Governance Meeting
Minutes of meeting held on
20 July 2023

10:00 – 12:30
In person and via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Nick Hobbs (NH)	Acting Commissioner, Head of Advice and Investigations
Nicola Vallance-Ross (NVR)	Head of Corporate Services
Ezmie McCutcheon (EMc)	Head of Communications
Gina Wilson (GW)	Head of Strategy
Judith Chisholm (JC)	Executive Assistant

Apologies: None

Chair: Nick Hobbs

Minutes: Judith Chisholm

	Details	Action By
	Start: 10:00	
1.	**Welcome and apologies**	
1.1 1.2 1.3	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no apologies. **Declaration of Interests** No declarations. **Minutes and actions from previous meeting** The minutes of the Governance meeting held on 19 January 2023 were approved.	
2.	**Updates**	
2.1	**Acting Commissioner Update** NH thanked all of team for the support they have provided since he has stepped up to the role of Acting Commissioner. It has been a smooth process and had a varied couple of months in the post. It was good to start as Acting Commissioner in Geneva at the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) session. It was a great trip being there with two of our Young Advisors, representatives from the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children's Parliament, all of whom were fantastic. Attended the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) Spring Seminar in Stockholm, which was a good opportunity to meet colleagues from around Europe. Opportunities for participation activities including attending a play event in Whitecraig and Refugee Week activity in Glasgow. The speaking engagement at the Youth Justice Conference went well. The opportunity sets us up for our work in relation to the next stage of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill. Illegal Migration Bill –worked with JustRight Scotland and the Scottish Refugee Council in response to this. We are waiting for an action plan from the Scottish Government. We have also been working with the Office of the Children's	

	Commissioner for England. This has been a good opportunity to strengthen our relationships between offices ahead of the new Commissioner starting.	
	Senior Management Team Update **Strategy:** A highlight and significant focus over the period has been on the UN reporting cycle. This involved preparation for the UN CRC pre-session in February and the State Review in May. We have involved children and young people throughout the process which has been really positive and a valuable process for both the children and young people involved and the Office. There is lots of learning from this work that can inform future work. We now have the concluding observations from the Committee and are considering how best to use those over the next cycle. The concluding observations provide a structure for next Commissioner's term to inform what we could focus on. We also had two of our young advisors acting as roving reporters in the UN at the State Examination. We now need to consider how to make best use of those resources to ensure children and young people's views are included in the next reporting cycle process. The Illegal Migration Bill has been a very significant area of work for Strategy and Advice and Investigations. It has been challenging as hard to influence in this area. A positive has been our work with the Children's Commissioner for England's office on this that has helped build a sense of collaboration. Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill has been and continues to be a significant focus as the Bill goes through the Scottish Parliament. It is likely that we will be asked to give evidence in September in relation to this. We will continue to engage significantly around the Bill. The Hearings for Children report has now been published. We have had some involvement on this to date with Sheriff Mackie. The Scottish Government will now review the report and it is likely that we will increase our involvement to influence the outcomes of that review. We will need to comment on the report. At the moment the timeframe is October or November for that. Following retirement of a long serving Participation Officer, and a gap in resource, we have a new Participation Officer that joined at the end of June. We are now recruiting for a Policy Officer and we anticipate there will be a gap in the Policy function until the new Officer starts.	

European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) and ENOC: - we've been involved in the working group focussed on the role of Independent Human Rights Institutions. This is timely as coincides with us reflecting on our own powers in light of incorporation. This is a valuable piece of work for the incoming Commissioner.

Two of our Young Advisors were in Malta in July for the ENYA session. This was a fantastic experience for them - they really valued meeting other young people from across Europe. ENYA has been a real success this year.

Preparation for incorporation continues. We remain involved with the Strategic Implementation Board.

The Scottish Human Rights Bill is out for consultation. We will be actively involved in the consultation as the Bill would confer additional powers on the Office. We will work closely with the Scottish Human Rights Commission on this.

We are working on a project with Families Outside following on from the A Place in Childhood project last year. It relates to children affected by imprisonment of a family member. We are looking at how to address gaps in information provided by directly targeting children between ages 12 – 18. This will cover issues that they may experience and support that they can access.

Communications:
Since last Governance Meeting it has been a busy period. The team had capacity issues in the first quarter of the year but the team is now back up to full capacity.

The period leading up to the former Commissioner demitting Office was extremely busy. There was a lot of work on Human Rights education, including an Activity Badge with Scouts Scotland, and development of the Early Years resource. We are now moving to the next stage on those pieces of work including offering Scouts Scotland badges to their Explorers Group which is up to age 18. We have sent them a memorandum of understanding for their consideration. Plan is that this could be launched in Autumn term. This would provide lots of opportunities for the new Commissioner.

Let's Explore Our Rights, our early years book, has been incredibly well received and we have had incredible feedback on it. We have had requests for it from a wide variety of stakeholders including teachers, foster carers, children rights officers, early years workers, and more. We have a BSL version that has been launched and plan is to have a version in Scots, Gaelic and braille. This is a resource that is gathering pace and something we can build on in our work. Participation Officer and Head of Communications are visiting an early years centre to observe how they are using it in practice with a view to developing

	more ideas for workshops or other activities that we could build as resources around the book. Website work – we have started a scan and improvement project. The website was launched as we went into the pandemic and recognised that it needs a refresh for content and user journeys, for example, how we categorise resources among other improvement work required. We will commission some scanning and analytics work to help with the improvements. The Communications team remain involved in the work across the Office, providing Communications support as required. The team are creating skeleton templates and guides for communications to be used across the Office. The team are also pulling together some ideas around development of the new Strategic Plan and for the new Commissioner in terms of what projects or activity could propose. The Communications team is in a positive place and team excited for new Commissioner and next quarter. **Corporate Services**: It has been a busy quarter. It has been wonderful to have additional support in the team during this busy period of audit and annual accounts, pension returns and it has felt much more manageable due to extra resource. Annual report and accounts are nearly complete as are pension returns to SPCB and myCSP. Budget process is underway with the deadline for submission in September. The draft basis of the budget bid has been circulated to SMT. Project based work continues to ensure that office is running smoothly. Project work is also continuing in relation to HR and Procurement. Positive and busy period and the Head of Corporate Service thanked the team. **Advice and Investigations**: Recruitment: with the retirement of a member of the team it has been decided, in discussion with SMT and the incoming Commissioner, to recruit a Legal Officer to provide the greatest flexibility for the Office going forward.	

	Restraint – the Daniel Johnson Bill has been published. We are supportive of the Bill and looking to work with the Mental Welfare Commission and the Promise to leverage this to create a statutory framework covering all situations where a child or young person might be subject to restraint. Youth Football – the Scottish Football Supporters Association report has been published. We are trying to set up a meeting with Scottish Government officials to see if the Scottish Government will take forward the recommendations in that report. Strategic Litigation toolkit – this was launched in March. It has been well received and we have made use of it in terms of discussions with the Lord Advocate and others regarding our powers that would be granted following incorporation of the UNCRC. Mental Health Investigation – the report was launched and laid at Parliament. We had a meeting with Parliamentarians including representatives of the Education and Health Committees. They provided good feedback and we have an invitation to meet with them again if we consider that the Scottish Government and COSLA are not progressing the recommendations. Five of our Young Advisors met with representatives from the Scottish Government and COSLA. They have committed to take the report and its recommendations to a network meeting in September. There is also the opportunity for influencing work at both Local Authority and Ministerial level. Secure unit visits – we visited all the secure units in May and are finalising report following those visits to meet the commitment given by the Office and also as a basis to inform policy discussions. Hotel accommodation for asylum seeking children and families – we have commissioned two research papers and submitted those to the accommodation provider. We intend to publish the broader rights paper. The one specific to the hotel contains sensitive information about children and families.	

3.	**Governance**	
3.1 3.2	**Annual Review of Register of Interests** SMT reviewed and no additional entries. ACTION -SMT to discuss whether any interests to be declared with individual team members and update register if required. **Risk Register** The risk register was approved. We have adopted the recommendation from the Advisory Audit Board to separate out organisational risks from project specific risks.	SMT
4.	**Monitoring**	
4.1	**Finance update:** **Highlights** Finances are as expected. We are overspent in staffing costs due to increase in staff salaries. There is an overspend in running costs as some annual fees come off in one month. We are considering spreading those payments across the year. Operational costs for Advice and Investigations, Strategy and Communications are underspent. There is an overspend in relation to postage and stationary costs due to lots of increased activity including sending out the early years book. SMT met to discuss budget phasing and the decision was not to rephase at the moment. Finance Officer and Head of Corporate Services to meet with Head of Strategy to agree level of detail for Strategy budget that would like reported on. ACTION: Head of Corporate Services to arrange meeting. **Budget for 2024/2025** Head of Corporate Services has circulated three options to the Acting Commissioner and SMT. Head of Corporate Services provided an overview of each of the three options. It was noted that need to carefully consider budget lines in light of any new powers that the Office may receive following incorporation. SMT to have indication of preferred option by 31 July. Drafting	

	letter to accompany the budget submission week of 31 July and recommendation to Commissioner for 16 August. Deadline for submission of budget bid is 4 September 2023.	
5.	**Children and Young People's Participation**	
5.1	Our new Participation Officer has started. They are currently reviewing the draft materials for our internal participation toolkit together with our policies attached to that with a view to finalising this within the next couple of months. The Young Advisors Group review is underway. The Participation Officer is considering new options around how we work with our Young Advisors, what shape this should take and developing some alternative options around how we recruit Young Advisors. We have had early discussions with Education Scotland around doing a regular online Commissioner session that would be delivered across schools in Scotland. ENYA and ENOC: ongoing work ahead of the conference in September. There are the regular Young Advisor meetings at the moment but we are doing no new activity until we present proposals to the new Commissioner. Head of Corporate Services looking at options for Young Advisors involvement in Advisory Audit Board. BSL strategic plan: this will be being developed within the next six months and as part of that process we need to ensure consult with children and young people using BSL. ACTION: NH, GW and EM to meet to agree process for development of the BSL strategy.	NH, GW and EMc
6.	**Continued professional development & training**	
6.1	**Commissioner induction:** Governance documents relating to role of Accountable Officer have been pulled together into an induction pack. Head of Corporate Services will share those with incoming Commissioner as part of induction. Tech will be provided to the Commissioner the week before the Commissioner commences. Strategy and Advice and Investigations will provide an Introduction Report. This is a thematic	

6.2 6.3	report on issues we've worked on with links to more material and recommendations about what could do in those areas going forward. **Recruitment** As outlined above, Legal Officer and Policy Officer recruitment ongoing. **Contribution Management Plans and training requirements** Corporate Services team have no large asks on training budget from Contribution Management Plans. SMT Executive Coaching is now finished.	
	Meeting end: 12:30	
7.	**Actions:**	
	- ACTION -SMT to discuss whether any interests to be declared with individual team members and update register if required. - ACTION: Finance Officer and Head of Corporate Services to meet with Head of Strategy to agree level of detail for Strategy budget that would like reported on. Head of Corporate Services to arrange meeting. - ACTION: NH, GW and EM to meet to agree process for development of the BSL strategy.	**SMT** **NVR** **NH, GW, EMc**