

## **Homerton Early Years Centre**

### **Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held at Homerton on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 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), Mitali Peckham and Surabhi Singh

Clerk: Gwyneth Barton

By invitation via Zoom: Ray Byford

#### 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 and Mick Patel.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3. Minutes of 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023 were approved as a correct record.

#### **4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

a) **Financial documents** – Ken confirmed that he had signed a paper copy of the Best Value Statement. Governors noted that the Debt Recovery Policy did not need to be submitted to the local authority.

b) **Chancellor's Budget statement** – No further information had been received about the proposed expansion of the 30-hour offer to include one- and two-year-olds. However, many working in the sector had expressed concern that this would be very challenging to deliver.

All other matters arising were covered on the agenda.

Ray Byford, the local authority financial adviser, joined the meeting on Zoom. Governors agreed to take the budget items next.

#### **5. 2022/23 Outturn Report**

Governors received the 2022/23 outturn report. The final outturn was a deficit of £18,000. This compared well with both the budget set at the beginning of the year, which had anticipated a deficit of £96,000, and the deficit forecasts reported to the February and March Governing Body meetings, £50,000 and £70,000.

Ken reported that the reduction to local authority income raised at the previous meeting had been investigated. It had been confirmed that this was £40,000 less than had been budgeted and £40,000 less than in 2021/22. The reduction was due in part to lower numbers of children in the nursery in the autumn term and in part to a change in the collection of the census data on which income was based.

Alex explained that previously, the number of children in the Centre had been counted termly. They were now counted weekly and children were counted only if they were taking up their full entitlement that week. This meant that children were not counted during the weeks of home visits and staggered intake at the start of the autumn term, even though they were on Homerton's pupil roll. In practice this meant that Homerton

had not received full funding for all nursery children until the start of October. Ray Byford confirmed that this counting method now applied to maintained nursery schools and to maintained nursery classes in primary schools.

Governors expressed concern that this method did not take into account the time spent by staff at the start of term preparing for children to join and getting to know them, nor did it recognise the practical, educational and emotional benefits of bringing children in in small groups. It was also unfair that primary schools were not penalised for staggered intakes, nor secondary schools for the time at the end of the summer term when students were not in school after exams.

It was agreed that Alex and the staff would work with the Curriculum Committee to consider whether changes could be made to reduce the financial loss at the start of the autumn term, without adversely affecting children's and staff members' well-being.

**Alex/  
Tandy**

It was also agreed that Alex would contact Beatrice Merrick at Early Education to see if this issue could be raised at a national level.

**Alex**

Governors welcomed the reduced deficit but asked why it was less than had been expected, even in relation to the forecasts received at the February and March Governing Body meetings. It was explained that the main reasons for the reduced deficit were:

- Higher than anticipated community-focussed school facilities income, which related to additional hours taken up by families in the Nest, Owlets and holiday club, and lower than anticipated costs in these areas.
- Higher than anticipated funding for SEND, £40,000 instead of £25,000.

Ray Byford would work with staff at Homerton to produce more accurate in-year budget forecasts prior to the actual outturn.

Taking into account the deficit, Governors noted that the end of year carry forward was £120,000, a reduction from £137,000 at the end of 2021/22.

## **6. 2023/24 Budget**

Two versions of the proposed 2023/24 budget had been circulated with the agenda. Alex explained that the difference related to one teaching post. A teacher had handed in her notice and would be leaving at the end of the academic year. She worked 0.6 full time equivalent and was on the teachers' upper pay scale 1. The two papers circulated were based on two options to cover her workload from September 2023:

- By replacing the current post with a 0.6 full time equivalent post at a lower level, main pay scale 3. This option had a projected end of year deficit of £73,700.
- By not appointing but distributing the workload between existing staff. This option had a projected end of year deficit of £58,300.

Alex also proposed a third option: as with option 1, to appoint a teacher at main pay scale 3, but 0.45 or 0.5 full time equivalent and on a one-year contract. This would reduce the end of year deficit forecast for the option including a reappointment, potentially from £73,700 to £68,000. Governors noted that in future years the impact of any decisions would be greater as they would run for the full financial year, whereas in 2023/24 they would run only from September to March. A one-year contract would allow flexibility to re-evaluate the financial position without making a long-term commitment.

Governors expressed concern that not appointing would increase the workload of existing staff, potentially increasing both their stress and the risk that they might also choose to leave Homerton. This option would also mean that children in the nursery had fewer hours with teachers' expertise and more covered by teaching assistants.

Governors heard from Ray Byford, who recommended appointing as it would be very difficult to reinstate a deleted post in future. He supported the use of a one-year contract, leaving flexibility for review in April 2024, and also welcomed Alex's suggestion of a 0.45 or 0.5 FTE instead of a 0.6, which would reduce costs.

Alex explained that she had a candidate in mind for the appointment, who had acted very capably to help cover long-term sick leave. If appointed this person's post would need to be back-filled, but this was likely to be easier than finding an external applicant for the teaching contract being offered.

Governors thanked Alex and Ray for their advice and agreed to approve the appointment of a replacement teacher at main pay scale 3 for one year at 0.45 or 0.5 FTE at Alex's discretion. Subject to amendment to reflect this decision, Governors otherwise approved the budget as circulated.

**Ray/  
Alex**

Ray Byford ended his Zoom call at 8.10pm.

## **7. 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 7 places left in the nursery and the Nest was expected to be full.
- For the first time, holiday club had been run across two rooms, with 2-year-olds in South and 3- and 4-year-olds in West, with the connecting door opened to bring both groups together for some parts of the day. This approach had been very successful and would be used again in future.
- The open morning had taken place on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2023 and had been attended by 37 families, double the number of the previous year. Alex thanked all who had helped out, both staff and Governors. It had been very useful to have people stationed around the Centre so that families could stop and chat if they wished. Governors thanked all those who had taken part and agreed that the event had been very useful and could be run again in future years.

### **b) Staffing – Governors noted that:**

- A new teaching assistant had started in the Nest and was settling in well.
- One member of staff who had been on long-term sick leave was back on a phased return. Another was signed off until the end of the month but was also then hoping to start a phased return.
- A new lunchtime supervisor would be starting at Homerton shortly.
- One member of the lunchtime staff who also worked as a teaching assistant would be leaving to work for Bright Horizons nursery, who would be paying for her to study for a Level 3 qualification. Alex also reported that a new nursery off Mill Road, N Family, was offering a £1,000 joining bonus for new staff.

Governors noted that one member of staff currently at Homerton was funding her own Level 3 qualification. Tandy reported that Curriculum Committee had discussed

the scope for Homerton to support staff to work towards Level 3, since not all were able to self-fund. Alex explained that staff could be eligible for a grant if their household income was less than £27,000. The cost of the qualification was £4-5,000. It would be complicated for Homerton to fund staff, as all eligible staff would have to be offered the same opportunity. For Homerton to benefit, a contract could be put in place requiring qualified staff to continue to work at the Centre for a number of years after qualification. However, for this to be effective, Homerton would have to be able to guarantee future employment, which was problematic given the long-term financial uncertainty faced by maintained nursery schools.

- It might be necessary to find up to three new 1:1 teaching assistants from September 2023, to replace staff who were changing role or leaving Homerton. Some of the current lunchtime supervisors might be interested in taking on these roles. They would need training but not formal qualifications.

- c) **Parent survey** – A small number of responses (11) had been received to the recent parent survey, which had been circulated on paper and electronically. It was suggested that the survey could be promoted in future years using the parent WhatsApp groups. **Alex/  
Parent  
governors**

Most responses were very positive. One parent had commented that they did not feel minority cultures and languages were celebrated at Homerton. This comment had been discussed at Curriculum Committee and it had been agreed that an informal session would be arranged one morning after drop-off, for which families would be invited to bring an artefact linked to their cultural background and to share this with the children. **Alex**

- d) **Events** – Governors noted that:

- The Eggstravaganza parent event had taken place on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023 and had been well attended despite pouring rain.
- A plant stall had been held that day and had raised £116.
- The Really Wheelie event would be taking place on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023. Isa and Stefania agreed to help out. **Isa/  
Stefania**

- e) **Property issues** – A safety rail had been fitted to the Centre’s roof over the weekend of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The solar panels had not yet been fitted. The expectation was still that the air source heat pump would be fitted over the summer, with components due to be delivered in July.

- f) **Centre Development Plan (CDP)** – Progress against the CDP was on track. Under ‘Wider community’, Governors agreed that a wider community event in the summer term was not needed, given both the success of the recent open morning and the range of activities that would be organised for children and families currently in the Centre.

## 8. **Update from Curriculum Committee**

The minutes of the Curriculum Committee meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023 were received. Tandy highlighted the following points:

- a) **Governor visit on SEND** – Tandy and Rob had carried out a joint Governor visit on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023 on support for children with additional needs. They had met with Bernie Cafferkey, Homerton’s SENCo, and had observed a child receiving 1:1 support in the Nest. They would be returning to observe two children being supported in the nursery, neither of whom had been present on the day of their visit.

Tandy commented that the visit had been very encouraging, with the SENCo having clear processes in place and being well supported by the leadership team. It was also good to

see external professionals coming into Homerton to see children, after the hiatus caused by the pandemic.

Governors noted that the number of children with SEND currently at Homerton was similar to the previous year, but had risen significantly in the recent years before this. Governors asked whether it was possible or appropriate to cap the number of children with SEND at the Centre. Tandy noted that Curriculum Committee had discussed this. Where children's needs were known in advance, Homerton planned to help ensure a balanced, harmonious and safe setting for all, with the aim of having no more than one child in each class requiring 1:1 teaching assistant support. However, last year two more children had been identified after joining as having significant needs, requiring two more 1:1 TAs. Governors noted that schools could not refuse to accept a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) unless they did not have a 1:1 TA available, in which case the local authority could provide one to enable the child to be placed.

Governors noted that it could be challenging to obtain EHCPs for children during their short time at Homerton before they moved to Reception, especially if their needs had not been identified prior to coming. However, Tandy commended Bernie's efforts as SENCo to ensure this was achieved if appropriate.

Tandy confirmed that she and Rob would circulate their report to Governors in due course, together with useful information provided by Bernie about the numbers of children receiving SEND support at Homerton and the pathway followed in assessing children's need and accessing support.

Tandy encouraged all Governors to take part in visits or to come and spend time in classrooms. It was agreed that Tandy, Elizabeth and Isa would come for a visit at the end of June to look at music provision.

**Tandy/  
Elizabeth/  
Isa**

- b) End of year reports** – Curriculum Committee had discussed the format of children's end of year reports and how this might be changed to reduce staff members' administrative workloads, especially given the other processes in place to share feedback with parents, including the children's special books.

As an update, Alex reported that this had been discussed at a recent staff meeting and two possible new formats shared. As there had been no overall consensus on which to adopt, it had been agreed that classes would decide individually whether to continue with the existing format or to adopt one of the new ones. Feedback would be sought from parents on which they preferred.

**Alex**

- c) Assessment of progress** – The Committee had reviewed Homerton's approach to assessing children's progress, using the EYFS assessment framework. In previous years, baseline assessments had been made in the autumn term, mid-year assessments in the spring term and end of year assessments in the summer term. Governors noted that the age bands in the EYFS framework were now so broad, 0-3 years and 3-4 years, that the spring term assessment had limited value. Governors agreed that the formal spring term assessment should be discontinued, with review in this term instead taking place via the spring term meetings with parents.

**Alex**

## **9. Safeguarding**

Ken noted that there were no safeguarding issues to report.

## **10. Policy Review**

Governors discussed a number of policies:

- a) Twitter Policy** – Mitali explained that she was still working on this policy, which would encompass Homerton's professional use of all social media, including Facebook and

Instagram as well as Twitter. She had done considerable research but had found that the local authority did not have a model policy on schools' use of social media, nor did the schools she had contacted have policies in place. Governors noted that Bernie Cafferkey's son worked in this field and had offered to meet Mitali to talk through some of the issues. Sam offered to send Mitali his company's policy as an example.

Sam

Governors thanked Mitali for her work on this to date.

- b) **Health and Safety Policy** – Ken reminded the Governing Body that Governors were ultimately responsible for health and safety within the Centre. Mick was the Lead Governor for Health and Safety, with Sam as his Deputy. Alex agreed to contact Mick and Sam to arrange the annual Health and Safety Governor visit during the coming term.

Alex/  
Mick/Sam

In answer to a question, Alex noted that Homerton's property management company had just carried out a full fire safety check. Staff would receive fire safety refresher training on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and there were regular fire drills.

It was agreed to approve the Health and Safety Policy as circulated.

- c) **SEND Policy** – The SEND Policy was approved as circulated. On page 2, Governors noted that if the local authority decided to issue an Education Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan), they had 20 weeks to do this from receipt of the initial request. Governors commented that the 20 weeks allowed to the local authority contributed significantly to the challenge of obtaining EHCPs for children during their time at Homerton, as discussed above.

- d) **Financial Responsibilities** – Suzy queried some of the responsibilities allocated to the Governing Body, including ensuring job descriptions were in accordance with the Financial Procedures Manual and authorising the disposal of write-off stock. She suggested that these would be more appropriately allocated to the Head or Office Manager. It was agreed that Alex and Suzy would bring this document to Resources Committee for more detailed consideration, together with the relevant manual.

Alex/Suzy/  
Roger

## 11. Any Other Urgent Matters

- a) **Weekly bulletin** – Alex asked whether Governors would like to receive Homerton's weekly bulletin, which was sent to parents by e-mail. It was agreed that this would be useful and that Gwyneth would forward the bulletin to Governors.

Gwyneth

## 12. Date of Next Meeting

The next Governing Body meeting would take place on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at 7.30pm. Elizabeth and Surabhi offered their apologies.

Gwyneth

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.