

The Link Academy Trust
Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes: Friday 27 November 2020
9.30am - F&GP 6/20

Held online using MS Teams due to Covid restrictions

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

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

Welcome:

Welcome by Roy Gillard, Chair of Finance & General Purposes Committee

Apologies: There were none.

Declaration of Business Interests: The CEO is a Trustee of South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust (SDMAT) and also a Trustee for the Bearnas Education Foundation. The Chair is a Director Labyrinth Accountancy Limited and undertakes company secretarial duties for Stock Props Limited, a dormant property rental business. The TBM advised that the most recent iteration of the summary of business interests (also on the Link website) has been checked and confirmed as sufficient by Bishop Fleming for auditing purposes. The Chair asked that Trustees ensure their business interests are declared and correct on the website summary and if necessary, updated forms sent to the Clerk.

1. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Part I Minutes of 28 September 2020 were approved as a true and correct record. The CEO asked that her declaration of business interests was updated in these minutes to include that she is a Trustee for the Bearnas Education Foundation.

Actions from the previous meeting

- TBM to use national baseline KPIs from the Kreston Academies Benchmark Report 2020 for the next financial year. The TBM reported that this had been noted. The TBM is awaiting the benchmarking report from Bishop Fleming following the year-end audit, expected January 2021.
- TBM to email IGO job description to the Chair. The TBM has forwarded this to the CEO and Chair of Trustees and it has been agreed.
- IJC to amend Terms of Reference. IJC had amended the Constitution and Terms of Reference and these had been approved by the Board of Trustees. She reminded the Committee that they set out their responsibilities
- IGO to produce short report on income generation at the end of each term for the committee. This has been noted and the next report is due in January 2021. The report for this term will be presented at the next F&GP meeting to be held in 2021.
- IJC to review Scheme of Delegation and identify updates. This has been completed and approved by the Board of Trustees.
- Version 6 of the Scheme of Delegation to be recommended to the Board of Trustees for approval at their 12 October 2020 meeting. This has been actioned.
- Following approval of the Scheme of Delegation (SoD), ATSiL to lead Local Boards through the document. The CEO advised that there will be a meeting held on 3 December to undertake this.
- Clerk to note any policies with a Local Board role as an appendix to the SoD. This is noted.
- TBM to submit audited accounts by 31 December 2020. The Annual Report and Financial Statements will be submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval on 7 December 2020, then signed

- TBM to submit the Budget Forecast Return to the ESFA. The TBM advised that the BFR had been submitted on 28 September 2020 and emailed to ND, IJC, RG, CM and the Clerk on 28 September 2020.
- TBM to check the programme of reviews for the 2020-2021 Internal Audit programme. The TBM advised that the Audit committee approved the Internal Audit programme on 11 November 20. The programme will be:
 - Autumn term visit (booked in for 19/11/2020)
 - Governance
 - Regularity
 - Risk management
 - Spring term visit
 - Budgeting & monitoring (particularly ensuring this is being done during and post Covid as per specific risk on register)
 - Payroll systems
 - Income systems
 - Summer term visit
 - Review of insurance cover
 - Purchase systems
 - Fixed asset controls (including review of capital funding applications as per specific risk on risk register)

A clean audit for the Autumn term on Governance, Regularity and Risk Management was received on 26 November 2020.

- HR Officer to return Draft Admission Statements to Andrew Brewerton. The TBM advised that the statements were with Andrew Brenton and Christina Mabin. The deadline for final Admission Statements is January 2021.
- CEO to rationalise the use of the Vision & Values in the Admission Statements and for this to be brought forward to February 2021. The CEO advised that the EIT and AHs will meet to rework this in January 2021 and prepare in advance for the next round.
- IJC to amend Central Funds Policy before recommendation to Trustees and TBM to correct the two references to the AFH. The Policy had been updated and approved by the Board of Trustees
- IJC to amend Investment Policy – word Directors to be changed for Trustees. The Policy had been updated and approved by the Board of Trustees.

2. Matters Arising

2.1 Item 2.3 – Income Generation

Meeting with the professional marketing company and the F&GP committee's request for assistance with marketing for new Trustees and assistance with capacity building. TBM to report back. The TBM and IGO met with an external marketing company in Exeter in early October. The Company spoke about marketing and branding the Trust but the TBM was unable to recommend their service.

The TBM had forwarded Facebook statistics to the Committee. Advertisements for local businesses on the FB page are being sold. Schools are doing as much marketing as they can in these trying times and are working together to create low maintenance and sustainable income generating schemes. Leaflets advertising schools in their areas had been welcomed by Estate Agents.

3. Finance

3.1 Full review of Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements. To include Governance Statements, feedback from closure meeting with the External Auditor and the Audit committee meeting of 11 November 2020.

The TBM had forwarded separately the Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements and advised that the final report could not be compiled until pension figures had been confirmed.

The Committee noted the reduction in income of lettings from Clubs due to fewer activities since March 2020 because of school closures.

The Committee noted the increase in professional fees which related to the conversion of the six schools to the Link Academy Trust during the year.

Costs for staff cover were noted. The TBM advised that this not only related to Covid issues but also to the integration of new schools into the Trust and their understanding of the Link process for when staff absences have to be covered. He anticipated that this figure will reduce to normal levels across the schools during the year.

CM noted that the pension reserves were shown as a deficit and asked why this was the case. The TBM replied that when the Trust took over from LA there was a deficit already in place. CM asked if this was guaranteed by the Secretary of State. The TBM replied affirmatively but advised that it had to be shown on the accounts as a deficit.

It was agreed that the Finance & General Purpose Committee recommended approval of the Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements to the Board of Trustees subject to information awaited from the pension regulator.

Agreed

3.2 Financial Performance to 31 October 2020, month 2.

The TBM advised that this report had been forwarded separately to the Committee.

The TBM advised that he had adjusted figures for the three schools with successful CIF bids to reflect prepayments and accruals from last year (Tedburn St Mary, Broadhempston and Yeoford). All schools were performing as expected. The slight reduction in income for Bearnas could be due to fewer numbers in the preschool. Additional costs for supplies related particularly to Ilsington and TA issues. Bearnas and Broadhempston show increased costs due to building works being undertaken. Moretonhampstead are recovering from their deficit position. Control of staffing costs in schools would remain a priority; the Trust is forecasting a surplus this year.

IJC asked whether the TBM had received any views about the prospect that teachers will not get the level of pay increases they have enjoyed in the past. The TBM advised that the ESFA will not talk about future funding and that he had not received any information through his network to date about a staff pay freeze. IJC asked, if the pay freezes become actual, how this would affect the budget and forecasts. It was agreed that the CEO/RG and TBM would discuss this at their next meeting. Whether future funding will be honoured also needs consideration along with pupil numbers.

Agreed

The TBM advised that he was looking at splitting the revenue and capital out in the Directors' Data Dashboard. IJC thought that focusing on revenue would be helpful to ensure Trustees understood how schools were operating within their annual budget.

4. **Pupil Census**

4.1 Result of October pupil census and impact on funding for 2021-22.

The TBM had forwarded the results for discussion separately and asked for confirmation from the Committee that the predicted numbers for Reception intake were realistic.

The Finance & General Purposes Committee agreed that the figures were fair and reasonable but would need to be monitored.

CM asked whether there were plans to change the age range at Diptford and take in two year olds. The CEO advised that the Academy Head was undertaking some exploratory work on this at the moment.

The Chair noted that external playgroups and nursery providers were struggling to remain open because of the pandemic and numbers could increase because of this.

5. **Property**

The following projects are being submitted for CIF funding in 2021/2022.

Bearnes – Roof

Diptford – Replacement Devon Lady Classrooms

Drake's – Mechanical & electrical

Harbertonford – Roof

Hennock – Roof/Windows and M&E

Ilington – Mechanical & electrical

Landscove – Mechanical & electrical Otterton – possible roof

Stoke Gabriel – possible roof

Widcombe – Mechanical & electrical Yeoford – Mechanical & electrical

The TBM added that the largest project would be Diptford. The CEO advised that the Diptford Devon Lady Classrooms had been raised as an issue at the recent Standards & Curriculum meeting. She had explained the difficulty of gaining CIF funding and the reasons for allocation were never clear.

The CEO encouraged Trustees to read the Local Board reports and added that a reporting pro-forma will be drawn up.

The TBM advised that the Ilington extension build deadline for tender was 20 November 2020. Five companies had been asked to tender on specification. The Tender Report had been emailed to the Committee. Planning permission has been granted with two conditions. The permission no longer has to go to the Minister for approval and will now be sent to the DfE Capital Teams Leader. It is anticipated that costs for the build will be less than originally agreed. Additional funds have been budgeted for Hall rental and possible staff costs due to a split site. The Academy Head has spoken to all parents and two parental consultations have been held. Parents are enthusiastic and supportive of the school. A contingency fund is in place and the Trust is in a strong position to go ahead with the project. The contractor could start on 18 January. Costs to date have been accounted for within the project. It was agreed that the TBM would write a short report on the Ilington build to recommend that the Board approves the tender on 7 December 2020. Report to be for Trustees' approval.

Action TBM

6. **Business Plan**

6.1 **Financial Strategy and Control.**

The Chair advised that he had discussed financial control with the CEO. Strategy will be discussed at a later date. The TBM has drafted a business plan, this is to be emailed to the Clerk for distribution to Trustees prior to their meeting on 7 December 2020. Each person responsible should look at their own section. ND/RG will have a phone meeting.

**Action TBM
Action CEO/Chair**

7. **Risk Register**

7.1 To receive IJC's changes to the Finance & Financial Sustainability section of the Risk Register and to recommend these changes to the Board of Trustees. This has been actioned.

7.2 To receive IJC's changes to the Infrastructure-Estate and H&S sections and to recommend these changes to the Board of Trustees. This has been actioned.

7.3 The TBM to advise where catering is located within the Risk Register. The TBM is working on this.

7.4 IJC to have written Covid in red against all areas where it could be an impact within the Risk Register. IJC to confirm action. IJC responded that, on reflection, she felt this

would not be helpful. The risk of a pandemic was included on the register and specific risks set out, for example with Safeguarding. All mitigations are in place and the Trust was adhering to Government guidance and direction. Children's mental health has been added. Covid also sits within staffing. The additional impact that Governors were unable to visit schools and could only meet remotely has been included.

- 7.5 To review the Infrastructure-Business Unit section of the Risk Register. The TBM agreed to work on this and for it to be an agenda item at the next F&GP meeting.

**Action TBM
Agenda Item**

The CEO advised that she will work on the Safeguarding element of the Risk Register with Jane Collings within the next two days.

The Audit Committee had agreed that responsibility for the risk register was part of their remit; IJC would be speaking to Dominic Course to discuss this further and ensure a smooth handover. The Audit Committee would monitor that Committees were reviewing the register at agreed intervals and agreeing amendments where risks had increased or decreased.

8. **Internal Audit**

- 8.1 A clean Internal Audit for the Autumn term programme was received on 26 November 2020. Please refer to actions from the previous meeting above.

9. **Human Resources**

The CEO reported no major issues. Legal advice had been sought on a staffing issue. The staff member has since resigned.

There have been some issues with Covid-19 'bubbles' being closed down at Moretonhampstead and blended learning at the school has not taken place seamlessly. The CEO has supported the Academy Head in this and Andy Keay is also supporting to ensure all staff and pupils can access MS Teams.

There have been other issues around staffing and the EIT are assisting with this. The health of staff continues to be monitored.

There have been parental complaints across the schools which seem to be based around Covid and stress related.

10. **Health & Safety**

The TBM advised that the newly appointed Premises Officer, Andrew Tranter, is settling in well and has visited each school. Mr Tranter now has a Trust van and an account with Screwfix and is undertaking low maintenance around the schools. The TBM is researching a ticketing system that Mr Tranter and the schools can access which will monitor Health & Safety compliance. This will afford the Trust a global view across checks in all schools. Administrators will hold the log in.

IJC advised that a possible candidate to take over the Health & Safety function at Trustee level had been identified.

11. **Data Protection**

The CEO advised that there have been no issues since her last report.

The HR Officer is looking into writing a Home Working policy.

12. **ESFA Bulletins**

The CEO and IJC confirmed that they have read the ESFA bulletins.

13. **Policies**

- 13.1 Accounting. It was agreed to recommend this policy to the Board of Trustees for approval.
- 13.2 Financial Reserves & Investment. It was agreed to recommend this policy to the Board of Trustees for approval.

Any Other Business

It was agreed that CM would contact Trustees to discuss which committees they would sit on for 2021.

The Chair thanked IJC for her brilliant work as a member of the Finance & General Purpose Committee.

14. **Dates of Future Meetings**

- 05 February 2021
- 26 March 2021
- 07 May 2021
- 02 July 2021