

Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes

18th March 2024

4 pm

Held at Lanscove School House

Present: Ben Thorne (Chair)
Nicola Dunford
Cheryl Mathieson
Paul Waterworth
Christopher Norman

In attendance: Deputy CEO - Mr Matt Matthew (DCEO), Louisa Taylor (Finance Manager)

No	Item	ACTION
1.	Welcome and Apologies The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome. There were no apologies.	
2.	Declarations of Business Interests The CEO is a Trustee for the Bearnas Education Foundation. Chris Norman is Director of CANE Properties Ltd.	
3.	Any Other Business No any other business was brought forward.	
4.	Minutes of the previous meeting The minutes of the meeting held on 26 th January 2024 were accepted as a true record. The Chair signed accordingly.	
5.	Matters Arising from the meeting held on 26th January 2024 (not included in the agenda) 5.8 Finger Guards – the DCEO confirmed that works were progressing across the Trust to fit finger guards with 3 schools currently completed. 5.13 It was noted that as the Risk Register process was still being finalised that the ToR would not be approved in its new form. It was added that the ToR were approved in Autumn 2023 and amendments was regarding the additional section related to responsibility.	
6.	Finance 6.1 Financial performance to 29 th February 2024 – month 6 to include: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of reserves/spending priorities update • Rolling capital spend programme • 3-year plan • Update on CIF bids • Sports Grant • Pupil Premium <p>The dashboard and accompanying paperwork were circulated before the meeting. The following questions/comments were made on the current budget directors' dashboard: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referring to the individual schools, the FM outlined the reasons for the variations. The reasons given were predominantly around changes in catering costs, staffing costs due to maternity or sickness, increased income from GAG or SEN/Pupil Premium and improved nursery forecast. It was noted that 3 schools in the Trust were reporting a nursery surplus. • There was a small deficit reported however it was an improvement on the previous month. 	

The Trustees noted that if the budget does end with a balanced budget the reserves would not be spent as planned and asked for this to be considered when the assumptions were being made. The Trustees asked about the last 3 months of increasing overspend in one school. The FM explained that it was to fund for alternative provision for a pupil not attending school. It was added that this pupil was leaving after Easter. The Trustees asked why it was coming from the individual school's budget? The FM said that this was because the student was still part of the school community. The meeting discussed whether there was a better way of paying for the high needs funding that the Trust offered. The DCEO and FM agreed to review this for consideration for future practice. The Trustees asked about the raised pupil teacher ratio in an individual school against the total staffing costs. The FM explained that the raised ratio was due to a larger number of TAs supporting SEN pupils rather than teachers.

DCEO/
FM

The Trustees **agreed** the DDD month 6.

The FM reported that the 24-25 budget had been started and shared the current budget review.

Referring to the following year's budget 24-25 the following comments were made:-

- The FM reported that some of the deficits in the 3-year plan reports were not reliable as some grants were currently unknown and that the Trust was still outstanding 4 GAG statements – the ESFA had been chased - so the Trust could not be confident of the actual income. Income to offset pay and pension awards had also not yet been confirmed.
- The SEN top-up funding was based on confirmed EHCPs. There could be additional EHCPs by September 2024. *The Trustees asked how many plans were still in the pipeline.* The actual amount was unknown however it was noted that the additional income would be used towards extra staffing to support the SEN pupils, so it was not actual additional income.
- The budget does not include Littleham or any other new schools expected to join the Trust.
- Overall pupil numbers were down by 7 overall for years R-6 from 23/24 numbers
- The income was higher due to one school being a full year instead of 10 months as in 23-24 budget.
- Staff costs currently included 1% unfunded pay rise at cost of £128.5k for all staff teaching and support. As part of the supporting papers, the DCEO had circulated a summary of the current position on pay awards for 24/25 showing the impact to the Trust of various % pay uplifts. The FM asked the Trustees what they felt would be a realistic percentage. The Trustees discussed this question further reviewing the numbers presented. It was noted that any percentage would be a 'best guess'. It was further commented that any more than 3% would need to be funded from the reserves. The Trustees asked about the assumed figures in the budget and whether they needed to be as prudent as in previous years; the budget deficit forecast at the beginning of the year always reduced dramatically by the end of the year. *The Trustees discussed pupil numbers and what the Trust response was?* The CEO outlined what was happening across the Trust by the EIT and Academy Heads. It was noted that declining pupil numbers was a national picture. The DCEO said that it was hoped that there could be areas of improvement on the budget however without taking drastic measures, a balanced budget was likely to be unfeasible. The Trustees said that looking at past budget history, other monies came into the

	<p>budget throughout the year. The Trustees discussed ideas of how to best meet the pupils' need to ensure that the learning was targeted effectively. The CEO shared anecdotally how other Trusts had tried different ways and the impact. The Trustees asked that currently the Finance team ran 3 budgets reflecting the 1%, 2% and 3% unfunded pay rise costs so contingency plans could be considered depending on the deficits. It was noted that the decisions needed to reflect preservation for the Trust's future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The TPECG Teachers pension grant was calculated on pupil numbers, not teachers so there was no grant for the central teachers. • Remainder of staff costs increase was 5% teachers' pension and 1% increase in support staff pension and banding changes. • Cleaning costs had increased by 4% minimum with some as much as 9%. The energy forecast was 5% increase. <p>The Trustees discussed the central costs and how to keep these to a minimum. It was added that as the Trust grew, the central team would need to grow to ensure that there was an effective provision for the schools of the Trust. <i>The Trustees asked about the schools joining the Trust and the financial impact expected.</i> The CEO outlined the expected impact. <i>The Trustees asked questions of clarification.</i> It was noted that Trustees would not let the new schools join the Trust without their expected carry forward. It was added that the due diligence process continued, and Trustees could view this on Sharepoint.</p> <p>The CIF bids applications had been submitted; there was no update – the outcome was expected April/May.</p> <p>It was reported that the Sports Grant and Pupil premium spending was on track. The CEO said that she had drawn up a paper on the pupil premium spending for the schools which she would circulate to the Trustees.</p> <p>Use of reserves – the Trustees said that once the following year's budget and current budget position was clearer, then the reserves could be allocated.</p>	
7.	<p>Benchmarking The Bishop Fleming's Kreston Academies Benchmarking Report 2024 was circulated before the meeting. It was noted it was a useful document however it would be better if it was per individual schools rather than the whole Trust. There was nothing in the report that was a surprise.</p>	
8.	<p>Property 8.1 The Estates and H&S report was circulated before the meeting. The Trustees thanked the Estates Manager and H&S Lead for their comprehensive report. The following questions/comments were made:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was nothing significant to report. Only low-level injuries reported across the Trust. • With the leaving of the Estate Manager, the H&S Officer would be covering his role. • There were a few outstanding projects to complete. <p>8.2 The DCEO reported that the LBCT submission had been submitted.</p>	
9.	<p>Human Resources The CEO outlined the changes in key personnel. The CEO reported that the EIT met every Monday morning to review the staff leaving and where savings could be made.</p>	
10.	<p>Health & Safety This was covered in item 8.</p>	
11.	<p>Due Diligence 11.1 The Due Diligence planner was available for the Trustees on Sharepoint. The DCEO displayed the planner and reported the following: -</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honiton, Pebblebed and Jubilee due diligence would commence now it had been confirmed that the intention for these schools to join the Trust. The Littleham due diligence was underway with some outstanding items. The last report had been shared in the previous week to all the Trustees. <i>The Trustees asked questions of clarification of how to review the planner to understand the risks.</i> <i>The Trustees asked about existing contracts that the schools held.</i> The DCEO there was nothing substantial – low level contracts such as photocopying <i>The Trustees asked for an update on the overall budgets of the new schools.</i> The DCEO shared the budgets that had been supplied by the DCC. It was noted that it was starting point but would need to be scrutinised further. The DCEO said it was felt that there was room for improvement was easily identifiable. The DCEO added that in the first instance the school budgets would be separated. 	
12.	<p>Safeguarding</p> <p>The CEO reported that CPOMs was being introduced across the Trust to ensure a more targeted approach. It was noted that it was expensive as individual school but as a whole trust approach it was the right intervention. The key was consistent reporting across the whole Trust. <i>The Trustees asked the cost.</i> The CEO reported it was in the region of £10,000. The Trustees felt that this was well spent. It was noted that the decision to go with CPOMs was following a tender process.</p> <p>The Trust online safety process was underway with regular meetings with Safeguarding Lead, Safeguarding Trustee, DCEO, DPO and Limbtec. There was definite improvement in keeping the Trust’s pupils safe. There was also a Netsweeper system in place to monitor what was being accessed by staff and children. <i>Following a question from the Trustees,</i> it was reported that the flagged notifications go to the Academy Head and the Safeguarding Leads. <i>The Trustees asked how many incidences across the Trust had there been inappropriate images filtered through.</i> The DCEO reported that very occasionally the filtering system failed however the children were aware to report anything inappropriate – subsequently following a failure there was a process in place to inform the relevant parties.</p>	
13.	<p>Risk Register and Strategy Plan</p> <p>Trustee had received the risk register update and discussed the report. It was noted there were no surprises. It was noted that the amber around the contracts was due to new schools and the Trust understanding any potential risks.</p>	
14.	<p>ESFA Bulletins</p> <p>There was nothing to report.</p>	
15.	<p>Policies</p> <p>There were no policies to review.</p>	
16.	<p>Evaluation of governance impact – Principle 3: Integrity https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en</p> <p><i>The Board acts with integrity, adopting values and creating a culture which helps achieve the Academy Trust’s charitable Objects. The Board is aware of the importance of public confidence and trust in Academy Trusts and their schools, and the Board undertakes its duties accordingly.</i></p> <p>The Trustees said that there was continuous challenge, keeping the children at the centre.</p>	

The next meeting - 13th May 2024 at 0930

The meeting closed at 5.45 pm