

The Link Academy Trust
Finance & General Purposes Committee

**Minutes: Friday 5 February 2021
9.30am - F&GP 1/21**

*Held online using MS Teams due to Covid restrictions
The meeting was also recorded*

Present: Mr Roy Gillard (Chair)
Mrs Nicola Dunford
Mrs Cheryl Mathieson
In attendance: Trust Business Manager - Mr Matt Matthew
Clerk – Rachel Hill

Welcome:

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

Apologies: Mr Paul Waterworth

Absent without Apology: Mr 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 and undertakes company secretarial duties for Stock Props Limited, a dormant property rental business. 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 27 November 2020 were approved as a true and accurate record.

2. **Matters Arising**

- 2.1 **Pupil Census.** The TBM advised that this had been completed in January 2021. Admission numbers are also coming in through the portal. It is anticipated that the Academy will see a dip in pupil numbers for the majority of schools. The CEO's report includes a grid that covers the first, second and third choices. Schools are monitoring the admissions portal on a weekly basis. A further update will be available at the end of March 2021.
- 2.2 **Renewal of Accounting and HR Package with Access.** The Chair and TBM have discussed this issue and agreed to review the package. One contract expires at the end of February 2021 and the other at the end of April 2021. The provider has proposed rolling both packages into one contract for the next three years at a price of approximately £180,000. The Academy will continue this financial year with the current provider whilst reviewing alternative packages. **CM asked if other packages could include HR?** The Chair advised that add-ons could be purchased. The CEO raised her reservations about the disruption that would be caused in transferring from one package to another.
- 2.3 **Payroll Provider.** The TBM advised that this is working smoothly and is linked with the renewal of the accounting package. The TBM advised that previous comparisons have been undertaken. The provider is charging approximately £4 per person per payslip per month. The CEO added this is approximately £2500 per school with the payment for the software in addition. The TBM suggested that the Trust could be more commercially aware about packages on offer. The TBM's concerns were that new software could have a negative impact on process; it needs to be easy to use; provide all the processes and reporting required and tie in with Audit. CM added that any new package would need to be a system that could adapt and grow in the future. The TBM added that the ESFA have a chart of accounts which the Trust doesn't use at present and that Access could be encouraged to provide more. The Chair stated that at this stage, we will be looking at various packages and only changing to a new financial system if all stakeholders agree.
- 2.4 **Claim notification received by third party employee against the Trust for injury.** The TBM advised that the matter had been forwarded to the Link insurers. The insurers

had appointed a Loss Adjuster who had advised the employee to contact their own employer. The matter was now closed for the Link Academy Trust.

3. **Finance**

3.1 The figures for the month end December 2020 and the TBM's financial report were presented to the committee. The TBM advised that he has asked for the revenue and capital totals to be split out showing the full cost for the central recharge, Inclusion Hub and Sports Grant. Covid-19 recovery, funding for next year and IT are issues that will require discussion in the near future. On a month by month basis budgeting figures are remaining steady and the schools are doing well. The TBM has spoken to the ESFA who could not give any assumptions for future budgeting, however they have advised that there is a pay freeze for all civil servants. The Chair commented that in terms of a rolling forecast he would like to see if the Academy was anticipating an overspend in areas over a period of up to eighteen months rather than twelve and this was where forecasting packages were helpful.

3.2 Annual Report and Financial Statements. The TBM advised these had been signed off by Isabel Cherrett (Chair of the Trust at the time) and submitted to the ESFA on time. They have been posted on the Link website and submitted to Companies House by Bishop Fleming. The aim is to clear any outstanding issues and not to have any going in to the audit next year.

4. **Financial Impact of Lockdown**

4.1 The TBM reported that the Link is seeing a negative financial impact on preschools, catering, donations and fund raising. Concurrently, schools have less spend in travel claims and supply. All schools are showing a small surplus at month end. Ilington Primary has had additional TA costs. The CEO added that 70 pc of children were down on progress during the first lockdown. Staff have worked hard to improve the situation and now 60 per cent of pupils are at expected levels. The remaining 40 pc of pupils could need one to one coaching and this would be costly in terms of staffing. The EIT has developed a strategy to enable help all children to reach expected levels. There has been a recent uptake in KickStart. The Chair advised that a six month rolling contract can be applied for with KickStart and this needs to be done by December 2021. [CM asked if you could take the same person on for another six months?](#) The Chair advised that this was not the case however if the person had proven to be a good employee they could perhaps be taken on as a TA or MTAs It was agreed to discuss this matter further at the next F&GP meeting.

Agenda Item next meeting

5. **Property**

5.1 Review school sites' security – fencing, public access etc. The Chair noted that he would like Mr Mike Fisher, with the help of the TBM, to develop the property section and asked if this could be an agenda item for the next meeting.

Action MF/TBM – Agenda Item next meeting

The CEO drew the committee's attention to the fencing at Hennock Primary School as some children are using it as a ladder. The CEO recommended using woven fencing in this area. The TBM advised that this matter fell into the remit of the Health & Safety Officer and he would ask him to review the situation.

Action TBM

5.2 Update on CIF bids and ongoing projects. The TBM advised that work on the successful CIF bids for 2019-20 has now been completed. A breakdown by invoice of expenditure has been requested. All CIF bids for 2021-21 have been submitted and equate to approximately £2.684 million in total. The school contribution level spreadsheet was shared on-screen with the committee. Diptford Primary School is the highest at 15 pc. It was noted that Diptford and Hennock would be unable to raise sufficient funds for their contribution levels from their reserves if their bids were successful. TBM to email a copy of the contribution level spreadsheet to the committee.

Action TBM

- 5.3 Ilsington project. The TBM advised that capital funding has now been signed off by the DfE. The school has sufficient reserves for the contribution level.
6. **Business Plan**
- 6.1 Financial Strategy and Control. The CEO advised that she had reviewed this section of the report and that she would add comments for committee understanding.
Action CEO
- 6.2 Central Business and Property. As above. CEO to forward her comments to the Clerk for distribution.
Action CEO/Clerk
7. **Risk Register**
- 7.1 Review of F&GP sections:
 - Finance & Financial Stability
 - Infrastructure Estate
 - Infrastructure IT
 - Infrastructure H&S

The Chair advised that these sections had been reviewed. CM noted that CIF bids would need updating to be relevant for this year. The CEO noted that this section was last updated November 2020. The review before that was May 2020. The next review will be April/May 2021. It was agreed that this would be an agenda item for the May F&GP meeting.
Agenda Item May meeting
8. **Internal Audit**
- 8.1 The TBM advised that there was nothing further to report at this stage.
9. **Human Resources**
- The CEO advised that there was nothing to report at this stage.
10. **Health & Safety**
- The TBM reported that the software compliance tool has been set up. After half term administrators will also receive training and have access to the software. The Health & Safety Officer's three month probation report has been completed. Claire Slee, the Health & Safety Co-ordinator, helps to ensure paperwork is kept up to date.
11. **Data Protection**
- The CEO reported an incident at Ilsington Primary School. A pond had been dug out and replaced with a reading room. This had gone through a consultation process which was not within the member of staff's remit.
- A letter will be sent to all parents today, with the subject being internet connection. The CEO will also take the opportunity to thank parents for the work they are doing and ask them to be sensitive to the mental wellbeing of staff at this time. CM advised that she had emailed the Executive/Academy Heads on behalf of the Board of Trustees thanking them for their hard work and dedication to their schools.
12. **ESFA Bulletins**
- The Chair advised that the ESFA Bulletins were circulated weekly and provided useful information. CM advised that she had recently started to receive them in her newly appointed role as Chair of Trustees.
13. **Policies**
- 13.1 Fair Processing. CM agreed to make changes to the policy prior to forwarding to the Board of Trustees for approval. The Clerk was asked to circulate the list of policies and their renewal dates to the committee.
**Action Clerk
Action CM**
14. **Any Other Business**
- 14.1 Clerk to draw up draft of 2021/22 meeting dates within the next two months.
Action Clerk
14. **Dates of Future Meetings**

26 March 2021
07 May 2021
02 July 2021