# Governance Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 12 September 2024

11:00-13:00

In person and via Microsoft Teams

**Attendees:**
**Nicola Killean – Commissioner – Chair**
**Nick Hobbs – Head of Advice and Investigations**
**Nicola Vallance-Ross – Head of Corporate Services**
**Gina Wilson – Head of Strategy**
**Ezmie McCutcheon – Head of Communications**
**Judith Chisholm – Executive Assistant - minutes**

**Guest Attendees: None**

**Apologies: None**

| Agenda Item | Notes and actions | Action owner |
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| 1. Meeting Start<br>• Welcome and apologies (NK)<br>• Declaration of interests (ALL)<br>• Minutes of previous meeting and actions (ALL) | The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and there were no apologies.<br><br>No declarations of interests.<br><br>Minutes from the previous meeting were approved subject to minor amendments.<br><br>**Actions** carried over from previous meeting:<br><br>- Line managers to complete any outstanding Contribution Management Plans (CMP) for team members<br>- SMT to agree whether to hold mid-year reviews for CMP as a separate process or to review in one to ones | |

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| | - SMT to reflect on and review CMP process once completed. | |
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| 2. Updates:<br>• Commissioner update (NK)<br>• SMT update (SMT) | **Commissioner update**<br><br>It has been a really productive quarter even though there have been some challenges.<br><br>Highlights from the quarter include UNCRC Incorporation into Scots law, the progress in relation to the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill resulting in all children having been removed from Polmont Young Offender's Institute.<br><br>Over the summer the Commissioner has been focussing on our strategic priority area of education. There have been a lot of stakeholder meetings covering a wide variety of issues, seeking commitments from key duty-bearers to further work. There is a lot of support in the sector for our prioritisation of education.<br><br>We have developed our model for school visits and to organisations for action research and for participation work.<br><br>Our work on our strategic priority in relation to poverty is ongoing. We have had a second meeting with key duty-bearers at the Scottish Government to discuss the Child Poverty Action Plan and involving children and young people. We are also looking at Child Poverty Action Plans at a local level.<br><br>The Young Advisors Group has been a real highlight. They are an amazing group of young people that are coming together really well.<br><br>There have been a number of key engagements during the quarter, including:<br><br>- The National Youth Justice conference<br>- The Highland Youth Parliament event in Inverness | |

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| | - The British and Irish Network of Ombudsperson and Commissioners for Children meeting in London<br>- Children's Health Scotland Bear's tea party<br>- Children's Health Scotland Parliamentary Reception<br>- Who Cares? Scotland summer camp.<br><br>The Commissioner is looking forward to many more opportunities for engaging with children and young people and key events in the next quarter.<br><br>**SMT Update**<br><br>**Strategy**: a highlight is that we have two new employees who are providing additional capacity in relation to participation and policy. Another highlight is our education work both with participation plans and meetings with stakeholders who can support us on the challenges in relation to education reform.<br><br>The Parliamentary uncertainty over the last quarter has been a challenge. The impact of the general election and changes with the Scottish Government has resulted in timetables for our work being disrupted. There has also been a lot of reactive work required as a result of Parliamentary timetables changing, and this has had a major impact on the office.<br><br>**Communications:** – a challenge has been the capacity of the team due to leave and also the amount of reactive work. Highlights are that key projects are starting, including the E-sgoil national assembly on World Children's Day. Let's Explore Oor Richts, the Scots version of our early years rights book has been nominated for the award of Scots Bairns book of the year.<br><br>**Corporate Services:** –challenges have been staff capacity due to leave. Current business as usual activity is more than we have in terms of staff capacity so have had to focus on audit, budget bid, and new staff inductions. This challenge is also a | |

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| | highlight as the process for each of those has gone well.<br><br>The Officeholders Shared Services Network group is working well and the Head of Corporate Services is pleased to support this, to share experiences across the Offices.<br><br>Corporate Services have been discussing with the Participation Officer around how best to involve our Young Advisors Group in Corporate Services work.<br><br>Those are all large pieces of work that Head of Corporate Services feels confident about and has had a lot of support from the team on.<br><br>**Advice and Investigations:** – key highlights are that the new Projects and Participation Assistant has started and that our new legal powers have come into force. We have made the first use of our legal powers for intervention in a case, which was a success.<br><br>There are challenges around the capacity in the team due to leave. There is also a level of expectation on us so we need to carefully think about that when scoping potential cases and how and when we use our powers and when we can publicly talk about it. | |
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| 3. Strategic Plan<br>• Performance against Delivery Plan (ALL)<br>• Horizon Scanning (ALL) | **Performance against Delivery Plan**:<br><br>This was the first quarterly update on progress in relation to the current delivery plan. SMT agreed that best process is to complete this working together as a team at team meetings where possible. Each of the areas of activity were reviewed to populate the document with a high-level update.<br><br>It was agreed that in order for the delivery plan quarterly update to be most useful for annual reporting that it should be updated on same version each time. Dates could be recorded against relevant updates if needed. | |

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| | The format of the delivery plan quarterly update is a useful resource for shaping Senior Management Team or Governance discussions. .<br><br>The delivery plan quarterly update  is a reference point for one to ones with team members.<br><br>The delivery plan quarterly update is linked to the policy tracker. The policy tracker could be updated to include links to Comms statements and media releases.<br><br>**ACTION: Head of Communications and Head of Strategy to consider updating policy tracker to capture and link to Comms reactive work.**<br><br>It was agreed that it would also be good to link to a tracker that shows the meetings and engagements the Commissioner has taken part in with a short summary of the purpose of that engagement.<br><br>**ACTION: Commissioner, Head of Strategy and Executive Assistant to meet to discuss best format for the meeting tracker to take.**<br><br>Noted that Advice and Investigations do not need a separate tracker as Thread, our database can report on the number of cases coming in, decision making and number of cases taken.<br><br>SMT and the Commissioner agreed that the delivery plan quarterly update is a useful exercise.<br><br>**Sections on performance:**<br><br>Head of Strategy presented on some of the highlights and challenges to note from the delivery plan quarterly update. Noted that Poverty work timetable may be challenging given capacity around other pieces of work. Agreed that no action needed at this stage but would bring to next Governance meeting where may need to rephase. Other updates for information only at this stage or covered by previous actions on ways to improve quarterly update.<br><br>**Horizon scanning:** | |

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<tr><td></td><td>Noted that Parliamentary response on the Scotland’s Commissioner Landscape Inquiry is expected next week.<br><br>There is the unpredictability surrounding the new UK Government and the Scottish Government.<br><br>There has been a pull back on existing commitments, for example, free school meals. Major pieces of reform that the office has been working on are now uncertain.<br><br>The office has made positive progress despite the challenging context. We will keep reviewing plans in terms of pressures on projects and reactive work.</td><td></td></tr>
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<tr><td>4. Monitoring<br>• Finance (NVR)<br>• Risk Register (ALL)</td><td>Finance update:<br><br>The August reconciliation will be taken to SMT at end of the month.<br><br>SMT and the Commissioner had been provided with the July finance update. The Head of Corporate Services provided an overview of key points to note from that update:<br><br>- We remain under budget which we expect will be offset later in the financial year with spend on large projects and legal opinion expected in relation to the use of the office’s powers.<br>- We have surrendered funds to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body following the pay review as budget awarded for pay was in excess of agreed pay policy for 2024-2026<br>- In terms of budgeting we are in a better position as we know pay increases for this year and next (two year deal).<br>- Only asked for small drawdown for this month to keep bank balance within limits of one twelfth operation costs.<br>- We foresee that the office will be overspent in running costs for professional fees. The Head of Corporate Services and Finance Officer will monitor and keep SMT updated monthly on</td><td></td></tr>
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| | where at on spend in this area together with updates to the Commissioner where required. There is the possibility of requesting contingency funding later in the year but not apply for this until we know that we will have a significant overspend.<br>- Comms has an anticipated overspend as a result of unbudgeted projects crucial for compliance and SMT looking at ways to offset this.<br><br>Commissioner noted how clear the finance updates are and passed thanks on to the Finance Officer.<br><br>**Risk register:**<br><br>It was agreed that SMT would review the Risk Register at its next meeting.<br><br>Noted that risk register needs to reflect risks around our new legal powers for strategic litigation.<br><br>**ACTION: Review of risk register to be put on agenda for next SMT next meeting.**<br><br>The Head of Corporate Services will brief the Commissioner on the updated risk register in advance of the Advisory Audit Board meeting scheduled for Friday 11 October 2024.<br><br>**ACTION: Head of Corporate Services to brief Commissioner on updated risk register following SMT meeting and in advance of Advisory Audit Board.**<br><br>Areas Commissioner would like SMT to focus on when reviewing risk register:<br><br>- Capacity of teams and how support. Are there more mitigations we can put in place?<br>- Insurance relating to strategic litigation and if not in place yet have we covered in the risk register the risk mitigation processes in place.<br>- Travel insurance – risk mitigations if a window between insurance expiring and new insurance in place | | |

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| | Head of Advice and Investigations provided a summary of the mitigations of risks in place in relation to insurance.<br><br>Head of Corporate Services provided a summary of measures in place in case there is a window between travel insurance expiry and new policy in place. | |
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| 5. Annual Planner (ALL) | The Governance group reviewed the annual planner. Minor updates were made to dates and categories. Noted it is another useful tool to review prior to SMT and Governance meetings to see if anything needs to be added to the agenda.<br><br>There were a couple of actions based on review of the annual planner:<br><br>**ACTION: Policies and plans – Commissioner and Head of Corporate Services to meet to discuss priorities for reviewing and finalising policies.**<br><br>**ACTION: Participation training in November– SMT to agree if should be open for all staff** | |
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| 6. Participation (GW) | Participation has been covered in Commissioner and SMT updates and is embedded in delivery plan quarterly update review.<br><br>It was also highlighted that we have a fantastic Young Advisors Group development plan that we are working on and which involves all teams from the office. It is the most structured development plan we have had and it will be really interesting to hear feedback on it from the Young Advisors and if they feel they have gained a deep understanding of our work.<br><br>Part of the work we are trying to address is the gap analysis in views from children and young people identified from our desk based evidence review for the strategic plan. There are geographical gaps that | |

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| | we have recognised and will need to review in the new year how to address. | |
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| 7. Human resources and organisational development<br>• Continued professional development and training (NVR / NK)<br>• Update on IT project<br>• Update on staff survey results (NVR) | The Head of Corporate Services has developed the outline of an all-staff training plan. This was provided to the auditors as part of the audit of our people strategy and workforce plan. This will be reviewed with SMT and once all CMPs are finished SMT will agree mandatory training and incorporate CMP needs.<br><br>**ACTION**: SMT to review all-staff training plan at meeting in February 2025<br><br>In terms of leadership training the Commissioner suggested some options that SMT may be interested in for CPD to further strengthen their existing skills.<br><br>It was agreed that it would be useful for SMT to review the performance management framework together to develop the draft policy and ensure consistent approach.<br><br>**ACTION**:  – **performance management policy signed off and SMT have internal session on approach.**<br><br>The Head of Corporate Services could deliver in-house refresher training to SMT on compliance with public sector governance and legal requirements including the FREM.<br><br>**ACTION – Head of Corporate Services to deliver**<br><br>It was agreed that external training on evaluation and impact could be beneficial provided that it was tailored to our organisation.<br><br>Another option suggested was capacity training but it was felt this would not add much value to existing skills.<br><br>**Staff survey**:<br><br>The Head of Corporate Services presented on key anonymised findings from the staff survey. Next steps | |

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| | are for Head of Corporate Services to prepare a more detailed anonymous summary to take to SMT meeting and then this would be presented to the all staff team.<br><br>Overall, the outcome of the survey is very positive. The initial findings show that there could potentially be some improvement in relation to levels of stress at work and transparency in terms of organisational decisions with the staff team.<br><br>**ACTION: SMT to review and update stress at work policy and communicate with teams and at one-to-ones to understand more and seek suggestions for improvement.**<br><br>**ACTION: SMT to discuss organisation findings with team members both as a team and at one-to-ones to try to get a better sense of survey findings in this area and what more, if anything, we could be doing.**<br><br>**Update on IT project:**<br><br>Due to pressures on time for the agenda it was agreed that this agenda item would be covered in a separate meeting.<br><br>**ACTION: Executive Assistant to put 30 minutes to discuss into SMT and Commissioner's diaries.** | |
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