



Minutes of a meeting of the Karten Network Board of Directors

10.30am-12.30pm, Thursday 18th February 2021

Remote Meeting – Microsoft Teams

Directors present:

- Arwyn Jones (Chair)
- Rohan Slaughter (Vice-Chair)
- Paul Doyle
- Max Bianconi
- Vicky Myko
- David Finch

Staff present:

- Dawn Green
- Liz Howarth
- Martin Pistorius
- Inés Meza-Mitcher (minutes)

Apologies:

- Robert Boyce
- Joe Cash

1. Apologies

- Directors resolved to conduct the meeting using Microsoft Teams. Apologies were noted as above.

2. Declarations of Business Interests

- There were no interests declared.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

- The minutes were approved as a true record of the last meeting by those present.

Items for discussion/decision/approval

4. Matters arising

- A meeting between Policy Connect and the Ian Karten Charitable Trust board was discussed and **ACTION: it was agreed that IMM should arrange this for June or July.**

- It was noted that the process for RS to be added as a signatory on the Network bank account was ongoing.
- All other matters arising would be covered as part of the agenda.

5. Covid-19 challenges, opportunities and organisational resilience

- Directors were invited to feed back their experiences of life over the past 12 months, including challenges, opportunities and achievements.
- MB gave an update to accompany his slides. In particular, it was noted that the Carter Centre run by Jewish Care had previously operated as an Internet Café for people who did not have specific technologies at home. Many activities were delivered in person, as well as higher number of staff onsite. Currently, the centre is closed and courses are delivered on a shared screen or via phone. This has proved problematic in some cases, both for service users and some staff members who have unreliable internet connection when based at home. There have also been significant issues surrounding organisational capacity and available technology. Additionally, Jewish Care centres are closed and community services are non-existent. There are no face to face tutorials which can prove stressful for both tutors and students. MB also touched on the issue of digital poverty – members who used to come to the Centres to use equipment can now no longer do so. Some have been helped by neighbours but others, particular among the older generation, live far from any kind of support network. Colleagues now realise how important it is for older people to be able to use technology and the value of digital engagement. Digital also means that more people can be reached who weren't necessarily able to travel to the centre previously. This will be continued into the future. MB felt that service delivery had improved. MB was thanked for his contribution.
- PD then gave a contribution. It was noted that he was coming from a different perspective than MB due to the fact he was not directly involved with the Network of centres. He reflected that there was an increasing tendency to carry out remote assessments and there is therefore an increase demand for this kind of service. PD felt that this was inappropriate and that nuance could be missed without face to face assessments. Additionally, PD reflected that he had seen an increased interest in the field of assisted living telecare and environmental control technologies, including technologies which not only provide feedback to the concentric circles of care, but also work better for things such as carbon neutrality. If these are joined up, then a truly holistic approach to providing accommodation for individuals can be taken. Examining how robots can make a difference to how

people live their lives has been a focus in PD's area of work for several years. **ACTION: it was agreed that this could be added as a discussion point for the next agenda.** PD was thanked for his contribution.

- VM gave an overview of the covid challenges at Homefield College. These are summarised as:
 - Challenges faced including the requirement for quick changes – needing to test everyone for covid and continually changing government rules and guidance; the need to move learning online
 - Digital issues included internet problems at Homefield itself and getting staff, students and trustees online. Connectivity at the main college sites is problematic.
 - The pandemic has forced the provision to move forward with its use of IT and for communication. Microsoft Teams has been the college's main platform for online learning, with no time to upskill staff and students.
 - Setting up home office environments has also been challenging, with concerns around GDPR and professionalism. There have been numerous external safeguarding concerns, an increase in e-safety concerns and issues with mental health and wellbeing. It has been necessary to create support and guidance around covid. Residents seem the most distressed, are unable to see their families and are experiencing poor mental health.
 - Positives included the fact that online learning has been an opportunity to engage with students who will not leave their rooms. Going forward, use of Teams will continue or the college will move to a platform which has more functions to safeguard students.
 - In terms of digital poverty, initially iPads and laptops had been sent out to students – bursaries were used and 16 laptops were also provided by the DFE.
 - Opportunities for Homefield during this time included online learning sessions on cooking, gardening, yoga, psychotherapy, and the use of online support for wellbeing and signposting.
 - Longer term implications for service delivery included loss of profit from the café, no community learning, lack of public interaction and no shut off time from technology for both staff and students.
- RS Suggested that Paul Drage, the IT Manager at Homefield, could join the Natspec technical subgroup.
- RS noted that his new role meant his experience was perhaps not as relevant as others. However, he reflected that in general the ability to switch off was a sector wide problem. There has also been a steep learning curve for those who have suddenly had to consider availability of resources for online learning (for example to support

deaf students). Upskilling is required in these areas. RS noted he was in regular contact with the Natspec colleges and the IT staff working within them. He felt that IT workers have been the “unsung heroes” in all of this. Organisations who had excellent IT teams already have reaped the benefit; for those who haven’t done so well in this area, this can often be traced back to poor decision making and strategy at senior level. This further underlines the fact that technology is a leadership responsibility.

- DG then spoke about other things the Karten Network could do to support some organisations. It was noted that MP has looked at Microsoft courses to support his development and skills acquisition. This is a natural evolution of his role. **ACTION: it was agreed that DG would work with MP to look at costs and choices.**

6. Themes for 2021 KNB meetings

- It was noted that Directors wished to identify a series of more strategic themes for future meetings, and that a list of these should be developed.
- Agreed themes included policy activity including Policy Connect Work, smart home technologies. **ACTION: DG to write a list of topics to circulate to directors.**

7. Nuvoic project update

- DG gave a brief overview to Directors. It was noted that there are still significant challenges, with the largest one around the ongoing issue of funding. DG reminded Directors that there had been a major fraud which meant that the prepayment that should have come to the Network bank account did not arrive. Since then, arrangements have been in place with Voiceitt but DG is still working with them on advanced payment agreements. The most recent of these is dependent on an improvement of a project amendment, which should have been received in January. However, this has been delayed and therefore funding of approximately 90,000 euros has not been received. This would have supported project activity until June 2021. In line with the consulting agreement, further funding would then be released. Before Christmas, job offers were made to Technologists and start dates were agreed, one for 1 February and the other for 1 April. We have been unable to make formal offers until the project amendment had been approved. Fortunately, the Technologist due to join on 1 February has been able to be flexible. However, we are in a situation where there is work ready and we are unable to formally appoint. DG asked Directors for a steer on what to do in this situation,

particularly in light of the fact the project has not yet been approved by the European Commission.

- RS asked about the contractual agreement. DG confirmed both a grant agreement and a consultancy agreement are in place. The grant agreement lays out the deliverables and the funding associated with these deliverables, and the consultancy agreement lays out the way in which organisations will interact with each other to implement the project. DG confirmed that it is Voiceitt who would be in breach of the contract if they do not provide us with the financial resources to support project activity. DG confirmed the contract was not due to end until 2023.
- **ACTION: Directors resolved that AJ should write to Voiceitt on behalf of the board, in conjunction with DG, given that we cannot move forward with recruitment until the situation is resolved.**
- LH was thanked by the whole board for her excellent work and perseverance with the project despite the challenges involved.

8. Annual accounts

- It was noted that DG had circulated the 2019/20 Karten Network accounts and Directors resolved to approve the accounts as they stand. **ACTION: IMM to arrange to send to AJ electronically for signature.**
- Directors then discussed the letter of recommendation received from the auditor. These are observations which AJ had previously raised with the Ian Karten Charitable Trust Chair. The issues involved are the absence of a grant agreement between the Trust and the Network, the issue of deferred income, the issue of governance and the role of freelancers.
- **ACTION: Directors resolved that AJ should discuss the issues with the Chair of the Trust and propose that a working group is established with representatives of both the Network and the Trust to review existing arrangements. It was agreed that this should be done ahead of the next trustee meeting in September.**

Items for information

9. 2021 Strategic and Operational Plan update

- It was noted that, based on discussions at the previous meeting, DG had incorporated Directors' thoughts into the Strategic and Operational plan for 2021. **ACTION: At the next meeting, it is proposed that there will be a progress update for Directors. This was agreed.**

10. Karten Network Development Co-ordinator update

- DG informed Directors that at the Ian Karten Trust board meeting on 17 February, applications from centres had been approved (albeit at a generally reduced level due to Trust finances being adversely affected by the pandemic). Trustees had also asked for another presentation by the TechAbility team at their September meeting, along with a presentation from the Nuvoic team. It was noted that trustees would hold an extraordinary board meeting in early October to discuss further funding for TechAbility.
- DG also reported back from the Trust board meeting regarding the centenary celebrations; there had been broad agreement from trustees that an Autumn celebration would likely not be possible. Alternatives were discussed including a possible virtual awards ceremony. There had also been a suggestion that small videos from users of assistive technology would be a positive addition.
- It was noted that no further funding from the Trust to centres would be available this year. **ACTION it was agreed to add this as a substantial agenda item for the next meeting, due to the risk of loss of engagement from centres not in receipt of funding.**

11. Mobile Technology Advisor update

- MP's paper was taken as read.

12. Israel Karten Centres update

- Directors watched a video report from Debbie Ben-Tal. As part of this, there was a focus on the Shalva Center. Directors found this very valuable and it was agreed that this could be repeated at future meetings, albeit at a length of 10 minutes maximum. DF made the point that research and development would continue to be key.
- The videos are listed below for reference:
 - Debbie's Report: https://youtu.be/5y_YH5DszNk
 - Shalva short version: <https://youtu.be/U0pQwCJ5ilc>
 - Shalva original: <https://youtu.be/9Gy2P7R2gPY>

13. Any other relevant business

- DF highlighted to Directors that he and RS are running some leadership training for organisations to look at assistive technology. The training is linked [here](#). **ACTION: RS and DF to share the recording from the upcoming training and slides with Directors.**
- The next meeting date was confirmed as 8 July with the venue TBC (it was agreed that this was likely to be virtual).