

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on Zoom on Wednesday 15th March 2023 at 7.30pm

Present

Isa Garcia Crestani, Stefania Deidda, Sam Garyali, Tandy Harrison, Elizabeth Head, Suzy Hughes, Roger Lilley, Ken Ong (Chair), Alex Pearson (Head) and Mitali Peckham
Clerk: Gwyneth Barton

Governors' challenge highlighted in green

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Ken welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Eirini Gkouskou, Mick Patel and Rob Payne.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of 6th February 2023

The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 6th February 2023 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 6th February 2023

a) Schools Financial Value Statement (SFVS) – Ken confirmed that the SFVS had been submitted to the local authority following the last Governing Body meeting.

All other matters arising were covered on the agenda.

5. Governance – Co-opted Governor

Governors were advised that Sam Garyali's term of office as a co-opted governor was due to end on 25th March 2023. As Sam was willing to continue, Governors thanked him and agreed unanimously to appoint him to another four-year term of office. Gwyneth would e-mail him the paperwork relating to his reappointment.

**Gwyneth/
Sam**

6. Head's Report

Alex briefed Governors on a number of issues:

a) Children – Governors noted that:

- The Centre was currently full. For September 2023, there were only 9 places left in the nursery and the Nest would be full.
- The YMCA nursery at Blinco Grove was experiencing staffing difficulties and was having to close fully on some days and early on others. Homerton had received a number of e-mails from families with children at the YMCA asking if spaces were available. Homerton was full at present but this could be relevant in the future.

Governors recognised that staffing was a challenge across the early years sector. Ken reported that another local childcare provision was currently operating to only limited capacity as it did not have enough staff to take on more children.

b) Staffing – Governors noted that:

- Two members of staff were on long-term sick leave but it was hoped that they would return to work early next term.
- Homerton was currently advertising one lunchtime staff vacancy. In the short term the vacancy was being covered, but it would be useful to recruit a new member of staff for September.
- The Centre was also advertising for a Level 2/3 qualified member of staff for holiday club. A former teacher trainee at Homerton had expressed interest and would be coming for interview. Governors noted that holiday club needed four members of staff because of the 1:4 staffing ratio needed for two-year-olds. The aim was to have two members of staff for two-year-olds and two for three-year-olds.
- Staff were also being sought for evening care in Owlets. This was being managed at present with help from two Duke of Edinburgh volunteers and a teacher trainee from the Faculty of Education, plus staff family members, but again it would be useful to make a substantive appointment. Application forms had been sent to two sixth form students who had expressed interest. Once these had been followed up, Alex would consider whether it would be useful to advertise more widely at Hills Road, Long Road and Cambridge Regional College.
- A successful session on wellbeing had been attended jointly with the other nursery schools on 20th February 2023. Bernie Cafferkey had attended a Virtual Schools Conference and was studying for a qualification in senior leadership. Alex, Mitali and Michelle Cooper were also undertaking leadership training. Alex had attended a Safer Recruitment refresher training course on 1st March 2023. Staff were being encouraged to work towards NVQ Levels 2 and 3 in Childcare where appropriate, as this would strengthen Homerton's overall position. Governors noted that these qualifications could be completed with online providers.
- A PGCE student would be working in West Room for 10 weeks. A student from the Essex SCITT (School-Centred Initial Teacher Training) would be in the Nest for one week. Two Duke of Edinburgh students were currently volunteering and one Cambridge Regional College student would be completing a 30-hour placement in the Nest, with another coming in June. Mitali had been working with a PhD student researching interactive reading apps and three families had given consent for their children to be videoed and interviewed.

Alex

Governors welcomed this wide range of activities and commended Homerton's return to its pre-pandemic training offer.

c) Events – Governors noted that:

- Staff had put on a very successful Goldilocks play, which the children had loved. It was planned to arrange a similar event in the summer term.
- The language of the half-term was Italian and a number of parents, including Stefania, had come to Homerton to share stories and cooking.
- Today was the Persian festival of Nowruz, celebrating the arrival of spring, and a parent had visited the Nest to share activities with children.
- A parent workshop on communication, language and literacy had been run in February and had been welcomed by the 12 parents attending.

- Parent consultations for nursery children were currently taking place. The equivalent for Nest children, based on the 2½-year-old check, would be taking place in the summer term.
- A cake sale had taken place that day and had raised over £400. The proceeds would be split equally between Homerton and the Save the Children relief work following the earthquake in Turkey and Syria.
- The Eggstravaganza parent event would be taking place on 22nd March 2023. Children had been watching chicks hatch, with 9 out of 10 eggs hatching successfully.

- d) **Property issues** – A safety rail was being fitted retrospectively to the Centre’s roof over the weekend of 18th-19th March 2023. The local authority would be paying for this. Over the same weekend, the caretaker’s hut would be relocated to make way for the air source heat pump. Plans were on track to install the air source heat pump over the summer.

Alex, Suzy and the caretaker, Bob Negus, had met earlier that day with representatives of Homerton’s new property management company, Cath Conlon, who would be taking on property management for all six Cambridgeshire nursery schools from April. The outgoing property company had visited the previous day to complete a fire safety maintenance report, free of charge.

- e) **Centre Development Plan (CDP) and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF)** – Progress against the CDP and SEF was on track.

- f) **Open morning** – Governors discussed the open morning currently planned for Saturday 22nd April 2023. This event had first been held in May 2022, when take-up of places for September 2022 had been low. Governors discussed whether it was still needed in the current year, when there were only 9 places left in the nursery for September 2023 and the Nest would be full. Concern was expressed that an open morning this year could generate demand for places that Homerton would be unable to meet. However, it was also noted that the previous year’s event had helped to raise Homerton’s profile more generally and had been attended by parents looking ahead to future years and parents with children who already had a place for later that year, who had welcomed the opportunity to get to know Homerton better.

Governors considered possible alternative timings of such an event, either much earlier in the school year, in the autumn term or early spring, or later, in July. Alex noted that there were some benefits to the April timing, including the more even distribution of demands made of staff and the better weather and appearance of the garden and Old Orchard.

It was agreed that Alex and the staff would decide shortly whether the planned event on 22nd April 2023 would go ahead. If it did, care would be taken to word publicity appropriately as the availability of places.

Alex

7. Safeguarding

Ken noted that there were no safeguarding issues to report.

8. Policy Review

Governors reviewed a number of policies:

- a) **Grievance Policy** – Alex explained that this was a standard policy provided by EPM, which now included a section on collective grievances. Governors agreed to approve the policy, subjecting to confirming on page 4, section 3.3.1, that if a grievance has not been

resolved to the employee's satisfaction they may appeal in writing, to the Clerk of Governors, setting out the grounds of their appeal, within 10 working days of receiving the written confirmation of the original decision. **Alex**

- b) **Debt Recovery Policy** – This was a new policy prepared as a result of advice received during the recent local authority financial audit. The draft had been reviewed by Resources Committee, who had recommended that it be confirmed by the full Governing Body.

Governors noted that there would continue to be some leeway in the early stages of applying the policy, enabling staff to take into account families' individual circumstances. However, under the third bullet point, if no payment was received within 3 months of an invoice first being sent and the amount owing was more than £250, the requirement to refer the matter to the local authority's debt recovery team could not be waived.

Governors agreed to approve the policy. **Alex**

- c) **Twitter Policy** – Mitali asked Governors to defer review of this policy. She explained that it had first been written at the start of the pandemic and needed to be updated to reflect changing circumstances and Homerton's use of other social media such as Facebook and Instagram. She explained that this was not covered by existing policy on social media, which focussed on appropriate use by staff as individuals. **Mitali**

- d) **Best Value Statement** – This was approved by Governors. Alex would arrange for Ken to sign a paper copy. **Alex/
Ken**

- e) **Financial Responsibilities & Health and Safety Policy** – These two documents had been circulated after the main agenda. It was agreed to defer them to the next Governing Body meeting to allow Governors more time to read them. **Alex/
Gwyneth**

9. **Update from Curriculum Committee**

Tandy advised that there had not been a Curriculum Committee meeting since the last Governing Body meeting, but that the Committee was due to meet on 23rd March 2023.

She and Rob would be carrying out a joint Governor visit on 20th March 2023 on support for children with additional needs. Bernie Cafferkey would be inviting Tandy and Rob to review the SEND Policy with her, prior to this policy coming to the April Governing Body meeting. **Alex**

Tandy thanked Alex and staff for all of the curriculum-enriching activities Alex had described in her Head's report.

10. **Update from Resources Committee**

The minutes of the Resources Committee meetings held on 1st March 2023 were received. Roger noted that most of the points covered by the Committee had already been discussed. The following points were highlighted:

- a) **Holiday club** – It had been agreed to raise the hourly charge by £0.50 for nursery children so that both two- and three-year-olds would be paying £9.00 from July onwards, to help cover the cost of the fourth member of staff needed.
- b) **Loan agreement** – Ken reported that since the Resources Committee meeting, he had signed the loan agreement with the local authority relating to the air source heat pump. He shared the costs of the project with Governors, as set out below:

Total Capital Cost of the Works	£308,663
Public Sector Decarbonisation Phase 3 Grant Funding	£122,791
(less Works Contract Fee)	-£164
Council Capital Contribution – Decarbonisation Fund	£93,832
Council Capital Contribution – Education Capital (gas boiler equivalent cost)	£35,488
Net Cost After Grant & Capital Contribution (2.25% fixed interest)	£56,716

Governors commented that the cost to Homerton of £56,716 was very reasonable, given the total cost of the works, and compared favourably with the costs the Centre would otherwise have incurred to replace its traditional boiler.

11. Budget Reports

The March budget reports had been published after the Resources Committee meeting and had been circulated with the Governing Body agenda. Governors discussed the following points:

- Overall, the end of year carry forward was expected to be £66,000, lower than the £90,000 previously anticipated.
- Ken drew attention to the Fund 01 funding instalment received from the local authority, the revenue funding received per child in the nursery. The 2022/23 budget had been set on the basis that this would be £495,319. To date, only £395,705 had been received, with the outturn figure expected to be £436,982, a shortfall of £58,337 against the original budget. Concern was expressed that this was a significant shortfall that, if correct, would have a substantial impact on the Centre’s financial situation. Governors noted that the Fund 01 funding would also be much lower than the sums received in previous years, £515k in 2021/22, £489k in 2020/21 and £498k in 2019/20. Alex and Suzy were asked to check the figure with Ray Byford, the local authority financial advisor, as a matter of urgency. They noted that they would be meeting with him on 20th March 2023 and agreed to raise this with him then. Alex/Suzy
- An announcement was expected imminently on Government funding for maintained nursery schools for 2023/24. The Governing Body expressed concern that Homerton’s diminishing carry forward meant that without additional funding, the Centre’s long-term finances would not be sustainable.

12. Any Other Urgent Matters

- a) **Chancellor’s Budget statement** – The Chancellor’s Budget statement earlier that day had included an expansion of the 30-hour offer to include one- and two-year-olds. Proposals also included changing the staff to child ratio for two-year-olds from 1:4 to 1:5, if providers wished.

Governors expressed concern at how the expanded 30-hour offer would be funded, given the current discrepancy between funding and actual cost of places for three- and four-year-olds. Concern was also expressed that the change to staffing ratios for two-year-olds could compromise children’s safety. The Governing Body agreed to continue to review the situation as more detailed information became available.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next Governing Body meeting would take place on Wednesday 26th April 2023 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 8.40pm.