan Hull, Chair of Internal Communications Group (Item 13)**

The meeting commenced at 9.39 am.

### **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 25 October 2024 had been published.

### **4. SMT Action Points**

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

SMT agreed that the outstanding actions in relation to the review of the file management system; the new climate change reporting duties; and the review of the Building Services Life Cycle Plan, could be closed and monitored at Directorate level, with updates provided in the Director's Update going forward.

In relation to a further outstanding action on the clarification of insurance cover, SMT agreed that it should remain open with an update provided on the approach taken in other legislatures.

*Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.39 am for agenda items 5 and 6.*

## **5. Political Update**

Lesley Hogg noted that on 10 December 2024 the Assembly would be voting on Articles 5 to 10 of the Windsor Framework.

## **6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda**

Robin Ramsey noted 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
- Draft Northern Ireland Assembly Public Engagement Strategy 2025-28
- 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 9.45 am.*

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

*Billy Mahoney and Karen Steele joined the meeting at 9.45 am for agenda item 7.*

## **7. Management Accounts October 2024**

Billy Mahoney noted that Karen Steele had resumed her substantive role and would resume responsibility for preparation of the monthly Management Accounts going forward.

Lesley thanked Billy for his work on the Management Accounts; the monitoring returns and the year-end accounts, over the last few years.

Billy presented the Management Accounts for October 2024 against the Department of Finance (DoF) October Monitoring Round position and SMT noted the updated forecast position.

Billy advised that notification of the January Monitoring Round had been received from DoF, that this was the final opportunity to revise the Assembly Commission's forecast financial outturn for 2024-25, and that returns were required by 3 January 2025.

Due to the holiday period, it was agreed that SMT would consider the Assembly Commission's return at its meeting on 17 December in order to submit it by 20 December 2024.

SMT noted the importance of accurate financial forecasting and that the Finance Office would inform Heads of Business (HoBs) and budget managers of the timetable for submission of returns.

Billy outlined and sought approval of bids from the Communications Office and Building Services.

Following consideration, SMT approved all bid requests, but asked for a more detailed explanation on the reason for the increase in Professional Fees.

**Action:** Steven Baxter to provide SMT with a more detailed explanation on the reason for the increase in Professional Fees.

On discussing the budget in relation to the legal fees for the roof litigation, further clarification was sought.

**Action:** Steven to provide SMT with further clarification on the budget for the legal fees in relation to the roof litigation.

The forecast in relation to Members costs was reviewed and Lesley requested that the Finance Office write to Members to seek an indication of their expected year-end outturn in order to inform the DoF return.

**Action:** Finance Office to write to Members to seek an indication of their expected year-end outturn.

Billy advised that the Finance Office had reviewed General Admin Expenses and identified some expenditure that should have been capitalised.

Lesley noted that the Capital Plan would be thoroughly reviewed as part of the January Monitoring Round return.

*Billy Mahoney and Karen Steele left the meeting at 10.10 am.*

*Diane Lamont joined the meeting at 10.11 am for agenda item 8.*

## **8. HR Management Information**

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

Diane advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 November 2024 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 371.5 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) against a staff complement (including complement plus) of 388.5 FTE.

Diane updated SMT on recruitment activity and requests for new recruitment competitions.

Following discussion, SMT agreed that recruitment competitions for Deputy Editor and two Digital Content Officers should be added to the Recruitment Schedule, and that the Senior Usher competition should be prioritised, if there was capacity to do so.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period November 2023 to October 2024, the average sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 10.9 days, which represented a reduction of 4.7 days when compared to 15.6 days for the period November 2022 to October 2023.

Diane advised that the HR Office had reviewed the Managing Attendance Policy, and she outlined some proposed revisions.

Following consideration, SMT approved the revised Managing Attendance Policy, subject to some further minor amendments.

*Diane Lamont left the meeting at 10.28 am.*

## **PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

*Michael Cairns joined the meeting at 10.28 am for agenda items 9 and 10.*

*Liz Beaton joined the meeting at 10.28 for agenda item 9.*

## **9. Internal Communications Quarterly Update**

Liz Beaton provided an update on internal communications activity for the period mid-August to mid-November 2024.

Liz noted that since the last update in August, there had been engagement and consultation with staff on a number of issues, namely, the 2024 Staff Survey; ideas for the 2025 All Staff Meeting; the draft Disability Action Plan 2025-2030 and draft Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2030; the draft Public Engagement Strategy; and the Hybrid Working Policy Review 2024 Survey.

SMT noted that not all staff contact details were recorded on AsslSt and Outlook and it was agreed that Liz would raise this at the next Heads of Business (HoB) meeting.

**Action:** Liz to raise the issue of staff contact details at the next HoB meeting and seek assurance that all staff information would be reviewed and updated on both AsslSt and Outlook.

Liz referred to a number of “Let’s Talk” / “Let’s Meet” / “Let’s Learn” / “Let’s Celebrate” activities that had taken place in relation to the staff summer briefing, smartphone photography, new colleagues and Parliamentary matters. She also advised that work was continuing with colleagues on the Let’s Talk” Parliamentary Culture / People and Culture Strategy activities.

Liz referred to the Directorate Meetings due to take place in March 2025 and potential topics for inclusions to provide continuity across all Directorates.

SMT thanked Liz and all those involved for their efforts in delivering a number of very successful engagement events over the last quarter.

*Liz Beaton left the meeting at 10.56 am.*

## **10. Strategic Communications Update**

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

*Michael Cairns left the meeting at 11.07 am.*

*Meeting suspended at 11.07 am and resumed at 11.15 am.*

*Stephanie Mallon joined the meeting at 11.15 am for agenda items 11 and 12.*

*Roisin Kelly joined the meeting at 11.15 am for agenda item 12.*

## **11. Revised Business Case for the Procurement of Interpretation, Translation and Transcription Services**

Roisin Kelly noted that SMT had approved, at its meeting on 14 December 2023, a Business Case for the procurement of interpretation, translation and transcription services using the Department of Communities Framework.

However, on joining the Framework, Roisin stated that, the supplier of sign language services had informed the Assembly Commission that it could not provide interpreters for live broadcast work at the contract rates and, in light of this, an interim solution was put in place to allow time for the procurement of a longer-term solution.

Roisin subsequently presented and sought approval of a revised Business Case for the procurement of interpretation, translation and transcription services.

Following consideration, SMT approved the Business Case as presented.

*Roisin Kelly left the meeting at 11.23 am.*

*Clare Maguire joined the meeting at 11.24 am for agenda item 12.*

## **12. 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**

Clare Maguire presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the 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.

Following consideration, SMT approved the paper for presentation at the January Assembly Commission meeting.

*Stephanie Mallon and Clare Maguire left the meeting at 11.27 am.*

## **OTHER ITEMS**

*Dan Hull joined the meeting at 11.27 am for agenda item 13.*

## **13. Reports Summarising the Results of the 2024 Staff Survey**

Dan Hull presented three reports summarising the results of the 2024 Staff Survey, along with an accompanying paper setting out the Internal Communications Group (ICG) observations on the key results and recommendations regarding the next steps.

Dan advised of a 78% response rate which SMT noted was very positive.

Dan also provided a demonstration of the data dashboard, which provided a rich and meaningful data set for analysis.

SMT considered the three reports and discussed the results of the Survey in detail, noting observations made by ICG and its recommendations regarding next steps.

SMT agreed that the three summary reports should be shared with staff and asked Dan to liaise with the Internal Communications Officer (ICO) and arrange for them to be published.

**Action:** Dan to liaise with the ICO and arrange for the three 2024 Staff Survey reports to be published.

SMT thanked Dan and the members of ICG for all the work they had put in to producing and reporting on the results of the Survey.

*Dan Hull left the meeting at 12.21 pm.*

## **14. SMT Paper(s) Cleared via Correspondence**

SUN Maintenance Contract.

## **15. Directors' Updates**

### **Corporate Services**

Steven provided an update on all business areas within the Corporate Services Directorate and, in particular, highlighted the refurbishment of the Blue Flax Restaurant and Long Gallery; the partial Electronic Access Control system; the cleaning of the exterior sides of Parliament Buildings and the Systems Review Project.

Steven recorded his thanks to the Pay Team for the work undertaken in processing the pay award for inclusion in the November salary and noted that lessons learned from the recent Business Continuity test event would be incorporated into the Business Continuity Plan.

Steven also noted that two additional Electric Vehicle charging points had been installed at the rear of Parliament Buildings.

### **Legal, Governance and Research Services**

Tara Caul provided an update on all business areas within the Legal, Governance and Research Services Directorate. In particular she highlighted litigation and the work that was ongoing in relation to finalising the management responses to Ernst and Young's internal audit of Corporate Governance Arrangements.

### **Parliamentary Services**

SMT noted the work undertaken by all business areas within the Parliamentary Services Directorate, since last reported at the SMT meeting on 25 October 2024.

## **16. AOB**

SMT discussed the agenda for the Assembly Leadership Team meeting on 5 December 2024.

## **17. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 17 December 2024.

## **18. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

- Draft Assembly Commission Paper on the Potential Implications of the Increase in Employers' National Insurance for Funding Under the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2024
- Biannual Update on Equality Action Plans, including Closure Reports for the Disability Action Plan 2022-2025 and Good Relations Action Plan 2022-2025
- Draft Assembly Commission Paper on the Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Sensitivity Review
- Strategic Communications Update

The meeting ended at 1.08 pm.