



## Finance & General Purposes Committee

### Minutes

5<sup>th</sup> May 2023

9.00am

*Held at Landscope House and via TEAMS*

**Present:** Ben Thorne (Chair) (Joined via TEAMS)  
Nicola Dunford (CEO)  
Cheryl Mathieson (CM)  
Paul Waterworth (PW)

**In attendance:** Deputy CEO - Matt Matthew (DCEO) and Angela Hughes (Finance Manager – AH)

**Minutes:** Charlotte Roe (Governance Professional – GP)

No	Item	Action
1.	<b>Welcome and Apologies</b> The Chair welcomed the Trustees to the meeting. Apologies from Christopher Norman were <b>accepted</b> .	
2.	<b>Declarations of Business Interests</b> The CEO is a Trustee of the Bearnas Education Foundation. Christopher Norman is a director and shareholder of CANE Properties Ltd. Ben Thorne is no longer a Trustee of Tor Bridge High Academy Trust. No additional declarations were declared.	
3.	<b>Any Other Business</b> It was agreed to consider the CEO job description via email for recommendation for the Board of Trustees' approval.	
4.	<b>Minutes of the previous meeting</b> The minutes of the meeting held on 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2023 were circulated before the meeting and <b>accepted</b> by the Trustees.	
5.	<b>Matters Arising from meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2023</b> There were no matters arising.	
6.	<b>Finance</b> 6.1 Financial performance to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2023 – month 7 – It was noted that the financial dashboard with a supporting report was circulated before the meeting. The Trustees confirmed that they had read them. The following was reported: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Month 7 was showing a balance in line with February's position. However, the Trust had received the insurance claim for Diptford from the RPA. This, though had been offset by electricity bills amounting to £51,000 being taken by direct debit. AH explained to the Trustees that the Trust had changed their energy provider in October 2022 and invoices had not been received during the opening period with some mistakenly charged the incorrect VAT and all had included a climate levy charge. AH added that the previous provider had paid back £15,000 rebate following adjustments to reflect meter readings. The standing charge rate had also increased following an Ofgem ruling. AH reported that the electricity budget line would now be increased for April 2023 onwards to be prudent.</li> </ul> <i>The Trustees asked if the energy provider was responding appropriately to the Trust's correspondence. AH said that the previous provider was prompt in</i>	

their response. The contract manager for the current provider has reassured the Trust that the outstanding queries would be addressed in a timely manner. *The Trustees asked AH to go back and challenge the timeline and suggested that no further direct debits were paid until these queries were resolved, adding that in future electricity bills were paid as and when invoices were received – thus giving the Trust more control.* The CEO explained that the electricity provider gave a discount if the Trust paid by direct debit. *The Chair said that the Trust should receive a notification before any monies were taken.* The DCEO reported that there was an Account Manager in place addressing the issues, meter readings had been submitted so this issue should be resolved. He added that he had given the energy provider a deadline of 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

- The Trust were still waiting on the outcome of the national pay awards which could significantly affect the forecast.
- The outcome of the CIF bids are still unknown but an outcome was expected the end of May 2023. Once this was available the Trust could consider the capital funding spend. The only project currently running was Diptford. *The Trustees asked how this project was going?* It was agreed to address this later in the agenda.
- AH explained that the dispute with Consortium was still ongoing. There was evidence of delivery notes of goods that had not been received and forged signatures. Some credit notes had been received. *The Trustees asked if trading had stopped with Consortium?* The CEO confirmed that the Trust would not be using them again and suggested that the Trust solicitors would be involved to get a full and final settlement. This situation was taking too much staff time. *Following a question from a Trustee the CEO confirmed that the finance team had a strong idea of the actual outstanding amount owed. The Trustees advised that under the Financial Handbook the Trust cannot pay monies based on forged invoices and signatures and so no monies should be paid until the finance team are satisfied that the settlement was correct. The Chair said that he would contact the Trust solicitors to clarify the Trust's position.*
- Catering was running at a deficit. The meeting discussed how the Trust now offered staff meals to offset the cost-of-living crisis. *It was noted by the Trustees that staff had expressed their appreciation and the meeting agreed that the wellbeing of the staff was important.* The meeting discussed other ways that the cost of catering could be reduced – a Catering Manager would address the wastage and value for money across the kitchens. *The Trustees asked about the menu – it was noted that it was the same menu in main across the Trust with each kitchen given the ability to adapt it according to the needs of the children.* The DCEO added that the cost of each meal was decreasing, and he would ask the catering staff to monitor wastage. *The Trustees asked questions around the newer schools joining the Trust and the current cost of school dinners.* It was **agreed** that no decision would be made on the staff lunches until all other areas had been exhausted. The meeting further **agreed** that, if possible, staff lunches must not stop completely. The CEO asked for an update on the Catering Manager appointment. The DCEO outlined that options and confirmed that the Trust were still advertising. The DCEO added that in the meantime the Kitchen Managers were doing a superb job providing a 5-star provision.

The Trustees accepted and **agreed** the budget as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

#### 6.2 3-year budget update

The 2023/2024 budget and supporting report were circulated before the meeting. The highlights were:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All the GAG notifications had been included along with the admission information on pupil numbers to outline the following year's income.</li> <li>The mainstream grant actual figure had been provided and included.</li> <li>The main change was in relation to the teachers' pay awards. Initially in the budget, the Trust included a 3% uplift however had now increased it to 5% in line with other public sector awards. The support staff awards were still unknown. <i>The Trustees asked whether the assumption was there was no additional government funding to cover the uplift.</i> AH said the assumption was 1% for teachers and 0% for support staff.</li> <li>AH drew the Trustees' attention to the overtime claims. It was reported that it was a higher-than-expected figure in the current budget. It was due mainly wraparound care being unpredictable making it difficult to forecast. The CEO reported that the ratios changed each day resulting in additional costs and felt that the Academy Heads need to think more creatively. <i>The Trustees discussed the impact of erratic pupil and staff attendance.</i> The CEO reported that pupil attendance was above national average across the trust. <i>The Trustees suggested an analysis on the reasons for overtime.</i> The Trustees <b>agreed</b> that moving forward each academy was given a supply budget for the year and could only overspend with central trust approval. The finance team would also create an additional ledger code to make it clearer the reason for casual claims/overtime. AH reported that in the next budget a reduced amount had been inputted as it was felt savings could be made.</li> <li>AH reported that other financial lines that would significantly affect the budget was utilities and food costs. It was noted that the most of the academies' utility contracts finished in September 2024 so discussion with providers had started.</li> <li>AH identified a few academies of concern with deficit budgets and there was a discussion around this.</li> <li>AH explained then the first indication was a deficit budget for 2023/2024 however an action plan had been created outlining savings. <i>The Chair agreed that financial savings could be made.</i> The savings would be done through tightening procurement procedures, reducing printing costs, being more energy efficient (turning off heating and electric during weekends and holidays) and prudent devolved capital spending. The DCEO reminded the meeting that the trust still had some old heating systems and were relying on successful CIF bids to address this. It was <b>agreed</b> that AH would attend an Academy Heads' meeting to support them on their curriculum budget. There was a robust discussion on the staffing structure across the trust. It was <b>agreed</b> that the finance team would look at staffing costs to rationalise any decisions on staff/pupil ratios.</li> </ul> <p>6.3 Use of reserves/spending priorities It was noted that the capital spend programme would be determined by the CIF bids outcome.</p> <p>6.4 Update on CIF bids There was no update available.</p>	
7.	<p><b>Property</b></p> <p>The DCEO reported that the Trust was unsuccessful in 3 Decarbonated Public Sector bids. There was an application for the Low Carbon Skills Funding outstanding – if successful the Trust would be able to commence a decarbonisation initiative.</p> <p>The Diptford building project was proceeding well. Initially the foundations had to go from 1 metre to 3 metres which used the contingency however once there was still water seepage, so the foundations were increased – this had a cost of £16,000. It was felt that once the project was out of ground, it would be more predictable. To offset the overspend the Trust was considering undertaking the fixtures and fittings portion inhouse. The DCEO explained that the building contractors by law required a site office</p>	

	<p>and compound area. The only option was a piece of land in front of the school which was Church owned. An agreement was drawn up with assurances and a donation made to the Church. There was now a conflict around this and it had been deferred to solicitors. <i>The Trustees asked questions of law and suggested a way forward to resolve the situation.</i></p> <p>The Trustees looked at other future building projects.</p> <p><b>PART II was taken</b></p>	
8.	<p><b>Human Resources</b> The CEO reported that staffing for September nearly finalised. Job descriptions were being reviewed.</p>	
9.	<p><b>Health &amp; Safety</b> A report from the Health and Safety lead had been circulated before the meeting – there were no F&amp;GP concerns.</p>	
10.	<p><b>Data Protection</b> The CEO said that there had been no major data breaches. The DPO was reviewing how and what information needed to be passed onto secondary schools.</p>	
11.	<p><b>Safeguarding</b> Reports from the Safeguarding Trustee had been circulated before the meeting – there were no issues for discussion.</p>	
12.	<p><b>Risk Register and Strategy Plan</b> The DCEO reported that the risk register proforma had been rewritten and sent to the schools. The Trustees were no long risk owners, this had been transferred to EIT. Trustees were now overseeing the registers. The DCEO reported that the Strategic Trust plan for 2023-24 had been created and he was in the process of populating it.</p>	
13.	<p><b>ESFA Bulletins</b> No issues for discussion</p>	
14.	<p><b>Policies</b> 14.1 Financial procedures manual <a href="#">Financial Procedures Manual 2023 - 2024.docx</a> The manual was circulated before the meeting. The Trustees <b>agreed</b> the manual.</p>	

**The meeting closed at 11.00 am**

**Dates of Future Meetings**

30<sup>th</sup> June 2023