



**Minutes of the Full Governing Board meeting for Priory School
On Tuesday, 16 January 2024 at 6pm
Held online via Teams**

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| Jonathan Wiltshire (JW) | Staff Governor | Present | |
| Julie Evans (JE) | Headteacher | Present | |
| Cheridah Mejias (CM) | Parent Governor | Present | |
| Jenny Hitch (JH) | LA Governor | Present | |
| Dominic Riddex (DR) | Co-opted Governor | Present | |
| Susan Powell (SP/CoG) | Co-opted Governor/ Chair of Governors | Present | |
| Harriet Brown (HB) | Co-opted Governor | | Apologies |
| Gertrude Martindale (GM) | Co-opted Governor | Present | |
| Hazel Samuriwo (HS) | Co-opted Governor | Present | |
| Jade Baker-Smith (JBS) | Co-opted Governor | Present | |
| Travis Littlechild (TL) | Parent Governor | | Apologies |
| Holly Smith (HS) | Co-opted Governor | Present | |

In attendance:

- Nadina Bedlow (NB) - Education Governance Team Lead
- John Fennell (JF) - JCA Finance Consultants
- Patroulla Lorke (PL) - HR/Finance
- Penny Deakin (PD) - Deputy Headteacher
- Linda Cunningham (LC) - Headteacher's PA

| AGENDA ITEM | MINUTES | ACTION NO: |
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| 1 | Welcome SP opened the meeting at 18:05 and welcomed those present. | |
| 2 | Absence Apologies for absence were received from: HB (personal), and TL (personal). The apologies were ACCEPTED and AGREED by the Board. With 10 governors present, the meeting was declared quorate and commenced at 18:05 . The Board agreed to proceed with item 5 and hear an update from PL and JF as the first item of business. | |
| 3 | Declarations of pecuniary & business interests i. No declarations were made in respect of any agenda item. | |
| 5 | Finance | |
| 5a | Q3 Verbal Report A verbal update of the December 2023 Actuals and Q3 Revised Budget was presented by PL who anticipated achieving 75% of the Budget. PL had no concerns regarding Income; received at 95.8% of the budget ahead. All funding and top up funding had been received from the Local Authority. PL outlined the following funding that was outstanding due to timing: Local Authority funding for Teachers' pay and pensions, bursary, top-up funding, Pupil premium and other donations. Similarly, PL had no concerns regarding expenditure, which was slightly under budget at 72.1%. PL noted that staffing and educational supplies had underspent, but premises had slightly overspent due to the cost of some Local Authority works pending reimbursement. Capital was low in terms of income, driven by a pending payment from the Local Authority for works undertaken. The other element of income was revenue to capital to follow in March before the close of the year-end. | |

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| | <p>Several items of expenditure would be reimbursed by the Local Authority including the first tranche of the LED light replacement contract. PL was confident that expenditure was on track.</p> <p><i>Q. In terms of the reimbursement from the Local Authority is there anything we need to do to make sure it's paid or is it typical that they would not have reimbursed us yet?</i></p> <p><i>A. We have an initial purchase order, so they have a commitment to pay us, for £30,000 with another £30,000 to come. We were told that additional amounts would be added to the initial purchase order, however we asked for confirmation of what the total amount of the purchase order is. There is a commitment for the initial £30,000 and the remainder will be paid, we are at their mercy in terms of their internal processes. (PL)</i></p> <p><i>Q. Are we confident that they know exactly how much they owe over and above the £30,000 and that it will be forthcoming?</i></p> <p><i>A. Yes, we have a log which we share with them regularly in terms of what is being added to that purchase order. (PL)</i></p> <p>PL went onto update the Board regarding the Q3 forecast which hadn't moved significantly since the last update. Headline only moved the revenue carry forward by £20,000 (decrease rather than increase). Driven by increases in training costs and some items costing more, representing an insignificant change in Q2 forecast from £340,000 to £320,000.</p> <p>PL anticipated further savings in the latest forecast, with the year-end position being better than the Q3 forecast. PL clarified that was because some projects built into the 2023/24 budget would be deferred, funding ring fenced, and moved to the 2024/25 budget.</p> <p>PL identified the main project as the ICT upgrade of PCs, representing £80,000 to carry forward into next year's budget. PL anticipated that the carry forward would be greater than the forecast.</p> <p>PL presented the Board with forecast balances for the next 5 years confirming that; based on the current expectation of the 2023/24 end position 2024/25 would also have a balanced budget. PL indicated there would be a potential issue in terms of a deficit carry forward in 2025/26 acknowledging that adjustments would be made for changes in funding.</p> <p><i>Q. Is there any clarity on the suggestion that the Local Authority may claw back any underspends, should we try and spend it?</i></p> <p><i>A. They funded us two children too many. We have not recognised that money in our budget at all if they don't claw that back; that goes off our bottom line and improves our position. The Local Authority are saying with budgets being tight, normally things would have to be labelled specifically, however, the Schools' Forum will now accept things like financial sustainability with forward planning. If you were to spend £100,000 of your carry forward, you would have an even bigger deficit in year-3 and that might lead to staff cuts. The Schools Forum are likely to look favourably on schools saying they need the money to sustain their budgets. Some of the money not spent will be ringfenced that is well documented. (PL/JF)</i></p> <p>SFVS Update</p> <p>5b JH presented the Board with an executive update regarding SFVS (Schools financial value standard and assurance statement). JH advised the Board that SFVS was a checklist to help schools and to ensure that Boards have adequate oversight of a school's financial health. JH explained that the draft SFVS was available on Governor Hub and that JH would be liaising with JE and LC to complete a small number of outstanding questions.</p> <p>The full and complete draft of the SFVS would be tabled at the Full Governing Board meeting for review in March. JH advised the Board that all governors were required to complete their annual declaration of pecuniary interests.</p> | |

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| | <p>Action: Send JH confirmation that annual declarations of pecuniary interests are complete. (All)</p> <p>The Board discussed moving towards having a more proactive role financially and the possibility of collaboratively setting budgets with the school in line with the School Improvement Plan (SIP). JE explained that the Board were welcome to be part of the process and input would be timely in terms of inclusion for the 2024/25 budget.</p> <p>The Board went on to discuss benchmarking as another area on the SFVS checklist.</p> <p><i>Q. The education consultancy costs were much higher than peers at 13% including "bought in" services what is the rationale?</i></p> <p>A. It will be to do with the number of agency staff we employ. Some schools build their vacancies into their staff costs so you can't see it as a separate area. Ours goes into "bought in" services, we know that is one of the reasons for the difference with other schools, but also the level of our vacancies. We run at about 20 vacancies continually; quite a high percentage of our staff are agency. Historically we have moved the vacancies into the staff salary line but recently we have changed it and kept it separate to show the true cost of it. (PL/JE)</p> <p>Action: JH and PL to discuss the categorisation of costs allocated to "other".</p> <p><i>Q. The supplies and services total are much higher for Priory than the comparison schools £7,000 compared to the next at £4,000 and an average of £2,000 (expenditure per pupil)?</i></p> <p>A. It depends on what they are categorising in that area. That is the bucket that does include the agency staff. We are a lot higher than other schools, that is how we categorise based on the volume of agency staff that we employ. That is per pupil so £3,000 per pupil is a big one but the agency is the answer basically. (PL/JF)</p> <p><i>Q. Our self-generated funding is very low, I understand the reasons for that but is there anything else we could do in that area?</i></p> <p>A. Most schools will generate income by letting, we are a small site with limited facilities however we stopped lettings a few years ago. The company we used went into administration, the pandemic happened, and we didn't want to employ people to do lettings for us. We are looking at lettings again but need to consider if it's cost effective when you have to pay people to manage the process and other costs involved in comparison to what is generated. We don't generate anything through lettings, we don't get any other funding/income other than Jack Petchy, and Friends of Priory School FOPS. our other income is very limited. There are other schools who generate income in other ways, such as outreach services. Some mainstream schools can let classrooms during the evenings and weekends, the logistics of our classroom set up makes it difficult to let them during the holidays. (PL/JE)</p> <p>SP extended thanks to PL and JF for their update. PL and JF left the meeting at 18:30</p> | <p>1</p> <p>2</p> |
| 4 | <p>Minutes of the meeting (12.12.2023) and matters arising</p> <p>With the following amendment to item 7: the minutes of the above meeting were AGREED as an accurate reflection, to be signed by the Chair for retention by the school.</p> <p><i>The Board APPROVED the increased the limit of the procurement card for AF the Food Technology Practitioner from £150 to £170.</i></p> <p>SP reviewed action points.</p> <p><u>Matters Arising</u></p> <p>i. Outstanding Actions: SP had reviewed outstanding actions.</p> | |



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| | <p>ii. Governors' Day: A series of proposed dates for governor visits had been circulated by LC in relation to holding Governors Development visits. SP encouraged the Board to review dates, subject areas and confirm availability.</p> <p>iii. Revised Code of Conduct: SP proposed the Board adopted the model NGA Code of Conduct (August 2023) to be reviewed and revised annually in September.</p> <p>Resolution: The Board AGREED to adopt the model NGA Code of Conduct and review it annually in September which would be signed by SP for retention by the School.</p> <p>Action: LC to upload the timetable for Governors Development visits on Governor Hub and sent via text to governors. All governors to review and respond by Friday, 19 January.</p> <p><u>Actions</u> As summarised below.</p> | 3 |
| <p>6</p> <p>6a</p> | <p>Head Teacher's Report</p> <p>Update on Autumn term attendance</p> <p>SP outlined the importance of reviewing attendance regularly. JE noted that attendance for last term was 90%, in line with special schools within the Borough. JE clarified that transport numbers were not included in the data present which impacted attendance negatively by a further 0.2%.</p> <p>Persistent absence was noted at 35 students or 25%. Each student's absence was reviewed regularly, and some students had an amended timetable. JE clarified that some amended timetables may impact registration.</p> <p>JE advised the Board that "Authorised Absences" were used for medical reasons, "Unauthorised Absences" tended to be unauthorised holidays. "Education Elsewhere" identified students who had registered in the morning but may be out on a school trip in the afternoon.</p> <p><i>Q. Is there a story around the lates in Yr. 14?</i> A. I would need to check that. Sometimes the data is disproportionate, the year group looks high, but the number of students is low. (JE)</p> <p><i>Q. I am intrigued by the cancellation of the buses, is this more of an issue since Croydon went bankrupt. Is it a money saving issue, is it availability of drivers, what is going on?</i> A. We started collecting specific data in 2021; it was hard to tell in 2020/21 due to school closures and covid absence. Since then, the bankruptcy had a huge impact because of the slowness to recruit and the required approval.</p> <p>It has been an ongoing issue and there is disparity within the borough. I am happy to circulate a letter addressing the matter (with the Board), signed on behalf of several local special provisions for the attention of the Local Authority. It feels like things deteriorated when another local provision was bought into Croydon's services, their transport was previously subcontracted to another company and subsequently bought back into Croydon which has also impacted on provision.</p> <p>Apparently, there is an agreement to go out to agency for bus drivers. There was a slight recruitment issue around bankruptcy, post covid and post Brexit. Qualified drivers were lost to more lucrative contracts.</p> <p>We feel its cost cutting measures but know the recruitment issue in Croydon in terms of agreement for replacement. It has a huge impact on families, sometimes they don't have alternatives. The number of lost school days last term was 56. Additional cars and transport</p> | |

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| 6b | <p>also adversely impact safety in the front of the school in the morning when transport is cancelled. (JE)</p> <p>SP reiterated the importance of scrutinising attendance and the impact of transportation and lending support to the School's position when communicating with the Local Authority.</p> <p>Synergy Project Update Commissioned by NHS England's Learning Disability and Autism Programme; the Programme offers practical strategies for understanding and responding to behavioural challenges in educational settings. Following discussions between the NHS and the Pastoral Lead, the School was invited to participate enabling the School's progression in Outreach.</p> | |
| 6c | <p>2022/23 Parent Survey Results Summary JE advised the Board that; the next survey would be undertaken in March during the Parent's Evening and that no specific concerns were identified.</p> <p><i>Q. The response rate was a bit disappointing (reduction on last year) what more can be done to ensure a good response rate in March?</i> A. The year before we had a better response through the Parents' Evening. This time we did it through Family Learning Week. Last year it was a one-off week, this year we are doing pathways as separate weeks so we will capture more parents. We hope to create more opportunities to catch people rather than in one week which we did last year. (JE)</p> <p><i>Q. Why were there low scores for parent family learning week and attendance?</i> A. some parents don't like to do it because of causing disruption in class and it's during the day which not many people can do. Not many schools invite parents in to join lessons, some children just don't cope well. We should have comparative data for how many attended the year before. (JE)</p> | |
| 8 | <p>School Improvement Plan (SIP) The Board deferred the SIP agreeing to hear item 8a prior to item 7 to allow PD to withdraw early.</p> <p>8a Autism Accreditation Update PD presented the Board with an executive overview of the Autism Accreditation including:</p> <p>The Accreditation is run by the National Autistic Society (NAS) with the aim of improving autism practice in social care, health or education. The format of the accreditation was revised in 2022/23 and split into three levels of achievement: Aspiring, Accredited and Advanced. The School was in the final year of the 3-year process.</p> <p>When work is submitted, the NAS observe and grade. At the pre assessment stage, a detailed review (self-audit) in terms of practice was undertaken and an action plan was created to identify weaknesses across the school in terms of meeting needs.</p> <p>The School would be allocated a consultant to support the process. Having completed the majority of the assessment tool the School was in the process of finalising case studies for presentation.</p> <p>PD advised the Board that the Self-Assessment Tool focused on 5 key areas of practice, similar to the areas of consideration addressed when applying for an EHCP. Within the Self-Assessment Tool, The school had to grade itself in all selected areas (20) demonstrating/evidencing achievement.</p> <p>PD presented the School's Action Plan in terms of each key area including:</p> <p>Social Communication, Interaction and Relationships</p> | |



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| | <p>PD advised the Board that this area was addressed in the previous term. With a focus on communication, PD delivered targeted whole School training with SALT practitioners who undertook learning walks, created an audit questionnaire and PD was working on a total Communication Policy for the whole school.</p> <p><u>Functional skills and self-reliance</u> PD explained that the School was focused on creating an environment for students to be as independent as possible when they leave. Learning walks would be conducted to ascertain the level of support offered to autistic students. PD noted that students could be more independent when a communication structure was in place to help them communicate their wants and needs.</p> <p><u>Sensory Experiences</u> PD noted that the School was strong in terms of sensory delivery in comparison to other schools. The School would highlight sensory as whole half term training experience. Given agency staff and turn over the focus would also be on the training agenda for the summer term. A sensory training hub would be established on the website for staff take responsibility of their own ongoing upskilling and training.</p> <p><u>Emotional Wellbeing</u> PD advised the Board that the School was strong in terms of emotional wellbeing but noted the issues in terms of challenging new skills and stretching autistic students. PD went onto advise the Board that self-advocacy for children in Pathway 1 would be an area of action. PD advised that a significant focus for the School was on what it is to be an autistic learner. The School was developing <i>glimmers</i> alongside <i>triggers</i>, identifying what makes autistic students happy and celebrate. An Autism training hub part would be set up as part of outreach and the ongoing upskilling staff.</p> <p>PD advised the Board of the next steps which included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Completing case studies. ii. Confirmation of supporting consultant from Autism Accreditation. iii. Action Plan to be shared with the whole school. iv. Date of assessment agreed for week commencing 24th May including class visits, followed by a presentation. PD advised the Board that once accredited the School would be reviewed every three years and could apply for an Advanced Level of accreditation (to train and support other schools). v. NAS might contact the Board in relation to the assessment, PD would advise in due course. vi. In preparation for the assessment further training for Governors/ SLT/ School would be identified and offered. <p><i>Q. We talked about putting materials on the website for other schools as part of the training would it be offered in that format or a more bespoke offering?</i> <i>A. We are looking at it slightly differently because of our connection with the Synergy Project. There would be pockets of very specific training for our school and a separate part for outreach and training. We are looking at a package that is slightly different to the one previous presented but that would still generate some income and provide a platform for our own training. (PD)</i></p> <p>JH extend thanks to PD and expressed interest in receiving more information regarding <i>glimmers</i> from the perspective of whole school wellbeing. PD left the meeting at 19.41</p> | |
| 7 | <p>Reports from governor visits/courses last term</p> <p>7a Safeguarding HS and DR will arrange a meeting and feedback at the February Full Governing Board Meeting.</p> | |

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| 7b | <p>Premises</p> <p>GM found the School to be clean and safe and was impressed with the team. GM noted that that staff were hands on, policies were up to date and reviewed regularly. GM advised that her observations/concerns were communicated with staff directly and were included in her report. GM went on to update the Board regarding improvements made in the playground, was pleased with progress made between visits and extended thanks to JE and the Team.</p> <p>JE noted the following in response to GM's observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Replacement of lighting was being undertaken to replace low level/hanging lights, work would commence on Monday, 22 January. ii. The capacity issue within the Staff Room had been previously minuted and raised with the Local Authority. SP noted that previous Estate Meetings had reviewed the available space for staff and could not find an alternative solution. iii. A broken desk had been removed. | |
| 7c | <p>Attendance at Governors Lunch and Learn: How to Achieve Outstanding Governance in Careers Education</p> <p>JBS updated the Board regarding the above training session with a focus on careers expectations in general not specific to Special schools. JBS had also liaised with NVC who confirmed the School was meeting the criteria and following the Gatsby Benchmark in order to comply with statutory regulations.</p> <p>An External Careers Consultant is contracted to deliver impartial support to students. Some students who can't access external work experience have alternative arrangements made. JBS advised the Board that the Careers Strategy was available to governors on Governor Hub and all information was available on the website. JBS was pleased with the positive situation and would be arranging another visit within 6 weeks.</p> | |
| 7d | <p>PREVENT Training</p> <p>SP advised the Board that PREVENT training could be updated bi-annually and would next be renewed in September 2024.</p> | |
| 7e | <p>Special Events</p> <p>SP updated the Board regarding the Christmas Fair and Pantomime and encouraged them to attend special events.</p> | |
| 9 | <p>Well-being</p> <p>JH will be focusing on Wellbeing when visiting to review curriculum, using it as a good opportunity to consult. JH would post 1-2 questions on Governor Hub for governors to consider when reviewing the curriculum to gather more data and get a better sense of student and staff wellbeing. JH planned to attend the Pathway Learning Weeks to meet informally with students, staff and parents. JE invited governors to attend Parents' Evening as an opportunity to meet with parents and also advised the Board of Coffee Mornings and Training Workshops</p> <p>Action: Share Learning Week schedule with Board. (LC)</p> | 4 |
| 10 | <p>Any Other Urgent Business</p> | |
| 10a | <p>Arrangements for the February FGB meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Governor visits by curriculum area to be conducted prior to the February FGB. ii. The Leadership Team would be in attendance to collectively review each curriculum area. iii. SP proposed starting the meeting at 5.30pm to offer flexibility for staff and proposed the meeting should be held in person <u>not</u> virtually. iv. The Board were reminded to respond to LC's invitation by Friday, 19 January. | |

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| 10b | <p>School visit policy and Proforma The Board discussed the process for circulating reports. Reports must be reviewed by JE prior to submission to Governor Hub by LC.</p> <p>Resolution: The Board AGREED the School Visit and Proforma for recording visits.</p> <p>Action: Consider/outline expectations for JW in terms of curriculum review. (SP)</p> | 5 |
| 10c | <p>Invitation extended to the Director of Education, Croydon Council SP advised the Board that SD Director of Education had been invited to visit the school.</p> | |
| 10d | <p>Training SP reminded the Board to complete Safeguarding and PREVENT training by the advised deadline via Governor Hub. LC advised the Board of the requirement to undertake Data Protection.</p> <p>Action: Add governors to school system and distribute the link for Data Protection training via judicium. (LC)</p> | 6 |
| 11 | <p>Confidentiality No matters were identified to be recorded confidentially under Part B minutes.</p> | |
| 12 | <p>Meeting dates for the spring term - all full Board meetings: Tuesday, 20 February – In Person Tuesday, 26 March (Sign off SFVS, Draft Budget & February Actuals)</p> | |
| 13 | <p>Closure The meeting closed at 20:07 with a vote of thanks from SP.</p> | |

Signed: _____ Print Name: _____
Chair of Governors

Date: _____

Action Points

Outstanding Actions and Actions arising from 2023-24

| No. | Action | Who | By | Status |
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| Meeting of 16 January 2024: | | | | |
| 1. | Send JH confirmation that annual declarations of pecuniary interests are complete. | All | ASAP | Open |
| 2. | JH and PL to discuss the categorisation of costs allocated to "other". | JH/PL | Not specified | Open |
| 3. | LC to upload the timetable for Governors' Development Visits on Governor Hub and sent via text to governors. All governors to review and respond by Friday, 19 January. | LC/All | 19.01.2024 | Open |
| 4. | Share Learning Week schedule with Board. | LC | ASAP | Open |
| 5. | Consider/outline expectations for JW in terms of curriculum review. | SP | ASAP | Open |
| 6. | Add governors to school system and distribute the link for Data Protection training via judicium. | LC | Not specified | Open |

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| No. | Action | Who | By | Status |
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| Meeting of 12 December 2023: | | | | |
| 7. | Send monitoring visit schedule to the Board | LC | | Closed |
| 8. | Send a copy of the GDPR action plan to JH. | LC | | Open |

| No. | Action | Who | By | Status |
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| Meeting of 31 October 2023: | | | | |
| 1. | Send contact details of WholeSchoolSEND to PD. | DR | ASAP | Closed |
| 2. | Conduct a follow up safeguarding visit before the end of term. | DR, HS | December | Open |
| 3. | Share the safeguarding audit report with Board. | JE | ASAP | Open |
| 4. | Update governor code of conduct in relation to the declaration of gifts and use of social media. | JE,SP,PL | ASAP | Open |
| 5. | Remove reference to curriculum link governor from the annual report and consider how to address the matter. | SP | ASAP | Closed |
| 6. | Publish Governing Board Annual Report on the new website. | JE | ASAP | Closed |
| 7. | Governors to confirm their availability for a Governor Day in school at the end of January or beginning of February. | All | December | Open |

| No. | Action | Who | By | Status |
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| Meeting of 26 September 2023: | | | | |
| 1. | Find another setting with a similar profile to enable sharing of moderation. | DR | Not specified | Open |
| 2. | Present a study of achievement to the appropriate Full Governing Board. | JE | tbc | Open |
| 3. | Include the actual number of children in each Pathway. | JE | tbc | Open |
| 4. | Split data to show persistent absences because of complex medical needs | TM | tbc | Open |
| 5. | Upload information about SFVS to Governor Hub to assist and start this term – March deadline. | SP | tbc | Closed |

| No. | Action | Who | By | Status |
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| Meeting of 26 September 2023: | | | | |
| 6. | Invite PD (DHT) to 31st October Meeting. | JE | October | Closed |
| 7. | Invite PL for Q2 update. (JE) | JE | tbc | Closed |
| 8. | Map priorities within the SIP to Link Governor's remits/responsibilities. | DR | tbc | Closed |
| 9. | Confirm Spring Term Governor's Day for working parties/review/visits by the end of December/winter | SP/JE | tbc | Closed |
| 10. | Make reference to filtering via Igfl in the policy | TM | tbc | Closed |
| 11. | Chase/arrange audit with Judicium. | LC | ASAP | Closed |
| 12. | Action: Bring GDPR back to the December meeting. | LC/NB | December | Closed |
| 13. | Advise the Board of the protocol for attending virtual meetings. | SP | October | Closed |

| No. | Action | Who | By | Status |
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| Meeting of 12 September 2023: | | | | |
| 1 | Email ToRs to HH. | LC | ASAP | Closed |
| 2 | Staff organisation chart will be created to identify relevant staff. | LC | Sept 2023 | Closed |
| 3 | Send TL a copy of the skills audit for completion. | LC/TL | ASAP | Ongoing |