

Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes: Friday 29 November 2019

Present: Mr Roy Gillard
Mrs Isabel Cherrett
Ms Nicola Dunford
Ms Cheryl Mathieson

In attendance: Clerk – Ms Becky Ames
The Trust Business Manager – Mr Matt Matthew
HR Officer – Mrs Susan Howard – item 2.1

Welcome and Apologies:

Mr Gillard welcomed everyone to the meeting; there were no apologies.

Declaration of Business Interests:

There were no declarations of business of interests.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

Subject to minor typographical amendments, the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2019 were agreed and signed as an accurate record.

2. Matters Arising

2.1 Item 2.1 - Payroll Provider

Officers had given the current Payroll Provider a final chance to improve on the accuracy of their service. Although the number of errors had decreased, there remained anomalies each month which was not experienced by other trusts. The CEO, TBM and HR Officer were exploring other payroll providers and were also investigating bringing the payroll in-house. The options would then be considered in terms of reliability and cost. The Committee supported this and recommended that any change should not take place until after the end of the tax year.

2.2 Item 3.2 - Constitution and Terms of Reference

The Committee had reviewed the Constitution and Terms of Reference in September but agreed further amendments to include the Trust Business Manager to attend meetings and an extra Duty to monitor the implementation of the Strategic Business Plan relating to Business & Property, Workforce and Finance. The Clerk would add the document to the Board's agenda on 9 December 2019 for approval.

2.3 Item 3.4 - Articles of Association

All four Members had now signed a Resolution adopting the revised Articles of Association. The Resolution and Articles of Association will be filed at Companies House by Anthony Collins, Solicitors. The revised Articles of Association will also be made available on the Trust's website.

Mr Gillard thanked the Board's Chair for completing this task which required a lot of work.

2.4 Item 4.3 - Trust Capacity Fund (TCaF)

The CEO confirmed that an application to the DfE's Trust Capacity Fund (TCaF) for £185,000 had been successful and will support continued future growth. The TBM summarised the areas the funding would cover, including training and additional support for the three schools joining the Trust in early 2020. Funding would only be

received once the expenditure, supported by receipts, had occurred. The Committee congratulated the CEO and TBM for their successful bid.

3. Financial Year 2018-19

3.1 Closure meeting

The CEO and TBM reported there had been no significant issues raised at the audit clearance meeting with Bishop Fleming.

The TBM presented the audit Management Letter which included one amber and two green recommendations. All previous year recommendations had been implemented.

3.2 Governance Statements

The TBM reported that the Audit Committee had concluded there are no significant issues from the Bishop Fleming audit and the draft Governance Statements were accurate.

3.3 Financial Statements

Mrs Cherrett had reviewed the Annual Report and Financial Statements and proposed further amendments which Bishop Fleming had accepted. The TBM would follow these up so they could be added to the papers for the Board.

Action: Clerk to upload the documents.

The Committee noted that the 'in' year surplus for the year 2018-19 was £29,824. The Committee thanked the TBM, HR Officer and the Finance Team for their dedication in setting high standards as this has had a significant impact on how successful the Audit was.

Action: IJC to email the HR Officer and Finance team with the Board's thanks.

4. Financial Year 2019-20

4.1 October 2019 Census

The TBM provided a breakdown by school of the October 2019 pupil census showing percentage capacity and impact on funding. The Committee welcomed the increase to 939 pupils within the Link Academy Trust resulting in a total of 89pc of capacity.

The CEO informed the Committee that the Reception year Published Admission Number (PAN) of 153 with the Trust having 155 places filled. This trend was likely to continue providing a healthy future for the schools. The Committee expressed their thanks to the Executive/ Academy Heads for their continued hard work in recruiting new pupils/parents. Funding for 2020-21 would reflect the increase in pupil numbers.

4.2 Financial Performance

The TBM presented the month-end management report to 31 October 2019. Following recent discussions, the Chair confirmed that he would be working with the TBM to enhance the useful income and expenditure and cashflow graphs that were now being prepared. The process would begin with the budget preparation for 2020-21. The "Directors' Dashboard" showed the figures for the end of Period 2 for individual schools as well as Trust-wide and the Committee questioned the TBM on how the Trust would ensure that we maintain a healthy position going forward. The Committee also queried the effects that the General Election might bring along with Brexit. The TBM would continue to look at the long term plan for financial sustainability including levels of reserves and future impact of growth.

4.3 Future funding

The TBM did not wish to speculate on future funding whilst a general election was in progress.

5. **Catering Provision for Schools**

The TBM reported that the new catering provision at Landscope and Hennock is working well with Landscope working in partnership with Broadhempston. The TBM presented the programme to improve catering across all schools and the Committee discussed where this might be accelerated if funding and circumstances permitted over the next three years. The CEO advised that parents were really pleased with the new provision.

6. **Trust Risk Register**

The Board Chair recommended that the Board should review the Risk Register sections on Quality & Reputation and Governance on 9 December and the Education Provision section at its February meeting, by which time the S&C Committee would have reviewed those risks in detail and updated the section.

7. **Data Protection.**

The CEO, TBM, HR Officer and Ms Mathieson had met with Mr James Twine of Wolferstans Solicitors who had provided an update presentation on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in schools which had showed the Trust was improving its practice.

The CEO reported Mrs Susan Stansfield had been appointed as Data Protection Officer (DPO) and will begin DPO training immediately. She will then be undertaking visits to audit all schools throughout the Trust and will ensure they are compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR. The schools will be reviewed on a termly basis. Mrs Cherrett suggested that the DPO also keeps the record of requests made under Freedom of Information as legislation for FoI and DP were aligned.

8. **Property**

There are 12 CIF bids currently being prepared for schools across the Trust. The deadline for submission is 13 December and will mainly focus on Mechanical and Electrical bids. The TBM was unable to provide greater details as all bids were currently out for tender. Once completed, he would be able to provide details of the funding being sought along with recommendations for the Trust's contribution, normally 10pc to 15pc. The Committee thanked the TBM for his hard work in coordinating the submission of the bids

Action: Clerk to add CIF to the Board Agenda.

9. **Human Resources**

The CEO commended the contribution by Ms Mathieson as HR Portfolio Holder in progressing the actions in the Workforce Strategy of the Business Plan. Good progress was being made and Ms Mathieson commended the HR Officer who was implementing decisions into everyday practice.

10. **Health & Safety**

The Board Chair had met with the Trust H&S Officer, Mrs Slee, Administrator at Yeoford. The Committee noted her report from 30 October 2019 and welcomed the way in which records were being kept.

11. **Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)**

Mrs Cherrett had reviewed the ESFA weekly bulletins since 1 October 2019 and raised a number of questions. The TBM responded as follows:

2 October 2019 – No issues affecting the Trust were expected as a result of Brexit
16 October - Condition Data Collection - All schools within the Trust have been surveyed.
23 October - Interest free loan for energy saving projects? SALIX and will be considered as part of the CIF applications.
30 October - Integrated Curriculum and Financial Planning training - TBM has submitted a request for training.
7 November – CIF deadline 13 December - TBM had provided an overview of applications, cost to follow once tenders returned.
20 November - Re-inforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete? The TBM was not aware of any buildings of this construction.

Are there any staff who have opted out of the Automatic pension enrolment? A few members of staff have opted out.

To the TBM's knowledge, there were no Ash trees on school grounds. A tree survey had been conducted.

12. **Policies**

12.1 **Financial Reserves & Investment Policy 2019**

The Committee reviewed the policy and agreed that six weeks' operating costs should be held as reserves. This was in accordance with the recommendation of the External Auditor.

12.2 **Fundraising Policy 2019**

The Committee reviewed the policy and agreed to add the tobacco and gambling industries to those from whom the Trust would not accept donations.

12.3 **Procurement & Tendering Policy 2019**

The Committee reviewed the policy and amended the requirement for three written quotations to £5,000 to £50,000 to align with the figure set out in Procedures.

Mrs Cherrett agreed to make the amendments so that the three Policies could be submitted to the Board on 9 December 2019 for approval.

13. **Growth**

Following protracted legal negotiation, the conversion of Drake's and Otterton CofE Primary schools had now been approved by the Secretary of State with a conversion date of 1 December 2019. The Committee thanked the TBM for his perseverance in this matter.

14. **Dates of Future Meetings**

7 February 2020

27 March 2020

1 May 2020

3 July 2020

Drafted: 29 November 2019

BA/IJC