CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland

Governance Meeting
Minutes of meeting held on
17 June 2024

10:00-13:00
In person and via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Nicola Killean (NK)	Commissioner
Nick Hobbs (NH)	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
Caitlin Hamilton-Jones (CHJ)	Finance and Administration Assistant

Apologies:	None
Chair:	Nicola Killean
Minutes:	Caitlin Hamilton-Jones

	Details	Action By
	Start: 10:00	
1.	**Welcome and apologies**	
1.1	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no apologies.	
1.2	**Declaration of Interests** No declarations.	
1.3	**Minutes and actions from previous meeting** The minutes of the Governance meeting held on 5 March 2024 were approved. Actions around Audit to be carried over.	

2.	**Updates**	
2.1	**Commissioner Update** The Commissioner shared positive reflections. Since the last Governance Group meeting, the Strategic and delivery plans have been finalised. The Commissioner reflected on the achievements of the office. The office is working on thematic areas such as education and there have been lots of planning in participation work on what will become continued action research. The office's work on poverty is also beginning. The Commissioner shared that they had a meeting with a Senior Official at Scottish Government in relation to Tackling Child Poverty and they raised the importance of involving children and young people in the next child poverty plan and the importance of this. Other highlights from this quarter included contributing towards external events such as the RCSLT Voicebox Awards, Edinburgh International Children's Festival, The Shetland Youth Festival online and Together UNCRC event. Attending Young Advisor Meetings and getting to know the group has also been a highlight. The office is developing with the YAG, a two-year plan on involvement and direction of the work of the office. The focus over the next three months is to continue planning for delivery of the thematic pieces of work. The Commissioner has also written to the new First Minister to ask for a meeting regarding Child Poverty, and the Cabinet Secretary to discuss Education Reform.	
2.2	**Senior Management Team Update** **Advice and Investigations**: NH shared highlights from the previous 3 months including a session with the Young Advisors at the RSPB reserve in Kinross. NH reflected that it was a great opportunity to build relationships. NH felt the event was organised incredibly well by the Participation and Policy Officers The Parliamentary session on the Disability Commissioner went well. NH went to the OSCE in Vienna and ensured that the office's work on trafficking was heard in an international space. Good feedback was received from the staff session on strategic litigation. Strategic litigation has been a focus for both the Strategy and the Advice and Investigations team.	

	As the office's litigation powers are being implemented over the next few months NH noted some of the challenges around this and a focus towards what the organisation can and can’t do qua Commissioner. There have been lots of positive conversations, generating actions for the team. NH and the Commissioner will have a session on risk and prioritising of tasks related to the new powers. **Communications:** EMcC discussed the session with the Young Advisors as a highlight, echoing NH’s feedback. Reflected on how useful connecting the environment to the work (Natural Environment Bill). This could be a model to replicate for future work with YAG. The last three months have focused on publications including the Strategic Plan, BSL Plan, Strategic Plan communications to children and young people video and also the parliamentary video. The work on the BSL plan has opened up some new relationships that the office can continue to build on. An action was noted around the need for some more detailed work to take place on detailed budget allocation to the BSL and Delivery Plans. The Annual Report is on track and currently with the designers and the Commissioner for final review. EMcC noted the new approach to the team contributing to the report was positive and productive. We will replicate this for future annual reports. In terms of Accessibility, staff are receiving more training from the Digital Media officer in smaller groups. Work will continue on the accessibility of our website, but EMcC noted progress in embedding accessibility across the organisation. **Corporate Services**: NVR reflected that the last full Team Meeting was a highlight and left feeling upskilled on the use of the office’s new powers and the development of the function to support this. Of particular note was the training received from the Policy Officer on Human Rights to the wider team, this was informative, engaging and thoroughly enjoyable. NVR reflected that the renewal of a commercial contract is going well. This has involved coordinating with four other Officeholders and it is almost complete. Corporate Services have been busy with year-end financials controls work with the auditor which was successful. Other work has included working with Strategy Team to support contract extensions, finalising procurement documentation and organising training looking for efficiencies in telephony, work around secure password management to make things more efficient and Sage reports have been submitted to the accountant.	

NVR reflected that audit and the Annual Report and Accounts were on track and this is wholly attributable to the work of the Finance Officer.

Another highlight was the Microsoft Records Management event in May.

Upcoming work includes a meeting with the new Advisory Audit Board Chair and the Commissioner.

The week of the 16th of August is fieldwork for audit and so the Annual Report and Accounts need to be submitted by then. GW and NVR to work on the RAG after GW's leave, in the interim NVR is going to produce a draft.

NVR noted some staff shortages within Corporate Services and this is being managed by reprioritisation.

Strategy:
Highlights include those previously mentioned including participation with new YAG and feedback from the visit to RSPB.

The office has undertaken several consultation responses regarding climate and had the Young Advisors involved in those different responses.

A huge highlight to note during this quarter was the Scottish Parliament passing the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill. Issues and themes have been worked on for a long time in the office and GW is very proud of the work done by the office around this.

GW mentioned the Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities and thinks there is something to be done to reflect on the office's work around ASN in this.

GW stated that there have been challenges around UNCRC incorporation implementation to work through in terms of the Scottish Government understanding their obligations.

GW noted the ongoing complex dynamic with the Commissioner Parliamentary Inquiry, and proposals for new Commissioners. She will be working to consider how best to continue the positive relationships that have been built with Parliament throughout this time and forthcoming election years.

Recruitment is ongoing at the moment within the Strategy and Advice and Investigations teams.

GW is mindful of the fact that with the new litigation powers there will be a need to understand the balance of work in a new way. There are some capacity challenges around information governance work and pressure around scheduling that work and meeting demands.

	Action: SMT will continue to monitor capacity across the team, pacing and allocation of workload across all staff members. **Action : EMcC and NH to meet around communications support with implementation of new litigation powers.** The Commissioner thanked all for the excellent progress.	
3.	**Strategic Plan**	
3.1 **3.2**	**Performance Against Delivery Plan** GW noted that performance will be measured through quarterly updates and there is a pro forma document for doing so. Members of the team will input into the quarterly update and will be notified two weeks' in advance. This will be discussed with staff members at team meetings or one to ones so they have a clear understanding. Quarterly updates will be kept short and concise – bullet points, hyperlinks etc rather than reporting large chunks of information. It is to be used as a high level source of information to see where the office is on track or where we might need to add resources or discuss timescales. If there is no update add '*in progress, delayed, not started*' etc. **Action - GW to add a note to the top of the document explaining that staff only need to give a high level of information while updating.** The Commissioner questioned whether there will be historic versions of the document available. GW and NVR suggested that this could be revisited after the first round of quarterly updates. **Action – each member of SMT to brief their team on the quarterly update process and when this needs to be done.** **Delivery Plan Funding Allocation:** SMT has allocated funds, where possible to projects contained in the Delivery Plan. SMT agreed they will hold a follow up meeting to scope any further detailed budgeting and invite the Commissioner if they require her to support decision making. NVR raised potential risk around the budget for staffing as pay negotiations led by SPCB have not concluded. **Action – Extraordinary Governance Group Meeting once the SPCB pay award has been concluded.**	

4.	**Monitoring**	
4.1 4.2 4.3	**Finance:** NVR gave a high-level overview of the finances. NVR took the Group through the year-to-date financial position – the office is £16k under budget (subject to small amendments due to access to the system to reconcile the Commissioner's credit card, although this will not result in a large change.) We have come under budget due to salaries (recruitment gaps), travel (due to projects not yet delivered), training (as appraisals have not yet been carried out and annual training plan is yet to be agreed) and finally Advice and Investigations is carrying a current underspend which is due to the new powers not yet in force, this is expected to change after July. This underspend in these areas is partially offset by over budget spend in professional fees (unbudgeted spend for internal audit) comms, admin and IT costs. NVR noted is that the biggest unknown for this years' financial position of the office is related to staff costs due to unknown pay award **Action – SMT to meet and agree how to report against projects in the delivery plan and assign actions for detailed financial scoping of projects.** **Risk Register:** The Group discussed the current risks to the organisation and whether the risk categories were accurate and reflect the current risks to the organisation. Updates were made during the course of the meeting. NVR discussed mitigation of cyber risk through yearly top up training. **Action – Finance and Administration Assistant to deliver IT security overview once a year.** **Action – add overview to training planner.** **Register of interests:** Matters discussed in private.	
5.	**Annual Planner**	
	Noted.	

6.	**Participation**	
	The Group covered this in another agenda item.	
7.	**Human resources and organisational development**	
	Professional Development and training **Action: Agreed that CMP document will be updated by the Commissioner/NVR with feedback taken so far, and SMT can schedule CMP meetings over summer** **Action: Annual Training Plan to be on the agenda of the next SMT to plan with information that has been gathered so far.** **ACTION: NVR to communicate to working group and then wider team via email and huddle.** **Update on projects:** NVR updated the Group on Corporate Services Projects and reported by exception. The Health and Safety Policy is currently a priority for updating. **Recruitment:** Interviews for new staff are taking place this week. Everyone is clear on timescales and needs for onboarding, induction and training. Checklist will be available with step by step guide of what is needed. A plan around timings has been made.	
	Meeting end: 13:00	
9.	**Actions:**	
	- **Audit**: GW agreed to write the policy process for strategic planning and agreed the deadline of March 2025. - EMcC and NH to meet around communications support with implementation of new litigation powers. - GW to add a note to the top of the document explaining that staff only need to give a high level of information while updating. - Each member of SMT to brief their team on the quarterly update process and when this needs to be done. - Extraordinary governance meeting to take place after more information received on the 24/25 pay award.	**GW** **EMcC/NH** **GW** SMT SMT/NK

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	- **SMT to meet and agree how to report against projects in the delivery plan and assign actions for any detailed budget scoping work for projects.** - Finance and Administration Assistant to deliver IT security overview once a year. - Add overview to training planner. - NVR and the Commissioner to update CMP and NVR to communicate to team	SMT CHJ CHJ