

Finance & General Purposes Committee

Meeting minutes

Friday 26th September 2025

12.30 pm - F&GP

Held at Landscope House

Present: Ben Thorne (Chair)
Cheryl Mathieson
Rachael Sharpe (CEO)

In attendance: Deputy CEO - Mr Matt Matthew (DCEO)
Finance Manager- Louisa Taylor (FM)
Charlotte Roe (Governance Professional)

Minutes: Nicol Bush (Clerk)

No	Item	Action
1.	Election of Chair The Chair confirmed their intention to remain in post, which was supported and agreed by the meeting.	
2.	Welcome and Apologies The Chair opened the meeting with a warm welcome and apologies were received and accepted from PW.	
3.	Declarations of Business Interests There were no new declarations brought to the meeting.	
4.	Any Other Business There was no other business brought to the meeting.	
5.	Minutes of the previous meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The part I minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2025 were approved as a true record and were signed accordingly. The Part II minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2025 were circulated privately via email to those who attended and were approved as a true record and were signed accordingly ACTION- Clerk to share the signed Part I minutes with the HROM for website publishing.	Clerk
6.	Matters Arising (not on the agenda) There were no matters arising brought to the meeting.	
7.	Governance Annual Review of Constitution and Terms of Reference to check: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Membership is appropriate Duties remain relevant All duties have been covered during the year and it aligns with the Scheme of Delegation It was noted that the membership of the committee had previously included the Chief Executive Officer and four trustees, which had been consistent in the past, the committee had four trustees making the arrangement compliant. However, the current number had reduced to three trustees. It was agreed that the wording should be amended to state that membership would include "at least three trustees," allowing flexibility and ensuring legal compliance.	

	<p>The meeting considered the placement of HR matters within the committee agenda. It was proposed that HR be moved to the Remuneration Committee to ensure better alignment and focus.</p> <p>The Trustees suggested removing the HR reference from its current location to avoid confusion with the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The meeting agreed with the proposal and concluded that this adjustment would be beneficial moving forward.</p> <p>The Trustees approved the Terms of Reference following some minor adjustments.</p>	
8.	<p>Risk Register</p> <p>DCEO to update the meeting on the following risk categories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial • Estate • H&S • Operational <p>The CEO confirmed that the Trust's Risk Register was under active review by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). She explained that while the register currently addressed operational risks, it lacked sufficient detail concerning school improvement, the quality of education, and the Trust-wide strategic overview. To address this, the SLT had embedded a comprehensive review of the Risk Register into their meeting schedule. The aim was to ensure that each committee would eventually be presented with risks specific to their area, all of which would be aligned with the Trust Evaluation Form and the strategic plan. The CEO clarified that the version of the Risk Register currently presented was largely unchanged from the previous review. She anticipated that by December, the document would be updated to reflect the outcomes of ongoing school reviews and strategic assessments. In the interim, it was agreed that the existing risk register would continue to be used to demonstrate the trust's ongoing focus on risk management.</p>	
9.	<p>Finance</p> <p>Part II was taken</p> <p>9.1 Financial Performance to 31st August 2025 (Month 12)</p> <p>9.2 Financial Budget for 2025/2026 including Financial Deficit Plan</p> <p>9.3 Budget 24/25 including BFR submission.</p>	
10.	<p>Estates and H&S</p> <p>10.1 Update on building programme over the summer holidays.</p> <p>The DCEO noted that the Health and Safety Officer had submitted a comprehensive report. One of the key highlights was the successful completion of the roof replacement programme at Stoke Gabriel, which had been delivered on time and within budget. He added that Diptford's project was still in the final stages, awaiting sign-off.</p> <p>The DCEO shared that significant improvements had also been made at Diptford, including new lighting and a heating system to replace outdated infrastructure. Originally, there had been some flexibility in the proposed scope and cost, but the final figures were expected to come in well under budget. As a result, the Trust anticipated returning a portion of the funding for this project to the government. Specifically, Stoke Gabriel was expected to show an underspend of £187k while Diptford's underspend was estimated to be in the region of £20,000. No further work could be carried out under the current funding arrangements.</p> <p>10.2 Potential CIF 26/27 projects and Capital Plan</p> <p>The DCEO reported that the Trust held approximately £90,000 in capital reserves, with an expected increase of £112,000 during the current year. He raised the question of whether the Trust should continue to rely on CIF and what alternative funding options might be available, though none were immediately apparent.</p> <p>The DCEO suggested that capital expenditure should now be approached on an "emerging works" basis, responding to issues as they arise. He proposed that planning for the summer term should include consideration of IT needs as well.</p>	

	<p>The DCEO said his recommendation to the board would be to stick with CIF for now, resubmit the unsuccessful projects but only commit the minimum contribution around 5% to keep things manageable. The Committee agreed with this approach.</p> <p>10.3 Draft Climate and Sustainability Strategy.</p> <p>The DCEO discussed the development of a Trust-wide sustainability strategy and informed the meeting that each school is required to nominate a sustainability lead and produce a climate action plan. The Trust has partnered with <i>Let's Go Zero</i>, a government-funded organisation supporting schools in reducing their environmental impact. Presentations have been made to academy heads, with further sessions planned.</p> <p>While individual schools were progressing, it was noted that a centralised sustainability strategy was needed at Trust level. Data has been collected on heating, lighting, and building fabric across schools. The next step was to consolidate this into a coherent Trust-wide plan.</p> <p>The DCEO proposed identifying a Governor with an interest in sustainability to lead at Trust level. Discussions with LAC Chairs were suggested to explore potential nominees. The matter will be added to the next agenda, and further engagement will take place at the upcoming strategy day.</p> <p>ACTION-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GP/DCEO to discuss Sustainability Lead role at LAC level with Governors. • Clerk to add Sustainability Lead Trustee update to the next F&GP agenda 	GP/Clerk
11.	<p>Internal/External Audit</p> <p>11.1 Suggested IA areas</p> <p>11.2 Tender for audit services</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the external audit had not yet commenced, and therefore there was no report available at this time.</p> <p>The DCEO informed the committee that Westcotts had been appointed to conduct the internal audit for the current year. An email from Westcotts had been shared with the Chair of the Audit Committee, as the Audit Committee is responsible for determining which risk areas should be prioritised for review.</p>	
12.	<p>Data Protection</p> <p>The DCEO noted there were no significant issues to report.</p>	
14.	<p>Finance Bulletins</p> <p>14.1 CEO and Chair to raise any issues for discussion</p> <p>The DCEO noted there were no significant issues to report.</p> <p>14.2 Academy Trust Handbook</p> <p>The Chair noted that there had been a few minor clarifications required in relation to data protection matters, primarily around roles and responsibilities. However, these were not significant and did not represent any major changes. It was confirmed that the existing documentation remained largely unchanged and continued to be fit for purpose. The Committee confirmed it had noted the changes.</p>	
15.	<p>Policies</p> <p>15.1 Capitalisation Policy- The Trustees approved the Capitalisation policy.</p> <p>15.2 Travel and Personal Expenses Policy- confirmed that the policy had been previously approved, but an additional clause had been added regarding mileage. The Committee raised concerns about potential inconsistencies within the policy and particularly where staff transferring permanently between schools might receive mileage allowances, while others remaining at their original school would not. The Committee discussed the possibility of defining what constitutes "reasonable" travel, acknowledging that interpretations may vary. It was suggested that clarification be sought from Bishop Fleming regarding any tax implications of mileage payments.</p> <p>The Committee agreed that further review and clarification were needed to ensure consistency and fairness.</p> <p>ACTION-</p>	GP/DCEO

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCEO/GP to review the Travel and Expenses policy with Bishop Fleming. 	
16.	Risk Register It was noted that financial sustainability and going concern remained rated as Red , while pupil numbers continued to be rated as Amber due to their significant impact on overall risk. It was agreed that the current ratings remained appropriate based on the discussions held.	
17.	Evaluation of governance impact The Chair noted that pupil outcomes remained central to all discussions and felt that the meeting had included several positive and constructive conversations, especially regarding school positions and future actions. The DCEO highlighted that the committee had covered the necessary agenda items effectively and had made good progress.	

The meeting ended at 2.10pm

Signed by the Chair of the Committee.....on 21st November 2025