

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

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources Committee held at Eliot Bank Primary School on Thursday, 3 November 2022 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Ms B. Arthur	
Ms J. Bishop	
Mr T. Bremner	Chair
Mr P. Fidel	
Ms M. Gilmore	Executive Headteacher
Mr P. Jenkins	
Ms F. Scott	

Also present

Ms A. Carter	Senior Admin Officer, Gordonbrock
Ms S. McAllister	Federation Business Manager
Mrs J. Woods	Clerk

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Carboo-Ofulue and Mr Goode.

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. ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2022/23

The Clerk took the chair of this meeting and invited nominations and self nominations for a governor to serve as Chair for the current academic year. Tom Bremner was nominated, and it was **RESOLVED** unanimously that he be elected as Chair of the Committee for the 2022/23 academic year.

4. ANNUAL REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee reviewed their terms of reference, which had been circulated with the agenda. It was agreed that they were an accurate reflection of the Committee's roles and responsibilities and that no changes were needed for this year. It was **RESOLVED** that the terms of reference be agreed for 2022/23 and commended to the Governing Body for ratification.

5. 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.

6. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 May 2022 be approved as a correct record.

Further to the discussion at the last meeting, it was noted that the meeting of the Finance Working Party had not taken place. Ms Gilmore outlined the timeline for approval of the revised budget plans. She said that the Governing Body would be asked to approve the revised three year budget plans at the meeting on 1 December, and the plans would then be submitted to the local authority the following day. The autumn term review was due to take place on 7 November, and she proposed that the Finance Working Party should then meet between then and the Governing Body meeting to scrutinise the three year plans in more details.

Mr Bremner was mindful that the Working Party had previously comprised a small group of governors, but it had been suggested at the last meeting that this should be opened up to

include more members of the Committee. It was **RESOLVED** that Ms Gilmore would circulate possible dates for a meeting during week commencing 21 November, and that all members of the Resources Committee would be welcome to attend.

Ms Bishop asked whether strategic decisions would be made separately from the budget plans. Ms Gilmore said that she would discuss with Mr Bremner and Ms McAllister what the Working Party needed to achieve from the meeting, and the strategy issues discussed would then be taken to the Governing Body. Ms McAllister added that agreeing the November budget was not as detailed a process as setting the budget in June, but was more of an in-year update to take the budget plans forward for the next two years.

7. 2022/23 BUDGETS

Copies of the finance reports, narrative reports, and cost centre summaries for both schools had been circulated prior to the meeting. The reports set out the funding received from the local authority, income, and expenditure, most of which was self explanatory.

(a) Eliot Bank

The summary cost centre report covered the period to the end of period 7, but the central expenditure report covered the period until the end of September (period 6); this included staffing costs, which were currently at 50%.

The report set out variations in income since the budget had been set, and an explanation of the reasons for any variations. Ms McAllister said that the projected in year deficit was now slightly lower, but would change when the November budget was prepared. **Mr Bremner asked the reason for this.** Ms McAllister explained that the new staff pay increases were not included in the September figures. Ms McAllister drew governors' attention to the areas where there were significant variations in expenditure from the agreed budget.

1031/1032 – Teaching assistants / nursery nurses – The term time only settlement had been higher than originally estimated, but supplementary funding had been received for this.

1050 – Admin and clerical staff – Ms McAllister's salary was still split on an 80/20% basis between Eliot Bank and Gordonbrock, which showed as a slight overspending, but this would be changed to 60/40 as previously agreed at the end of the year.

1073 – Senior Meals Supervisor – Ms Mc Allister explained that the calculation in the spreadsheet had been incorrect, and this would be rectified in November.

1085 – Recruitment advertising – This budget was overspent by £19,505, but the Governing Body had been asked to increase this budget to £25,000. However, it would be necessary to request a further increase of £7,000 to a total of £32,000. This would be shown in the November budget update.

1600/1601 – Electricity / gas – Both of these budgets were currently underspent, but much higher bills were anticipated over the winter months now that the weather had turned colder. Ms McAllister said that the local authority had advised schools to increase their budgets by 100%, and the current budget allocations should be sufficient. The schools had benefited from the local authority's central purchasing power. **Mr Fidel pointed out that there had been an overspending at the time of the last meeting because of electricity used in the kitchen, which had been due to be paid by the catering company, and he asked if this was an ongoing situation.** Ms McAllister said that this had just related to the last financial year.

1912 – Brought forward learning resources / SIP budgets from 2021/22 academic year – There was an underspending of £22,663 from the 2021/22 academic year, which could

either be used in the total budget surplus for 2022.23 or used for school improvement projects, such as the Rights Respecting School work. Ms McAllister explained that this had arisen because the funding was spread across two academic years, and one financial year. The learning resources budget ran from September each year, and whatever was not spent by July each year was frozen and a new budget was allocated from the autumn term, which carried forward into the new financial year. She said that it had been necessary to make a virement of £4,400 to meet the cost of Little Wandle, the new phonics system which was a government requirement, and Mr Fidel would be asked to sign this off.

2600-2628 – Supply budgets – Some of the supply budgets had overspent due to resignations received from May to September from teaching and support staff, as well as long term absences. Although some of this had been recovered through the insurance scheme, Ms McAllister reminded governors that only absences of teachers and key staff were covered. This would need to be increased in the November budget update, but there would be a corresponding decrease in the cost of employed staff where appropriate.

2708 – New Woodlands – It was noted that £4,000 had been spent on art therapy at New Woodlands. No budget had been set for this, and it was proposed that this should be vired from the learning resources budget.

2716 – PE Grant expenditure 2022/23 – The expenditure shown in the budget plan was based on the amount received so far for the 2022/23 academic year, but the allocation for this year had not yet been received. Ms McAllister hoped that it may be possible to incorporate this into the November budget update.

Ms Arthur asked for clarification on the totals, but Ms McAllister explained that it was more relevant at this point in the year to look at the allocated amounts and percentage spent; in some cases, budgets would be showing as being 100% spent because they related to one off payments.

(b) Gordonbrock

Ms Carter informed the Committee that £29,000 more income had been received than expected, and the projected in year deficit had now fallen from £255,000 to £216,225. She emphasised that this could change again, particularly as more children were awarded EHCPs. The report gave a detailed breakdown of variations under the different budget headings.

1032 – Nursery nurse – Ms Carter informed governors that there had been a refund of £2,862 for an overcharge of maternity pay in the previous year.

1037 – Care assistants – There had been an increase in the number of children attending the breakfast club, and it had been necessary to increase the level of staffing to reflect this. An adjustment would be made to the November budget update.

1070 – Senior meals supervisor – Ms Carter informed governors that it was very difficult to recruit permanent midday supervisor staff, and it had been necessary to use agency staff, which had been more costly. This would be reviewed over the next couple of months.

1073 – After school club – Charges for the after school club would be allocated later in the year because they were paid on an overtime basis and would be journalled from the teaching assistant budget.

1901-2066 – Learning resources / SIP budgets from 2021/22 academic year – Most of these budgets were currently underspent because the majority of the expenditure usually took place in the spring term.

2600-2628 – Supply budgets – Governors were informed that some of the supply budgets were higher than forecast at this point in the year, because of the use of agency supply staff to cover teaching assistant posts. This strategy had been discussed previously as part of the budget plan. Rather than advertising for a permanent replacement, when a teaching assistant resigned, they were replaced by supply cover, which would enable posts to be phased out more easily as part of a possible future restructuring. Although the cost of using agency supply staff was slightly higher, Ms Carter reminded governors that this was balanced against having to pay possible redundancy costs in future if a restructuring exercise took place.

There had also been an increase in the number of children with particular needs, and it had been necessary to employ additional learning support assistants to provide support. This was very costly to the school, because the first £6,000 of support for each child had to be met from within the existing budget. Ms Carter said that it took an average of 26 weeks for an EHCP to be agreed, which left the school with no funding for two terms. She hoped that additional funding would be received before the end of the financial year, but this could not be guaranteed. The school was currently providing support for two children, at a cost of around £60,000 for the year. **Mr Bremner asked if the funding for EHCPs was backdated**, and it was noted that payment would only be made from the date the Plan was agreed.

Ms Gilmore pointed out that the two children concerned were high needs children who must have support. **Mr Fidel reminded the Committee that he was a member of the Schools Forum and had asked for payments for EHCPs to be backdated, but this had not been agreed. Governors agreed that this attitude helped to incentivise delays.**

Capital expenditure

Ms Carter informed the Committee that it had been necessary to make expenditure in a number of areas from the capital budget. There had been issues with the boilers, and it had been necessary to replace one of them at a cost of £28,527, and this would be vired from another budget heading. A new entry system had been installed at a cost of £5,893, and it had been necessary to purchase a new washing machine, camera, and seven new Chromebooks.

Ms Arthur asked for clarification about the cost of school trips. Ms Carter explained that parents paid for trips, and the money came into the school fund account, but trips were paid from a different budget so that the school could reclaim the VAT paid. She reminded governors that the school provided support for parents who could not afford the cost of the school journey by way of a bursary.

Mr Jenkins referred to the increase in costs in the breakfast club as a result of the need to increase the number of care assistants, and questioned how cost effective this was. Ms Carter said that Gordonbrock used to make a profit from the breakfast club, but this had been affected by the pandemic. Although the number of children had not yet risen to pre-COVID levels, there had been an increase in the number. Consideration had been given to increasing the cost of the club, but Ms Carter stressed the need to strike a balance and bear in mind the economic situation. Ms Gilmore said that wrap around care was extremely important to many parents, but **Ms Bishop pointed out that with the number of parents working from home on a permanent basis this was shifting again.**

Ms Carter said that she was aware of companies who provided food free of charge to some breakfast clubs, but Ms Gilmore said that this could be because the schools concerned had a very high proportion of disadvantaged or vulnerable children on roll, unlike Eliot Bank and Gordonbrock, where numbers were low.

Ms Bishop referred to the report she had sent following the recent finance training session she had attended, and the discussion that had taken place at the session

about possible funding streams, for example Kelloggs. Ms Gilmore asked Ms McAllister to investigate this to ascertain what funding might be available. The Chair thanked Ms Bishop for the detailed report she had sent on the training session, which had highlighted the drivers of schools' financial concerns. This information would feed into the discussions of the Finance Strategy Group, and **Ms Bishop agreed to circulate the course information to members of the Committee.**

9. STAFFING ISSUES

(a) Eliot Bank

Ms Gilmore informed the Committee that a teacher had resigned in the summer holiday just one day before the September INSET day, and this had presented a considerable challenge. A supply teacher had been employed in the class concerned, who had then moved on after two weeks, and she had looked to find an ECT who had not yet found a permanent placement. This had been successful, and the ECT who had been recruited had said that she was they were very happy at Eliot Bank and would like to complete their training at the school. The post had been advertised, and the teacher had been recruited from 12 October. Ms Gilmore confirmed that there was now a class teacher in every class.

There had been a turnover in teaching assistants; one had resigned to pursue a different career and another had resigned for personal reasons. The teaching assistant in Year 5 had not been replaced and there was now one TA working across both classes. The options for going forward would be discussed further at the next meeting of the Strategic Group.

Ms Glasheen had been working as Head of School for two days per week, and this arrangement had been going very well. Unfortunately there had been an urgent situation at her school, and it had been necessary for her to return as Acting Headteacher on a full time basis. Mr Bremner asked about the likely timescale involved for this. Ms Gilmore had initially hoped that Ms Glasheen would be away for a couple of weeks, but a meeting had taken place just before half term with the local authority, who had decided that she should return to her school for up to six weeks. Mr Fidel had expressed his concern about this.

Ms Gilmore said that Ms Glasheen had been extremely positive about Eliot Bank and she was keen to work at the school. Ms Gilmore hoped it might be possible for her to spend blocks of time at Eliot Bank rather than two days each week. Once the situation had stabilised, the substantive post would be advertised because, although the deputy heads and Ms McAllister were all stepping up really well, the situation was not sustainable in the long term.

Ms Bishop asked if a full time person would definitely be recruited at Eliot Bank on a permanent basis and if other changes in senior staff could be made going forward.

Ms Gilmore emphasised that her current position as Executive Headteacher and Head of School was not sustainable. It was possible that governors may wish to consider looking at the leadership structure across the Federation in the future, but this would be a much longer term issue. **Ms Scott asked Ms Gilmore if she thought it likely that Ms Glasheen would apply for the permanent job, or if she thought there could be other candidates.** Ms Gilmore said that she thought Ms Glasheen would apply, but the range of other potential candidates would depend on the Governing Body's decision on how to advertise the post, and the advice she received from HR on the process.

Mr Bremner asked whether the post might be advertised earlier, and was mindful of the stress the additional workload was placing on Ms Gilmore. She said that no firm decisions had been made about the preferred starting date for the new Head of School, and discussions had taken place about the timetable. It was now looking likely that a September start would be more realistic to give Ms Glasheen had not had as much time in the post this term as had been planned. However, this would be discussed in more detail

with the Strategic Group. Ms Gilmore said that there was also an issue of integrity with the other school involved, but that she also had to bear in mind that she needed to spend more time at Gordonbrock and to be able to focus on more strategic work.

Ms Albert said that parents had been concerned about the situation regarding the Head of School at the start of term, so it would be very reassuring to have a firm agreement in place. Ms Gilmore stressed that the current arrangements were not impacting on the children's education at Eliot Bank, and many parents did not understand that she had been a headteacher for many years previously; however, **Mr Bremner expressed concern about the impact this was having on Ms Gilmore's work life balance.** She said that she needed to be very resilient and carry on and was very well prepared for the school improvement visit the following day. She was keen to get back to her strategic role, but recognised this was not possible at the moment.

Ms Gilmore said that she was feeling very positive about the way forward and felt that this could have an extremely positive outcome, but it would be necessary to weather a difficult period. A memorandum of understanding was in place between Eliot Bank and Kilmorie as well as a mediating process with the School Improvement Partner, and regular reviews had been taking place. Governors were pleased to note that Ms Glasheen intended to come to the Governing Body meeting on 1 December.

(b) Gordonbrock

Mrs Wright informed the Committee that three teachers had joined the school at the start of term and one teaching assistant had left to pursue her dream job. In addition, the nursery nurse/teaching assistant was resigning from 18 November.

There were currently six vacancies for teaching assistants, and six vacancies for learning support assistants, who were all being covered by supply staff, as well as a vacancy for a two day per week nursery nurse who was being covered by supply.

Mrs Wright informed governors that it had been necessary to use one of the inclusion teaching assistants to provide cover for a child with extreme medical needs and a developmental age of 9-12 months, who was waiting for an EHCP to be agreed. The child was not suited to a mainstream setting, and although it was agreed that the child would move to Watergate, there was no space available until April. A representative from Watergate had been into the school to give support and had said that Gordonbrock was providing support above and beyond what was needed. Ms Gilmore said that she was concerned that Watergate may feel that the school could continue to accommodate the child.

Ms Scott asked when the situation regarding the supply teaching assistants would be resolved. Ms Gilmore explained that this was a school based decision, and the decision on whether to recruit replacements or reduce the staffing level would be discussed with governors. This was part of the three financial plan, and whether or not to reduce the number of staff would be a strategic decision. Ms Carter stressed that this was extremely difficult, because the quality of education must be balanced against the financial cost.

Ms Scott asked how the situation in Year 5 at Eliot Bank was working, with one teaching assistant spread across two classes. Ms Gilmore said that the teachers in the Federation recognised that they were working in schools with a high level of support, and most teachers no longer had full time teaching assistants. The teachers in Year 5 at Eliot Bank were highly experienced, and the newly appointed teacher in this year group had said that she had never had a teaching assistant in all her years in teaching. Because of her experience, she realised that she was fortunate to share a TA with another class. Going forward, Ms Gilmore said that it would be necessary to organise CPD on how to run classes without a teaching assistant, particularly for Year 4 upwards. She said that other schools

had different models, for example teaching assistants working in teams, or working in one year group for a particular time.

10. PREMISES AND HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

Mr Goode's detailed report on a range of premises and health and safety issues at both schools had been circulated prior to the meeting; however, no items had been highlighted for discussion on this occasion. In Mr Goode's absence, governors were asked to contact him directly if they had any questions they wished to raise.

8. AUDIT REPORTS

The audit reports for both schools had been received and circulated with the agenda.

(a) Eliot Bank

The overall judgment for Eliot Bank had been substantial, with two medium risk issues and three low risk issues identified. One of the medium risk issues related to the auditing of the voluntary funds, and the other related to completion of bank reconciliations. With respect to the low risk items, one of these related to a date which had been missing from one of the purchase orders, and the other two related to the review of non statutory policies during the pandemic, which did not require an annual review.

Mr Bremner congratulated the school for an excellent report, and noted that all of the issues raised had now been addressed. Ms McAllister said that the audits had been extremely difficult for both schools this time and had been the most difficult in her 17 years as a School Business Manager. The audits had been carried out online, and the auditor had wanted every document to be scanned and sent to him, which was much more time consuming than going through the folders in the school. In addition, when audits were carried out on a face to face basis, discussions could take place and it was possible to avoid misunderstandings. Mr Bremner asked whether the contract with the auditor was for an online report to be carried out, rather than in person. Ms Gilmore said that this was because of COVID, but it had taken an extremely long time for the reports to be received. Ms McAllister added that the audits had been carried out by a very junior auditor, and had taken place in a year when she and Ms Carter had both suffered from serious illness, which he would not take this into account. It was noted that a formal complaint had been made about the process.

The Committee thanked Ms McAllister for her very hard work and commitment in achieving such a good outcome.

(b) Gordonbrock

The overall outcome for Gordonbrock had been satisfactory, and a total of six medium risk and six low risk items had been identified. Ms Carter said that the auditor had also been extremely pernickety, particularly with procurement matters, and had not been willing to give any leeway. He had penalised the school for one item which was paid one day late, and for filing the budget report when she had been off sick. There had also been an issue around dinner money debt, which was largely due to two families in financial difficulties, and the auditor had refused to make any allowance for this. Ms Gilmore said that there had been reflection on the approach at Gordonbrock, and whilst it had been difficult to collect dinner money from some families, the situation had moved on and dinner money debt was now being monitored twice termly, which should avoid a similar situation happening again.

Mr Bremner asked Ms Gilmore whether she was surprised by the satisfactory judgment, particularly bearing in mind that the impact of the findings on the school was minimal. Ms Gilmore said that she had been surprised and had expected the outcome to be substantial. She felt that the process followed out by the auditor had been unsatisfactory, and Ms Carter was extremely disappointed because she had worked so hard to prepare for the inspection. Ms Carter pointed out that it was sometimes not

possible to get things signed during holiday periods when the vast majority of staff were not in school, but the auditor would not accept this.

Mr Bremner said that he was not worried as a governor by anything he had seen in the reports, and he recognised that all of the actions which had been identified had been addressed promptly. He reinforced Ms Gilmore's appreciation for the commitment and hard work by Ms McAllister and Ms Carter, particularly in respect of the very difficult budget management situation at present. He recognised that this had been an exceptionally difficult year for both of them, and it was a credit to them that their health issues had not shown in meetings. Governors agreed that the quality of their work and professionalism was outstanding.

11. SCHOOLS FINANCIAL VALUE STANDARD (SFVS)

It was noted that the SFVS documentation must be returned to Lewisham Finance by 14 February 2023. It was **RESOLVED** that Ms McAllister would review the questionnaires for both schools and would then email these to Mr Bremner and Mr Fidel. It was noted that the SFVS report must now be signed off by the Governing Body, although this could be done retrospectively, providing the report was submitted on time.

12. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICY AND CODE OF PRACTICE

The revised Financial Management Policy and Code of Practice had been circulated with the agenda. Ms McAllister said that only minor changes had been made to the Whistleblowing Policy, and the contact details had been updated to reflect changes in personnel. The segregation of duties had been updated to reflect Ms Walsh's departure, and would be revised again to include the new Head of School.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Financial Management Policy and Code of Practice be approved and commended to the Governing Body for ratification.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

Ms Bishop asked if contingency plans were in place in the event of a strike by staff. Ms Gilmore said that a ballot was currently taking place of teaching staff, and it was possible that industrial action would take place in January. If strikes took place, the teachers concerned would not be replaced, but it was possible that some classes could be kept open. Depending on the number of staff involved, it may be necessary to close the school to children, although some staff would still be on the premises.

Ms McAllister informed the Committee that the support staff trades unions had accepted a pay offer of £1,925 per annum across the board nationally. With London Weighting, this would equate to £2,355 per member of staff in inner London, which had already been included in the salary calculation.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Governors were reminded that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 23 February 2023 at 6.00 p.m.

Chair 

Date 23 Feb 2023