

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

**THURSDAY, 4 JULY 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)
Gary Browne, Senior Accountant (Item 7)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 8, 9, 10 and 11)
Karen Martin, Deputy Head of HR (Items 8, 9, 10 and 11)
Terri Quigley, Head of Building Management (Item 12)
Christine Watts, Environmental Services and Health and Safety
Manager (Item 12)
Donna-Marie Clark, Data Protection and Governance Officer (Item 15)
Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IT (Item 16)
Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications (Items 16 and 17)**

The meeting commenced at 9.34 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 31 May 2024 had been published.

4. SMT Action Points

The outstanding action points were reviewed and progress was noted.

Robin Ramsey joined the meeting at 9.42 am for agenda items 5 and 6.

5. Political Update

Lesley Hogg noted that voting in the General Election was taking place and that the results may have implications for the Assembly.

SMT noted that there were significant potential procedural, legal and resource implications arising from the judgement in the case of *In Re Mediahuis and Others (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act (NI) 2022* [2024] NIKB 45 for the Assembly and that these would have to be considered.

6. Draft Assembly Commission Agenda

Robin Ramsey advised that provisional dates for Assembly Commission meetings in September and October were being considered.

Proposed items for the next meeting included:

- Clerk/Chief Executive's Report
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- The Assembly Members' (Remuneration Board) Bill
- Determination on Members Allowances and Expenses
- Request for the Assembly Commission to Display a Portrait of His Majesty The King
- Corporate Governance Review
- Implications of the Judgement in the *Mediahuis* Case

Robin Ramsey left the meeting at 9.52 am.

CORPORATE SERVICES

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

7. Management Accounts

Gary Browne presented the Management Accounts for May 2024.

SMT noted the forecast outturns for Resource DEL and Capital DEL.

Gary highlighted the current month movements in Resource DEL, and sought approval for a request for a re-allocation of budget totalling £20k within the IS Office. SMT approved the re-allocation

Gary informed SMT of two adjustments in the Capital DEL forecast, namely, the removal of £300k from the Bill Drafting Software project and an additional requirement of £5k for the Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points.

SMT sought and received clarification that the £300k related to a reduction in the overall anticipated cost of the project and approved the additional £5k

for the EV charging points pending preparation of the relevant business case.

Gary advised that the Assembly's Annual Report and Accounts would be laid with the Assembly on 5 July 2024.

Gary noted that, as previously agreed by SMT all budget managers had been advised that projects included in the 2024/25 Capital budget must have Business Cases completed by July if they are to be retained in the Capital plan for this year.

Gary highlighted that the Finance Office had engaged with Business Areas to provide training and to assist with budget management, but that this had only been possible due to additional resources in the Finance Office, and that it was not therefore sustainable going forward.

Lesley stated that part of the role of the Deputy Head of Finance - Secretariat, supported by the Senior Accountant was to meet with Directorate Management Teams (DMT) and budget managers on a monthly basis to discuss their budgets and forecasts, and that while this had been paused due to resource issues in the Finance Office, now that all senior finance posts had been filled this process should be recommenced.

Steven Baxter highlighted the recent Internal Audit report that highlighted the key person dependency risk within the Finance office and the fact that there had been a period of training and familiarisation with new staff over the last few months. Steven also noted that an Independent Review of Finance Office staffing was to be conducted.

Gary agreed to speak to Billy Mahoney about recommencing monthly budget meetings with DMTs and budget managers.

Gary Browne left the meeting at 10.09 am.

Sinéad McDonnell and Karen Martin joined the meeting at 10.09 am for agenda items 8, 9, 10 and 11.

8. People and Culture Strategy

Sinéad McDonnell noted that she had met with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors on 21 June 2024 to consider, in detail, a proposed People and Culture Strategy and associated resources.

Sinéad presented the proposed People and Culture Strategy and this was approved by SMT, subject to some minor formatting changes to ensure consistency with the Corporate Strategy 2023-2028.

Gareth McGrath sought clarification on whether the Strategy needed to be Equality Screened. Sinéad advised that as the People and Culture Strategy was a high-level document the individual projects/programmes of work would be equality screened during the course of the Strategy's tenure.

Sinéad also requested a permanent increase in staff complement within the HR Office, of one Organisational Development and Learning Manager and one Internal Trainer, to support the implementation of the Strategy. Following further consideration and due to the strategic significance of these posts, SMT approved the staff resources as requested in advance of a planned wider holistic review of resources across the Assembly Commission and noted that the posts would be subject to Job Evaluation.

Discussion took place on the need to immediately progress the leadership work within the Strategy and the need for resource to assist with this specific piece of work. SMT agreed that Sinéad could engage temporary resource to support her with this important piece of work, pending recruitment of the posts.

SMT noted that development of the Strategy was a key objective in the Corporate Strategy and thanked Sinéad for her comprehensive and well written paper.

9. HR Management Information

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

Karen advised that the Staff in Post (SIP) figure on 1 June 2024 (including agency and inward seconded staff) was 348.8 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.

Karen updated SMT on recruitment activity.

On reviewing the Recruitment Schedule, Karen advised of the need to add the Assistant Assembly Clerk (Clerking) and Clerical Officer competitions to the Schedule as merit lists were either already exhausted or approaching their expiry date. SMT was content for the competitions to be added to the Recruitment Schedule.

Karen also referred to a vacancy within Building Services, and a request from the Head of Facilities Management to add this competition to the Recruitment Schedule and fill the post on an interim basis by internal temporary promotion. SMT was content with this approach.

Karen advised that Stephanie Mallon, Clerk Assistant, had sought approval to permanently recruit the Assistant Coordinator and Support Officer posts in the Youth Assembly Team and add them to the Recruitment Schedule. SMT approved the request.

Lesley referred to the recruitment competitions for the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee Chairperson and Independent Member, that had been approved by the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 20 June

2024, and asked that these be added to the Recruitment Schedule and taken forward as a priority.

Gareth sought approval to add an AG6 (two-year fixed term) competition to assist with the Communications Office Web Project to the Recruitment Schedule, noting that the post may need to be filled on an agency basis in the interim. SMT approved this request.

Gareth also expressed a desire to progress the permanent and temporary competitions for Assembly Clerk.

In relation to progressing the competitions for the Visitor Experience Team, it was agreed that Karen would liaise with the Public Engagement Manager.

SMT also agreed that the two new posts with the Human Resources Office - Organisational Development and Learning Manager and Internal Trainer - should be added to the Recruitment Schedule and taken forward as a priority.

In light of the new competitions discussed and changing recruitment priorities, Sinéad stated that she would review the Recruitment Schedule and recirculate to SMT for consideration.

Action: Sinéad to review the Recruitment Schedule and re-circulate to SMT for consideration.

Sickness absence information was provided and it was noted that for the period June 2023 to May 2024, the average sickness absence per FTE member of staff was 13.5 days, compared to 14.1 days for the period June 2022 to May 2023.

10. Staff Complement Change Application

Steven asked that SMT consider a Staff Complement Change Application for a temporary AG4 in the Finance Office, for a period of up to four months.

Following consideration, SMT approved the application.

11. Draft Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

Karen advised that the current Protection of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Policy had been reviewed and proposed replacing it with a new Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Karen presented a draft of the new Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, highlighting the proposed key changes.

Karen noted that mandatory training would be provided to staff involved in working with children and vulnerable adults or in the implementation of the Policy, and that awareness training would be available to all other staff.

Karen also provided SMT with a draft revised Security Clearance Policy.

Following consideration, SMT approved the draft Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and revised Security Clearance Policy, subject to some further minor amendments, for formal consultation with Trade Union Side.

Action: Karen to amend the draft Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Security Clearance Policy as proposed by SMT.

Karen proposed that following consultation and approval of the final Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and the revised Security Clearance Policy that they are published in the Staff Handbook, with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy also being published on the Assembly's website. SMT was content with this approach.

Sinéad McDonnell and Karen Martin left the meeting at 11.09 am.

Terri Quigley and Christine Watts joined the meeting at 11.09 am for agenda item 12.

12. The Evacuation of Disabled Persons from Parliament Buildings

Terri Quigley provided SMT with an update on the current position in relation to the evacuation of disabled persons from Parliament Buildings; the current limitations on the number of disabled people that can be accommodated in Parliament Buildings at any time; the measures that were currently being taken to address these issues; and the current evacuation protocols.

Terri confirmed that risks associated with the evacuation of disabled persons from Parliament Buildings, were recorded in the Building Services Risk Register along with accompanying mitigations where possible.

Terri agreed to update SMT as potential measures were developed.

Terri Quigley and Christine Watts left the meeting at 11.19 am

Meeting suspended at 11.19 am and resumed at 11.30 am.

Change to agenda running order.

LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Donna-Marie Clark joined the meeting at 11.30 am for agenda item 15.

15. Revised Data Protection Policy

Donna-Marie Clark presented a draft revised Data Protection Policy, which she noted had been reviewed and revised in line with recent updates to the

Records Management Policy and Guidance, in addition to consultation with the Information Asset Owners.

Following consideration, SMT approved the revised Data Protection Policy.

SMT also took the opportunity to thank Donna-Marie for all the work that had gone in to producing and obtaining approval of the revised Retention and Disposal Schedule, which SMT noted had recently been laid in the Assembly.

Donna-Marie Clarke left the meeting at 11.33 am.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

Mary-Ellen Nutt joined the meeting at 11.33 am for agenda item 16.

Michael Cairns joined the meeting at 11.33 am for agenda items 16 and 17.

16. Outline Business Case for the Procurement of a Microsoft Cloud Partner and Digital Agency

Mary-Ellen Nutt presented an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the procurement of:

1. A Microsoft Cloud Partner to support the migration of the existing 'on premise' infrastructure and to upgrade applications to a secure Cloud platform; and
2. A Digital Agency to design and deliver a new Assembly website, including a Content Management System.

Steven commended Mary-Ellen on the well written OBC, whilst noting that re-architecting the Assembly Commission's technical environment was ambitious and would be challenging, it would modernise the operating environment and further enhance security.

SMT noted and was content with the proposal, within the OBC, not to fill vacant IS Office posts in the staff complement until the project to migrate to a secure Cloud platform was completed, and to divert the funds allocated to these posts to the project. It was agreed that Mary-Ellen would liaise with HR to record these posts separately so that they would not be counted for budget purposes in the intervening period.

In relation to the new Assembly website, Michael Cairns advised that work was progressing in relation to the production of a new Style Guide and the development of a new Corporate Content Management Strategy. He also noted that he was working with the Public Engagement Manager on Corporate Branding, and that a paper outlining proposals would be brought to a future SMT meeting.

Following consideration, SMT agreed to the proposals in the OBC and requested that a paper be prepared seeking Assembly Commission approval

as the value of the OBC exceeded the Clerk/Chief Executive's delegated authority.

Action: Mary-Ellen to prepare a paper seeking approval of the OBC from the Assembly Commission.

Mary-Ellen Nutt left the meeting at 12.14 pm.

17. Strategic Communications Update

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

Michael highlighted positive media coverage in relation to Assembly Committee work.

Michael also referred to the Assembly's Corporate Values and advised that these would be embedded in the Corporate Content Management Strategy.

Michael Cairns left the meeting at 12.25 pm.

CORPORATE SERVICES CONTINUED

13. Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Annual Contribution to Stormont Estate Security Costs

Steven advised SMT of the Assembly Commission's estimated contribution to the overall costs for the provision of security at the Stormont Estate for the six years from 2024/25 to 2029/30, as notified by the Department of Finance (DoF), Stormont Estate Management Unit.

Following consideration, SMT approved the estimated costs for the six years from 2024/25 to 2029/30.

14. Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Annual Rates Bill Business Justification

Steven presented a Business Justification for the continued payment of the Assembly Commission's annual rates bill to Land and Property Services, for the four years 2024/25 to 2027/28.

Following consideration, SMT approved the estimated expenditure outlined in the Business Justification.

OTHER ITEMS

18. Papers Cleared by Correspondence

- Revised Legislative Drafting Solution Project Update

- Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 2023-2024
- Systems Review Project Update
- Defects in the Roof of Parliament Buildings
- Roof Remedial Repairs Business Case
- Quarterly Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Determination on Members Allowances and Expenses

19. Directors' Updates

Corporate Services

Systems Review Project

Steven provided an update on the Systems Review Project.

Corporate Plan

In relation to the Annual Plan 2024-25, Lesley queried references to its production when it had already been developed as part of the Corporate Plan 2023-28 and should now be operational. Steven advised that further work was required to help inform the Assembly Commission's future budget requirement and other potential developments and resourcing options were discussed, pending a wider discussion that was scheduled later that month.

Legal, Governance and Research Services

Legal Services Office

Tara Caul noted ongoing litigation.

Office of the Examiner of Statutory Rules

Tara updated SMT on the work of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

Governance

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

Information Standards

Tara advised that Information Standards were working to launch the new Retention and Disposal Schedule in tandem with the Annual File Review exercise.

Research and Information Services (RaISe)

Tara noted a continuing increase in research requests and library queries.

Tara advised that two interns under the 2024 United Kingdom Research and Innovations PhD Policy Internships Scheme had successfully completed their three-month placement in RaISe.

Procurement

Tara updated SMT on the ongoing procurement projects.

Tara noted the significant changes associated with the introduction of the Procurement Act 2023.

Other

Tara advised that the Head of RaISe had offered to Chair the new Artificial Intelligence Working Group, and that work to set up the Group would take place over the summer.

Parliamentary Services

Clerking

Gareth advised that The Executive Office's proposed legislative programme for the 2024 calendar year comprised of a total of 19 Bills that Ministers intend to introduce.

Gareth informed SMT that development of the Lawmaker legislative drafting software was progressing well. He also stated that a number of Members had expressed an interest in developing Bills.

Communications Office

Gareth advised that the refurbishment of the Senate Chamber was nearing completion.

Parliamentary Culture

Gareth noted the excellent work carried out by Peter Hall and Liz Beaton, in delivering the 'Let's Talk Parliamentary Culture' sessions during June, which had engaged with more than 250 staff.

20. AOB

SMT considered dates for the summer staff briefing and it was agreed that it would take place during the week commencing 26 August 2024.

21. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place during week commencing 26 August 2024.

22. Proposals for Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Corporate Governance Review
- The Assembly Members' (Remuneration Board) Bill
- Implications of the Judgement in the *Mediahuis Case*
- Internal Communications Quarterly Update
- Strategic Communications Update

The meeting ended at 1.12 pm.