

The Link Academy Trust
Finance & General Purposes Committee

**Minutes: Monday 26 April 2021
14.00hrs - F&GP 2a/21**

*Held online using MS Teams due to Covid restrictions
The meeting was also recorded*

Present: Mr Roy Gillard (Chair)
Mrs Nicola Dunford (CEO)
Mrs Cheryl Mathieson (CM)
Mr Paul Waterworth (PW)

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

Welcome:

Roy Gillard, Chair of Finance & General Purposes Committee welcomed all to the meeting.

Absent without Apologies: Mr Mike Fisher (MF).

Declaration of Business Interests: The CEO is a Trustee of South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust (SDMAT). It was noted that the final accounts meeting for SDMAT has been held but no official notification of closure has been received as yet. SDMAT remains an active company at Companies House. The CEO is also a Trustee for the Bearnes Education Foundation. Mr Roy Gillard is a Director of Labyrinth Accountancy Limited.

1. Digital Learning Strategy & Vision March 2021-24

A paper titled Digital Learning Strategy & Vision March 2021-24 had been circulated to the committee prior to the meeting and formed the single agenda item for this meeting.

The contents of the paper included:

- the Link Academy Trust vision and values, including a local and national reputation for the innovative use of IT and Digital Media
- developing a current digital learning vision balancing the use of technology alongside quality first teaching to provide an excellent education packed with opportunity
- planning actions to build the digital learning vision to ensure consistency and a shared purpose
- devising the technical roadmap to ensure an excellent experience that launches children into remarkable lives

The TBM advised that the paper was based on experience gained over the previous sixteen months. The CEO added that the paper covered the financial requirements and digital learning vision required to ensure satisfactory growth for the Trust over the next three years.

The connectivity for the Trust's schools is a limiting factor and was discussed. Two schools, Yeoford and Ilsington, have been successful in gaining funding through the Rural Gigabit Connectivity (RGC) programme to improve internet connectivity. Hennock had been proposed to the RGC programme but a desktop cost exercise was conducted and found it was cost prohibitive. The use of Air Band had also been considered. One school, Hennock, already has this arrangement but their internet speeds remain sub requirements.

The CEO continued that families and staff are reliant on the internet to find research information. The TBM advised that the schools with the least IT and connectivity provision have become the priority schools for IT equipment. These schools are Cheriton Bishop followed by Stoke Gabriel and Hennock. IT provision needs to be balanced with capital costs.

The need for the Trust to be pragmatic and move quickly as technical developments occur was noted. Broadclyst Primary School, part of the Cornerstone Trust, have been held up as the exemplar in the region. The Trust has spoken directly to the Microsoft Education Team who has suggested devices, provided quotes and training advice.

The dependence on trained teachers and/or connectivity and how these aspects could be aligned to enable the success of the strategy was discussed. The TBM advised that teacher training could be supplied by Microsoft if they were chosen. The CEO added that equipment should only be purchased if it could be used in the school and that an IT champion for each Academy should be developed. The Trust has built up resources in terms of recorded lessons and BBC Bite Size but should be prepared for another lockdown. Schools could deliver online on snow days, if a child was sick and also for home-learning in order to continue the educational progress of pupils. Flexible working hours for staff is being developed and the Trust will be researching how online learning can be used to enable this. Current data is showing that pupils have maintained progress and haven't lost ground from January 2021 through online teaching.

The monitoring and survey work mentioned in the strategy was discussed. The CEO advised that survey work would be undertaken by Academy Heads working with their Local Boards. The Trust has capacity at Executive Improvement Team level to develop school improvement and blended learning. The TBM added that the Trust needs to provide the tools for staff to deliver this action plan. It was noted that the Standards & Curriculum committee have a major part in the decision making process.

The three year financial road map of the strategy was discussed. The strategy is programmed to commence Summer Term 2020. The academic year 2021-22 would realise an investment of £166k, the academic year 2022-23 would realise an investment of £170k and the academic year 2023-24 an investment of £77k. The Chair was of the opinion that the Trust should be looking further than three years of expenditure and that it could be extended to five to ten years. The CEO agreed. The option of leasing IT equipment was discussed. The TBM advised that the Trust could only use an operating lease. It was agreed that the TBM would look at the DfE framework for costs on lease of equipment and provide the committee with figures within the next seven to ten days. It was agreed to add Digital Learning Strategy to future F&GP agendas for an update.

Action Clerk/TBM

The TBM advised that there could be some movement in anticipated costs. Income generation will be researched. Some PTFA's could assist. Potential spend would not occur until Summer 2021. The Trust has the financial reserves for this investment.

The CEO asked those present if, in principal, they agreed that the Trust should continue to work towards the Digital Learning Strategy and expenditure. Each committee member responded affirmatively but requested assurance that the financial investment was used wisely and that regular updates were received. It was noted that it was the responsibility of the schools and staff to ensure the equipment was used effectively.

Agreed

It was agreed that the TBM and CEO would make a presentation on the strategy to the Standards & Curriculum meeting on the 28 April 2021 and to the Board of Trustees on 24 May 2021.

It was agreed that the CEO would write a termly CPD programme for Trustees, commencing September 2021.