

The Link Academy Trust

Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes 25 March 2022

9.30am F&GP 2/22

Held online using MS Teams

Present Ben Thorne - Chair
Paul Waterworth (PW)
Nicola Dunford – Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Cheryl Mathieson (CM)
Christopher Norman (CN)

In attendance Matt Matthew – Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO)
Sue Howard (Clerk)

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

CM welcomed the trustees to the meeting.

2. **Declaration of Business Interests**

The CEO is a trustee of South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust and also a trustee for the 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.

To note - Following email circulation to all trustees of proposed committee structures including Chairs, approval had been obtained and will be minuted at the next full board meeting of trustees. Ben Thorne was proposed and agreed to stand as Chair of F&GP and so was invited to chair this meeting from this point.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Approved

4. **Matters Arising**

4.1 **Item 4.2 Staff vacancies**

The DCEO reported that the Trust are following the national guidance on pay and are in line with the National Minimum Wage.

4.2 **Item 5.3 Reserves / Spending Priorities**

The chair confirmed that an Extra Ordinary Meeting (EOM) was held on 11.3.22 to discuss the Trust reserves and future spending priorities. A further meeting is scheduled for 29.4.22, supporting papers will be available for committee members by 1.4.22 and any decisions and outcomes will be shared with the Full Board at their next meeting in May.

4.3 **Item 12.1 Data Protection Policy 2021**

To note that this policy was presented for review in error at the meeting of 18 February 2022. It is now an Audit Committee policy. Amendments and queries will be passed to the Audit Committee for consideration.

5. **Finance**

DCEO to report

5.1 Financial Performance to 28 February 2022 – month 6 (Directors Dashboard and ASCL Budget Assumptions document available on SharePoint)

The DCEO shared his screen to illustrate the data at the end of month 6. A few schools are slightly over on staffing budgets, but this has been predominately due to Covid absences. Comments are now added to the reports by the finance officer to help explain reasons for any overspends. The trustees look forward to the new budget software from IMP to assist in better analysis of budgets going forward. There is concern over the visibility of detailed reporting via the new software, but the DCEO

assured the trustees that detailed and easy to read reports will still be possible. The Chair agreed and clarified this and added that there are capability options for KPI reporting also, with the aim to develop monthly reporting even more so following a period of bedding in. The DCEO advised that the overall picture for the Trust at present is a positive picture at the half way point with healthy reserves. A surplus estimate of £200K trust wide is predicted for year-end by the DCEO.

An early indication of 2022-2023 budgets should be available for the next F&GP meeting. ASCL budget assumptions are now available via SharePoint for trustees to read. General Annual Grant (GAG) statements have been received for each school for 2022-2023 and will be uploaded as part of the budget preparation.

Possible increase in staffing expenditure with proposed teacher pay increases and minimum starting salaries proposed by the DfE by 2023. The trustees need to be aware of this and look at what measures, if any, should be put in place for support staff also. Draft Budget reports will include various assumptions and scenarios for trustees to see based on the above.

- 5.2 Use of reserves / spending priorities update
Carried forward, see 4.2.
- 5.3 Update on CIF bids
To be carried forward. The DCEO is anticipating results and announcements by the end of April.
- 5.4 Teaching staff 0% pay award
The trustees will continue to monitor and discuss teachers' pay, taking into account the DfE proposals of a boost to Teachers pay by 2023.
- 5.5 Support staff 2.75% / 1.75% pay award
The Trust awarded a 1.75% pay increase to all support staff in September 2021, and following the NJC pay award announcement, have now applied a further 1% to all staff being paid at Grade A1, backdated to September 21.
- 5.6 The trustees were advised that a one-off additional payment of £1 was applied to all Main and Upper Pay Scale teachers for March payroll. This is in relation to non-indexation of benefits during periods of pay freeze which could lead to consequent pension losses for teachers. The Trust took advice and a recruitment and retention payment, at any level, would change pensionable salary and this would trigger TPS indexation.
- 5.7 The Chair enquired regarding energy contracts and our current situation in relation to the increase in rates. The DCEO reported that we went out to tender approx. 3 months before price increases started to come through and we are now in contracts til 2024. Finance team continue to monitor energy costs at all our schools.

6. **Property**

DCEO had nominated three trust schools, Cheriton Bishop, Widecombe-in-the-Moor and Diptford for the DfE Schools Rebuilding Programme via Bailey Partnership, who are producing structural and condition reports to support the applications. The deadline for submission is Monday 28 March 2022. Following review, Widecombe has been removed from the final submissions due to insufficient evidence.

The trustees were advised that one of the Devon Lady classrooms at Diptford sustained roof damage during Storm Eunice. The classroom is out of action and pupils are being taught from the village hall, which is not ideal, but a suitable alternative during this period. The DCEO has met with loss adjusters and from this, has submitted quotes for replacement roof and electric repairs, totalling approx £45k. DCEO has approached the DfE capital team to ask advice as to

whether the repair/replacement option is the best value for public money. This has been taken on-board and the DCEO will update further when any correspondence is received.

To note that planning for painting and decorating summer projects will commence soon.

The DCEO advised that in a recent announcement, every school by 2025 will have super-fast internet connectivity. He added that he is in constant communication regarding IT and infrastructure for the trust schools.

7. **Human Resources**

The CEO reported that there are recruitment processes currently taking place for the appointment of Academy Heads (AH's) for Morchard Bishop and Widecombe from September 2022. CEO advised that a successful appointment was made following a two day rigorous interview process for Morchard Bishop and she will update further following Widecombe interviews next week.

The Chair asked whether the Trust is able to use the Apprenticeship Levy to assist with supporting and training new AH's. The CEO advised that yes, we do use the Levy to help with National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and other leadership qualifications. The new AH's will also have mentors allocated to them from a current experienced AH to help them through the early stages to ensure they are well supported.

Morchard Bishop also have another two teacher vacancies to fill for September and a recruitment process will commence soon to ensure the correct staffing is in place. CEO meeting with members of the Executive Improvement Team (EIT) to discuss staffing across the schools, looking ahead to 2022/23 and any changes or development opportunities necessary. She will then meet with DCEO and HR Officer to discuss proposed changes and any impact cost wise to the schools and Trust.

Q -The Chair asked where the Trust stand on appointments if there is more than one very strong candidate during an interview process.

A - The CEO said that the Trust are always looking at the possibilities around employment options and how we can offer something to both to enhance a strong team, be it at the same school or an alternative school within the trust.

Finance Manager interviews are taking place 6 April. Income Generation and Maintenance Person vacancies still to fill, but recruitment has been very difficult to date nationally.

The trustees were advised that due to our employee total now exceeding 250, the trust must report on Gender Pay Gap, this is in hand by the HR Officer.

8. **Health & Safety**

There are no specific issues to report.

CN asked if all defects that are highlighted and reported, addressed. The DCEO said that reporting of serious accidents is done via the Devon County Council OSHENS system by the individual schools. This area is a responsibility of the Audit Committee who receive a report from the Trust H&S coordinator to monitor any issues. Any costs associated with defects and repaid works in relation to H&S would come to F&GP.

9. **Data Protection**

9.1 The DCEO advised that following recent cyber security audits on the security and storage of data within emails, there was nothing to report or recommendations for the Trust. He added that RPA are now covering cyber security within their package, but the Trust have to undertake certain pre-requisites to enable this cover, such as two-step authentication, which has been put into place for the DCEO and Trust Administrator.

9.2 No other issues were raised for discussion.

10. **ESFA Bulletins**

No issues for discussion.

11. **Risk Register**
DCEO updated the trustees and said that the Risk Register is a constant work in progress. All trustees have risks allocated to them and these should be reviewed regularly with subsequent meetings then arranged with the DCEO to raise any queries/concerns. The Audit Committee were due to look at existing risks to cut down those at trust level, CM to follow up with them to obtain an update. **Action CM**
12. **Strategic / Business Plan**
DCEO to catch up with portfolio holders CN, PW and BT on their areas to ensure plans are in place for September 2022. The CEO reminded of the importance that these need to be effective in moving the Trust forward.
13. **Internal Audit**
DCEO advised that the Kreston report was made available via SharePoint along with the Benchmark Data 2022 report from Bishop Fleming (BF). The Trust are in a good position based on these reports and there are no areas for concern. The BF report is taken from the data of multiple academy trusts of varying sizes following audit and it provides useful benchmarking data to see how the Link compares and sits within the education sector.
14. **Policies**
14.1 Reserves and Investment Policy 2021 – to be carried forward following further EOM around reserves (see 4.2)
14.2 Equality Statement **Approved**
15. **Dates of Future Meetings**
15.1 Provisional committee and board meeting dates for consideration / amendment. (2022-23 draft calendar available on SharePoint)
15.2 29 April 2022 – Extraordinary meeting to further discuss spending of the surplus reserves.
06 May 2022
01 July 2022

AOB

CEO would like to see a standard agenda item on 'Growth' for all F&GP future meetings in relation to financial impact for the trust. All agreed. **Action – Clerk**

The School Resource Management Self-assessment tool is an annual statutory return to the DfE, comprising of a list of questions about the trust, the people and its practices. The DCEO reported that this was processed, reviewed by the Chair of F&GP and CEO, and successfully submitted last week with no issues.

Q - CN commented he had read as part of the questionnaire, there is a question around the awareness and duty of care regarding H&S legislation and the need to ensure all trustees are aware of their responsibilities for this.

A - The CEO confirmed that H&S will be included as part of the training programme for trustees due to commence in September 2022.

The meeting ended at 11am