



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2022/23

Friday 27th January 2023, 9:15am at Acorn

Attendees: Amanda Birtles (Acorn Manager), Annie Fitt (Trustee), Emma Clack (Trustee), Chris Clements (Trustee), Kayleigh Petts (Parent), Alex Clements (Parent), Rebecca Wade (Parent), Clare Miller (Parent), Gabrielle Shakeshaft (Parent), Julie Barrett (Parent), Ben Williams (Parent), Katie Brunt (Parent), Jess Richardson (Parent), Michael Clarke (Parent), Amy Clarke (Parent), Alexis Bond (Parent), Claire Marsh (Parent).

Apologies: Delia Alves (Administrator), Linda McLellan (SenCo Manager), Lara Rulton (Parent), Jess Baldwin (Parent), Hilda Knee (Parent)

1. Welcome

Emma Clack welcomed everyone to the AGM. A great turnout!

2. Apologies for Absence

Noted above.

3. Minutes from 2021 AGM

The minutes from last year were distributed via email to all parents and staff on 8th November 2021 and again on Wednesday 25th January 2023 with no queries raised, therefore the minutes are confirmed as read and agreed.

4. Manager's Report – Amanda Birtles

Review of the academic year 2021 – 2022

- This was our first full year of operating post Covid-19 lockdown. We had operated as two independent 'bubbles' for most of the previous year with staff and children operating completely independently so it was going to be a change for everyone blending back into one setting.
- In September 2021 the updates to the Early Years Foundation Stage came into effect, another change for the Acorn team.
- In September a new manager started at Acorn who had been recruited from outside of the setting unfortunately she left at the end of November 2021.
- In January 2022, our Deputy Linda McLellan stepped up as Temporary Manager with Angela Lumsdon and Karen Redmond becoming our Deputies. They all did a sterling job working together running the setting to the end of the academic year.
- We had high levels of Covid and general illness in the setting throughout the year affecting both children and staff. Clearly everyone's immunity levels were lowered due to lockdown restrictions.
- The number of children attending settings had dropped following parents' worries of sending young children into early years settings. Acorn's numbers were lower than pre-Covid-19 years.

Focus for the year ahead

- Development of the inside learning space to create a more neutral calming environment.
- Continuing to focus on quality over quantity of resources and equipment both for inside the classroom and in our garden.
- Develop specific areas of learning in the garden.
- Continue to enhance the extended learning for our pre-school children.
- Replace the old gross motor skill toys in the garden.
- To have a wonderful year full of fun and learning!

5. Chair's Report – Annie Fitt

Welcome / Introduction

Firstly, a big “thank you” to all the Acorn staff, Trustees, fundraisers and parents for another successful year at Acorn despite being another very challenging 12 months with lots of change. We started the academic year in September 2021 with a new manager who we had externally recruited when Mrs Birtles retired for the first time. Unfortunately, our new appointment was not successful in her probationary period and we said goodbye in November 2021. By January 2022, the Acorn team had agreed to step up and we had 3 deputy managers running the setting to ensure we could stay open and operate. The team did a fantastic job of keeping the children safe and happy during what was a very difficult academic year for the setting. We would like to thank Mrs McLellan and Mrs Redmond for all their hard work. Mrs Lumsdon is no longer working with us but without her support we would not have been able to remain open.

Numbers in attendance

We started the 2021 academic year concerned about the number of children at the setting, predominantly caused by the pandemic. September 2021 saw numbers less than at the same time in previous years and the deputy managers and Trustees had a plan in place to address this. We introduced new uniform so that the children were more visible in the local area, we had a real drive on our social media (Facebook), we had new signs added to the external setting and we held more open days than in previous years. The key factors in numbers returning however was the increase in parents returning to work – either hybrid or in the office – and also the normalisation of sending children back to preschool and playgroups following the pandemic.

The key to a successful operation at Acorn is not necessarily the number of children at the setting but the hours that the children are here, which is our key driver. This coming year we aim to have more 2 year olds in the morning sessions and 3-4 year olds in the afternoon as post-pandemic the age group structure became a little sporadic.

Fundraising

2020-21 was a tricky year for fundraising and the focus from the Trustees was on ensuring the operational and financial stability of the setting in the day-to-day running. The Mature Oaks fundraising group raised a fantastic £1,000 for Acorn by running/walking/cycling throughout December 2021 -a big thank you to Jess Baldwin who organises these annual challenges and gets us moving during the Xmas period. Jess and the Mature Oaks have raised over £4,500 in the past 3 years for Acorn which is amazing, thank you. The staff also held a Mother's Day tea which was a great success. Thank you to everyone who supported this.

If any parents or carers would like to start up a fundraising group, or hold a fundraising activity then you are very welcome to do so - we can help you with planning and advising on what has worked well in the past.

The year ahead

The focus for us in 2022-23 is the stability of our management team and ensuring that we have a development pathway for staff who want to progress to deputy manager and manager. Amanda Birtles has returned on an interim basis whilst we focus on developing the team and ensuring we have the right people in place at Acorn. The Trustees are confident that we are building a team for the future and that the work we are doing now will ensure the successful running of the setting for many years to come.

We would like to thank Mrs Birtles for coming out of retirement to support Acorn and ensure it continues to meet the high standards that our children and parents expect.

6. Treasurer's Report – Chris Clements and Delia Alves

Financial Summary for 2021-2022

Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school started the academic year retaining most of our non-reception aged children who moved into our afternoon pre-school/full days sessions, in addition to welcoming new children and their families to the setting.

Acorn faced deficits to our expected income for the Autumn term 2021 impacted by the loss of several new starters due to the change in family circumstances. Our overall number of sessional hours being accessed were less than the previous year and the expected average remained at a lower than desired level for the duration of the year.

Our income and expenditure were also impacted from the previous year by the reduction in government financial support, following the Covid-19 pandemic, with both staff furlough payments and County childcare additional funding payments being completely removed. This contributed to an increase in staffing costs and a reduction in childcare income. In addition, staffing costs increased in comparison to the previous year due to staff salary/hour increases; National Living Wage increases and pension increases. These factors had been accounted for and financial planning had been carried out previously to ensure our reserves were sufficient to cover the proposed losses and it was an expectation that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic would be financially faced in this academic year.

Outgoings which Acorn were able to reduce were monitored with strict budgets to ensure our deficit figure would be as low as possible whilst still maintaining high levels of staffing and standards of learning and developmental opportunities for our children.

Fundraising efforts were maintained with the successful operation of several fundraising events and campaigns and utility expenses were reduced by the resolution of an overpayment issue by one of our utility suppliers.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

We have included a summary of Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school's finances over the last financial year (1st September 2021 – 31st August 2022), and those from the 2020/21 financial year for comparison.

(see overleaf)

	2020/2021	2021/2022
INCOMINGS	£	£
Fees (Hertfordshire County; Invoice; lunch club; reg fees)	159,834.35	140,875.11
Fundraising	3,645.05	3,519.66
Other (Petty Cash; Misc)	2,590.00	935.00
Interest	0	0
Total	166,069.40	145,329.77
OUTGOINGS		
Wages; NI; Tax; Staff pension	(131,480.22)	(138,457.82)
Rent and Insurance	(2,326.35)	(3,089.91)
Utilities	(5,118.67)	(3,305.30)
Building and Garden	(8,717.97)	(3,442.61)
Uniform and Book bags	(133.35)	(664.60)
Snack and Household	(1,741.38)	(1,855.59)
Equipment; Stationary and Craft	(10,870.50)	(4,853.48)
Professional Fees and Memberships; Staff Training	(3,417.14)	(2,999.11)
Advertising	(105.00)	(105.00)
Banking fees	(122.40)	(117.03)
Other	(1,440.25)	(335.40)
Total	(165,388.23)	(159,225.75)
ANNUAL PROFIT/(LOSS)	596.17	(13,895.88)

We wish to thank the Acorn Trustee and staffing team, for their efforts in managing our outgoings and keeping costs as low as possible during a financially difficult year in addition to their fundraising efforts. Thank you to all of our families who have helped organise; attended and supported the years events.

In addition, we would like to say a huge thank-you to Keith Jones, Acorn's accountant, for his invaluable assistance during this time.

Finances 2022-2023:

As a charity, we do not aim to end each financial year with large amounts of profit and instead, prefer to spend our funds on improving the setting and ensuring the children enjoy the best learning experiences through quality teaching and resources.

Although Acorn returned a loss last year, we are hopeful that with the continued close monitoring of our outgoings and expenditure, our financial position will be more positive for the 2022-2023 academic year.

We have seen a large increase in our number of children and their hours being accessed with many of our sessions currently being at maximum/near maximum capacity. We do, however, need to remain stringent due to the national rise in utility and general household costings and expected staff cost increases.

For 2022/23 we must continue to strive to run cost effectively:

- Further our reserve funds for a potential year of increased staffing costs and utility hikes.
- Continuing our financial obligation as employers, redundancy contingency fund and pension contributions.

7. Election of Trustees

All existing Trustees stepped down from their positions and attendees were invited to put themselves forward if they wanted to become a Trustee and be nominated in during the meeting. No attendees came forward so the proposal was motioned that the previous Trustees would be re-elected to their positions. A vote took place, the outcome of which was:

Annie Fitt – proposed to be re-elected as Chair

Supported by Amanda Birtles

Seconded by Chris Clements

Chris Clements – proposed to be re-elected as Treasurer

Supported by Gabrielle Shakeshaft

Seconded by Julie Barrett

Emma Clack – proposed to be re-elected as Secretary

Supported by Alex Clements

Seconded by Chris Clements

Kayleigh Petts – proposed to be re-elected as Trustee

Supported by Amanda Birtles

Seconded by Amy Clarke

A number of parents asked for further information on becoming a Trustee and they will be invited to the next Trustee meeting after Feb half term to see what the role entails. We will hold an SGM later in the year to vote in new Trustees.

8. AOB

Questions re: Government funding and notice given by the Government, and who the EY section is in the Council who set the funding.

Chris confirmed that Central Government allocate a pot to local Government, who then decide on funding levels. They could give EY settings as little as 1 month's notice. We are waiting to hear from the local Council as to what funding levels will be for 2023 onwards.

Meeting finished at 10am.

