

Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes: 01 May 2020

Conducted using the online platform MS Teams due to the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing rules

Present: Mr Roy Gillard (Chair)
Mrs Isabel Cherrett (IJC)
Ms Nicola Dunford (CEO)
Ms Cheryl Mathieson (CM)

In attendance: Trust Business Manager - Mr Matt Matthew (TBM)
Clerk – Rachel Hill

Welcome:

The Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee welcomed all present.

Apologies: There were none.

Declaration of Business Interests: The CEO advised that she is a Trustee of the South Dartmoor Academy whilst it is being wound down. The Chair advised that he is contracted to other companies in a business capacity.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020, Part I, were agreed and will be signed at a later date.

Covid-19 Update

The CEO reported. Six Hubs are open. The online booking system is working well. Executive and Academy Heads are meeting weekly. All families of vulnerable children are called weekly by teachers who are also in contact with their social workers. Executive and Academy Heads provide the CEO with a weekly list of vulnerable children. The Academy continues to provide hampers. The TBM has been successful in applying for a grant to partially cover the costs of this and a further grant has been applied for. The Link Academy Trust has passed information to KEVICC detailing how this funding was obtained. The CEO will meet online with other CEOs this week. A Head Teacher has been appointed at Ilsington Primary School. An appointment has also been made at Harbetonford and the staffing structure at Moretonhampstead Primary School has been assisted by this appointment.

2. Matters Arising

2.1 Trust Risk Register to be updated in light of Coronavirus

The Chair summarised that the Trust Risk Register should be updated in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The CEO advised that she was updating the Safeguarding section of the risk register. It was the CEO's opinion that the Link Academy Trust could witness a phased return to school from June 01. The impact to the wellbeing of children during lockdown was discussed.

As a starting point, and in order to draw up a robust pandemic risk register, it was agreed that IJC would provide a headline list of risks and circulate this to the committee. Once a full list of risks had been plotted, each risk would be allocated to different people on the team. Head Teachers would be involved following input from Trustees. IJC suggested holding an Away Day to discuss the matter fully, possibly at Buckfastleigh Abbey or a Village Hall. **Action IJC**

2.2/2.3 Key Performance Indicators & Benchmarks for the next Financial Year

The TBM reported from his briefing notes. These had been circulated in advance of the meeting to the committee and are appended to these minutes. There are a number of

KPIs and benchmarking tools which the Trust uses in the creation of its annual budgets and monthly reporting. During the creation of the annual budgets, individual academy budgets are benchmarked using the School Resource self-assessment (SRMA) toolkit and Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning (ICFP). Once the data has been entered onto the SRMA toolkit it provides a rating against similar schools and is RAG rated to highlight areas for consideration. The results of both the ICFP and SRMA toolkits are then compared across the schools within the Trust. The DfE provide a schools financial benchmarking page where schools can be compared against each other. The TBM offered a word of caution about using the DfE benchmarking page as they take data from the last set of accounts submitted and can be out of date. In addition, on completion of the annual audit, Bishop Fleming will provide a benchmarking report of the Trust's financial performance in comparison to other MATs. This is taken from the annual Kreston Benchmarking Report. The DfE has also published the top 10 planning checks for school resource management. Using an accumulation of the above the TBM proposed a set of KPIs to be employed and used annually. The TBM suggested choosing a set of four KPI's as a baseline and to then draw on other areas through the year. The Chair proposed choosing some reactive KPIs. **Action TBM/CEO/Chair**

2.4 Item 3.2 - Outline costings to support Central Business Unit and School Improvement 2020-2021

It was agreed that the TBM would report on this at the next meeting of the committee when staffing is reviewed. The CEO advised that the curriculum leadership groups were successful and four new groups will be set up next year. **Action Trust Business Manager (TBM)**

2.5 Insurance – Risk Protection Arrangements (RPA)

The TBM reported. The Trust is a member of the Government's RPA scheme, an alternative to commercial insurance. A summary of what RPA covers was listed in the TBM's briefing notes, circulated prior to the meeting. It was noted that Minibus and engineering insurances are not covered by the insurance and are obtained through a commercial provider (Zurich). It was noted that although the Trust is currently signed up to RPA it would be possible to sign up to other insurers at a later date if this was desired.

3. **Financial Year 2019-2020**

3.1 Financial Performance to 31 March 2020 – month 7

The TBM reported that at the end of each month a full set of reports are produced in accordance with the Academies Financial Handbook. The TBM outlined the actions taken to achieve these reports. Financial reports are sent to all Executive and Academy Heads. The RAG rating school system works well for income and staffing but not always so well for curriculum. The TBM reminded the committee that the finance system reports against a budget set well in advance of the new financial year starting and changes in income and expenditure would therefore be seen. The TBM reported that the financial position was healthy and improving and that he had no major concerns at present. Most schools were in a surplus year to date position. TCAF money has now been received and recharges can be made. The cumulative cost of the IIH has been recharged to Bearnes from schools within the Trust.

The TBM's comments from the month end reports for March 2020 were listed for the committee. There was one comment that the TBM wished to draw the committee's attention to which was a recent Procurement Policy Note issued by the Cabinet Office on supplier relief due to COVID-19. The Policy Note was intended as guidance for public bodies on payment of their suppliers. The TBM continued that the main suppliers for the Link Academy Trust in this instance would be the caterers (Chartwells), cleaning and catering (Devon Norse) and cleaning (ServiceMaster). It also affects PE coverage for After School Clubs. The TBM advised that he had been in discussion with all companies listed above and advised that the Link Academy Trust would expect their services to continue but on a reduced scale if they had not furloughed their staff,

however hours would be banked. If service providers weren't providing a service and had not furloughed their staff they would be paid but with the expectation that hours are paid back at a later date. None of the companies have come forward with how the future invoicing will look and the TBM is left waiting to see their next invoice before continuing the dialogue with them.

The Chair recommended reviewing companies after the pandemic. The CEO advised that she would be reviewing catering with the TBM before the start of the 2020/2021 year. **Action TBM/CEO**

The TBM advised that accounts to the end of April should be ready by 08 May. Debtors and creditors have been printed off. Where the Academy is owed money it is followed up but the finance team are mindful of the current situation. One company used by the Link Academy Trust might not financially survive the financial implications of the pandemic. The cash flow report system will only report to the financial year end.

IJC asked if any companies or services were providing additional IT support. The TBM replied that Limbtec had responded well to the situation. The CEO advised that the DfE were asking specific schools or groups with a high level of IT expertise to develop online communication. Cornerstone Academy and Broadclyst School were excellent in this respect. Two representatives from the Link Academy Trust had attended their webinar and provided good feedback.

3.2 Budget 2020-21 – outline budget and key assumptions

The TBM reported. Budget planning for 2020-2021 is progressing well and will be ready for the F&GP meeting in July.

The TBM drew the committee's attention to the briefing notes circulated prior to the meeting which detailed the key assumptions the Trust will be using when drawing up the 2020/2021 budget. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) guidance has now been released a copy of which had been circulated prior to the meeting. They are recommending a 2.12 per cent increase in General Annual Grant (GAG) funding until 2023. **It was agreed to follow ASCL guidance in this matter.**

The TBM then drew the committee's attention to the Appendix of the briefing notes which detailed the 3 Year Budget Forecast as at 18 April 2020. The TBM noted that this forecast does not take into consideration any reserves being brought forward.

Schools are now booking appointments to talk through their budgets online with the TBM.

The meeting moved to Part II minutes

The meeting moved to Part I minutes

4. Property

4.1 CIF Bids

The TBM reported that decisions about CIF bids have been delayed until early May 2020. The TBM has spoken with Trustee Mike Fisher recently about capital. Tenders have been received for the additional classroom at Bearnas. This build is part funded by Bearnas' reserves. The TBM is waiting for written confirmation of funding before moving forward with the build at Ilsington Primary School. The outcome of the CIF round will have an impact on the budget. IJC asked what the protocol was for approving tenders at this time? The TBM advised all tenders are completed in accordance with the Financial Manual and noted on the audit trail.

The schools that are not successful with CIF bids will look at a package of works locally over the summer months.

The Chair asked for clarification about how the builds would affect the schools. The CEO replied that the Bearness build is relatively simple as it is one classroom. However, the Ilington build is more complex and likely to take six months. The window of opportunity to commence the build has been lost due to the coronavirus.

The meeting moved to Part II minutes

The meeting returned to Part I minutes

5. **Business Plan**

5.1 Financial Strategy and Control

It was agreed to defer this matter to the next meeting in July. CEO and Chair to discuss.

Action CEO/Chair – Agenda Item July

5.2 Central Business and Property

6. **Risk Register**

This had been discussed under item 2.1 above. **Agreed to review to the F&GP sections and update in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

7. **Scheme of Delegation**

All comments from Trustees received to date have been incorporated into the Scheme of Delegation. A further copy will be emailed to the ATSIL and CEO to focus on the local board section as there appears to be a differing practice between boards. The CEO and ATSIL are to define membership, what their role is and what is delegated. There are some issues with the South Dartmoor Academy boards. The CEO has encouraged them to keep meeting with a view to the three groups meeting around one table. Once this is achieved it will become more effective. This matter was also discussed at the Standards & Curriculum committee meeting.

The CEO drew the committee's attention to the fact that it had been minuted at the Standards & Curriculum meeting of 29 January 2020 that Trustees should be encouraged to go into schools. The CEO advised that this is **not** correct practice. Governors relate to the school and Trustees relate to a function.

8. **Internal Audit**

The TBM advised that he had spoken with Trustee Mike Fisher from the Audit Committee about internal auditing. It had been agreed that internal scrutiny should continue to take place once it is safe to do so. Griffin Accountancy has been contacted and the TBM will talk to one of the partners about what they can do in terms of remote scrutiny.

The TBM reassured the committee that processes and procedures are still being adhered to 99 per cent of the time.

9. **Human Resources**

The meeting moved to Part II minutes

The meeting returned to Part I minutes

The method of appointing Peter Bethel as a Trustee of Bearness and then as a Member of the Link Academy Trust was discussed. **Action ND/Clerk.**

10. **Health & Safety**

The TBM advised that there were no major issues to report but highlighted the matter of water compliance during the current Covid-19 situation and the closure of some schools. It would seem as if the ESFA recommend conflicting guidance to that of Devon County. The TBM was of the opinion that as long as schools had switched off their heating and were undertaking weekly flushings this should be compliant.

11. **Data Protection**

The CEO reported that there were no major issues to bring to the table. Schools are being recommended to conduct meetings using the online platform of MS Teams. The Chair advised that Zoom security is now encrypted. The TBM added that all teacher's laptops are now password protected. Recording of meetings was discussed. It was suggested that once the meeting had finished the recording should be stored in the Clerk's OneDrive but would not be published.

12. **ESFA Bulletins**

The committee's attention was drawn to the letter from Eileen Milner, Chair of the ESFA regarding adjustments to the normal financial reporting schedule.

13. **Policies**

13.1 **Nursery Admissions Policy & Oversubscription Criteria**

TBM to send the Clerk the latest version of this policy. Clerk to recommend the policy to the next Board of Trustees meeting on 18 May 2020. **Action TBM/Clerk**

14. **Dates of Future Meetings**

F&GP 4/20 - 3 July 2020