

# Office of the Clerk

## FUNCTION

The Office of the Clerk co-ordinates procedural and corporate services in the Assembly Secretariat. In addition to providing management support to the Clerk, the senior management team, and directors' meetings, it deals with Legal Services, the examination of Statutory Rules, the internal audit and review, procurement, external liaison and corporate policy and planning issues. The main functions of the various parts of the office are described below.

### Private Office

- Provides key support services to the Clerk and his two deputies, the Deputy Clerk and the Deputy Chief Executive;
- Contributes to the development and review of strategic and business plans, policy development, implementation and review; and
- Deals with customer relations and internal communications.

### Legal Services

- Provide legal advice to the Clerk, the Speaker and his Deputies, the Commission, committees, Members and the Secretariat on a range of issues including constitutional law, human rights law, employment law, EU law and contractual issues;
- One of the specialist functions of Legal Services is the provision of advice to the Speaker so that he can fulfil the duty of deciding whether or not a Bill would be within the Assembly's legislative competence. This examination means that the legal advisers have to consider issues concerning human rights, EU law and the boundaries between accepted, reserved and transferred matters;
- The legal advisers provide legal advice and assistance across the range of the Assembly Commission's functions, for example,

contract, freedom of information and data protection, allowances and pay, employment and anti-discrimination law;

- The legal advisers provide advice and support to committees, for example, in relation to their powers to call for persons and papers.

### Examiner of Statutory Rules

- Assists the Assembly and its Committees in the scrutiny of Statutory Rules and reports on the rules within prescribed timescales.

### Internal Review Unit

- Provides an independent and objective internal audit service in accordance with the approved terms of reference with each client in the Northern Ireland Assembly. It works to the standards laid down by HM Treasury (*Government Internal Audit Manual*) to examine, evaluate and report on the adequacy of internal control as a contribution to the economical efficient and effective use of resources; and
- Provides advice and guidance in relation to corporate governance and continuous improvement arrangements.

### Procurement Office

- Provides professional purchasing expertise, including advice and direction on good (procurement) practice to ensure propriety, efficiency, best value and compliance with legal obligations;
- The development and implementation of procurement policies and procedures across the Secretariat;
- The interpretation, negotiation and purchase of major service contracts; and
- The monitoring and review of supply and service contracts to ensure quality and value for money.

**ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD****1 APRIL 2002 TO 31 MARCH 2003**

- Developed an 'election preparedness' plan and produced dissolution guidance for Members and officials;
- Co-ordinated the terms and conditions/pay and grading project;
- Prepared an implementation plan for the Commission's equal opportunities policy;
- Prepared a draft publication scheme under the Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- Established a risk register and developed corporate governance arrangements;
- Co-ordinated activities during suspension, including liaising with the Secretary of State's office, maintaining the Secretariat in a state of readiness for restoration, suspension planning and monitoring key projects;
- Arranged formal management/trade union meetings under the Whitley constitution;
- Established the Assembly Legal Services, which provided legal advice on the competency of Bills and a range of issues;
- Provided advice on the competency of 29 Bills within the prescribed timescales;
- Established, and provided administrative support to, the Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust;
- Provided administrative support to the senior management team, the board of management/ directors' meetings, corporate, and clerking and reporting team meetings;
- Established an internal review unit, which, in

addition to providing internal audit services, assisted in the development of corporate governance arrangements;

- Considered and reported on subordinate legislation within prescribed timescales;
- Provided technical scrutiny of subordinate legislation to the Assembly and the appropriate committees;
- Reviewed Assembly procurement needs and developed a procurement strategy;
- Commenced the development of an electronic purchase order system; and
- Introduced a contracts database and developed a suite of contract documents.

**KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2003-04**

In addition to providing its full range of services and carrying out its normal functions, the Office of the Clerk will have to:

- Put in place arrangements for a smooth transition to the new mandate;
- Ensure compliance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- Embed risk management arrangements in the Secretariat's business planning process for 2003-04;
- Implement the Northern Ireland Assembly's terms and conditions/pay and grading arrangements;
- Develop protocols between Legal Services and other parts of the Secretariat; and
- Agree a procurement strategy for the Assembly.