MINUTE OF MEETING OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Held at The Royal Blind School, Edinburgh on Wednesday 10 May 2017

Present:         Kate Cherry (KC) (Chairing), Mike Martin (MM), James Milhench (JM), 
                 Margaret McCartney (MMcC)

In Attendance:  Richard Hellewell, Chief Executive (CE) 
                 Elaine Brackenridge, Head Teacher (HT) 
                 Julie Jamieson, Care Services Manager (CSM) 
                 George Notman, Facilities Manager (FM)

Apologies:       None

A. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

B. REPORT BY SENIOR PUPILS

KC welcomed senior pupils __________ and __________ to the meeting. The pupils had been invited to give a presentation to the Committee on their learning experiences at the Royal Blind School.

______ told the Committee that she had been at the school for ___ years __________. During her time at school ______ has become very good at switching to control music, tell stories on a computer and send messages. The parts of school life she particularly enjoyed were going to the Yard and meeting new people, splashing everybody at the hydro pool, singing and playing musical instruments. __________

________ reported to the Committee that he ______ attended the Royal Blind School as a residential pupil and had enjoyed his time there. He was proud to have been __________ helping recreate courtyards, and had become very good a fixing computer problems in the school. __________

________

KC asked the pupils if there was anything that could be done to make things better at school. The pupils were in agreement that there was nothing that needed to be done to improve the school experience.
The Committee thanked the pupils for attending the meeting and wished them well for the future. The pupils then left the meeting.

JM asked if there was going to be enough help available for when he begins college. HT advised that his parents had taken steps to ensure that there was appropriate support in place by requesting that although beyond school age there should be a co-ordinated support plan.

In response to a question, HOC advised that family would be offered links to allow to keep in touch with friends at the school and in Forward Vision, and respite would be available if requested.

KC suggested that the Committee might want to consider asking pupils to attend future meetings of the Committee to take part in discussions on particular topics.

C. MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF 1 February 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2017 were approved.

D. MATTERS ARISING

1. Appeals Tribunal (Item D.1.)

   MM asked if we had received any information regarding the reasons for the placing request for having been refused by the Appeals Tribunal. EB advised that the family had shared the Tribunal report with us, and we were not happy with some of the comments in the report. The Committee discussed the following points in relation to the Tribunal process:

   - MM commented that Govan Law seemed to have missed things which might have changed the outcome of the Tribunal. HT responded that Govan Law’s top person had left and taken his expertise in VI issues with him. They had not kept in contact with us through the Tribunal process. We were now trying to find out if parents could refuse to use Govan Law and appoint their own representative for Tribunal hearings. MM commented that he had been particularly impressed by, a solicitor who specialises in guardianship, powers of attorney, capacity etc. and could be a useful contact for any of our service users/parents

   - KC asked if there was anything the Education Committee could do to address the issues with the placement and tribunal processes. JM responded that councils were still biased towards mainstream, and parents were not given enough information to make informed choices. He expressed the view that blind children needed to have regular interaction with other blind children, even on a part time basis, but financial constraints were stopping children being placed at the Royal Blind School. HT commented that she was hoping that the Government would revisit the presumption towards mainstreaming as it was not working for a lot of pupils with a visual impairment

   - MM commented that there was work to be done on providing support and guidance for parents. KC commented that it was difficult for parents who did not
have information on the options for placements but it was beyond our remit to provide that information

- JM asked if we could arrange for specialist people to speak to the parents of blind children. MM commented that some parents did not want their child labelled as blind and placed in specialist schools. JM commented that parents did not always realise that their visually impaired children were perhaps not integrating or doing well in mainstream schools.

- CE commented that his replacement had good links with Scottish Government which may help in making effective representations on these issues.

2. **52-Week Provision (Item D.7.)**

CE reported that the 52 week service had opened and was functioning well.

E. **ROYAL BLIND SCHOOL**

1. **School Report**

HT introduced the paper, which reported on issues and events since the meeting on 1 February 2017. The Committee noted the content of the report and discussed the following points:

- JM noted that the pupils held a Pop up Shop and exhibition at Morningside Library, and asked if it had been a central enough location to attract a good turnout. HT advised that attendance had been good.

- JM asked if there had been any increase in the demand for respite now that the 52 week provision was in place. HOC advised that we currently had two enquiries and were preparing costings for them. HT added that she would be working with the Marketing Department on raising awareness of the service.

- JM noted that nine young people had attended the residential weekend delivered in partnership with RNIB. He asked if any of the participants had been at the previous event in November 2016. HT advised that the March event had been aimed at a different age group from the November one so there was no duplication of participants. JM suggested that it might be worth considering focusing a future event on more advanced skills.

- MM noted that students from Edinburgh University had received training at the school, and asked which Post Graduate Diploma course they were studying for. HT advised that they were studying for a specialist VI qualification. MM suggested that there might be some way of getting a student to do a dissertation on assisting the parents of visually impaired children. HT responded that this was unlikely as dissertations had to be purely about visual impairment.

- KC noted that our link with the University of Edinburgh was not as close as in the past, and asked if there was any possibility of further discussions with Scottish Government at an early date about increasing our role in the training of students. CE responded that introduction of our new Chief Executive would create a good opportunity to ask for a meeting.
• KC asked if there had been any comeback from the complaint made in connection with the administration of medicine. HT advised that the matter was now settled.


HT introduced the paper, which provided an update on achievement of the Royal Blind School Business plan for the period to 31 March 2017 and progress towards attainment of the plan to 31 March 2018. The Committee noted the content of the report and discussed the following:

• The Committee noted that the goal to explore options for providing adult education services had not been taken forward as we cannot, at this point, see any path towards funding such a service. CE commented that there was a need for this type of service but it would be very expensive to do it properly and it would need political action to make funding available. JM commented that we would have to persuade local authorities that we could help. KC responded that local authority budgets were tight. HT advised that we had contacted Edinburgh College but no progress had been made with them.

3. Management Accounts and Staff Analysis

The Committee noted the paper, which provided information on the financial results of the Royal Blind School in the period to 28 February 2017. CE advised that the overall position for the full year to 31 March 2017 was just positive against budget. Income was down due to having fewer pupils than we had assumed for the budget. However, we had saved on staff costs and there had been no major overspends.

4. Facilities Report

The Committee noted the paper, which provided an update on building and facilities issues and capital expenditure. Approval was sought to carry forward £14,817 of capital underspend into the capital budget for 2017/18 for fire safety improvements. The Committee agreed to propose this to the Board.
G.

[Text content]

[Further text content]

[Additional text content]
H. PROPERTY STRATEGY UPDATE

CE introduced the paper, which updated the Committee on the remaining elements of the property strategy agreed by the Board in March 2013, regarding the properties Royal Blind owns in South East Edinburgh adjacent to the former Craigmillar Park Campus, and outlined a proposal to be made to the Board that these properties be disposed of. In reviewing the paper, the Committee noted the present position with the property strategy and discussed the following points:

- JM asked how many children attended the Friday morning playgroup. CE responded that numbers varied. We would advise on this at the June Board meeting
- KC asked if there would be a feasibility study done before any decisions were made to move the playgroup to the school as this could have an impact on the space required for education and for Kidscene. CE responded that FM was looking at this and he was confident that space could be found in the school. It would not be economical to retain ownership of high value properties which were so seldom used
- KC commented that she would visit the playgroup and Kidscene in the near future. She suggested that we might retain one property adjacent to the Craigmillar Park site to use if the situation at the school changes. JM commented that if we needed additional accommodation it would be better to have something closer to the school than to use properties near the Craigmilar Park site
- FM advised that once Cala started to develop the Craigmillar Park site the works would have a severe impact on the two properties that are adjacent to the site.
I. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

KC noted that this would be CE’s last meeting of this Committee. The Committee thanked him for taking on the role of champion for education, playing a pivotal role in the Doran Review and implementing significant changes within Royal Blind, and wished him well for the future.

J. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on 13 September 2017 at Gillespie Crescent at 2.00pm.