

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

**WEDNESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2025 at 9.30 PM
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
Paula Ewart, Interim Director of Performance and Improvement**

In Attendance:

**Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Krystal Clarke, Executive Assistant
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support
(Items 5 and 6)
Roisin Kelly, Assembly Clerk (Item 7)
Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IT (Item 8)
Robert McCausland, IT Security Officer (Item 8)
John Hart, Head of Communications (Items 9 and 10)
Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer (Item 9)
Karen Steele, Deputy Head of Finance (Item 11)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 12, 13, 14 and 15)
Catherine McIntosh, Organisational Development & Learning Manager
(Item 15)
Christine Watts, Environmental Services and Health and Safety
Manager (Items 17, 18 and 19)
Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Item 20)
Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services (Item 21)**

The meeting commenced at 9.31 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 24 October 2025 were in the process of being 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 Christmas recess commenced on 13 December 2025.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

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

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.44 am.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Roisin Kelly joined the meeting at 9.44 am for agenda item 7.

7. Survey of Members' Experience of Abuse

Roisin Kelly presented a report outlining the findings of a survey of Members' experience of abuse, online and in person, carried out by the Research and Information Service (RaISe) between June and September 2025.

Roisin noted that the survey had been undertaken to fulfil a commitment given by the Assembly Commission in response to an oral question from Diane Dodds MLA.

Roisin noted a high response rate to the survey and outlined a recommended approach to taking forward the findings, which involved establishing a cross-directorate Task and Finish Group of Assembly officials to take forward work to inform a broader programme of activity for the Assembly Commission to support Members experiencing abuse; consideration of proposed Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group; and preparation of a final report to SMT including a communication plan, for transmission to the Assembly Commission by 31 March 2026.

Roisin stated that a short-term dedicated resource would need to be identified to take forward and deliver on the programme of work.

Following discussion, SMT agreed to establish a cross-directorate Task and Finish Group as proposed, and to identify resources to take forward the programme of work.

SMT thanked Roisin for the all the work that had been carried out in relation to the survey and for the very comprehensive paper.

Roisin Kelly left the meeting at 10.11 am.

Mary-Ellen Nutt and Robert McCausland joined the meeting at 10.17 am for agenda item 8.

8. Interim Information Security Incident Response Plan

Mary-Ellen Nutt and Robert McCausland presented a paper which provided SMT with an update on the Assembly Commission's Information Security Incident Response Plan.

Mary-Ellen noted that the previous Information Security Incident Management Policy, which had supported the organisation for a 12-month period, had now lapsed and she stated that the Information Security Incident Response Plan had been further developed to support the Assembly Commission for the next six months, after which the final version would be presented to SMT for approval in May 2026.

Mary-Ellen subsequently sought approval of the proposed Interim Information Security Incident Response Plan along with the Information Security Incident Management Policy; Standard; and Procedure. Mary-Ellen confirmed that documents would be communicated to staff.

SMT welcomed and acknowledged the significant progress that had been made in developing the Information Security Incident Response Plan, and approved the Plan and accompanying documents, subject to including a reference in the Information Security Incident Management Policy to the Personal Data Breach Plan.

Mary-Ellen Nutt and Robert McCausland left the meeting at 10.33 am.

John Hart joined the meeting at 10.33 am for agenda items 9 and 10.

Liz Beaton joined the meeting at 10.33 am for agenda item 10.

9. Internal Communications Quarterly Update

Liz Beaton provided an update on internal communications from September 2025 to mid-November 2025.

Liz highlighted activities such as the staff webinars; “Let’s Meet” Refresh, Relax and Reconnect” sessions; the production of videos in relation to the Parliamentary Culture project; “Let’s Walk”; the launch of the Men’s Health Network; and the work undertaken by the Internal Communications Group and the Charity Fundraising Group.

Liz also provided SMT with a draft Corporate Engagement Calendar for 2026.

SMT thanked Liz and all those involved in organising and supporting staff engagement activities over the last few months and was delighted to see the engagement activities proposed for 2026.

Liz Beaton left the meeting at 10.56 am.

10. Strategic Communications Update

SMT received a communications update from the Head of Communications.

John Hart left the meeting at 11.04 am.

The meeting suspended at 11.04 am and resumed at 11.14 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Karen Steele joined the meeting at 11.14 am for agenda item 11.

11. Management Accounts October 2025 Including Agreed December Monitoring Position

Karen Steele presented the Management Accounts for October 2025, and formally reported on the December monitoring position as submitted to the Department of Finance on 20 November 2025.

Karen provided a report detailing an updated Forecast for 2025-26 compared to the June Monitoring position, and highlighted what had been agreed by SMT as the December Monitoring position.

SMT considered and approved a number of bids in relation to Admin costs with the exception of the bid for the modernisation programme, as a Business Case was required.

SMT also noted, and was content with, the offset of a number of capital bids against capital surrenders. Lesley asked that budget holders be reminded that any funds surrendered by business areas would need to be bid for again should they subsequently be required outside of the current financial year.

Gareth McGrath highlighted that information relating to the costs of the Electronic Access Control (EAC) project were not clear and was concerned that it indicated that the total cost would not become clear until a later stage.

Action: Steven Baxter to clarify the total cost of the EAC project.

Karen Steele left the meeting at 11.31 am.

Change to agenda running order.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 11.33 am for agenda items 15, 12, 13 and 14.

Catherine McIntosh joined the meeting at 11.33 am for agenda item 15.

15. Proposed Good Ideas Scheme

Catherine McIntosh presented a paper outlining a Proposed Good Ideas Scheme.

SMT noted that the proposed Scheme had been designed to support staff voice, encourage innovation, and promote a culture of continuous improvement and would be piloted from January 2026, supported by the Good Ideas Group (a subgroup of the Internal Communications Group).

Following consideration, SMT was very supportive of the proposed Good Ideas Scheme and for a pilot to commence in January 2026.

SMT thanked Catherine and the Good Ideas Group for all the work undertaken thus far to develop the proposed Scheme.

Catherine McIntosh left the meeting at 11.48 am.

12. HR Management Information

Sinéad McDonnell presented the HR Management Information as at 1 November 2025.

Sinéad advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 November 2025 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 391.4 Full Time Equivalents (FTE).

Sinéad sought SMT approval of two staff Complement Change Applications from the Director of Corporate Services, in relation to the extension of two temporary (complement plus) arrangements at AG6 until 31 March 2026. SMT approved both applications.

Sinéad updated SMT on recruitment activity.

In relation to the Recruitment Schedule, Sinéad highlighted that the volume of work being generated by the current live competitions was going to impact the ability to carry out all the competitions currently scheduled in the first quarter of 2026. In light of this, she proposed some changes to the schedule for the period January to March 2026.

SMT noted the proposals, and agreed that HR would consult those Heads of Business (HoBs) impacted by the proposed changes in advance of the SMT meeting and present the changes for ratification by SMT.

13. External HR Support in Employee Relations Matters

Sinéad presented a paper which sought SMT approval for the HR office to take the necessary steps to identify a small number of external HR experts to carry out aspects of employee relations processes on behalf of the Assembly Commission.

Sinéad noted that the HR Office currently utilised Assembly Commission staff to carry out aspects of employee relations processes, but that problems were being encountered, including staff availability to undertake such roles alongside their core duties which extended the duration of the process.

SMT noted the problems being encountered with the current process and approved the use of external HR support in employee relations matters.

14. Review of Job Specifications for Members' Support Staff

Sinéad sought approval of a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Review of Job Specifications for Members' Support Staff.

Following, consideration SMT approved the draft Assembly Commission paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission, subject to consultation with Party Whips in advance of the next Assembly Commission meeting.

Action: HR to consult with Party Whips and update the draft Assembly Commission paper, if required.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 12.13 pm.

16. Annual Plan 2025/26 Status at 30 September 2025

Steven presented a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Annual Plan 2025/26 status update at 30 September 2025.

Following consideration, SMT approved the paper for presentation to the Assembly Commission, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: Steven to arrange for the draft Assembly Commission paper to be updated as discussed.

Christine Watts joined the meeting at 12.22 pm for agenda items 17, 18 and 19.

17. North Lift Upgrade Business Case

Christine Watts presented and sought approval of a business case to upgrade the North Lift within Parliament Buildings.

Christine noted that the typical lift lifespan was approximately 15-20 years and, as the North Lift was now approximately 30 years' old, would be deemed as having reached the end of its optimal life. A recommendation to update the lift was also highlighted in the most recent planned preventative maintenance (PPM) inspection.

Christine noted that the business case outlined three options with a recommendation to proceed with Option 3, i.e. to enlarge the lift car and upgrade the installation to fire lift status.

SMT noted that the recommended option would involve enlarging the existing lift car to accommodate some larger wheelchairs to enable it to be used by the emergency services, to evacuate building users when necessary. SMT also noted that the upgrade would encompass Disability Discrimination Act requirements as identified in the Disability Access Audit.

Following discussion, SMT approved the business case.

Lesley requested that Evacuation Procedures be reviewed and updated following the upgrade and also to reflect the previous upgrade of the South Lift.

Action: Christine to arrange for the Evacuation Procedures to be reviewed and updated.

18. Building Surveys and Production of Estimated 1 – 5 Years, 5 – 15 Years and 15 – 30 Years Investment Profile for Parliament Buildings

Christine presented and sought approval of a business case in relation to the continuation of Building Services to conduct comprehensive building surveys; the development of a Conservation Management Plan; and the creation of a 30-year maintenance plan for Parliament Buildings.

Christine noted that the business case outlined three options with a recommendation to proceed with Option 3, i.e. to utilise an existing Department of Finance framework and their in-house skills to procure an ICT team to deliver the surveys and associated reports.

Following detailed discussion, SMT requested further information in relation to costs, the outputs of the various facets, why use was not being made of existing asset information and the Fixed Asset Register and that an example of a Conservation Management Plan be provided, to help inform the business case.

Action: Christine to provide the additional information requested to inform the business case.

19. Climate Reporting

Christine noted the requirement under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and the Regulations, for the Northern Ireland Assembly to submit a Climate Mitigation Report to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), and confirmed that the Report had been submitted on 31 October 2025.

SMT noted the Report and thanked Christine for all the work that had gone into its preparation.

Christine Watts left the meeting at 1.06 pm.

The meeting suspended at 1.06 pm and resumed at 2.02 pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark joined the meeting at 2.02 pm for agenda item 20.

20. Biennial Review of the Risk Management Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan

Donna-Marie Clark presented the Risk Management Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan, which she noted had last been reviewed and approved by SMT at its meeting on 14 December 2023.

Following consideration, SMT approved the updated Risk Management Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan, subject to a minor amendment.

Action: Donna-Marie to arrange for the Risk Management Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan to be amended as agreed by SMT.

SMT noted that the revised Risk Management Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan would be presented to the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee at its next meeting.

Donna-Marie Clark left the meeting at 2.07 pm.

Jonathan McMillen joined the meeting at 2.08 pm for agenda item 21.

21. Solicitor Apprenticeship in the Legal Services Office

Jonathan McMillen presented a paper, seeking SMT approval to recruit an Apprentice Solicitor.

Jonathan provided background on the role of an Apprentice Solicitor, outlining the benefits for both the Apprentice and the Assembly Commission.

SMT noted proposed adjustments to the staff complement within the Legal Service Office (LSO) which would enable the apprenticeship to be funded from within the current LSO salary budget.

Jonathan also sought SMT approval to make a 50% contribution towards the academic fees of the Apprentice Solicitor.

Following consideration, SMT approved an adjustment to the staff complement of the LSO and the recruitment of an Apprentice Solicitor with a 50% contribution towards the academic fees.

Jonathan McMillen left the meeting at 2.15 pm.

OTHER ITEMS

22. SMT/Commission Papers Cleared via Correspondence

- Management Accounts September 2025.
- Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Salary Arrangements.

23. Directors' Updates

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Tara Caul 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; the comprehensive report in relation to ongoing work in RaSe; and ongoing procurement projects.

Corporate Services

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

In particular, Steven updated SMT on the cleaning of the façade of Parliament Buildings; remedial works to the roof of Parliament Buildings; and the Partial Electronic Access Control project.

In relation to the cleaning of the façade, Steven advised that Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) did not have capacity to issue the necessary tender for the works and that they were therefore unlikely to be completed in the current financial year. SMT noted its frustration as the budget for the works was held in the current financial year.

SMT expressed a number of concerns in relation to the status of the roof project and it was agreed that a further detailed discussion was required and that an update paper would be provided to the Assembly Commission at its next meeting.

Parliamentary Services

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

Performance and Improvement

Paula Ewart advised that work was progressing with projects to streamline some of the current Finance and HR systems.

Paula also updated SMT on the development of the new stationery ordering systems for Assembly Commission staff and Members.

24. AOB

There was no other business.

25. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 15 December 2025.

26. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Admin Support to Pension Trustees
- Disability Access Survey
- Five Year Review of the Application of the Equality Scheme 2021-2025
- Bi-annual Report on the Disability Action Plan and Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2030
- Closure Report of the Audit of Inequalities
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Sensitivity Review 2024 to 2005 Release
- Litigation Update
- Procurement Policy Update
- Assembly Commission's Interparliamentary and International Strategy
- Security Operations Centre Service to Support the NI Assembly Cyber Security
- Strategic Communications Update

The meeting ended at 2.58 pm.