

The Link Academy Trust
Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes: Tuesday 6 July 2021
9.30am - F&GP 4 /21
Held online using MS Teams

Present: Mr Roy Gillard (Chair)
Ms Nicola Dunford
Mrs Cheryl Mathieson
Mr Paul Waterworth

In attendance: Trust Business Manager - Mr Matt Matthew
Clerk – Sue Howard

Welcome:

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

Absent without Apologies: Mike Fisher

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. Mr Roy Gillard is a Director of Labyrinth Accountancy Limited. Mr Michael Fisher is a Foundation Director of Bailey Partnership LLP, Amethyst Property Ltd, and Adorn Development Ltd, property consultancy and management companies.

1. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of 7 May 2021 were approved as a true and accurate record.

2. **Matters Arising**

2.1 Item 2.2. Budget Assumptions. Schools Wish Lists. TBM said that package of Summer works is being collated following the completion of the Schools Wish Lists.

2.2 Item 3.1. The Financial Procedures Manual has been updated to reflect the HR Officer and Finance Officer delegations to sign off expenditure up to and including £300. This has been actioned and is agreed by this Committee.

Agreed

2.3 Item 6.1. TBM to meet with Griffin Accountants concerning the internal audit. TBM reported that the Internal Audit took place 28 June 2021, report has been issued and uploaded to SharePoint. No concerns were raised, but a few suggestions around prepayments, accruals and fixed asset register were given, but no issues.

2.4 Risk Register. Agenda Item from previous meeting. CEO to make changes to all areas that are the responsibility of the F&GP committee and email the Chair for his comments once completed. This has been actioned. To note.

3. **Digital Learning Strategy & Expenditure**

Agenda Item from meeting 7 May 2021.

ND reported on the development of the Digital Learning Strategy and that discussions have begun with Academy Heads. TBM added regarding the expenditure and devices have been purchased for all Year 6's across the Trust schools using central reserves. These devices will be sent direct to the Trust's IT partner, Limbtec for configuration and will be ready for September.

The Trust summer works will include updates to some schools with their internal infrastructure, including connectivity reworks via a DfE project team which will fund IIsington

and Yeoford for a total infrastructure update. The committee discussed future projects for internet improvements and Hennock was noted as being in need.

4. Finance

4.1 Financial Performance to 31 May 2021 or 30 June 2021 – month 9/10.
TBM reported no issues or concerns. Cash balances are taken into account as schools will always reach their budget limits at this time of year. All purchasing and orders are now shut down allowing the finance team to ‘tidy up’ for year end. It was noted that central expenses have changed dramatically since the budgets were set last year, but this is illustrated in recharges to schools and take into account the Apprenticeship Levy, purchasing of laptops for staff, central PE staff and Landscope School House refurb, all of which were not included in the original budget setting. All the above are improvements for the future and sustainability of the Trust and having a central team for a Trust of our size is imperative for providing a consistent financial and support service to all our schools, enabling the Academy Heads and their staff to concentrate of ensuring the best education for our pupils. TBM reported to the Committee that the Trust is in a good healthy position at this time.

4.2 Support Staff Pay Award 2021-22. Final Review. This item forms part of the budget assumptions in item 4.3. TBM advised that there has been no formal communication regarding NJC pay awards received to date.

4.3 Budget 2021-22. Final Review.
TBM provided the final budget for 2021/22 to the committee prior to the meeting and summarised the Trust’s key assumptions provided by the ASCL as in previous years, they are:

- *1% inflationary increase to core schools funding 22/23 and 1.8% 23/24*
- *ASCL guidance is 0% Teachers pay award 21/22 with 3% thereafter in years 22/23 & 23/24. For the purposes of the Trust’s budget planning I have profiled the teachers’ pay award as 1% 21/22, 3% 22/23 and 2% year on year thereafter. This, in part, is to reflect the offer made to NJC staff as I cannot see how the government will be able to offer a pay award to support staff without offering to teaching staff*
- *ASCL guidance is 0% Support staff pay award with 0.87% in 22/23 and 1.87% in 23/24. The offer made by the national employers to NJC was rejected and I have therefore profiled the Support staff as 1.5% 21/22, 0.87% 22/23, 1.87% 23/24 and 1% year on year thereafter*

Included in the document was a table detailing revenue funds for each school b/fwd at the end of 2019/20, in year deficit/surplus to 1 June 2021 and estimated costs for summer works, resulting in all schools showing a healthy surplus going into 2021/22. School by School current situations and future predictions were highlighted in the TBM’s report with the schools of financial concern summarised at the meeting.

Following the unsuccessful CIF bids this year, the Committee are aware that funds incorporated into the budget for CIF applications could now be spent elsewhere. Further discussions will be had and a working party formed to look at a reserves strategy going forward. The TBM highlighted the uncertainty over future pupil funding in our schools and this needs to be taken into consideration. *CM attended a recent Bishop Fleming seminar where GAG Pooling was subject of discussion.* The TBM reported that the Trust do ‘GAG Pool’ by default, but the GAG income that comes down from the ESFA goes to each individual school and he also feels that GAG Pooling could potentially affect the future growth of the Trust.

The Chair proposed that the Trust investigate forecasting software to enable instant figures to be produced based on budgets, taking into account future projects, staffing or pupil number. TBM said the use of more automated systems provides efficiency for the Trust and he is always welcome to opportunities to improve adding that any

decisions around future accounting software needs to be communicated to the Trusts auditors to ensure future collaboration and effective relationships.

Action Chair/TBM

The Chair gave thanks to the TBM and his team for their hard work in producing the budget. The Chair is recommending for the Committee to accept the budget as presented and to forward to the Board for approval at their meeting scheduled for 12 July 2021. All present in agreement.

Agreed

5. **Property**

5.1 CIF bids: The Trust were unsuccessful in CIF applications, but the TBM is submitting Appeals for Hennock, Widecombe, Ilington, Drake's and Diptford following communication with the DfE CIF team and feedback/scoring received.

Action TBM to feedback

6. **Academies Financial Handbook**

6.1 Letter received from Baroness Berridge, Minister for the School System regarding name change of the Academies Financial Handbook to The Academy Trust Handbook and Financial Notice to Improve to Notice to Improve. To note.

6.2 Update re-issued. Summary of changes can be found at the following link <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-financial-handbook/what-has-changed-in-this-edition>

7. **Accounts Direction**

Accounts Direction 2021-22. TBM reported there are no implications of any changes.

8. **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**

Employee Assistance Paper presented for review by this committee. All in agreement for recommendation for approval by the Board on 12 July 2021.

Agreed

9. **Human Resources**

The CEO reported that as usual at this time of year, there are lots of staffing changes across The Trust which are being implemented.

10. **Health & Safety**

There were no issues for discussion.

11. **Data Protection**

There were no issues for discussion.

12. **ESFA Bulletins**

There were no issues for discussion.

13. **Policies**

13.1 Travel and Expenses

Brought forward from meeting of 7 May 2021. TBM has checked Table 2 and made comparisons with other Trusts, all similar. Committee agreed for this to be put forward to the Board of Trustees for ratification.

Agreed

14. **Dates of Future Meetings**

24 September 2021

26 November 2021

04 February 2022

25 March 2022

06 May 2022

01 July 2022