CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland

Governance Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 13 March 2025

09:45 – 12:45

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

Agenda Item	Notes and actions	Action owner
1. Meeting Start • Welcome and apologies (NK) • Declaration of interests (ALL) • Minutes of previous meeting and actions (ALL)	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no apologies. No declarations of interests. Minutes from the previous meeting were approved subject to minor amendments. The action log was reviewed and updated to reflect completed and any ongoing actions and any amendments to deadlines as required.	
2. Updates • Commissioner Update • SMT Update	**Commissioner:** - The programme of action research with children and young people has been going really well. - Targeted work with groups of children and young people are now well underway.	

	- Through our analysis we have built a picture of systemic issues that need reform or developed. - We have also now completed our visits to secure units. - Poverty work has been more streamlined than originally planned for, but the work we have done has been meaningful and useful. - The Commissioner Landscape Inquiry continues. We continue to put forward why it is so important children and young people have their own dedicated officeholder. **SMT Update:** **Corporate Services:** - Been a heavy focus on structural governance. Working significantly on audit, insurance and planning. We are trying to ensure that this is proportionate and focus on the value of it, for example, internal audit. The GDPR internal audit went well and provided both assurance in the process in place and valuable assurance to the team involved of how valuable the work they do is to the organisation. Internal audits have been thorough and consistent. However, these audits continue to impact on other project work as they take up a lot of time. **Communications:** - It has been a business as usual period since the last Governance meeting. - Team noted the media work on the complaint to the Competition and Markets Authority re: youth footballers rights as a highlight. - We have had lots of opportunities to work with our Young Advisors on different projects, for example blogs and filming	

	- There were capacity issues over December into January. - Our accessibility project has been progessed in this period although there have been delays when unplanned or deadline driven work has taken priority. We are making consistent improvements to website accessibility. We expect to have the BSL section of the website ready by the end of March. **Advice and Investigations:** - Our first case using our strategic litigation powers led to a judgment in our favour, protecting the scope of the UNCRC Act and ensuring that all decisions to prosecute children can be tested against the UNCRC standards - We have completed the programme of secure unit visits. - We had a positive audit result in relation to procurement of legal services and the timing of that has been really helpful in showing assurance of our processes and value for money in our procurement. - The team has had issues with capacity having been a member of staff down for a substantial period of time. - There is a significant amount of additional work in responding to the Commissioner Landscape Inquiry, the Education Committee and the Covid Inquiry. **Strategy:** - Strategy and Advice and Investigations working closely together on projects. - Following UNCRC Incorporation we are seeing a change in the way others are working with our Office. There have been lots of technical advice requests asking whether activity is within UNCRC or outside from a wide range of bodies including MSPs, public bodies and third	

	sector. This has changed how we work together between Legal Officer and Policy Officers. We need to consider whether something could be strategic litigation or whether we need to use other policy levers. It is positive as we can see a genuine sense of culture change around the way people are using the UNCRC. - One of the groups we have been working with as part of the targeted activity group project has been at threat of having its entire service cut. Ultimately the funding was maintained. It has been a direct example of the distress to young people and practitioners caused by the threat of cuts and also of using the UNCRC in subtle ways to support services. - Impact Framework: started work with our Young Advisors Group. It has been a positive start and we have lots of interest from external organisations about it, including Parliament.	
3. Monitoring	**Finance:** The Head of Corporate Services provided an update based on an interim report that includes estimates of March payroll costs and the tax due. Current position is that we do not need to drawdown continency unless there is any unplanned expenditure, for example legal fees. This approach would leave us within the 1/12th bank balance as required by the SPCB. SMT will continue to monitor the position including work to be completed before financial year end and any outstanding invoices. **Annual Audit Plan:** At present the annual audit plan is not yet available. Membership of the audit team at Audit	

	Scotland has changed so dates are still to be agreed. **ACTION:** Head of Corporate Services circulate Audit Plan to Group once available and highlight anything for review. **Internal Audit Outcomes** **Procurement:** good process and outcome. Recommendation received was one we encouraged and an amendment was made to it to take a proportionate approach given the size of our organisation and capacity. **GDPR**: –Report not issued yet but at the closing meeting there was only one recommendation and one observation. Positive outcome. **ACTION:** Governance Group to continue to review if can move to one internal audit a year from 2027onwards. **Audit Actions – action tracker** This has been developed to keep track of the volume of audit requests. Group agreed it is a useful tool. Any key dates or deadlines to be scheduled in relevant diaries. Audit Action tracker is separate as it is not an internal document but shared with the external and internal auditors. **ACTION:** Action tracker will go to SMT monthly for review. **Commissioner Code of Conduct** The Group provided high level comments on the latest draft. It was noted that as well as involving our Young Advisors it would be good to have a child friendly version. **ACTION:** take an updated draft to next SMT meeting.	

	Risk management policy Minor amendment from Nicola to review to incorporate. It is with AAB for comments and then bring back to SMT for approval. **ACTION:** Risk management policy to go to SMT for approval once updated with AAB. **Risk Register** Noted that succession planning for SMT is still to be written. This will be built into the workforce plan. Developing Information Governance risks to update the Risk Register. Travel insurance for our Young Advisors does not need to be included. Process in place and we get specific individual insurance for our Young Advisors if involved in international travel. Discussed online safety and incidents where images from social media accounts of organisations are copied and used on inappropriate websites. Agreed that this could be considered as part of our consent forms. **ACTION**: add this to agenda when considering Young Advisors and other children and young people's consent forms. **Health and Safety** Annual report which builds in an update from the Bridgeside House Building Manager. In the last six months only one minor incident of a slip and trip. No damage and not reportable. Line managers continue to monitor health and safety in one-to-ones. Health and safety monitoring includes assessment of home working. Corporate Services working on reminding team on need for clear desk policy and clear floors in walkways. **Child Protection and Safeguarding**	

	Annual update paper was considered by the Group. All staff have had training on child protection and safeguarding. This training is supplemented if there are any changes or incidents. Noted changes to PVG regulations. The paper had a table summarising the child protection referrals made through the year, which was small numbers. Majority reported were already known to police or social work. We have in place continuous improvement and policy reviews as required. Our risk assessments are positive and the quality is strong. They are live documents and are reviewed by three members of staff including Senior Management. We have used the NSPCC template review process to test our policy and procedures. This identified a few areas which we will consider carefully about whether we need to implement or are already covered. For example, our Young Advisors do not sign up to an overall code of conduct when we recruit them but should they have guidance on how they communicate with each other and any other areas. Agreed that the risk of an adult or staff member being part of an incident that does not involve children but could be considered to impact on ability to work with children covered by Office existing law, policy and procedures. **ACTION:** SMT to discuss code of conduct for our Young Advisors at the next meeting in April and work out how can build into Young Advisors programme of activity for them to review. **Child Protection and Safeguarding policy – revised March 2025** Made a few minor edits based on practice in last year and NSPCC review process.	

	Reviewed version control table on policy and highlighted changes. No major substantive changes. Policy approved. Question about implications of obtaining verbal consent, for example, on the day of a school visit. **ACTION:** Commissioner, Head of Corporate Services and Head of Communications to review consent form, including potential issue around images being taken from our website and used on inappropriate websites as noted above. **Business Continuity Plan** Noted that have policy and to be reviewed by SMT by summer ready for next Governance meeting and practical run through.	
4. Strategic Plan	**Performance against Delivery Plan** Significant things to note: - It has been updated to clearly reflect that decisions were made at the last meeting in November about adjusting some projects in the plan. - Having reviewed our original plans around poverty work, we decided to reframe this to take the opportunity to engage with the UK Taskforce review. At the whole team delivery plan session we need to reflect on this and agree on what is achievable. - Education – lots of resource in this area balanced around other project work - Looking forward to discussion right across office when do reflection on delivery plan. - Overall a really positive picture. - In terms of moving into next year as we have budget agreed and delivery plan developed it will hopefully feel a bit smoother.	

	- All well and update provides a clear briefing on what's on track and where things are at. - Noted that need to review deliverables across the delivery plan, for example, Corporate Services section has review of recruitment practices which is a huge piece of work. The Information Governance project is the priority. - The Commissioner recognises that need to review all pieces of work in delivery plan based on information gathered from last year and emerging priorities. - Delivery plan day with team is an opportunity to celebrate what we've done and our successes. - **ACTION:** Following the all-staff day, SMT meet with their teams and then SMT met with Commissioner meet to finalise updates to delivery plan. - ACTION: At delivery plan update meetings, consider how to record reactive work going forwards as well as worked pre-planned. **Horizon Scanning** - UK Government considering benefit cuts. This will affect UK Government Child Poverty Taskforce, and will lead to discussions with the Scottish Government which may affect need for proactive advocacy.	
5. Annual planner	Nothing to update in this meeting.	
6. Participation	Review progress and work Young Advisors with staff in April team meeting and Young Advisors review of year in June.	
7. Human resources and organisational development	Attendance and sickness annual overview: - Verbal update to Group as need to avoid risk of disclosing special category data. There will be a report in the annual report and accounts which will show if there has been an increase or decrease.	

	- That information will be available at the end of March. - In terms of return to work processes we are better at doing those within a week of staff returning to work. - At one-to-ones there are health conversations and supportive conversations - ACTION: Head of Corporate Services to check right version of the return to work form and one-to-ones. **Wellbeing:** We have a comprehensive support package in place: - Stress at Work Policy - Employee Assistance Programme - Return to work support - 1:1 support The Group is still mindful of staff survey results in terms of stress. It was recognised that there are challenges from pieces of work that have no choice over undertaking which limits the ability of SMT to manage capacity. There is a positive culture and line managers are proactive about wellbeing. This includes constant conversations and encouragement about having a break, going for a walk, having a cup of tea etc. In terms of wellbeing the importance of celebrating work at the all staff review of the delivery plan day was noted.	
12:30	**Meeting close**	