

The Link Academy Trust

Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes 6 May 2022
9.00am F&GP 3/22
Held online using MS Teams

Present Ben Thorne - Chair
Paul Waterworth (PW)
Cheryl Mathieson (CM)
Christopher Norman (CN)
In attendance Matt Matthew – Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO)
Sue Howard (Clerk)

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed trustees to the meeting.
Apologies were received from Nicola Dunford

2. **Declaration of Business Interests**

The CEO is a trustee Bearnas Educational Foundation. Christopher Norman is a director and shareholder of CANE Properties Ltd. Ben Thorne is a trustee of Tor Bridge High Academy Trust.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

3.1 The Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting (EOM) held on 11 March 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record. **Approved**

3.2 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record. **Approved**

3.3 The Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting (EOM) held on 29 April 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record. **Approved**

4. **Matters Arising**

4.1 **Item 11. Risk Register**
Refer to item 12

5. **Finance**

DCEO reported on:

5.1 Latest financial performance position -
DCEO shared his screen to display the latest Data dashboard and summarised that the Trust are currently in a surplus position year to date and looking healthy. School Administrators are chasing small debtors, predominately relating to preschool/nursery fees. Trustees are mindful of families struggling in the current financial climate. He confirmed that the Trust have moved from HCSS to IMP for budgeting software, but frustration around having access still. A Training session is taking place on the 12th May, so there is a delay currently for month end detailed reporting to schools and Trustees. Newly appointed Finance Manager starting at the end of the month has experience of IMP, so will be useful to learn from her. Staffing particularly in need of updating as soon as we have access. Energy contracts were discussed regarding increased rates and the push for an increase in sustainability from the DfE. DCEO advised that the Trust have a Sustainability Plan in place to address energy usage going forward. It was proposed that schools remind parents by way of a newsletter item or email check eligibility and apply for Free School Meals - **Action DCEO**

5.2 Use of reserves / spending priorities update – It was confirmed that this has been discussed at length at recent Extra Ordinary Meetings and will move forward as agreed.

- 5.3 Update on CIF bids -
No update available, awaiting results and further announcements
 - 5.4 Bishop Fleming Academy Update (Budgeting) circulated by email 30.03.22 (PDF available on SharePoint) – To note
 - 5.5 Early indication of 2022/23 draft budget if available – Pupil numbers and staffing costs are the key factors to be considered in budget preparation. There are proposed Teacher pay grades increased from the DfE and NJC to be aware of too when giving budget scenarios. Predicted surplus for 22-23 and then moving to a deficit by 24-25.
 - 5.6 School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool Checklist (Available on SharePoint) – Trustees were advised that that this is a statutory requirement to be done annually, it has been completed and will be submitted by the required deadline.
6. **Financial Impact of Trust Growth**
DCEO reported that financial impact is predicated on new schools joining and what they bring to the trust with regards to their budget situation and forecasts. Wolborough C of E primary School, currently in a Management Partnership with the Link are going through various pre-conversion processes prior to joining, which should be complete in approx. 12-18 months.
At this point, the meeting moved to Part II
Moved back to Part I
The Trust are still waiting to hear from other schools that have expressed an interest in joining the Trust and whom we have presented to their Governors.
7. **Property**
DCEO advised that applications have been forwarded for Cheriton Bishop and Diptford for the Schools Rebuilding Programme (SRP). An Insurance claim for the damaged roof at Diptford was submitted via RPA. A Loss adjuster has come back to report that there is no value in replacing a roof on a life expired classroom, but the slates on main building for repair/replacement will go ahead. The claim has now been passed for further investigation, and the Trust are hopeful that the SRP will come to fruition for Diptford. Trustees asked for communication to be provided via a letter to update concerned parents. *To note - Following the meeting, the clerk discovered that this has been actioned by the CEO.* Summer projects for redecorating and small maintenance projects are in process of being organised.
8. **Human Resources**
CM reported that Academy Heads have been appointed for Widecombe and Morchard Bishop to commence in September. A further two AH resignations were received this week and so a recruitment process is underway. Interviews are taking place today for the Diptford AH fixed term maternity cover. Generally lots of staffing changes and actions required ready for the new academic year. The Trust need to ensure that adequate support and mentoring is put in place for any new AH's to ensure longevity of employment. CM advised that exit interviews are always offered to pick up on any specific reasons for leaving and taken forward to the Board if necessary.
9. **Health & Safety**
DCEO – No serious incidents to report to Trustees. RPA have visited the Trust schools over the past few months to carry out H&S audits and the level of compliance. It has become apparent that there are areas that need some improvements and these will be addressed following receipt of audit reports. The Trust are looking into the possibility of increasing the role of the H&S Coordinator going forward.
10. **Data Protection**
Similar to above, as part of the central business unit, the role of the Data Protection Officer maybe increased next year. The DCEO advised that there are no GDPR breaches to report. He added that reports are provided to the Audit committee in relation to GDPR and H&S matters, are we duplicating this by bringing to this committee also? CM confirmed both areas

are a risk management process so Audit should be monitoring, but F&GP to be aware of cost implications regarding any issues/projects around property, staffing and H&S, so must come to F&GP still.

11. **ESFA Bulletins**

To note - The next ESFA return is the Budget Forecast Return due for submission at the end of July and main annual Audit preparation for financial year 21-22 being completed during summer holidays and into September.

12. **Risk Register**

12.1&2 The DCEO updated the committee that the Risk Register of each individual school was transferred onto Every by way of an excel spreadsheet and collated into one main Trust Risk Register. He met and discussed with the Audit Committee to 'thin out' any duplications. Risks are then associated to an owner (Trustee), who may bring to their committee for further discussion. All risks are reviewed with a RAG rating system and any countermeasures to be updated to provide an overall score. DCEO shared his screen to show the Risk Register on the Every system and how it works, the category and association with the 'risk owner'. DCEO is happy to provide training on Every and assist Trustees going forward with their area of risk.

13. **Strategic / Business Plan**

The Strategic Plan is available on SharePoint and Trustees to know their areas and portfolio subjects. Trustees are to review actions for this current year, liaise with the DCEO to tidy up and set action plan highlighting focus/targets for 22-23. Regular meetings will take place throughout the year to ensure it is monitored and updated. Trustees to connect with key personnel in the Trust for their area and DCEO will make contact with anyone needing a meeting to make a start.

14. **Internal Audit**

DCEO advised that the Trusts current Internal Audit provider, Griffin, have one further audit to carry out this year from their programme of works. DCEO has tendered out for new provider for 22-23, three companies including Griffin again have submitted proposals and quotes based on our previous audit programmes, but taking into account costs as well as ensuring a focussed programme of visits. The Trust may need to look at a longer term contract of a 3 year audit programme (prev one year) to ensure all areas are covered sufficiently in line with Academies Financial Handbook and Risk Register areas. Audit Committee will receive a summary of the proposals at their next meeting and they will then invite their preferred company to present. Chair asked for the Audit Committee to ensure not only a detailed programme of works is provided, but a very tailored approach is given for our Trust.

15. **Policies for review**

15.1 Reserves and Investment Policy 2021

Agreed to recommend for Board approval

To Note – Policy to be revisited by the board once 2022 audited financial statements are received

The Trustees asked for clarity from the DCEO in relation to the banking of reserves and where they are held – **Action DCEO for next meeting to update**

16. **Dates of Future Meetings**

16.1 Provisional committee and board meeting dates for 2022-23 were provided via SharePoint for consideration/amendment – Chair happy with dates as they currently stand, although he is still waiting his teaching timetable and will advise the clerk as soon as he knows. Only proposed amendment at this stage was for the first F&GP to be pushed back by one week to 30 September.

16.2 01 July 2022 – The committee proposed that this meeting be held in person at Landscope House – Clerk to liaise with Trustee's to confirm availability and advise.