

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held at Homerton on Wednesday 27th April 2022 at 7.30pm

Present

Isa Garcia Crestani, Stefania Deidda, Sam Garyali (from 7.45pm), Tandy Harrison, Elizabeth Head (until 8.15pm), Suzy Hughes, Ken Ong (Chair), Mitali Peckham, Alex Pearson (Head) and Surabhi Singh

Present by invitation: Sue Smith

Governors' challenge highlighted in green

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Ken welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially those who were attending a meeting in person for the first time. Apologies for absence were received from Roger Lilley.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of 16th March 2022

The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 16th March 2022 were approved as a correct record. Governors thanked Surabhi for the presentations she had given at the last two meetings on safeguarding and the Prevent duty.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 16th March 2022

- a) **Health and Safety visit** – Alex would contact Mick to arrange a Health and Safety visit this term.

**Alex/
Mick**

5. Governor Vacancies

Amy Mehta had decided to step down from her post as one of the parent governors. An election process had just started and it was hoped that a new parent governor would be in post in time for the July Governing Body meeting.

Sue Smith had left her post as Office Manager at the end of the spring term and had stood down as staff governor. Governors noted that Suzy Hughes, the new Office Manager, had been nominated as the new staff governor. Governors welcomed Suzy to the Governing Body.

Gwyneth

6. Head's Report

Alex briefed Governors on a number of issues:

- a) **Children** – The Centre was full at present. All places in The Nest had been offered for September 2022. However, 35 of the 96 places in the nursery were currently unfilled for September 2022. This was a higher number of unfilled places than at the same time in 2021, which also had been unusually slow to fill and when there had been approximately 20 unfilled places for September 2021.

Governors discussed a number of advertising activities that were planned or underway, including:

- Information on Homerton's Facebook and Twitter
- An advert in the weekly Queen Edith's News e-mail

- Posters for display both outdoors and at internal locations. Governors agreed to help with putting up posters and suggested a number of locations, including on lampposts along school run routes; the City Council’s noticeboard on Wulfstan Way; at the Hands on the Circle group in Trumpington; and at Addenbrooke’s. Mitali would provide posters, laminated if they would be displayed outdoors.
- Promoting Homerton via local school and parenting WhatsApp groups. Mitali would also provide a separate digital version of the advert.
- An open day on Saturday 14th May 2022, when families would be able to look around the Centre.

**Mitali/
All
Governors**

Mitali/All

b) Staffing – Governors noted that:

- Homerton’s caretaker, Roy Stamp, would be retiring at the end of term. Governors discussed options for covering his work. Roy currently worked from 7.00am to 10.00am, Monday to Friday, 52 weeks a year. He covered a wide range of tasks including opening up the Centre; day to day handyman tasks; liaising with contractors; and overseeing a rolling programme of maintenance work such as painting. It was especially helpful that Roy worked during the school holidays, a key time for maintenance work but when other staff were not around.

It was suggested that Roy might be difficult to replace as most schools tended not to have caretakers any more, but rather had site officers who primarily opened and closed the building and called in contractors for other tasks. Governors felt that this arrangement would be less effective for Homerton. Concern was also expressed that it would not be appropriate for other existing staff to take on all of Roy’s current responsibilities.

It was therefore agreed that the Centre should advertise and recruit a new caretaker if possible. Alex was also asked to contact other local schools to see if any still had a traditional caretaker who might be willing to take on additional hours at Homerton.

Alex

- One member of the office staff was absent with Covid. Governors thanked Suzy for her efforts to cover the work. Sue Smith was coming in for one day a week during the summer term to help with handover of the Office Manager role.

Generally, Covid rates were lower than before Easter, when a total of 15 staff had tested positive. However, the local authority had warned schools that there could be a spike in cases two weeks after coming back from the Easter holidays.

c) Events and activities – Governors noted that:

- Living eggs were in the library and eight chicks had hatched.
- The core book was currently *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* and a bear hunt event would be taking place with parents.
- Trips for all children to Nightingale Park would take place in June.
- The Really Wheelie event would take place in the second half of the summer term. Elizabeth and Tandy would help with this. They agreed to liaise with Alex to confirm the date.

**Elizabeth/
Tandy/
Alex**

d) Parents – Responses to the parent survey had been compiled and circulated with the agenda. Governors noted that these were mostly highly positive, with some parents commenting about not being able to come into the Centre. This had continued to be a challenge in the spring term because of the surge in Covid cases, but was now improving

with events such as the Eggstravaganza and the cake stall, which had raised £550 for Ukraine.

- e) **Centre Development Plan (CDP) and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF)** – Governors noted good progress against the aims set out in these documents.

7. Update from Curriculum Committee

The minutes of the Curriculum Committee meeting held on 31st March 2022 were received. Tandy drew Governors' attention to the following:

- a) **Updated policies** – The Committee had approved the Personal, Social, Emotional Development (PSED), Physical Development and Understanding the World policies, which had been updated in line with the revised Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

- b) **Governor visits** – Catch-up with Governor visits was needed, since visits had not been possible for some time due to Covid. Tandy urged all Governors to visit the Centre, if not for a formal visit then to read, talk to or observe the children and to talk to staff. It was noted that:

- Tandy would be making her annual visit on children with additional needs on 16th May 2022 and would be meeting with Bernie Cafferkey, the SENCo, as well as observing children.
- Stefania and Isa were both visiting to share stories and language games.
- Tandy and Eirini would be visiting to find out about Planning in the Moment. Tandy would contact Eirini to arrange a date for this.
- Elizabeth would be visiting to learn about helicopter stories.
- The Curriculum Committee had discussed the use of children's special books and how they might be refined to track children's progress even more effectively, without this becoming too onerous for staff. Tandy asked if Governors, especially those not on Curriculum Committee, might like to come in specifically to look at this issue and give their views.

**Tandy/
Eirini**

**All
Governors**

It was noted that after a formal visit, Governors were asked to complete a report to share with the Governing Body. A template was available for this, which Alex would circulate to all Governors. It was suggested that Governors might also like to write a brief paragraph after more informal visits, setting out their observations. It was also suggested that Governors' reports and findings could be published on the website. This would be good evidence of Governors' involvement in day to day life at Homerton and could be a useful source of information for parents wanting to find out more about specific subjects and about Homerton in general.

- c) **Music teacher** – The Committee had discussed whether Homerton should seek a music teacher as a successor to Rachel Rigby. All Governors agreed that music sessions had been a key part of life at Homerton and helped all children's development; in addition, small group sessions had been used specifically to support children with additional needs. It was noted that provision had been made in the proposed 2022/23 budget for a music teacher, although not for small group work. Governors agreed that Homerton should continue to make enquiries to try to find a suitable person. Some suggestions were made.

8. **Safeguarding** – Ken noted that there were no safeguarding issues to report. As Lead and Deputy Lead Governors for Child Protection and Safeguarding, Ken and Surabhi would liaise with Alex to arrange the annual visit on a Thursday or Friday in the summer term.

**Ken/
Surabhi/
Alex**

9. Update from Resources Committee

The minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 22nd April 2022 were received.

a) **Budget** – Ken introduced the budget papers and set out a financial overview. Governors reviewed the following points:

- In the 2021/22 financial year, Homerton had made a loss of £28,000. This was largely in the Nest, £27,000, with a loss of £1,000 in the nursery. Overall, this loss was £10,000 less than had been anticipated at the start of the year, as income had been higher than predicted. However, costs had also been higher than predicted, relating to Covid, children with additional needs and rising costs of living.
- A deficit of £68,000 was predicted for 2022/23, with a £27,000 deficit in the Nest and a £41,000 deficit in the nursery.
- The deficit for the nursery was based on current take-up for September 2022, with 35 places still vacant. Each of these places filled from September 2022 would bring in approximately £2,000 to April 2023, helping to reduce the deficit. Other possibilities that could help to address the nursery deficit included additional SEND income – in 2021/22, SEND income had been £12,000 higher than predicted due to exceptional numbers of children with SEND; and additional parental contributions – in 2021/22, these had also been higher than anticipated. However, these measures would not help to address the deficit in the Nest; and historically, Homerton had not been permitted to subsidise the Nest using income from the nursery.
- Indications from the local authority were that it would be acceptable to set a deficit budget for 2022/23, provided that a three-year plan for financial recovery was also submitted.
- Homerton had a historic carry forward, which provided a buffer but had reduced substantially in recent years, by £136,000 in 2020/21 due to the impact of Covid and by £28,000 in 2021/22.

Given the above information, Ken outlined the three main options open to Governors: to submit a budget with the full deficit; to take steps fully to eliminate the deficit, which could include redundancies; or to take steps to reduce the deficit by increasing income. Governors agreed that redundancies should not be considered at this stage. Governors considered a number of measures to reduce the deficit by increasing income.

Fees

Governors were reminded that the Governing Body had previously agreed at the meeting held on 7th February 2022 that hourly fees should be increased from September 2022, from £7.50 to £8.50 for the Nest and from £6.50 to £7.00 for the nursery. These fee increases had been included in the budget proposals for 2022/23. However, Resources Committee had proposed that these increases be revisited, given the rising costs of salaries, National Insurance contributions, utilities and food, and the deficits totalling £68,000 still projected for 2022/23. A paper had been circulated to all Governors with amended proposals for increases from September 2022.

Governors noted that the proposed further increases would make Homerton's fees similar to those currently charged by Brunswick, the nearest maintained nursery school. Other providers' charges might be lower as they did not employ teachers.

Governors agreed that it was appropriate to increase fees, given that fees had not been increased in recent years; the losses sustained in 2020/21 and 2021/22; the rising costs faced by Homerton; and the projected deficits for 2022/23. Governors agreed that the increases should be set out to parents before the start of the year, not made in-year. They

also asked Alex to make clear to parents when communicating these increases the reasons for them and to continue to emphasise Homerton's unique offer. **Alex**

With these points in mind, Governors agreed to make the following fee increases from September 2022:

	Current charge (previous proposed change for September 2022)	Amended charge from September 2022
Nursery lunches	£9.00 (£9.50)	£10.00
Nest lunches	£10.00 (£11.00)	£11.50
Evening care	£15.00 (£16.00)	£17.50
Nursery hourly rate	£6.50 (£7.00)	£7.50
Nest hourly rate	£7.50 (£8.50)	£9.00

Settling in period

Governors noted that at present, children joining the Nest were charged only for the hours they attended during the settling in period. This system was complicated and costly to administer and meant that Homerton lost potential income during the time children took to settle. Governors considered whether families should be charged full costs from the child's start date, as was practice elsewhere. However, some Governors felt uncomfortable with this, given that some children attended for shorter sessions on teachers' advice, not at parents' request.

Following discussion, it was agreed that charges should be made for the hours attended for three weeks from a child's start date, following which full charges would apply, even if some children took longer to settle. Governors asked for this to be made clear in the information provided to prospective Nest parents.

**Suzy/
Alex**

Rising 3 year olds

Alex explained a proposal that subject to appropriate staffing ratios, children who would turn 3 in the first autumn half-term should start in the nursery, rather than the Nest. This would enable the children to settle from the offset in their nursery room and would free up spaces in the Nest for fee-paying children.

Governors accepted this proposal but asked Curriculum Committee to consider the implications of children spending six terms in the nursery, in particular whether it would be appropriate to have a two-year rather than a one-year rolling programme.

**Tandy/
Mitali**

In conclusion, Governors noted that Homerton was required to submit its budget proposals for 2022/23 to the local authority by 6th May 2022. Ray Byford, the local authority's Finance officer, would be visiting the following week to help finalise the proposals.

It was agreed:

To approve the budget for 2022/23 as circulated, subject to any amendments required by the decisions made above relating to fees, the settling in period and rising 3 year olds; and to advice received from the local authority's Finance officer.

- b) Heating and lighting** – Governors had been advised at the previous meeting of funding offered by central and local government to replace heating and lighting at Homerton, with Homerton asked to make a contribution of £23,025. The Centre would retain a gas boiler but as much of the heating as possible would be from an air heat source pump. The lighting would be switched to LED lighting and photovoltaic panels would be installed on the roof, the electricity from which would be used in part to power the air heat source pump.

Since the last meeting, Bouygues, the contractor, had visited to make a technical assessment and had found that repairs to the roof would be needed to support the weight of the photovoltaic panels. A further inspection of the roof was due to take place the following day. The local authority had agreed to meet the cost of the repairs. However, the additional work would increase the time needed to complete the overall project, which was now expected to extend into the first two weeks of September. Children would not be at the Centre during this time, as staff would be carrying out home visits.

Governors welcomed the project but agreed that the work would require careful scheduling to minimise the impact on staff and children. Governors asked who would be responsible for overseeing the contractors working on site and for health and safety. Alex explained that this would be the responsibility of Bouygues and the local authority. Sam asked if, given his professional experience, he could visit while the work was taking place; this was welcomed by Governors. It was also noted that Roy, the caretaker, had already agreed to stay on until the beginning of September to act as a point of contact for people working on the site. Given the new proposed extension of the work into the first two weeks of September, Governors asked Alex to see if Roy would be willing to stay on until the work was complete.

Sam

Alex

10. Any Other Urgent Matters – none.

11. Thanks to Sue Smith

Ken paid tribute to Sue Smith, who had stepped down as Office Manager at the end of the spring term, concluding a 21-year career at Homerton. He led Governors in thanking Sue for her clear and calm professionalism and, on behalf of the Governing Body, presented her with a card and gifts.

12. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next Governing Body meeting would take place on Tuesday 12th July 2022 at 7.30pm at Homerton.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.