



**Governance Meeting**  
**Minutes of meeting held on**  
**19 January 2023**

10:00 – 12:30

In person and via Microsoft Teams

**Present:**

Bruce Adamson (BA)	Commissioner
Nicola Vallance-Ross (NVR)	Head of Corporate Services
Ezmie McCutcheon (EMc)	Head of Communications
Nick Hobbs (NH)	Head of Advice & Investigations
Gina Wilson (GW)	Head of Strategy
Amanda White (AW)	Executive Assistant

**Chair:** Bruce Adamson (BA)

**Minutes:** Amanda White (AW)

	Details	Action By
	Start: 10:00	
<b>1.</b>	<b>Welcome and apologies</b>	
1.1	Meeting started and welcome. No apologies.	
1.2	<b>Declaration of Interests</b> No declarations.	
1.3	<b>Minutes and actions from previous meeting</b> The minutes of the Governance meeting held on 22 November 2022 were approved.	

<b>3.</b>	<b>Updates</b>	
3.1	<p><b>Commissioner Update</b></p> <p>The Commissioner stated office staff had a good break over the festive period. Staff were invited to use CPD days during the quiet period which had been a positive start to the year and received well by staff.</p> <p>There had been an increase in participation work towards the end of 2022 and at the start of 2023 which is encouraged.</p> <p>The office has been noticeably busier with increased numbers using the office week on week, and welcoming to new staff at the office.</p> <p>The Commissioner shared the result of his external evaluation report had been positive in all aspects and has been submitted to Parliament.</p> <p><b>Commissioner Recruitment</b></p> <p>Parliament is planning to start recruitment of the new Commissioner imminently; the delay may result in an Acting Commissioner being appointed in the interim.</p> <p>The Commissioner has strongly recommended that Children and Young People are included in the recruitment process.</p>	
2.2	<b>Senior Management Team Update</b>	
	<p><b><u>Communications:</u></b></p> <p>Head of Communications updated the Group:</p> <p><b>Early Years Book:</b></p> <p>The communications team put the illustration project out to tender, receiving ten submissions of mixed styles and approaches. The chosen illustrator worked as an early years teacher and is planning to create online early years content.</p> <p>The Head of Communications shared the good connections made with several illustrators in the process and would be interested in utilising their skills for future projects.</p>	

**Staffing:**

In terms of the wider communications team, it was noted there is a current staffing shortage due to health. The Annual Report is a large project underway and the team are working at capacity to keep on top of the workload. The Senior Management Team explored temporary staff as a support option, however it was decided these roles were not effective in the communications team.

**Advice & Investigations:**

Head of Advice and Investigations updated the Group:

**Covid Inquiry**

Pre-Christmas, the office received a Covid Inquiry draft of Rule 9, deadline 17 February 2023. The Head of Advice and Investigations highlighted the significant amount of time this reactive project would take up and impact on other work.

The Senior Management Team agreed that a temporary trainee legal advisor would be a good use of budget to support the completion of this work.

The Head of Advice and Investigations suggested we publish a young person's version of the report and share as a positive story, the Commissioner agreed.

At the end of 2022, the team completed work on the Strategy Legal Toolkit which will be launched on 3 March 2023.

**Graduate Placement**

The Head of Advice and Investigations also noted he would like to another placement from Edinburgh University as these have previously been positive. The Senior Management Team agreed that the Legal Officer would be a good mentor for such placement.

**Incorporation**

The Legal Officer is investigating the legal options available to the Commissioner in the event the Bill is subject to further delay.

### **Exceptions Reporting**

The team is exploring the possibility of an individual investigation in relation to restraint and other concerns in a residential unit. Ongoing conversations are taking place with the Care Inspectorate.

The Head of Advice and Investigations highlighted the potential for emerging systemic issues in the provision of residential care to young, vulnerable people, particularly those at risk of CSE.

### **Strategy:**

Head of Strategy updated the Group:

### **Scottish Covid Inquiry**

The Scottish Covid Inquiry would like to hear experiences from young people regarding the pandemic. The APIC Project recorded experiences from young people in real time, the outputs from this project will feed into the Scottish Inquiry.

### **Reactive work**

The office had hoped to dial down the amount of time spent on reactive work however the Covid Inquiries had taken up significant time over the last quarter. It was noted the positives that could be taken from these big projects, especially the young people's work feeding into the Scottish Inquiry.

### **Policy Work**

The Head of Strategy shared the policy work undertaken over the last quarter:

- Care and Justice Bill
- Scottish Government Decision Making
- Transitions Bill

### **Current Focus**

Current focus on Early Years; General Comment 26 feedback; and the early years webinar organised by the Policy Officer. The cost-of-living crisis continues to be a priority. Coordination of the United Nations event in Geneva is underway.

16 March 2023 marks two years since the Incorporation Bill was passed, the office plans to highlight how little has been done to return the Bill.

The Head of Strategy shared the positive work the office has undertaken to include children and young people in General Comment 26; at the pre-session at the United Nations convention; and the CRIA Toolkit.

**Corporate Services:**

Head of Corporate Services update the Group:

**Exceptions Reporting**

The Head of Corporate Services shared the AAB went ahead, the Annual Accounts were laid on time at the end of 2022, and the office changed auditors from Deloitte to Audit Scotland. The office plans to change the timing of the Audit to be closer to the end of the financial year.

Positive update included the current staffing position with all roles being filled so the team can work efficiently. The focus this quarter will be reviewing documents; procurement; policies; and team training.

**Auditor Fee**

It was noted the fee for our annual audit had increased by 30% which seemed steep given the size of office. The Head of Corporate Services had undertaken a piece of work to compare similar size organisations and will be looking into this further.

Noted that staff managed to take a rest over the festive period and the flow of emails was quieter than usual which was positive.

The CPD dates offered at the start of the year had been received well by staff and the timing worked well. The Senior Management Team agreed the timing of this should be utilised each year and staff felt appreciated.

<b>3.</b>	<b>Governance</b>	
3.1	<p><b><u>Union Matters</u></b></p> <p>PCS has called on its members to take part in strike action on 1 February 2023 as part of a UK wide dispute over pay, job security, pensions and redundancy terms.</p> <p>The Senior Management Team agreed that the flow of information to both union members and employers had been poor in the preparation of the strike action. However, noted the importance of supporting the right to strike.</p> <p>The SPSO and SHRC offices will close on 1 February 2023, it was agreed our office should be aligned and will suggest to work from home for those not striking. The Head of Corporate Services will share a draft email to prepare staff. <b>(Action - NVR)</b></p> <p>It was agreed to add wording to the staff email to say union members will be assumed to be on strike unless expressed otherwise.</p> <p>The Commissioner also noted the strike actions being taken by other organisations will affect staff who rely on the NHS or those with school aged children.</p>	
<b>4.</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	
4.1	<p><b><u>Finance:</u></b></p> <p>The Group were updated by The Head of Corporate Services on the current phasing of the budget. The latest Finance Report can be found within the last Senior Management Team Minutes and is also held in Microsoft Teams.</p> <p><b>Highlights</b></p> <p>The office has an overspend of £25,000 on staffing costs however there is an underspend on Operations due to the delay in incorporation.</p> <p>In November 2022, the office surrendered £30,000 of underspend.</p> <p>The Commissioner noted the underspend could be utilised for the conference on 16<sup>th</sup> March; the lawyer support for the Covid Inquiry; and office equipment.</p> <p>The Head of Communications highlighted the Early Years Resources budget may need an uplift and agreed to discuss offline. <b>(Action – EM)</b></p>	

<b>5.</b>	<b>Children &amp; Young People's Participation</b>	
5.1	<p><b><u>Young Adviser Group</u></b></p> <p>The office is currently planning the next Young Adviser Group meeting to be in-person on 11 March 2023. Six of the group are new. The office is aware that the new starts may need a softer welcome and greater support initially.</p> <p>It was noted the office do not plan to recruit more Young Advisers in the first half of the year and will discuss the process of recruiting with the new Commissioner in H2.</p> <p><b>Participation</b></p> <p>The Commissioner shared details of an early years visit during the week. The nursery school had organised the day very well, the children were engaged in the topic and some clear learning had been achieved.</p>	
<b>6.</b>	<b>Continued professional development &amp; training</b>	
6.1	<p><b><u>Recruitment and capacity</u></b></p> <p>It was recognised that a number of staff are off due to secondment or health reasons and the Senior Management Team had made the decision not to cover with temporary staff at this time.</p>	
6.2	<p><b><u>Commissioner transition and recruitment</u></b></p> <p>The Commissioner shared he had been in close contact with Parliament regarding the recruitment and the delay in the process. The gap between the finishing mandate and the new start may result in an Acting Commissioner being appointed in the interim.</p> <p>The Commissioner has discussed with the SPCB the process for a temporary term. As a result, the office will need to consider other staffing matters that may be affected.</p>	

<b>7.</b>	<b>Reflections and end of meeting</b>	
<b>7.1</b>	<p><b>Reflections of meeting:</b></p> <p>No further reflections noted.</p> <p><b>Meeting end:</b> 12:35pm</p>	
<b>8.</b>	<b>Actions:</b>	
	<p>Governance: Union Matters – Strike action email to be prepared and circulated to staff in preparation for 1 February 2023.</p> <p>Finance: Budgets – Early Years Resource budget may need adjusting.</p>	<p><b>NVR</b></p> <p><b>EMc / NVR</b></p>