

THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE ELIOT BANK AND GORDONBROCK PRIMARY SCHOOLS FEDERATION

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources Committee held on Monday, 22 February 2021 at 6.15 p.m.

PRESENT

Mr T. Bremner	Chair
Mr P. Fidel	
Ms M. Gilmore	Executive Headteacher
Mr P. Jenkins	
Ms K. Knowles	

Also present

Ms A. Carter	Senior Admin Assistant, Gordonbrock
Mr G. Goode	Federation Premises Manger – for item 7
Ms S. McAllister	Federation Business Manager
Mrs K. Walsh	Head of School, Eliot Bank
Ms J. Wright	Head of School, Gordonbrock
Mrs J. Woods	Clerk

Because of the ongoing pandemic, the meeting took place remotely via Zoom.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Governors were reminded that they must declare conflicts and pecuniary interests before items were discussed, and must withdraw from the meeting while the item was under discussion.

3. TO AGREE THE BUSINESS FOR THE MEETING

The order in which items were to be discussed and those items which would be considered as urgent business was agreed upon.

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 November 2020 be approved as a correct record.

In view of the ongoing pandemic, the Committee asked the Clerk to sign the minutes on behalf of the Chair.

Page 5, Minute 7(b) – Old laptops

Further to the discussion at the last meeting, Ms McAllister gave an update on the work to recycle the old laptops at Eliot Bank. It had been possible to convert 12 of the old laptops into Chromebooks for distribution to the children. She said that 55 Chromebooks had been available at Eliot Bank; apart from the 12 which had been converted, 15 had been funded by EBSA and the remainder had been received from the DfE.

Ms Carter informed governors that it had not been viable to upgrade the old laptops at Gordonbrock, because the batteries or keyboards would need to be replaced. However, the school had received a number of Chromebooks from the DfE, and more had been ordered for use in school. Any child who needed a computer would be loaned one from the school's new purchases.

Page 3. Minute 7(a) – COVID expenses

Mr Fidel asked whether the second claim for additional COVID costs had been reimbursed yet. Ms McAllister explained that, since the last meeting, the DfE had decided that further claims for expenses in the autumn term would not be accepted. However, schools had been able to claim

for any further costs incurred until the end of August 2020, and claims had been submitted for both schools for this period. Although there had been an overspending on additional COVID-related expenses, this had been offset by savings made in other budget areas.

5. UPDATE ON 2021/24 BUDGETS AND THREE YEAR BUDET PLANS

Copies of the finance reports and summary by cost centres had been circulated for both schools.

(a) Eliot Bank

Ms McAllister highlighted variations in the projected outturn since the last meeting.

107 – Other grants and payments – The local authority had agreed to fund the cost of vouchers for free school meals children during holiday periods, and claims had been submitted so far for £765 for the October half term and £1,491 for the Christmas holidays; the second claim had not yet been received. Further claims would be made for February half term and for the Easter Holidays, although this latter claim would be received in the new financial year.

108(b) – Bank interest – additional income of £5,234 had been received for bank interest.

110 – Supply insurance claims – £5,690 had been received for the second payment for the claim for a teacher who had returned to school from maternity leave in January. This had not been included in the original budget, so was additional income.

117 – Community focused income – Additional costs of £1,669 had been incurred for extra COVID-related cleaning expenses, which would be shared with the Children Centre and Kelvin Grove.

Catch up grants – The total amount claimed for the catch up grant for 2020/21 was £32,300; of this, £13,499 would be received in the new financial year.

Additional grants – Ms McAllister said that she had submitted the second application for additional cleaning expenses of £5,858. This had not yet been received and she said that she would contact Lewisham Finance.

Additional COVID expenditure – Eliot Bank would be out of pocket in respect of additional COVID expenditure by £4,752 once all claims had been received, but Ms McAllister pointed out that this figure was increasing. A total of £21,809 had been spent on extra cleaning, of which £4,920 had been refunded from the previous claim. However, she pointed out that savings had been made in other areas.

At the beginning of the financial year, an in year deficit of £206,939 had been predicted, which had since reduced to £161,730, assuming all budgets were spent. Ms McAllister said that a reimbursement of £70,000 was expected from the Children Centre, and looking at the CFR report, where a number of savings were predicted, the projected in year deficit was now expected to reduce to £40,000.

The Committee then considered the budget summary report by cost centre. Ms McAllister reminded governors that by this point in the financial year, 83.33% of the budget should have been used. The books had been closed for January, and some recharges would be made from Gordonbrock. Ms McAllister drew governors' attention to areas where there were significant variations to the expected expenditure.

1032 – Nursery nurses – Ms McAllister pointed out a typing error in this budget heading, and said that the allocation should have been £35,250 rather than £32,250.

1041 – Casual assistant salaries – Ms McAllister informed governors that Payroll had put all staff back into the pension scheme, whether or not they wanted to take part, and it took

some time to rectify this. Although the members of staff concerned would not lose the contributions that had been taken from them, Eliot Bank would not be reimbursed for the school's contribution.

1040 – Premises staff and 1050 – Admin and clerical staff – From April to September 2020, the salaries for the federated staff had been charged in full to Eliot Bank instead of splitting the cost between the schools. This happened because of an error in the new Lewisham Payroll System. Ms McAllister said that she had now asked Schools' Finance to journal the costs for the Gordonbrock share to their budget.

1202 – Fixtures and fittings – There had been an overspend in this budget because of unexpected expenditure on awnings.

1802 – First aid – This budget was overspent due to the cost of purchasing epi-pens, and Ms McAllister proposed that this budget should be increased next year, as this was now a recurring annual cost.

2620 – General support staff supply – It had been necessary to pay for additional premises support staff, but half of this cost would be recharged to Gordonbrock.

Ms McAllister explained that where there were overspends in the budget headings, this was generally because costs had not yet been recharged to Gordonbrock. She informed governors that this re-charge happened in March of every financial year.

(b) Gordonbrock

The Committee then considered the Gordonbrock reports. Ms Gilmore informed governors that the schools were experiencing serious competency issues with Payroll, which were creating a significant amount of extra work for Ms Carter and Ms McAllister. There were also problems with HR, but the many errors being made by Payroll were having a greater impact and it had been necessary to issue a number of apologies to school staff for the problems created. ***Mr Bremner asked if governors could do anything to assist.*** Ms Gilmore said that the schools were constantly being asked to be patient, and she would ask governors to write to Lewisham if necessary.

Ms Carter said that there had not been many significant changes since the last report, but highlighted areas where variations had occurred.

105 – Pupil Premium – The amount received for Pupil Premium was £3,485 less than had been anticipated - because some of the new children entitled to free school meals had not yet filtered through.

107 – Other grants and payments – An additional £1,500 had been received from the DfE for Google Classroom, and £8,130 had been received for home learning. This related to a pupil who had now left the school, and Ms Carter had been chasing this outstanding money for a year. A reimbursement of £1,125 had been received for free school meals, but a further £2,165 was still outstanding.

The only area where there was a significant difference was in facilities and services, where the school had lost income from the Nursery and breakfast club for two terms of almost £30,000; however, this had been anticipated.

Ms Carter informed governors that if all of the budget was spent this year, there would be an in year deficit of £181,000, but she anticipated that it was likely there would be an in year surplus of £288,000 because of savings made. This would result in an overall budget surplus of up to £1.3m. Ms Carter explained that some of this money could be lodged with Lewisham and would not then show in the budget, and could therefore not be clawed back if there was a move towards taking money away from schools with significant surpluses.

This money could then be used for areas of major expenditure, such as the proposed second floor extension above the dining room.

Ms Carter then highlighted areas from the summary by cost centre. As already noted, Eliot Bank would be recharging Gordonbrock for premises costs. Staff had not had the opportunity to spend against the learning resources budget because of the situation, and the need for physical resources had been reduced. It was noted that the main expenditure from the learning resources budget would take place that week.

Ms Carter said that she anticipated the remaining COVID-19 expenses claim would be reimbursed, and said that she hoped schools may still be able to claim for autumn term expenditure.

6. UPDATE ON 2021/24 BUDGETS AND THREE YEAR BUDGET PLANS

Ms McAllister informed the Committee that the schools had not yet received the funding figures for next year. The current budgets must be closed by 31 March, and the draft balances would be received by 22 April. Schools would then have until 15 June to submit their new budgets to the local authority, which would be need to be approved by the Governing Body before submission.

The government had indicated that there would be a freeze on salary increases. Ms McAllister said that there had been a change in the way in which the Pupil Premium Grant was calculated, and instead of using the figure of children on roll from the January 2021 census, this had now been changed to October 2020, which meant that schools were being funded to outdated figures.

Ms Gilmore gave an update on the applications for September Reception places. There had been 267 applications for the 60 places at Eliot Bank, of which 70 were first place preferences. At Gordonbrock, there had been 364 applications for 90 places, with 104 first preferences. Both schools were oversubscribed in first preferences, which had a very good impact on funding. Although it had not been possible to show prospective parents round either school, governors were extremely pleased that this had not impacted on applications.

7. SCHOOLS FINANCIAL VALUE STANDARD (SFVS)

Ms McAllister reminded governors that the SFVS reports had been due for submission to Lewisham Finance by 25 February, but this had now been put back to 28 May because of the pandemic. ***However, arrangements had already been made for her to meet Mr Bremner and Ms Keyte the following day, and this meeting would still go ahead.*** The questionnaires were the same for both schools, and the answers were very similar. Once the documentation had been approved, it would be submitted to the Governing Body for ratification and would then be submitted to the local authority.

8. BENCHMARKING INFORMATION

Ms McAllister shared the benchmarking reports on her screen. Both schools had received their benchmarking report card from the DfE, which showed a very positive position and the report for each school gave comparisons with five other schools. For both schools, expenditure on teaching staff was slightly above the average of the other schools, whilst expenditure on admin and clerical staff was below average. The revenue reserves were higher than average for Eliot Bank, and significantly higher for Gordonbrock. However, Ms McAllister said that she had been surprised by the schools which had been selected by the DfE for benchmarking purposes, which had little in common with Eliot Bank or Gordonbrock. Some schools were far smaller, whilst others were much larger; some of the schools had different Ofsted ratings, including one which required improvement. The free school meals data was also different, and some of the schools were in different areas of the country where there would be lower staffing and running costs. All of these factors made meaningful comparisons more difficult.

Although the data in the report cards was interesting, Ms McAllister said that it was more valuable to benchmark against similar schools which were using the same kind of resources and which had similar challenges. She had visited the benchmarking website, and had selected a number of

schools in Lewisham with similar characteristics for comparison. These had included those of similar size, similar free school meals uptake, similar outcomes, and outstanding/good schools. When looking at total expenditure, Eliot Bank was around the middle level, whereas Gordonbrock was below average.

Mr Bremner asked if there were any particular issues that governors should be aware of. Ms McAllister said that compared with other schools, Eliot Bank and Gordonbrock were in the middle for most areas, although some areas were RAG rated as red, particularly staff expenditure. Teaching staff costs and admin and clerical costs were slightly lower at Gordonbrock, but revenue resources were much higher. She pointed out that Gordonbrock was being compared with a voluntary aided school on the DfE report card, and it would be much more helpful if comparisons could be made with other federations, but this was not currently possible. **The Chair asked Ms McAllister to send both benchmarking reports to the Clerk for circulation to governors, together with a link to the website.**

8. STAFFING ISSUES

(a) Eliot Bank

Ms Walsh informed the Committee that three members of staff had resigned since the last meeting. A SEN teaching assistant had left on 3 January, and another was retiring on 31 March. A teacher who had been working for two days per week providing PPA cover had resigned and would be moving to a full time job elsewhere. A teacher had returned from maternity leave at the start of January, and would continue to work for three days per week.

Ms Walsh said that it was necessary to discuss how to recruit to fill the SEN teaching assistant posts. One of these had been for 4.5 days per week, and the other had worked for three days, one of the posts was currently graded at Scale 3 while the other was Scale 4. She said that she would be discussing with Ms Gilmore possible changes to the roles before the posts were advertised. Ms Gilmore added that this would also provide an opportunity to identify whether these posts were still required or whether savings could be made.

(b) Gordonbrock

Ms Wright informed governors that a teacher who was on maternity leave had been due to return in September, but had left in January; the teacher concerned had been a part time phase leader.

A resignation had been received after Christmas from a teaching assistant who was moving on to different work, and she had left at the end of January.

The teaching assistant and learning support assistant who had just been recruited at the time of the last meeting had now started work, and had been working in school with children during the partial closure.

The teacher providing maternity cover was back in Key Stage 1, and there was a vacancy for a teaching assistant in Key Stage 2 which was being covered by a learning support assistant.

10. PREMISES AND HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

Governors welcomed Glen Goode to the meeting to discuss his detailed report, which had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. The report covered all statutory requirements which had been completed or were scheduled, all health and safety issues, and other building works and premises projects. Repairs and maintenance issues were also highlighted, together with items for discussion.

Mr Goode reminded governors that the annual health and safety self-audit checklist was due for completion by the end of February, but there had been no updates yet on the local authority's

website for 2020/21. He said that he would still like to arrange to meet Mr Fidel and Mr Hale to review the relevant files, and to reassure governors that all of the necessary documentation was in order. In the meantime, he would check with Lewisham on the status of the check, and would get the files ready to send to Lewisham to demonstrate compliance. It was agreed that he would contact Mr Fidel and Mr Hale to set a date for a meeting.

The roofing and plumbing work at Eliot Bank had now been completed. The pump in the boiler room had been replaced, but Mr Goode explained that he was not yet in a position to test that it was working properly because the school was still operating on a reduced service with only critical worker children and vulnerable children in school. He had been in discussion with the contractor, and once the school had reopened fully on 8 March, it would be possible to assess how well the system was working.

There were no significant issues to report at Gordonbrock. Mr Goode said that the heating system was being monitored at present, and Foreshaws were monitoring the temperature in the main hall and music room.

The Chair thanked Mr Goode for his very comprehensive report. The Committee agreed that the very thorough reports provided for the school, with timely and focused updates, enabled governors to feel fully briefed, and for meetings to run very efficiently.

11. URGENT BUSINESS

No items of urgent business were raised.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Governors were reminded that the next meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, 27 May 2021 at 6.00 p.m.

These minutes were approved at the virtual meeting of the Committee held on 1 November 2021. In view of the ongoing pandemic, the Clerk was asked to sign the minutes on behalf of the Chair.



Jackie Woods, Clerk to the Governing Body

Signed on behalf of Tom Bremner, Chair of the Resources Committee, 1 November 2021