



- b) **Dates of Governing Body and Committee meetings-** Noted. Proposed dates for Governing Body meetings in 2018/19 would be brought to the next Governing Body meeting.
- c) **Governing Body training update-** RM had attended SENCo training. GR had attended the last Governors' Termly Briefing. It was noted that VA would shortly receive an invitation from the County Council to attend a Governors' induction session. She would also receive details of other Governor training offered by the County Council.
- d) **Succession planning-** GR reminded Governors of the need to keep succession planning for the Chair in mind.

## 7. Head of Centre's report

RW briefed Governors on the following issues:

- a) **Summer fair-** It was proposed to hold the summer fair on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018. RW encouraged Governors to help with preparation and on the day if at all possible. RWy agreed to make contact with the Friends of the Fields.
- b) **Teaching arrangements-** RH had reverted to the Red room, co-teaching with a student teacher. Viv Aggett was no longer available to provide teaching cover. One temporary teacher had been employed briefly but had now left. A second Early Years teacher had been recruited to work until the end of term and might apply for the vacancy from September.
- c) **NEU update-** A letter from Paula Champion, National Education Union representative, was circulated to Governors. The letter gave notice of strike action proposed for Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018. However, discussions had taken place with the County Council's Service Director for Education, Jon Lewis, and his response was awaited. Depending on his response, it was possible that the action could be cancelled. This decision could be made up to the day before the proposed action.

RW explained the background, noting that the transfer of children's centre functions to the local authority had meant that the funding for her post as Head of Centre had been halved. During negotiations, the local authority had stated that no additional funding was available to make up the shortfall. However, The Fields was now proposing that the Centre be allowed to retain the carry forward from 2017/18 for the children's centre, £47,000. This would enable the Head's full-time salary to be maintained for the coming year, whilst the wider structure and services at The Fields were reviewed.

Governors noted that if strike action were to take place, it might be necessary to close Willow. It was unlikely that Cherry would be affected. A meeting with parents was planned for Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at 5.00pm, which Jon Lewis had agreed to attend. Jon Lewis was likely to respond to the Union by this time, so that it would be known at the meeting whether the strike action would be happening. Governors suggested that Willow parents be warned of the possibility of strike action before the meeting, giving them as much time as possible to make alternative arrangements for their children should these be needed.

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Governors thanked Paula for the update and welcomed the positive working relationship between Union members and the Governing Body.

**8. Chair's report-** GR reported on a number of issues:

**a) Meeting with Service Director for Education-** GR reported on a meeting that had taken place on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2018 between the local authority's Service Director for Education, Jon Lewis, and nursery school Heads and Chairs. Other local authority employees had also attended, Hazel Belchamber, Annette Brooker and Penny Price. Jon Lewis had:

- Appeared supportive of the nursery schools and shared their aims of excellence in education and narrowing the gap.
- Expressed support for the Teaching School. He would be encouraging commissioners to invite tenders from the Teaching School. He had encouraged the nursery schools to charge properly for successful bids, including backfilling for staff time. RW reported that another meeting with Jon Lewis on the Teaching School had taken place after this one, at which the nursery schools had jointly pitched showing how they could contribute to raising quality.
- Been keen for the nursery schools to work more closely together, sharing resources. Governors noted that The Fields was already doing this by offering RH's SEN support to Histon nursery school on a charged basis, half a day a week.
- Noted that he would be reviewing internal County Council services and encouraging more services to be shared between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

**b) Finance Committee-** Jon Lewis and Hazel Belchamber had also attended the first part of the Finance Committee meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2018. Jon Lewis had emphasised that no additional funding was available and that it would be essential to make all services at The Fields financially sustainable. Governors had asked Jon Lewis to set out the local authority's vision for services to be delivered by The Fields but he had not been specific, stating that it was for The Fields to determine service provision, taking into account local need. He had also emphasised that The Fields should make it clearer to parents what services were offered.

VA echoed this view, commenting that it was not always clear to parents how The Fields' offer differed from that of private nurseries. Governors noted that a brochure was currently being prepared.

**9. Budget**

**a) Year-end figures for 2017/18-** Governors noted the year-end figures for 2017/18. These included carry forwards of:

- £78,172 in Cherry. This had been discussed at Finance Committee, where it had been explained that it was a result of not employing staff, not growing services and extremely tight financial control. This was not a sustainable improvement. Cherry was due to receive an Ofsted inspection in October 2018 and it would be essential to address quality to ensure that staff efforts were properly recognised.

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- £4,920 in Willow, partly because a teacher had not been replaced in-year.
- £9,994 in capital. Governors noted that at least £4,000 would have to be spent on replacing the old Wi-Fi system. Other pressures on the capital budget including work needed to address the Cherry corridor and cracked walls, plus painting to refresh the general décor. SM and other Governors noted that some firms such as PWC and Eversheds might be willing to offer staff time to community projects such as painting and decorating. It was agreed to investigate this. The Centre's security and fire alarm systems also needed upgrading. Finance Committee had recommended that RW should write to the local authority as landlords, outlining their responsibility to provide safe premises.
- £47,000 for the children's centre. This was the sum discussed under Minute 7 c) above.

**b) Budget for 2018/19: overview-** Governors noted that:

- Preparation of the budget this year had been complicated by the local authority's introduction of a new software package and by the absence on sick leave of the local authority Schools Financial Adviser, Janet Jallow. Her manager, Ray Byford, would be visiting The Fields to assist RM. The local authority had also offered an extension to the deadline for budget submission, but it was hoped that this would not be needed.
- With the transfer of children's centre functions to the local authority, considerable effort had been made to separate out remaining budgets within The Fields. For 2018/19, the salaries for RW and RH would for the first time be entirely within the Willow budget; RM's would be entirely within Cherry's. Clear separation between budgets would make it easier to look at the sustainability of each and to show where the effects of future changes and decisions would fall.

**c) Cherry budget-** Governors first considered the proposals for Year 1, 2018/19. It was proposed to retain services at their current level for the coming year, with only minor variations, using this time to assess the impact of changes already made and to consult staff properly on proposals for the future.

The proposal included increasing staffing by 1 person in Cherry for 2018/19, but not the recruitment of a daycare manager. The figures included non-negotiable staff salary and pension increases and also a proportion of admin costs, 15 hours, and kitchen staff to prepare fresh meals on site.

The figures showed the effect of the proposed fee increases, which would raise £32,000 in 2018/19. The increases would make fees at The Fields comparable to those of the other maintained nursery schools, but higher than those of some private nurseries. It was recognised that some families would be hit hard by these increases. Governors agreed that it would be important to communicate effectively to parents the difference in the service offered by The Fields, as compared with private nurseries. However, it was accepted that ultimately there was a risk that some families would choose to move their children.

The proposal included keeping 8.00 to 6.00 hours of opening for 2018/19, with the exception of Mondays, when the Centre would close at 4.00, enabling staff meetings and training to take

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place, driving up quality. VA reported that this aspect of the proposal seemed to be accepted by most parents.

The proposal included keeping Poppy open for the coming year, with 8 children as at present.

The figures showed the anticipated outturn figures with 90%, 80% and 70% occupancy rates. 90% occupancy would achieve almost break-even; lower occupancy than this would result in a deficit. Governors noted that occupancy was currently over 90%; however, this brought its challenges. Staff were being matched very tightly to the numbers of children present, requiring considerable flexibility and good will. Reduced continuity of staffing made it harder to track issues such as SEN and child protection; and parents did not always see the same staff at the beginning and end of the day.

The figures for Years 2 and 3, 2019/20 and 2020/21, showed:

- Further fee increases of 5%
- More children in Bluebell, 20 rising from 16 in 2018/19
- Separate details of the implications of opening from 4.00pm to 6.00pm. One option might be to charge families at a higher rate for these hours
- A move from Year 2 from all-year to term-time only opening.

VA and other Governors emphasised the significance of a shift from all-year to term-time only opening, particularly for working parents. Families needed to know as soon as possible if a move to term-time only was to be implemented, as some would have to make alternative arrangements and doing this would take time.

RW explained that the figures for Year 2 and Year 3 were only indicative at this stage: the questions of opening hours and a move to term-time only would be explored during the coming year. Any move to term-time only would also include exploring options for alternative holiday provision.

Governors noted that holiday provision was becoming increasingly difficult for The Fields to offer. Low numbers of children made it financially unprofitable. In addition, the transfer of the former Senior Family Worker to the local authority meant that RM was the only Designated Safeguarding Lead contracted to work during school holidays. A Designated Safeguarding Lead had to be present at all times that children were on site, making the situation very difficult if RM were to be unwell or obliged to leave the site because of an emergency. The senior leadership team would be considering how to manage this issue over the coming summer holiday.

- d) Willow budget-** RW reported that it was possible at present that there might be too many children wanting places in Willow for September 2018; however, this could change. The major risk for Willow was that 2018/19 was the last year of funding certainty. In future years, national changes to funding for nursery schools could jeopardise both the lump sum of £113,000 and the hourly rate of £4.79, which could be reduced to as little as the £4.04 currently paid to the PVI sector. Governors noted that 2020 could be a general election year, in which case nursery school funding could become an election issue. There was also some uncertainty for future years relating to the £100,000 to be paid by the local authority for the children's centre.

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e) **Discussion and resolution-** Governors agreed that it was not possible to make firm decisions for the years after 2018/19, given both local and national uncertainties. Governors recognised that this was unsettling for both families and staff but noted that all providers in the sector were in a similar position. It was also recognised that any future changes to services should ideally be made in July/September, in line with the school calendar year.

It was resolved:

- To agree the budget plan for 2018/19 for Cherry and for Willow, acknowledging the risks and benefits for the community
- To agree to implement Monday closure at 4.00pm instead of 6.00pm from September 2018 to allow for staff meetings, supervision and planning time
- To agree to keep baby provision for the time being, monitoring occupancy
- To consider the terms of 4.00pm to 6.00pm provision in years after 2018/19 and to determine best options with regard to employment of staff.

Governors recognised the need to communicate effectively with parents, so that they understood the situation and could if they wished be involved in developing realistic options for the future. It was noted that RW would be writing to all parents after this meeting and that Governors' decisions would also be shared, together with the latest update from Jon Lewis, at the meeting with parents on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

[SM left the meeting at 8.10pm.]

**10. Safeguarding-** The notes of the Safeguarding meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018 were received. The date of the next meeting had been confirmed as Monday 14<sup>th</sup> May at 11.00am.

RW noted that the number of children with plans in place was reducing. She expressed concern that this might be because thresholds were changing because there were not the social work staff available to support them: there were currently children in daycare and in the nursery who might previously have had a designated social worker, who were now getting a family worker instead. Governors shared this concern and noted that it made effective record-keeping within The Fields all the more important, to ensure that children received the help they needed.

**11. Pupil Premium-** Early Years Pupil Premium data would be send to The Fields following the recent schools census and reported to Governors at the next meeting. It was noted that in early years, pupil premium funding was £350 per child per year, a much lower sum than at primary age. At The Fields approximately 25 children were eligible each year and the funding was used primarily to pay for speech and language therapy.

**12. Teaching School update-** Covered under the Head's report; Governors also noted that a conference, 'Be Bold', was planned for 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

### **13. Committee reports/policies**

a) **Finance Committee 20<sup>th</sup> April 2018-** Received and noted. VA sought clarification on proposals for Poppy, the baby room. RW explained that the earlier decision to close the baby room had been made reluctantly and had since been revisited, primarily because the 2017/18 carry forward in daycare had been higher than anticipated. However, the carry forward was only a

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buffer and it would be essential to continue to work to place the whole of day care on a sustainable footing. The challenge was to think innovatively, involving parents, whilst working within the limitations imposed by being a local authority setting.

**b) Personnel Committee 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018-** Received and noted.

#### 14. Any other business

**a) Thanks to staff-** SS noted that this was only his second Governing Body meeting but that he wanted to commend staff at The Fields for their commitment to maintaining standards whilst working under significant pressure. He also highlighted the complexity and range of tasks that they were expected to undertake, overseeing the education and welfare of children, financial management and communications. Other organisations would have a specialist lead for each of these areas. Governors thanked SS for his comments and fully endorsed them.

**b) Petition to County Council meeting-** VA noted that she would be speaking to The Fields petition at the next County Council meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018. As this would come after the parents' meeting with Jon Lewis on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018, it was hoped that she would be able to focus on seeking Councillors' support for national lobbying to secure the future of nursery schools. RW agreed to send VA the recent letter to Schools Forum which set out key points.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

The next meeting would be held on **Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2018 at 6.30 pm.**

#### Actions from the meeting:

Governor name	Item number	Action	When
GR	6 a)	Meet Carmile Trancoso-Gordon; propose joining HS&P Committee	2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2018
GB	6 b)	Identify proposed dates for 2018/19 Governing Body meetings	By 3 <sup>rd</sup> July 2018
RWy	7 a)	Make contact with the Friends of The Fields	ASAP
RW	7 c)	Notify Willow families of possible strike action	ASAP
RW	9 a)	Investigate corporate volunteering for painting and decorating etc	When possible
RW	9 e)	Write to parents advising them of the outcome of this meeting	ASAP
RW	14 b)	Send Schools Forum letter to VA	ASAP

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