



Minutes of the Meeting of the Karten Network Board

February 20, 2025

Remote Meeting – Microsoft Teams

Directors/Trustees present:

Joanne Rees-Proud (Chair)
Rohan Slaughter (Vice-Chair)
Samantha Haddock
Julie Moores
David Webster
Miriam Hendry
Kayleigh Hunt
Alison Keeley

Others present:

Dawn Green
Sal Cooke
Martin Pistorius

Minutes:

Pamela Johnson (from a meeting recording provided by MP)

1. Welcome and introductions

- JRP did a round of introductions for new trustees who have joined Karten Network's board and DG welcomed them to their first board meeting.

2. Apologies:

- Paul Doyle, Emma Stewart, Max Bianconi, Robert Boyce, Pamela Johnson

3. Declarations of conflicts of interest

- There were no conflicts of interest noted.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record by those present. DG thanked PJ for producing them.

5. Matters arising

- No matters arising that were not going to be addressed by the meeting agenda.

6. KN Finances – 2024-2025 interim budget position

- A brief paper was included in relation to the grant agreement in March. The paper summarises the need to monitor the income and the expenditure and the different costs centres to track the different activities. The board will need to consider how to distribute funds that are received from IKCT to go out to Karten Centres and how to manage other funds that are received from the trust to distribute for other activity, plus any additional income and expenditure associated for specific project activity. For instance, where those funds would need to be ring fenced.
- There are currently no active projects, the DfE project that Rohan and the University of Dundee led has been concluded and there has been no income from IKCT this financial year, because of the situation with the agreement. The paper outlined the expenditure to date. There was a slight underspend from the Trust administration grant for the Network last year. JRP thanked DG for the report.

7. Annual accounts 2023-2024

- DG provided an overview for new trustees of the process leading up to preparing the accounts, which were sent out in the pack. There were no questions.

8. Finance and reserves policy

- JRP noted the level of reserves at £70k is something to consider in the future as the accountants noted that the Network are currently above what is what is necessary to be held in reserve. DG noted there is a proposal later in the meeting around how some of reserves accumulated can be addressed. AK made the point that clarity in why reserves are at a certain level in a policy will keep the Charity Commission satisfied. DG stated she was happy to receive comments on the proposed finance and reserves policy. JRP and trustees confirmed that the wording of the policy was acceptable as it currently stood.

9. IKCT Grant agreement verbal update

- DG provided an update of the grant agreement. The final version will be going to the IKCT Trust Board meeting on the 13th of March, 2025. Full board approval was provided for JRP to sign the agreement on behalf of the Karten Network.
- AK remarked from her experience of another charity it has really helped to have this proposed level of division and has enabled the charity to stay part of, but also be separate from its funding partner. JRP thanked AK and noted that SC is the link from an IKCT trustee perspective between the network and IKCT and considers the agreement succinct and clear.

10. Strategic discussion

- A strategic discussion took place on Karten Network's new way of working, what the future could look like and how the Karten Network could continue its great work. DG shared an overview and the trends over the past few years with a discussion paper. DG directed trustees to the spreadsheet and paper 10a IKCT funding allocation detailing the number of applications that have been received, how much funding was allocated and for what purpose. 2017 was a bumper year. In 2018

and 2019 there were high levels of funds allocated to Karten Centres. In 2020, due to the lockdown no one's priority was around purchasing new equipment. Following the pandemic, it's been a different picture, and there have only been applications put forward to be considered by IKCT at Board meetings based on quality and affordability.

- The funds that are available through the agreement mean that 50% of IKCT's investment portfolio return will be allocated to the Karten Network for distribution. So 2 guaranteed payments of £80,000 and then an adjustment at the year end. Taking into account all staff costs, subscriptions and insurance, there's not a huge amount of funding left to be allocated to Centres and therefore a need to think about maintaining focus on important strategic issues to support the work. TechAbility funding does not sit within the agreement and will continue to be funded by IKCT separately.
- JRP thanked DG for her overview and stated that the Karten Network will need to look at other ideas for generating income. JRP invited comments from Trustees. AK stated it is a good thing to be aspirational for the organisation and in the appointment of the fundraiser, had some suggestions.
- DG stated there are funding pots and opportunities for fundraising, with external support. There is an underspend of £13-14k to engage with a fundraiser to do some bid writing which is included in the pack.
- AK stated that the National Lottery is a really good idea and suggested DG look at Charity Excellence framework for other funders and support. She also suggested that corporates who are looking for opportunities like this would be worth considering. JRP thanked AK for her suggestions. DG requested that trustees come to her with ideas or named contacts within organisations that she could target.
- RS suggested Jack Churchill scanning pens, approaching members of companies that may be more inclined to discount equipment and software to Centres rather than providing funding directly. Possibly explore crossover with employment opportunities for Centre beneficiaries with some of those companies. Also collaboration with government for wider diversification around the National Centre for Assistive Technology. Cross government, e.g. Department of Work and Pensions, Health and initiatives off the back of the work DG has been involved in, in relation to service delivery.
- DG suggested securing funding to get back into Centres given the direct correlation between the allocation of grants and engagement of centres given how TechAbility has taken off, e.g. TechAbility standards, resources and courses, webinars and consultancy, in addition to more R&D type projects - codesign and coproduction to support Centres - alongside continued renewal of equipment, software and associated services.
- RS presented a preview of a couple of the figures from a research report that explained how the above things fit together, in terms of assistive technology provision in in the UK, training and dedicated support for posts with a national support body to underpin that training and support. If the Network could equip every Karten Centre with an assessment kit that was appropriate to the people that they were working with, they would be in a much better position to be able to undertake assessment for beneficiaries.

- JRP thanked RS for those ideas and DG reiterated the quick wins discussed with Policy Connect to pilot an initiative to equip every Karten Centre with an assessment kit that's relevant to the people they support, and ensure that the Staff Skills Institute could do that effectively – based on the previous work of the Learning and Skills Council (Annex 6 TG assessment document).
- AK suggested that a National Lottery Awards for All bid is a maximum of £20,000 and could easily be put together quickly for a funding like that. She stated that in terms of fundraising she would happily join a working group on this, but more work is needed to consider what type of fundraiser is required - bid writing for government contracts is quite different to bid writing for grants and foundations and DG's job description for a fundraiser doesn't currently quite encapsulate what is needed. JRP suggested DG revisit the brief to look at the different avenues of funding that are available and suggested a new project brief be put together. DG requested a further discussion on this with AK outside of the board meeting and JRP also volunteered to be part of that working group.
- JRP reiterated how important it is to be aspirational, and that the level of passion is relevant to achieving new funding. JRP also thanked other trustees for their comments in the chat on funding pilot schemes or something new from a research perspective.
- DG discussed item 10d – the application process document. Centres that have applied for funding have been told what the process will be - decisions will be made by the Network and not by IKCT. 10 applications from current Karten Centres have been received and reviewed technically by Martin. As reported, the time scale in terms of decision making by March, is not manageable. DG asked trustees to support a proposal to send holding responses to applicants to defer decisions until after the next board meeting, in order to create processes, a scoring matrix, convene a panel and fully assess applications. JRP confirmed that trustees were in agreement with DG's proposal.
- The Strategic Plan which lays out the vision, ambition and aspiration has 5 strategic goals that were agreed back in 2024 and run through to 2027. DG suggested the board may need to revisit these given what they're now talking about. DG proposed a strategic face to face for the next board meeting to consider the goals. JRP confirmed support for this and DG stated that trustee travel expenses would be met. DG suggested the date of the July board meeting as this is already in people's diaries and will be hybrid to be completely inclusive. KH offered to host in Cheltenham. AK was also happy to host. JRP thanked trustees for their offers which DG will follow up.
- Item Operation Plan - DG mentioned an overview of what has been done historically, a standing item of monitoring of progress. Actions and objectives will be reviewed in July.
- Item – Risk register
Project funding opportunities are unrealistic and board aspirations for the charity mean there are risks around funded activities that have already been spoken about more broadly, so it is due a refresh. DG to action.

Items for information

11. Karten Network Development Co-ordinator update

- DG urged trustees to read the report (circulated by email). Rob McLaren will be presenting key findings at the IKCT March board meeting. JRP thanked DG for this and considered it very clear and that there was much to learn from it.

12. Technology Adviser update

- There were no comments on MP's Technology Advisor report. JRP thanked MP for the overview and DG also thanked MP for his willingness to go into and support the organisations, which has been well received by Centres.

13. Israel Karten Centres update

- DG has been updated by Debbie and knows the KN board is sensitive to the situation and the impact that it's having on their provision and the users they support for the whole situation. An article from Centre Deaf Blind was received and appeared in the last Karten Network newsletter.

14. Any Other Business

- Date of next meeting is **3 July, 2025 10.30 – 3.30pm** in person/hybrid (venue to be confirmed).