

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

FRIDAY, 30 AUGUST 2024 at 10.00 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
Paula McClintock, Head of Finance (Item 7)
Gary Browne, Senior Accountant (Item 7)
Karen, Deputy Head of HR (Item 8)
Ken Eccles, Head of Usher Services (Item 9)
Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications (Items 11 and 12)
Liz Beaton, Internal Communications Officer (Item 11)

The meeting commenced at 10.22 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 4 July 2024 had been published.

Change to agenda running order.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Paula McClintock and Gary Browne joined the meeting at 10.23 am for agenda item 7.

7. Management Accounts

Gary Browne noted that the Management Accounts for June 2024 had been issued to SMT for consideration by correspondence on 30 July 2024.

In relation to the June 2024 Accounts, Lesley Hogg queried revenue and capital bid requests for the committee room refurbishment project. Gareth McGrath advised that a final business case for this project would be presented at the next SMT meeting and it was agreed that these bids would be given further consideration at that time.

Gary proceeded to present the Management Accounts for July 2024.

SMT noted current forecast outturns for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and the Windsor Framework costs.

Gary referred to the formal Department of Finance (DoF) 2025/26 budget setting exercise which had recently been commissioned, and he stated that the Finance Office would be seeking an extension to the submission date of 4 October 2024 as it was unlikely that the internal budget setting process would be completed by this date.

Lesley asked that clarification be sought on the Assembly Commission's need to comply with this initial timeframe, as she did not think there was a requirement for the Assembly to participate in the first part of the DoF exercise. Steven Baxter and Paula McClintock agreed to take this matter forward and formalise a process.

Gary outlined and sought approval of bids and surrenders which had been brought forward by budget holders in Admin costs and Capital. Following consideration, SMT approved the bids and surrenders as presented, with the exception of the bid for the cleaning of the building's exterior stonework, and noted that a business case would be brought forward for consideration.

Gary informed SMT of a decrease in the forecast for the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (WFDSC) costs. Lesley and Gareth commented that the underspend was higher than they would have expected and it was agreed that Paula would check the figures and report back to SMT.

Action: Paula to check the forecast for the WFDSC costs and report back to SMT.

Gary informed SMT of the current forecast outturn for Members' costs. He highlighted the year to date underspend against the monitoring position for Financial Assistance for Political Parties (FAPP), but noted that the funding was likely to be fully utilised by the end of the year.

In relation to managing the development of Capital projects, Gary advised that a traffic light system had been introduced, with red/amber/green indicators incorporated into the Capital Plan, the aim of which was to signify those projects which may not complete this year and which SMT may wish

to reconsider or remove from the Plan. He then sought updates on four red projects i.e. ones whereby business cases had yet to be approved by SMT.

Following review, SMT approved estimated expenditure for the project to upgrade the broadcasting equipment in the Control Room noting that the business case was within the threshold for Director approval. Steven provided an update on the two 'red' projects, which were still ongoing.

Lesley queried the inclusion of some capital projects in the approved category, the accuracy of the accompanying narrative and the fact that some of the forecast expenditure had not been updated to reflect the value approved on the business case. Gary agreed to follow up these issues.

Paula referred to the urgent DoF in-year information gathering exercise and asked if SMT was content to submit a NIL return, at this stage given that the next formal monitoring round was due to be commissioned shortly. SMT was content with this approach.

Paula McClintock and Gary Browne left the meeting at 11.03 am.

Karen Martin joined the meeting at 11.03 am for agenda item 8.

8. HR Management Information

Karen Martin presented the monthly HR Management Information as at 1 August 2024.

Karen advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure had increased to 361.4 full-time equivalents as at 1 August 2024.

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

Karen updated SMT on recruitment activity.

Karen advised that the Research and Information Services (RaISe) General Manager post had been added to the Schedule.

Karen subsequently sought the views of SMT in relation to a number of other posts.

Following discussion, SMT agreed the inclusion of recruitment competitions for Payroll Supervisor and Senior Usher. SMT also asked that Karen liaise with the Clerk Assistants to determine the priority of potential competitions within Parliamentary Services.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period August 2023 to July 2024, the average sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 12.3 days, compared to 15.0 days for the period August 2022 to July 2023.

In relation to hybrid working, Karen noted that SMT had previously agreed to carry out a further review of the Hybrid Working Policy following six months of normal Assembly business. Given that the Staff Survey was due to launch in late September, Karen advised that the Head of HR had proposed postponing the Hybrid Working Policy Review until November 2024.

SMT was content with the proposed revised timeline. SMT also agreed to consider the provision of equipment for hybrid working, after the survey.

Karen advised SMT that Section 8.01 of the Staff Handbook, Pay Award System, had been under development and proposed a draft version of the Policy which set out how the Assembly Commission negotiates and implements pay awards. Following discussion, SMT approved the proposed Policy, subject to some minor amendments.

Action: Karen to update the Policy on the Pay Award System as proposed by SMT and re-circulate for final approval.

Karen Martin left the meeting at 11.37 am.

Ken Eccles joined the meeting at 11.37 am for agenda item 9.

9. Draft Business Continuity Plan

Ken Eccles presented the draft Business Continuity Plan (BCP), which he noted had been updated following discussions with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors in September 2023 and June 2024.

Ken highlighted the key issues related to the development of the new BCP, which included proposals regarding staffing, training, command and control communications and temporary site relocation, and testing of the BCP on a biennial basis going forward.

Following consideration, SMT approved the draft BCP as presented, subject to some minor amendments, and agreed that it should be uploaded onto a Teams site that could be accessed by all Heads of Business (HoBs). Ken advised that a test of the BCP would be completed later in 2024.

Action: Ken to update the BCP as proposed by SMT and arrange for it to be uploaded onto a Teams site which can be accessed by all HoBs.

Ken Eccles left the meeting at 11.54 am.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Michael Cairns joined the meeting at 11.54 am for agenda items 11 and 12.

Liz Beaton joined the meeting at 11.54 am for agenda item 11.

11. Internal Communications Quarterly Update

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

Liz commented on successful staff engagement initiatives held during the reporting period, noting that in May some 230 staff had attended sessions/meetings on the new Assembly Values, and over 270 staff had participated in “Let’s Talk” Parliamentary Culture sessions in June.

Liz referred to the new Health and Wellbeing Group which she noted was going from strength to strength.

In relation to the recent “Let’s Celebrate” event which was attended by some 187 staff, Liz updated SMT on positive feedback received from the Internal Communications Group.

Liz also advised that following a meeting in June, a summary of the HoBs consideration of the themes emerging from the AG8 Focus Group Report had been published on AssISt.

Liz noted that whilst all the engagement initiatives were very positive, they were challenging as they involved a lot of work and placed a huge demand on the resources within the Communications Office. Michael Cairns commented on the level of requests for support and delivery being asked of the Internal Communications team, and suggested that consideration be given to additional resources.

SMT noted the concerns and the fact that support should also be available from the Public Engagement team, and proposed that a meeting be held with Liz, the Head of HR, the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Group and the Public Engagement Manager to discuss and scope out resource requirements.

Liz noted the new format of the Staff Survey and stated that the Communications Team would be producing a video to promote the new survey and explain how it differed from previous surveys.

Liz referred to the action plan that is normally produced following a review of the findings from the Staff Survey and the fact that there would also be an action plan to accompany the People and Culture Strategy, and suggested that it may be better to have a combined action plan. SMT noted the proposal and agreed to consider it.

SMT thanked Liz and all those involved in organising and supporting the very successful engagement events over the last few months.

Liz Beaton left the meeting at 12.30 pm.

12. Strategic Communications Update

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

SMT discussed opportunities for further external engagement and the promotion of Parliament Buildings.

Michael Cairns left the meeting at 12.54 pm.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

10. The Assembly Members (Remuneration Board) Bill

Tara presented and sought SMT approval of a draft Assembly Commission paper on the Assembly Members (Remuneration Board) Bill.

Following consideration, SMT approved the paper for presentation to the next Assembly Commission meeting.

OTHER ITEMS

13. Papers Cleared by Correspondence

- Management Accounts June 2024
- HR Management Information
- Variation to the Business Case for Microsoft Enterprise Agreement 2022
- Variation to the Business Case for the Procurement of Replacement Devices, Network Components and Secure Remote Access

14. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Building Services – Roof Update

Steven advised that the erection of scaffolding within the inner courtyards and the rear parapet was being undertaken along with investigatory works to enable full scoping of the roof repairs.

Systems Review Project

Steven noted that an Options paper was being prepared for consideration by the Systems Review Project Board.

Corporate Values

Steven advised that the Corporate Services directorate had recognised a

number of staff who had gone “above and beyond” in exhibiting the Assembly’s Corporate values.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Legal Services Office

Tara noted the increasing number of requests for legal advice being received and also updated SMT on ongoing litigation.

Governance

Tara advised that the next Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee meeting was scheduled for 17 October 2024.

Tara also noted the ongoing internal audit review of Corporate Governance Arrangements.

Research and Information Services (RaISe)

Tara advised that six vacant Research Officer posts had been filled.

Procurement

Tara updated SMT on the ongoing procurement projects.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg noted that Summer Recess would end on 1 September 2024.

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

A provisional date for an Assembly Commission meeting in September was noted.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive’s Report
- Annual Plan 2024-2025
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- The Assembly Members (Remuneration Board) Bill
- Determination on Members Allowances and Expenses
- Internal Audit of Corporate Governance Arrangements
- Request for the Assembly Commission to Display a Portrait of His Majesty The King
- Assembly Members Pension Scheme Accounts

15. AOB

There was no other business.

16. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 26 September 2024.

17. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Review of Fraud Prevention and Anti-Bribery Policy and Response Plan
- Draft Assembly Commission Paper on the Determination of Members Allowances and Expenses
- Draft Assembly Commission Paper on the Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Draft Assembly Commission Paper on the Annual Plan 2024-2025
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Cyber Security Self-Assessment
- Review of Fraud and Bribery Self-Assessment Checklists, Bribery Risk Assessment and Action Plan
- Sensitivity Review 2003
- Procurement Office Staffing
- Examiner of Statutory Rules Staffing
- Implications of the Judgement in the Mediahuis Case
- Streamlining Administrative Tasks
- Draft Assembly Commission Paper on the Internal Audit of Corporate Governance Arrangements
- Final Business Case for Upgrade of Audio and Video Systems for Committee Rooms
- Strengthening Assembly Scrutiny – Implementation of the Corporate Strategy
- Strategic Communications Update
- Update on the Work of the Internal Communications Group April 2024 to September 2024

The meeting ended at 2.00 pm.