

The Link Academy Trust
Finance & General Purposes Committee

**Minutes: Monday 28 September 2020
9.30am - F&GP 5/20**

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:

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

Apologies: There were none.

Declaration of Business Interests: The CEO is a Trustee of South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust (SDMAT).

1. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The Part I Minutes of the meeting held on 03 July 2020 were agreed to be a true and accurate record. To be signed at the next face to face meeting.

2. **Matters Arising**

2.1 **Item 2.2 - Key Performance Indicators and Benchmarks for the next financial year**
It was agreed that the TBM would use national baseline KPIs from the Kreston Academies Benchmark Report 2020.

Action TBM

2.2 **Item 3.2 – Covid-19 Impact**
The TBM reported on lost income for paid places in Early Years. This equates to an approximate loss of £19,000 across the whole Trust and reflects approximately 15 per cent of income for the year. The risk is that if the Trust experiences another lockdown due to the Covid pandemic, a further reduction of income will be experienced.

The TBM advised that the Growth & Capacity report for the Business Plan is now ready to be forwarded to Trustees.

2.3 **Item 9 – Health & Safety and Income Generation**

The Health & Safety Officer job description has been emailed to the Chair as requested and a Health & Safety Officer appointed to start at the beginning of the Autumn half term. The Trust is researching which software could aid the position for identifying and recording work to be done; the purchase of a second-hand van, rather than a lease arrangement, had been decided at this initial stage. The appointment will ensure that regular Health & Safety checks are carried out consistently at each school.

The Income Generation Officer (IGO) job description has been completed and will be sent to the Chair.

Action TBM

Sustainable income streams are being researched. The TBM and IGO will meet with a professional marketing company this week to take this drive forward. [IJC asked if the TBM could also use this meeting to request assistance in finding new Trustees?](#) IJC to provide documentation for this.

Action TBM/IJC

Discussion has been requested with the Local Authority (LA) over the asset transfer of the old community centre building in Stoke Gabriel.

The LA portion of land in Ilsington, leased by the Link, was discussed. This matter is not being taken forward at present.

2.4 Bishop Fleming fee for auditing 2019-20 at £19,500

It was noted:

(1) the increased fee of £3000 to cover the conversion of six schools during the year and, in particular, the additional work associated with the three former South Dartmoor schools.

(2) Nathan Coughlin, Audit Partner, would cover the audit for 2019-20 as Mrs Tuckett was the Audit Partner for Westcountry MAT.

The Committee agreed that long term relationships in this area are vital and Bishop Fleming provided excellent support. Ongoing costs will be reviewed.

2.5 Management Partnership with Morchard Bishop

The CEO reported that a joint committee meeting will be set up. Jo Carter, the Local Board Chair of Woodleigh will be invited to attend given her experience with supporting schools joining the Trust. Due Diligence is in process. The School House remains occupied by the Caretaker and the Diocese will determine a course of action by the end of this year in this matter. It is anticipated that the school will convert in September 2021, by which time the Head Teacher and Senior Teacher will have left their posts.

At an RSC meeting on 28 September, another Trust which might need some support was flagged up.

2.6 Update on pupil numbers

The CEO reported there has been a drop in pupil numbers this year. Capacity will be reviewed at the next Academy Heads' (AH) meeting. Pre-School activities for 2020-21 will be based around Forest School learning. It was noted that one third of Bearnese pupils are either SEND or PP.

3. Governance

The Finance & General Purposes Constitution and Terms of Reference was reviewed and the following amendments were agreed to be recommended to the Board of Trustees meeting on 12 October 2020:

6.1 To add the following sentence. The Trust will seek to attract external funding and grants through income generation to benefit pupils within academies and across the Trust.

7. Final word in the last sentence to be changed from Academy to Trust.

Action IJC

It was agreed to ask the IGO to produce a short report on income generation at the end of each term for the committee.

Action IGO/TBM

[CM asked if, in respect of item 6.4 of the Terms of Reference, schools were able to request provisions?](#) The Chair replied Local Boards were able to signal to the Committee if there were items that Academy Heads had identified as being necessary but this was subject to funds being available. The TBM added that IT was a major request at present.

4. Scheme of Delegation

- 4.1 Review Sections relating to F&GP and identify any updates. It was agreed to update the number of meetings from five to six.

Action IJC

- 4.2 The CEO reported that she had met with the ATSIL over the summer months and the Local Board section of the Scheme of Delegation had been revised. The revised version 6 of the Scheme of Delegation is filed in SharePoint.

It was agreed that the revised Version Six of the Scheme of Delegation would be recommended for approval to the Board of Trustees at their 12 October 2020 meeting.

The CEO reported that the ATSIL now meets with Local Boards on a regular basis to ensure that they are operating effectively.

It was agreed that following Trustees approval of the Scheme of Delegation (SoD), the ATSIL would lead Local Boards through the document at one of their workshops

The Chair reported that when she had met with the Diocese last September she had been advised that any policies which have a Local Board role should be noted within the SoD. It was agreed that the Clerk would action this.

Action Clerk

At this point in the meeting a ten minute comfort break was taken and the meeting resumed at 10.26.

5. Finance

- 5.1 The Financial Performance to 31 August 2020 – month 12 report had been circulated to the committee prior to the meeting. The TBM reported that the Bearnes deficit includes the building works. Diftford has a large overspend on electricity due to the meter reading not being taken. Staffing hours have been reduced at Drakes. Moretonhampstead Primary School poses the biggest concern followed by Drakes and Otterton. Hennock spent £16000 from their reserves on a new boiler. [The Chair asked why Moretonhampsted was such a concern?](#) The CEO replied that capacity development at Drakes and Otterton and Moretonhampstead required hard work. A USP needs to be developed for Drakes. [CM asked if the marketing company that the TBM was meeting with could help the Trust with capacity building?](#) The TBM thought they could and agreed to ask them.

Action TBM

The CEO added that the School Improvement Team would help with the capacity issue this year and added that it would be reviewed on a monthly basis.

The meeting moved to Part II minutes

The meeting returned to Part I minutes

[The Chair asked why the other expenditure budgets had been exceeded at year end?](#) The TBM replied that it was due to a mixture of capital projects undertaken over the summer break and that some represented commitments for the year. The TBM continued that overall every school bar one would see a carry forward at the year end.

The Chair noted that there could be Pension and NIC changes post Covid and that this should be monitored.

[The Chair asked how the rural gigabyte bid was moving forwards?](#) The Trust had applied to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport for Hennock which was eligible. The TBM had been advised that the significant infrastructure costs could not be funded. The TBM agreed to monitor the situation.

The CEO advised that it had been agreed to use the funds received per child to deliver hybrid and blended learning and that the Trust was currently looking at how

this funding could be used to ensure all schools had an interactive whiteboard that worked and sufficient IT coverage to record lessons.

The TBM stressed the need to maintain the Reserves Policy. The Chair advised that this would be a topic for discussion at the next monthly meeting. The TBM advised that the year end position is subject to audit and, given the refunds due from South Dartmoor, it was not possible to forecast the outturn for 2019-20.

The TBM had met with Bishop Fleming. An accurate balance on reserves will be known post audit. The final audit meeting will be completed virtually on the 11 November 2020. In accordance with the Trust's protocol, the Chair of F&GP would attend the audit closure meeting with the CEO and TBM. The Governance and Trustees' Statements had been drafted and would be discussed by the Audit Committee in November. The draft Financial Statements would be discussed by the F&GP Committee in November and the full accounts presented to the Board in December. Whilst the ESFA permitted Trusts to defer submission of accounts until 31 January 2021, the Committee agreed submission by 31 December 2020 would be adhered to.

Action TBM

- 5.2 Budget 2020-21. The TBM reported that he was anticipating growth in Trust reserves this year. No information about Government funding of schools in the future has been received. IJC noted, yet again, that the Trust had to submit its budget and forecast before the national pay award for teaching and support staff, effect from 1 September, had been announced.

The Committee reiterated that the Board must focus on year 3 and beyond to ensure the Trust is sustainable during a period when the public sector funding, post Covid, would be under immense pressure, . Pupil growth into schools needs to be sustained. There is increasing risk based around capital items, in particular a new roof for Hennock.

The committee agreed that the Budget Forecast Return (BFR) could be submitted to the ESFA by the TBM. Action TBM

- 5.3 Annual Report of Income Generation and fundraising – central and school level. This has been covered under item 2.3 above. The TBM had also provided a summary for the committee.

6. Property

- 6.1 CIF update. The TBM advised on the following successful CIF bids:

- Yeoford £126,379. There are no issues to report with this project.
- Broadhempston £77,880 which includes a £11,000 contribution from the school. This is for an improved lighting and heating system. One classroom has been relocated to the Village Hall. The project is on target to be completed by half term.
- Tedburn St Mary £159,560 for an improved lighting and heating system. This project is now complete.

The unsuccessful CIF bids for Hennock and Landscope Primary Schools have been appealed.

- 6.2 Ilsington Primary School Building Project. The TBM reported that a tentative agreement had been received from the ESFA. The Trust will proceed to the point of tenders being received. The project is currently out for planning with the tender process running concurrently. By mid/end October tenders and planning should be received and the project will be ready to proceed with the ESFA. At this point the Trust will request the funding agreement from the ESFA. [IJC asked if the Diocese](#)

had seen the plans? The TBM replied that they had been kept informed at each stage. A January 2021 start is anticipated if the funding agreement is successful.

7. Business Plan

7.1 Financial Strategy and Control.

The Chair reported that he had met with the CEO and TBM to discuss this matter and that it will form part of their ongoing monthly meetings with the focus to improve the financial position of the Trust.

7.2 Central Business and Property.

The CEO reported that this subject will also form part of the monthly meetings with a focus on blended learning, hybrid learning and access to IT equipment for all academies.

8. Risk Register

The Committee reviewed the following sections:

- Finance and financial stability
- Infrastructure – estate, IT, Business Unit, Health & Safety and Data Protection

IJC reminded the Committee that the annual cycle for the Board and each of its committees she had prepared earlier in the year ensured that sections of the Risk Register were considered over the year although all could be accelerated for discussion if circumstances changed. Thus Risk Management was a standing item at all meetings.

The Audit Committee's role was to ensure that Trustees regularly monitored the Register to ensure it identified and assessed all potential risks and that mitigating actions were fit for purpose. Whilst the Committee agreed the current risk scores remained appropriate at present, these needed to be kept under review. The Chair added his concern that if the Trust has to go into lockdown again, there could be a potential problem with the Government clawing funds back and that he was unsure how to quantify this.

It was agreed that the scores would remain the same in the four F&GP sections of the Risk Register noted in the bullet points above and that this would be reported to the Board of Trustees at their meeting on the 12 October 2020.

The next review will be in 2021. IJC agreed to write Covid in red against all areas where it could be an impact.

Action IJC

The following amendments to the text were agreed:

Finance & Financial Sustainability

To add a line about possible Government clawback of funds

Action IJC

Infrastructure - Estate

The TBM to add the Asset figure for the Trust (now 15 schools) in I-E1 when the accounts are finalised.

Action TBM

To reduce the RP and RI for I-E3 Bearnas. Once the project is complete this line can be deleted.

Action IJC

Infrastructure - H&S

Add that a Health & Safety Officer has been appointed and for H&S10 that risk assessments to re-open schools after the Covid closure have been checked at Local Board, Trustee and Member level.

Show the RP & RI for H&S9 the same as for Estates regarding the Burnes temporary classroom.

Action IJC

Once IJC has completed the above amendments the Clerk to file the copy in SharePoint.

Action Clerk

The TBM to look at where catering is located on the Risk Register.

Action TBM

The CEO advised that updating the Risk Register for S&C is a serious priority. It was agreed that the CEO would review that Committee's sections and send to S&C Chair to confirm.

Action CEO

9. **Internal Audit**

The Board in July had delegated to Mr Course, Audit Committee member, and the TBM to agree the programme of reviews for 2020-21. The TBM would check the programme which is due to start in November.

Action TBM

10. **Human Resources**

10.1 Cycle2Work Scheme. A paper from the HR Officer was presented for discussion.

The Committee agreed to the scheme subject to a tight policy being written to cover any staff who have taken advantage of the scheme but subsequently leave the Trust. The Committee was pleased that the scheme should be promoted to staff but that it should be used to travel to work with but that they do not have to necessarily purchase a £2000 bike

11. **Health & Safety**

This has been covered under item above 2.3 above.

12. **Data Protection**

The CEO reported a low level risk data protection breach. This has been noted on the internal system.

13. **ESFA Bulletins**

IJC reported that the Trust had received a letter from the ESFA offering an alternative timetable for the submission of accounts.

It was agreed to submit the 2019-2020 audited accounts on 31 December 2020

14. **Policies**

14.1 Draft Admission statements

The draft admission statements were reviewed. It was agreed that in the ethos statement paragraph in all schools' versions should read as follows:

As a Multi Academy Trust we want to be nationally recognised for putting...

And the words 'be known to' to be deleted.

The Board Chair had previously circulated some editorial changes which should be actioned on all 15 schools.

Action HR Officer

It was agreed that subject to the above amendment, the Draft Admission Statements could be returned to Andrew Brewerton

Action HR Officer

The CEO advised that she would like to rationalise the use of the Vision and Values in the statements and for this to be brought forward in February 2021 in good time for the next review.

Action CEO

- 14.2 Capital and Revenue Reserves
- 14.3 Capitalisation
- 14.4 Central Funds
- 14.5 Fundraising
- 14.6 Investment

Subject to the following amendments it was agreed that the above F&GP policies (14.2-14.6) should be recommended to the Board of Trustees for approval.

Rename Capital and Revenue Reserves Policy 2020 in the title and reverse text so Revenue comes first.

Rename Capitalisation Policy 2020 and correct Trust Business Manager initials

Central Funds 2020 - renamed for 2020, all the references to 'LAT' deleted as the Trust does not use this abbreviation, added H&S and Data Protection to the list of bullets plus reference to X-Trust staff.

Action IJC

TBM to correct in the text the two references to the AFH.

Action TBM

Fundraising 2020 - file renamed as 2020 and Directors changed to Trustees

Investment Policy 2020 - renamed for 2020 and Directors changed to Trustees

Action IJC

15. **Dates of Future Meetings**

27 November 2020

05 February 2021

26 March 2021

07 May 2021

02 July 2021

First draft issued: 02.10.2020 to Chair/TBM/IJC
 IJC's tracked changes above: 2 October 2020
 RG approved 5 October and filed in SharePoint F&GP and Trustees