

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

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources Committee held at Gordonbrock Primary School on Monday, 16 May 2022 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

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

Also present

Ms B. Albert	Observer
Mr G. Goode	Premises Manager – for item
Ms S. McAllister	Federation Business Manager
Ms F. Scott	Observer
Mrs J. Woods	Clerk

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Carboo-Ofulue, Ms Carter, and Mrs Wright. The Chair welcomed Ms Albert and Ms Scott, the two newly elected parent governors, to the meeting.

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 22 February 2022 be approved as a correct record.

There were no items arising which were not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda.

5. 2021/22 BUDGET / UPDATES

Ms McAllister opened the discussion by informing the Committee that the draft balances had not yet been received for either school, and Lewisham was currently operating around one month behind their timetable because of issues with the Lewisham Payroll data and late journal submissions. The balances should have been available on 19 April, and the CFR was due by 31 May. The week 53 reconciliations had been received without any balance, and there had been major issues with Lewisham around the payroll and reports, with numerous errors, which had affected all schools.

Mr Bremner asked if it was possible for the Committee to review the school's outturn figures in the absence of the confirmed information from Lewisham. Ms McAllister explained that the school's figures must match with the week 53 reconciliation, but with the issues with Lewisham Finance, it had not been possible to close the system down for 2021/22. This had caused a number of difficulties for the schools, but Ms McAllister had now found a way to at least pay invoices. It had been necessary to make a number of assumptions in preparing the budget plans, and had used the schools' draft balances. If the outturn balances were different when the information was received from Lewisham, it would be necessary to update the figures. **Mr Bremner asked whether it was likely that there would be significant differences between the**

schools' calculations and the figures received from Lewisham Finance. Ms McAllister reassured governors that she and Ms Carter both knew their budgets very well, so she did not anticipate that there would be a significant difference.

(a) Eliot Bank

Copies of the budget summary, budget narrative, and general ledger cost centre summary had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Ms McAllister drew governors' attention to the projected outturn figure of £326,622.79 surplus for the revenue and capital budgets, which, if confirmed, would be carried forward to 2022/23. For the benefit of new governors, she explained the way in which the budget was structured, and that the income was made up of revenue and capital funding. The revenue budget comprised income from the local authority and other funding, together with expenditure, while the capital budget related to tangible assets; this included anything which improved the school or learning outputs such as new computers and other equipment which was recorded in the asset register, and work to the fabric of the school.

Ms Albert asked for more information on the income. Ms McAllister explained that schools agreed their budget plans in June and November each year, which were shown at the bottom of the budget summary, and the actual outcome was shown separately. The projected outturn for the revenue budget for Eliot Bank had been for a surplus of £431,285 at the last meeting, but had now reduced to £317,070 because of an in year deficit of £114,215. Ms Albert asked for clarification of the deficit. Ms McAllister said that an in year deficit showed the school was no longer living within its means, and explained the difference between an in year deficit and an overall deficit. The school still had reserves of £317,070 (revenue) and £9,552 (capital) which were carried forward to the 2022/23 budget.

Ms McAllister drew governors' attention to the budget narrative, which summarised significant changes since the last budget review.

I01 – Funds delegated by the local authority – The amount of nursery funding had been lower than anticipated at the beginning of the year because of the additional closures in 2021. £123,741 had been received in nursery funding including Deprivation Grant funding of £891, Early Entitlement funding of £4,599, and EYPP of £1,144. The school had also received £1,846 for the teachers' pay grant, and £5,216 for the teachers' pension grant.

I05 – Pupil Premium – An additional £1,690 had been received in Pupil Premium funding

I06 – Other government grants – Reimbursement of £867 was received from Bromley Collegiate for School Direct tutoring costs for the autumn and spring terms. The balance of £650 had not been received in time for the end of year closure, but had arrived in April.

I07 – Other grants and payments – Additional income was received of £8,050 for the Executive Head's work for the School Improvement Board, £941 bank interest, and £15,748 reimbursement for the costs of the term time only support staff agreement.

I08a – Income from lettings – The amount of income from lettings was less than predicted, but this was now split between I08a and I08b.

I08b – income from facilities and services – Additional income was received of £10,873 for nursery supervision contributions, £10,295 for costs reimbursed by Gordonbrock, and £376 for use of the school site as a polling station.

I09 – Income from catering – Income had been received for pupils/adult meals (£37,323) and the catering surplus return (£26,847).

I10 – Supply insurance claims – A total of £27,158 had been received for staff sickness and maternity leave claims for the year.

I12 – Contributions to school journey - £26,876 had been received in contributions from parents and carers.

I13 – Income donations - £6,081 had been received for contributions towards trips and events.

I17 – Community focused income - £73,640 had been received from Kelvin Grove, the banker school, for reimbursement of the costs of the Children Centre.

I18 – Additional grants for schools – Additional income had been received for COVID catch up premium (£13,500), free school meals voucher claims (£11,611), COVID recovery premium (£4,422), and school led tutoring grant (£4,134).

I18d – Additional school grants - £19,410 had been received for the PE and Sports Grant, and £56,613 for the Universal Infant Free School Meals grant; this was £5,630 less than anticipated because of the fall in the school roll.

Ms McAllister highlighted areas where expenditure had been higher than anticipated.

1085 – Recruitment advertising – This budget had been overspent due to the cost of recruiting a Year 1 teacher during the year.

1400 – Cleaning costs – The budget had been overspent by £11,590 because of additional cleaning requirements during the pandemic from January – March 2022. It was noted that 10% of cleaning costs and consumables had been recharged to the Children Centre.

1600 – Energy – The budget was overspent by £5,666 because the school now had to pay for the electricity used in the kitchen; however, this would be absorbed by the catering surplus return received under I09.

2600-2628 – It was noted that some of these budgets were significantly overspent, due to unexpected resignations from one of the teaching assistants/midday meals supervisor in the summer, and some teachers at the end of the autumn term. In addition, the school had to cover several long term sickness absences and some SEN one to one learning assistant cover. It had also been necessary to provide cover for staff who were absent due to COVID related illness or isolation requirements, and no reimbursement was available from the government because the budget was not in deficit. However, some of these costs had been offset by insurance claims for staff who had been on long term sickness absence under I10. While this did not cover the cost of the absence in full, Ms McAllister said that she had claimed every day possible, and it had helped with the overall budget.

3121 – Children Centre buildings R&M – Ms Bishop asked for more information about the reimbursement of the cost of the boiler from Kelvin Grove Schools. Ms McAllister explained that Eliot Bank and Kelvin Grove shared the Children Centre. Kelvin Grove was the banker school for the Centre, and received the funding each year. The Headteachers and School Business Managers from both schools took part in a budget process each year, and Eliot Bank was reimbursed at the end of the year for a proportion of any costs. At the last meeting, Ms McAllister had informed governors that she had requested reimbursement of £2,241 for the cost of a new boiler for the Eliot Bank Centre, which had been received.

Ms Bishop asked what was covered by income donations. Ms McAllister explained that this was contributions for the cost of trips etc, and in response to a further question,

she confirmed that the budget was lower than usual because fewer trips had taken place due to the pandemic.

Ms Albert asked whether there were significant concerns about rising energy prices and if the schools had fixed contracts. Ms McAllister said that schools had been told to increase energy budgets by 100% for gas and electricity. Both schools were part of the Lewisham bulk contract. Ms Gilmore informed governors that the Executive Director had written to all schools to say that energy bills would be increasing by 100%, but although there had been talk about a support fund, this would be restricted to schools who were in a worse position than either of the schools in the Federation.

Ms Bishop asked whether the schools would qualify for grants to install solar panels. Ms Gilmore said that this had been discussed before the pandemic, and agreed that it would be helpful to consider this further. Ms McAllister pointed out that solar panels needed to be angled, and this could be an issue at Eliot Bank, where the rooves were flat; some areas of Gordonbrock also had flat rooves. In addition, the weight of the panels could be an issue, and the schools would also not be able to meet the initial installation cost. **Ms Bishop was aware of programmes to provide solar panels to schools, and it was agreed that she would send relevant details to Ms Gilmore.**

Ms Scott asked whether the schools reviewed energy efficiency on a regular basis. Ms McAllister said that schools had a statutory duty to have an energy efficiency review every year.

Ms Albert questioned the interest payment. Ms McAllister explained that this was the school's share of the interest from the Lewisham account, and was much lower than usual.

Ms Bishop asked whether the lettings income was a meaningful amount. Ms McAllister said that the majority of the lettings income came from TopMark, who ran the breakfast and after school club at Eliot Bank. In general, weekend lettings did not take place because of staffing issues; both schools had very complex sites and it would be necessary to have premises staff on site, which would largely offset the income received and would not be cost effective. Ms Gilmore informed the Committee that there had been discussion about increasing lettings before the pandemic, and TopMark had wanted to run holiday clubs. However, there had been concerns about the relatively low income that would be received once premises costs had been taken into account, and it was also important to consider staff wellbeing. Ms Gilmore agreed to look at this again,

Ms McAllister informed governors that the contract with TopMark was due to be renewed on 31 December 2022, and that raising the cost by 10% was being considered. TopMark ran the after school club at both schools, and the breakfast club at Eliot Bank. Governors would be involved in discussions when the renewal date was closer.

Mr Bremner recognised that the school was still living beyond its means, but was pleased that the situation was better than had been expected. The Finance Strategy Working Party were due to meet the following week, and Mr Bremner felt that it was important to look at the structural deficit at Eliot Bank and the number of teaching assistants at the school, who were the most expensive resource, in more detail. He was also mindful that it had been possible to safeguard the Inclusion Team for some time and it may not necessarily be possible for this to continue.

Ms Bishop asked whether it would be a serious issue for teachers if they no longer had a full time teaching assistant for each class. Ms Gilmore explained that most schools no longer had the benefit of full time TAs, and she emphasised that Eliot Bank, and Gordonbrock in particular, were in a very luxurious position with the level of teaching assistant support.

Mr Fidel was concerned that inflation was rising rapidly and schools had only been allocated a 2% uplift for salaries. Ms McAllister said that she had just received the new budget templates and would be budgeting for a 3% increase in leadership salaries and a sliding uplift between 6.5% for teachers on M1 to 4% for teachers on M6 and 3% for teachers on the Upper Threshold scales. For support staff, the budget included last year's increase of 2.75% and a further projected increase of 3.25% from April 2022.

Ms Gilmore pointed out that balancing the demands placed on schools with the standards which were expected was becoming increasingly harder. The school could not afford to lose expensive teachers, who were the most experienced, and while ECTs were employed where possible because they were less costly, there was very little room for professional development without experienced staff to lead them. She said that there was a constant challenge for schools to balance more experienced and more expensive staff with cheaper and less experienced teachers whilst ensuring that they maintain a high level of performance, and this inevitably came at some cost.

Gordonbrock

Ms McAllister informed the Committee that the predicted end of year outturn for Gordonbrock had been a surplus of £1,150,785, with a projected in year deficit of £70,361. She explained that the budget for Gordonbrock was much higher than Eliot Bank because, at 3fe, the school was 50% larger than Eliot Bank, and she also explained the issues around Eliot Bank losing two bulge classes in 2019 which had affected Eliot Bank's budget by approx. £100,000 less funding year-on-year.

Mr Bremner pointed out to governors that, based on current predictions and staffing levels, Eliot Bank's budget surplus would be used up in three years' time, whereas at Gordonbrock, the budget surplus would last much longer. Ms McAllister pointed out that the budget plans included an inflationary increase of 6.4%, so the deficits would get worse. She said that she had now received the first bill for paper, for example, and had been concerned that the cost had doubled; she would be working with Ms Carter to identify any savings, and it was agreed that this would be considered further at the Finance Strategy Working Party the following week.

Ms McAllister then highlighted the significant variations from the agreed budget.

I01 – Funds delegated by the local authority – The amount of nursery funding had been reduced by £12,921, but it had been possible to fill some of the spaces with fee paying children, and income of £36,984 had been received under I08b (facilities and services).

Additional funding had been received of £5,048 for the teachers' pension and pay grants.

I03 – SEND funding – An additional £12,787 had been received since the budget had been agreed.

I07 – Other grants and payments – Additional funding had been received for The Chartwell's catering refund (£28,218), Green school support remote learning (£2,000), bank interest (£2,515), term time only settlement reimbursement (£27,742), and Edmund Waller support (£1,650).

I08(a) – Income from lettings – An additional £887 had been received from after school rental, chess club, and taekwondo.

I08(b) – Facilities and services – A total of £74,080 extra had been received from utilities contributions from Chartwells (£21,213), breakfast contribution and uniform contribution (£8,972), tree planting, school trips, and Big Cat (£36,984), reimbursement from Eliot Bank for staff training (£337), and reimbursement from Southward for a looked after child (£600).

I10 – Insurance claims - £21,752 had been received for maternity cover claims.

I13 – Donations – A donation of £17,709 had been received from FoG towards the cost of new playground equipment and Chrome Books/trolley.

I18(c) – Additional school grants - Reimbursement had been received of £17,148 for free school meals vouchers, and Ms McAllister informed governors that Lewisham had decided to continue with the provision of vouchers for needy families for both schools, for the May half term and summer bank holiday. The cost was £15 per week, which the school claimed back. £20,030 had been received for the COVID catch up grant, £7,205 for the school led tutoring grant, and £7,686 for the COVID recovery premium.

Ms Albert asked why the management costs were almost the same in both schools, when there was such a significant difference in size between Eliot Bank and Gordonbrock. Ms McAllister explained that the senior leadership structure was the same for both schools, with one Executive Headteacher across the Federation, one Head of School at each school, and two deputy heads at each school. Ms Gilmore said that she would be considering the structure of the Senior Leadership Team and the way in which the cost was allocated. Some staff were shared across the Federation, for example, the Executive Head, Federation Business Manager, and the premises staff, and there were differences in the structure of middle leaders between the schools, where Eliot Bank had two assistant heads compared with one at Gordonbrock, but Gordonbrock had more middle leaders.

Ms Bishop asked whether there was likely to be a major focus to pressurise schools to join into larger groups and Mr Bremner asked whether the Federation could be pressured to expand. Ms Gilmore said that there had been discussions around local authorities leading multi academy trusts (MAT), and there had been a focus around collaboration and expansion of partnerships. She said that the Federation had always wanted to take the lead in any possible future expansion rather than being subsumed in another group of schools.

Ms Bishop suggested that spreading management costs across more schools could make a significant difference, but it was recognised that this was a broader issue for the Governing Body to discuss. Ms Bishop was mindful that the Federation already worked closely with a number of other schools, and benefitted from this work. Ms Gilmore agreed that it was important to be realistic about the future. Eliot Bank and Gordonbrock were in a peer review group with Kelvin Grove, Kilmore, Horniman, and Dalmain, which was a group currently made up of very strong headteachers. Partnerships were already being encouraged, and heads were looking at other ways of working together, including sharing professional development and teachers.

Ms Bishop asked if there was scope to share budgets, but Mr Bremner said that this was not possible, and even within the Federation, the schools must retain discrete budgets.

Mr Jenkins pointed out that £45,631 had been spent on school trips in 2021/22 and asked whether the school would be compensated for this. Ms McAllister explained that this was reimbursed through the School Fund. Ms Carter had initiated the transfer between the two budget headings, but this was not yet showing in the accounts. This had inflated the in year deficit artificially, so this would actually fall to just under £30,000 once the transfer was completed.

Ms Gilmore informed governors that the cost of school trips was increasing hugely; for example, the cost of a coach to Gravesend was now £1,500. The cost of coaches to London Zoo was extremely expensive this year, and the schools were prioritising how much should be spent. **Ms Bishop asked whether parents were given the opportunity to pay**

for more than one child when making payment for trips. Ms Gilmore said that some parents did pay extra but she would be extremely reluctant to suggest this. **Ms Knowles added that both schools had extremely active PTAs, but they could not pay for a specific trip.** However, Ms Gilmore said that at Gordonbrock, FoG allocated a notional amount to each year group for trips every year, and while some parents offered to pay more, she did not want to request this, because many families were finding it extremely difficult to pay for their own children without the possible perceived pressure of a suggestion that they pay for others.

Ms Scott pointed out that on Parent Pay, it was possible to pay a higher amount for some items, and suggested that changes could be made to enable parents to do this for trips. Mr Fidel felt that this must be worded very carefully, and Ms Bishop agreed to share the wording used by her children's school. Mr Bremner recognised that this was an extremely sensitive issue but was worth exploring carefully.

Ms McAllister said that the in year deficit at Gordonbrock would now fall to around £30,000, and there were balances in some budgets which could be used to subsidise other areas.

Ms Scott asked whether schools who were in deficit were held to account by the local authority. Ms McAllister said that she would be looking at the draft budgets in detail the following week, and deficit prevention plans must be prepared for both schools; Eliot Bank's surplus would be exhausted by year 3 of the new budget, and both schools would have a built in structural deficit, because the budget surplus would be exhausted by year 3 of the new budget. **However, Mr Bremner said that both schools were in a much better position than most other Lewisham schools.**

6. 2022/23 BUDGETS AND THREE YEAR BUDGET PLANS

In the absence of the draft budget information, it was agreed that the draft budgets would be discussed in detail at the meeting of the Finance Strategy Working Party the following week. The budgets must then be approved by the Governing Body at the meeting on 13 June, prior to submission to the local authority.

The financial audits had taken place at both schools, but the final reports had not yet been received and would be included on the next agenda for discussion. The local authority had outsourced the provision of the audits to an external company, which had created a number of administrative difficulties.

7. STAFFING ISSUES

(a) Eliot Bank

Ms Gilmore reminded governors that the resignation date for teachers was 31 May, and at this point, it was only possible to speculate on the number of vacancies at both schools.

A Year 1 teacher had been appointed at Eliot Bank on a temporary contract to replace a teacher who was leaving to go overseas. The supply teacher had been employed directly, rather than via an agency, which had resulted in a saving in fees.

One of the School Direct students who had trained at Eliot Bank was leaving to move out of London.

Sarah Bridgman would be returning from maternity leave in July.

There was currently a vacancy for a teaching assistant / midday supervisor, which was being covered by supply staff. There were also vacancies for Year 3 and 4 class teachers; both posts were being covered by supply teachers, one of whom had verbally accepted the offer of a permanent post. As governors were aware, the Head of School had left Eliot Bank at Easter.

Mr Bremner asked for an update on recruitment of the new Head of School. Ms Gilmore said that she had discussed this with Mr Fidel and Mr Hale, and it had been agreed not to recruit for September to give a little more time to steady Eliot Bank and re-establish expectations. There were some potential options going forward, which she was discussing with Mr Fidel and Mr Hale.

(b) Gordonbrock

The nursery nurse would be returning from maternity leave on a part time basis.

The staffing situation at Gordonbrock was currently very stable. Catherine Nash was moving to another school for personal reasons, and Heather Petty was retiring. Although the resignation deadline had not yet passed, Ms Gilmore did not anticipate any further resignations. Three teachers had been appointed: one ECT, a trainee teacher who was currently at Gordonbrock, and had been appointed as an ECT, and one more experienced teacher. The new appointments had been included in the budget.

Ms Gilmore explained that there were technically a number of vacancies for teaching assistants, but these would be discussed further at the Finance Strategy Working Party the following week. Four of the vacancies had been filled with supply staff to give greater flexibility in planning for September, and it would be necessary to consider the children with EHCPs and where support was needed.

Mr Bremner asked Ms Gilmore to consider the most important areas for the Finance Strategy Working Party to focus on at the meeting the following week, and to identify opportunities and how these could be embraced.

9. POLICY REVIEW

The Charging and Remissions Policy, Lettings Policy, and Debt Recovery Policy had been circulated with the agenda for governors' consideration. Ms Gilmore said that no substantial changes had been made to any of the policies, but they had been flagged as being due for review at the recent audit. **Mr Jenkins pointed out that the amount of the contribution was missing from paragraph 6.3 of the Charging and Remissions Policy,** and Ms McAllister said that she would rectify this. Subject to this amendment, it was **RESOLVED** that the Charging and Remissions Policy, Lettings Policy, and Debt Recovery Policy be approved.

Ms McAllister reminded governors that, now Mrs Walsh had left the Federation, it would be necessary for the Segregation of Duties document to be amended. It was **RESOLVED** that Mrs Walsh should be removed from the Segregation of Duties document for Eliot Bank.

8. PREMISES AND HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

Mr Goode was welcomed to the meeting to discuss his premises report, which had been circulated with the meeting. **Mr Bremner thanked him for preparing such a thorough document.**

The report covered a wide range of premises and health and safety issues at both schools, and gave details of the action taken. Mr Goode highlighted a number of items for discussion.

It was noted that the local authority had now reintroduced the requirement for an annual governors' health and safety self audit to be carried out. **Mr Goode reminded governors that the last self audit had taken place in 2020, in conjunction with Mr Fidel and Mr Hale.** The Lewisham audit must be returned by 8 July and included 117 questions, which was considerably more than the 80 questions on the assessment offered by Claire Firmin, the school's health and safety adviser. Mr Goode said that while both assessments could be completed, the focus should be on the Lewisham assessment. It was **RESOLVED** that Mr Goode would contact Mr Fidel and Mr Hale to agree a date for a walk round inspection of both schools with a view to completing the self audit by the deadline of 8 July.

Eliot Bank

Mr Goode informed the Committee that the decking to the Key Stage 1 playground, which had been provided as part of the works agreed for the bulge classes, was starting to show signs of decay in some areas, and the struts were beginning to push through the wooden planks where it had been suspended to level off with the playground. He was due to meet a contractor the following day to explore possible options for repair, but was concerned that this could potentially be very expensive.

Gordonbrock

There were also issues with the decking in the Reception, Key Stage 1, and Key Stage 2 playground areas, and the surface was starting to show signs of rot from underneath, and the struts which were supporting the planks were moving when weight was applied to the surface. Mr Goode reminded governors that this decking had been installed to replace the flower beds when the rebuilding had been carried out. Ms Gilmore said that this work would be expensive, and it would be necessary to consider carefully how much of the decking was replaced. This had initially been a large project, and discussions were taking place in the Admin/SLT meetings.

Ms Albert asked how long the decking had been in place. Ms Gilmore said that the work had been carried out approximately ten years ago. It was noted that Lewisham had paid for the decking at Eliot Bank, but the school had funded the work at Gordonbrock.

Mr Goode highlighted an issue with the boilers. He explained that there were six boilers on the Gordonbrock site in total, and the two boilers in the biomass boiler room had been replaced in 2019. One of these had begun to play up, and had started to spill out water, which had led to shutting down the other boiler. The boilers had now been judged to be unsafe and had been condemned. However, the biomass boiler could be run independently from the gas boilers. It was noted that Ms Gilmore and Ms McAllister had been discussing a possible solution with contractors who had been in to assess the situation.

Ms Albert asked whether there was a guarantee on the boilers, and whether it was possible to install further biomass boilers rather than gas boilers. Ms Gilmore explained that the situation was extremely complicated. Biomass was a very unreliable source of energy, and it took a long time to get the pellets, which became unusable if they got wet; in addition, biomass boilers were more labour intensive. At the time the two boilers concerned were installed, it had been the case that gas was a cheaper energy source, but this was not the case going forward. It was likely that the cost of replacing the boilers would be around £20,000, and Ms Gilmore said that she would come back to governors once more information was available.

10. URGENT BUSINESS

Governors were reminded that the Finance Strategy Working Party would be meeting on 25 May via Zoom, and the Clerk was asked to send the link for the meeting to all those present at the meeting.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the Clerk would be preparing a schedule of proposed dates for meetings of the Governing Body and committees over half term, which would be included in the agenda for the forthcoming Governing Body meeting.

Chair



Date

3 November 2022

