

## Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

### Governance Group

**Meeting:** First Meeting of 2021/22, 5 May 2021, 9.30-12.30, online via Microsoft Teams

**Chair:** The Commissioner

**Present:** Head of Advice and Investigations  
Head of Corporate Services  
Head of Strategy  
Head of Communications

**In attendance:** Executive Assistant (minutes)

#### 1. Welcome and apologies

The Commissioner welcomed everyone to the Governance Group (the Group) meeting. There were no apologies. The Group agreed that instead of allocating an individual meeting monitor for each meeting, an additional standing agenda item would be added for reflections from the Group on the meeting.

#### 2. Declaration of Interests

None.

#### 3. Minutes of previous meeting

The Group agreed the minutes of the previous meeting. It was noted that any open actions from previous meeting were covered by the items on the agenda.

#### 4. Commissioner Update

- In late November to December the position in relation to the impact of COVID-19 had been looking more positive.
- However, as a result of the additional restrictions in late December it has been a challenging quarter both in terms of workload, including in relation to SQA and assessments, COVID-19 Independent Advisory Group and other reactionary work in response to announcements relating to COVID-19, and also in terms of staff wellbeing and welfare including caring responsibilities in light of school closures.
- The major news for the quarter is that the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill on 16 March 2021. The Commissioner noted the incredible amount of work that has gone into that over the last quarter particularly in relation to amendments at Stage 3 of the proceedings, and from the team on the week of the vote. A couple of parts of the Bill are subject to legal challenge by the UK Government to the Supreme Court. The Commissioner is

considering whether to intervene in those proceedings but it is important to stay focussed on the positives.

- ENOC work and the COVID-19 theme are progressing well. ENOC is in the process of selecting the theme for next year. There is good engagement with ENYA.
- The Office has now completed the recruitment of the three new Young Advisers Groups.

## 5. Senior Management Team (SMT) Update

- The Head of Strategy provided an update on behalf of SMT. It was noted that many of the updates were covered by those provided by the Commissioner.
- The recruitment process for the new Young Advisers Groups and the new approach for working with the young advisers is a significant achievement. There was a great deal of interest from young people and there is a lot of diversity across the groups.
- Two new projects commenced in the last quarter:
  - o **A Place in Childhood:** longitudinal research into children and young people's experience of lockdown from March 2020. The research is concluding soon and should provide a rich source of evidence for the work of the Office.
  - o **Children's Rights Impact Assessments and Children's Rights Impact Evaluations:** this is a partnership project with the Children's Parliament, the Observatory for Children's Human Rights Scotland and Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)Sc, supporting East Lothian Council in looking at how they improve children's participation in developing its processes for those as part of their incorporation work.
- **Climate justice:** –the project had to put on hold as a result of COVID-19 response work. The work on this has now recommenced focussing on delivery plans and proposals on ways to engage with COP-26. We have submitted a joint proposal with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) to host a digital exhibition. Due to COVID-19 there is still uncertainty if COP-26 will go ahead but both offices agreed still keen to do joint work on climate justice even if it does not go ahead as it is a great opportunity for our young advisers and Northern Ireland Commissioner's office to do some collaborative work.
- **Delivery planning:** two-year delivery plan was planned but as a result of the ongoing challenges to planning from COVID-19, we are now focussing on a one-year plan for this year together with designing process for moving towards introducing a two-year plan for reporting years 2022/23 and 2023/24.

## 6. Finance:

- **End of Year Report 20/21**  
Head of Corporate Services provided an overview of the report:

- Total budget last year was £1.3m. Due to COVID-19 there has been an underspend and drawdown was £1m. SPCB has been notified and is content with the reasons for the underspend.
  - Bank balance is slightly higher than optimal. SPCB aware and content for this to remain drawn down into next financial year. Accounts will reflect that.
  - IT spend is higher than budgeted due to need to adapt equipment for working from home. SPCB advised that officeholders did not need permission to move expenditure to the capital budget in FY20/21 as an exception due to COVID-19.
  - The report excludes some transactions for March from corporate credit card spend. Those are likely to be around £500 so including those will not be a material change to the report.
- The Commissioner noted that:
- At the moment do not have tech solutions for the Young Adviser Groups and need to review this position against budget as work of the groups develops.
  - As we transition back into the office, where likely be working from the office and working from home, opportunity to use budget for tech solutions that are best for individual staff to work flexibly from both.
  - As at least half reporting year 2021/22 likely to continue to be affected by COVID-19 restrictions need to focus on learning from last year when considering budget, allocation and spend. For example, impacts on travel, so Group need to consider how much of that can drawdown and spend towards the end of the financial year.
  - **ACTION:** Recruitment - need to progress that.
    - Need to bear in mind that have a number of new staff who generally commence at the minimum pay band, which may mean that staffing budget could be artificially low, and will increase significantly as staff progress to higher pay bands.

**The Group approved the end of year 20/21 finance report.**

**7. Risk register**

The Group reviewed and discussed each of the risks in the risk register. In general, the risk register reflects the current position but there are a number of risks and mitigation that the Group agreed need to be updated.

The Head of Corporate Services noted that they are meeting with BDO UK to discuss revising the risk register. It was agreed that the Group would take advice from BDO on

how best to update the risk register overall, rather than making specific amendments to the risk register prior to that advice.

**ACTION:** It was agreed that based on that advice from BDO, SMT would hold an additional meeting to approve an updated risk register taking into consideration the contributions on amending the risk register made from the Group at this meeting.

**BREAK** (15 minutes) – The Group agreed that it would be good to trial adding space for wellbeing / mindfulness into the meetings of the Group and for SMT to consider how to roll similar initiatives out across the Office. The Group recognised that a break from a meeting, often resulted in staff going straight back to their 'desk' to do other work.

The Commissioner had benefitted from wellbeing ideas being built into a recent Healthy Minds Highland young people's event, where the event programme built in space for proper breaks, and other relaxation techniques. In line with the values of Bravery and Leadership it was agreed that the Group should try to lead by example and continue to invest developing a culture of a break meaning an actual break from work to see if this improved sense of wellbeing and effectiveness of meetings.

## **8. Children and Young People's Participation**

- **New Young Advisers Groups**

The Head of Strategy provided an overview and update on the work of the new Young Advisers Groups.

- 1) **ENYA**

This group is the most active at present as the scope was pre-agreed and a structured plan was in place with activities mapped out. The group are well underway with the programme of work.

- 2) **Governance**

This group's initial focus will be on the office's social media and child protection and safeguarding policies using targeted participation exercises. The work of this group will focus initially on those policies in order to gradually ease them into our ways of working. Following this the group will look at climate justice and developing the project proposal for the digital exhibition at COP-26. The group will also look at our internal governance policy updates.

The next meeting is in early June as most of group are going through educational assessments throughout May. We remain in touch online and using Basecamp as ways of engaging but those are deliberately light touch in May due to the pressure of assessments.

The Commissioner raised if it would be good to consider if it is feasible to include the Young Advisers Governance group in the budget planning process for financial year 2022/23.

**ACTION:** The Head of Corporate Services and the Head of Strategy would meet to discuss if there were opportunities in the budget planning process to include the young advisers.

- **Mental Health**

The group have had their introductory session but as for the reasons given above in relation to assessments the work of the group will commence in early June. In June the group will develop their project plan around what our mental health investigation should be. Strategy and Advice and Investigations are working together to pull together some initial ideas and a skeleton of a proposal to take to the group for discussion.

The Young Advisers Group from previous year who have remained on as mentors will finish in June. To mark their achievements and successes we are planning an online celebratory party, consulting with them on preferred format and dates.

- **Roadshow**

The Commissioner referred to the draft project initiation document for roadshow participation activities ideally commencing in late August, early September running over approximately a four-month period. The core ideas underlying this project:

- is to reconnect which children and young people, and professionals in the 'physical' world as COVID-19 restrictions ease
- to promote incorporation of the UNCRC and;
- to report back shared learning and ideas to feed into the work of the office. It would also be a staff team and skills building opportunity.

The idea would be to arrange around 12 – 15 trips covering a range of geographic areas. The trips would involve schools, nurseries and scheduled visits to existing events and other supported groups of children and young people, rather than being our own organised events. This would reduce the

level of risk assessment required as safeguarding and other policies should already be in place.

In terms of resources and tools for delivery this could be a whole staff team developing a series of small workshops to provide a broad toolkit of activities and practice in advance. The whole staff team could also pull together a

checklist for planning each visit, for example, which Young Advisers are in the area, who is the local MSP, media / comms etc. Disclosure checks and appropriate refresher training would be provided including, child protection and safeguarding training.

In terms of staff commitment, would ideally be two or three trips each, subject to consultation and being sensitive to staff availability. Small teams of 3-4 people and try to mix the teams for each trip to provide opportunities for staff to work with other colleagues from across the office.

The Group discussed and agreed that the idea is good and should go ahead with planning.

**ACTION:** SMT were asked to feed any specific comments on the project initiation document they have back to the Executive Assistant. The project initiation document and overview would then be presented to the staff team at an all staff meeting. The aim is for the project to commence with the staff team in early June.

## 9. Continued Professional Development

- **The Government Financial Reporting Manual (FrEM)**

The Head of Corporate Services presented to the Group on the key elements of the FReM relevant to the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, including specific guidance within the FReM relating to reporting disclosures for Annual Accounts.

The Head of Corporate Services highlighted to the Group the need to consider the links between the process for preparing the 'Annual Report and Accounts' as defined in the FReM and that for the 'Annual Report' that the Commissioner must lay before Parliament under section 10 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2003. It was noted that feedback from the auditors on the requirements under FReM is that that 'Annual Report' may require a slightly different tone of narrative, but in previous years the two had used the same narrative.

**ACTION:** The Group agreed that SMT would consider and agree the best way of taking this forward and how best to align preparing the two as part of its ongoing

discussion in terms of indicative dates and timelines for forward planning that SMT had started to map at its planning session..

The Chair thanked the Head of Corporate Services for the excellent presentation and powerpoint slide deck, which will be very useful as a reference document.

- **Executive coaching**

Governance Group agreed that would like to proceed with procuring executive coaching services for each member of SMT tailored to each member of SMT's individual needs.

**ACTION:** Executive Assistant to work with Head of Corporate Services and Head of Strategy to obtain quotes.

#### **10. Audit matters:**

- **Amendments to FReM**

The Head of Corporate Services updated the Group in relation to two amendments:

- 1) All public authorities now have to report on going concern matters. Seeking advice on how to report this.
- 2) Increased reporting on climate emissions. Corporate Services have a project in relation to this. The Group noted the need to consider this in event and travel plans.

#### **11. Employee handbook**

In final phase, this will be approved by end of May.

#### **12. Absence reporting during COVID-19**

**ACTION:** Due to time constraints on the agenda, it was agreed by the Group to take this agenda item as an action to discuss and agree.

#### **13. Any other business**

None.

#### **14. Reflections on meeting**

The Group reflected on the meeting. Overall, felt that it had been a productive meeting and remained focussed on the agenda. Enjoyed the introduction of the wellbeing break concept. Learning for future meetings is that it is a very full agenda and that be good to be more mindful of indicative timings for each agenda item and / or if should be taken as separate meeting to keep to time. For the purposes of the minutes ideally if the Group or the Chair could summarise decisions or actions at the end of each agenda item as appropriate.

**CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

Title	Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland
Name	Bruce Adamson
Signature	
Date	29 July 2021