



Full Board Meeting

Remote meeting held on TEAMS

11th July, 2023 – 4:30pm

MINUTES

Present:

Sue Bailey
Mark Williams
Julie Perry
Kim Taylor
Mike Westcott-Rudd
Anthony Upshall

Apologies:

Rebecca Bierton

In Attendance

Clerk to Trustees (Jayne Perkins)
Genevieve Cowcher

No.	Minutes	Actions
1.	Welcome and Apologies SB thanked everyone for adjusting diaries to make earlier meeting.	
2.	Declaration of interests (and reminder for those who have not updated theirs) <i>None declared</i> Those present have already updated declarations	

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Signed.....(Chair) Date.....

3.	<p>Approval of minutes of previous meeting</p> <p><i>All agreed to sign meeting minutes off as approved</i></p>	
4.	<p>Budget discussion and sign-off</p> <p>SB gave context to budget plans by asking GC to give brief summary so that JP and MWe could give their views.</p> <p>GC explained Spring Common is still on track for being on budget, and that there had been good progress at controlling cost. There was a larger surplus at Riverside Meadows – and the problematic funding had been included within this surplus.</p> <p>GC explained that there were key risks included in the report and actions were being taken to mitigate this – all headteachers had been involved in this.</p> <p>Salaries were based on real pupil and pupil matrixes. Information presented and discussions with headteachers had resulted in a budget that would be difficult as this involved adapting staffing.</p> <p>GC expressed the ‘biggest headline’ involved what had been done with salaries and why. The board had been advised that; previous review body discussions suggested a higher pay award and 0.5% of that would need to be funded by schools. It had been proposed that a ‘rolling pay award’ was implemented.</p> <p>GC stated there was potential to use past reserves to meet pay awards or there may be a need for a reduction in staff head count. GC explained that an agreed budget would involve another review. The proposal needed to be uploaded to ESFA by August.</p> <p>KT commented that she wished to clarify that the documents presented included reduction in year for Spring Common but also recall on reserves. She felt it was important that a decision had been made to reduce costs overall next year and there had been a difficulty to balance this due to training, site work and curriculum resources costs.</p> <p>JP stated that she felt the team have done the best with a ‘bad’ situation, the key for her was balancing the educational provision relating to EHCP provision and workload and work-life balance for senior leadership. She felt this has been done well. JP questioned whether there was enough contingency to cover fallout from performance management frameworks and contractual arrangements.</p>	

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GC explained that they had assumed that all teaching staff and TA's were able to get progression and would move up each year. This allowed for 'slack' within budget. This ensures that there is the money to do that.

JP asked about protocol and stated that she was going through this process in another Trust, she did not feel that extending the pay increase deadline to the end of August had been 'helpful' as there is no big announcement and people available to recut and rebalance the budget. She stated that her expectation was that she was approving the budget to be submitted and a reforecast would be conducted in September. She asked whether the pay settlement landing in the coming weeks would result in a re-budget for GC and KT.

GC summarised that if approval was given today from the Board, the document would be uploaded this week. Any changes would impact in internal management of budget.

MW added that the Government expectations of pay award had been included and discussed at FPP and was expected to last one year and not to be used in perpetuity from reserves.

MWe spoke to confirm that the board were approving the budget today, subject to any changes needing to be made due to the pay award results, enabling GC to make projections now, with potential need for tweaks.

KT asked whether the board were happy to approve the pay award as they are announced. She explained that other Academy Trusts are having similar problems due to an inconsistency between incoming money and inflation.

KT explained that there had not been the announcement as expected. She said that they may have no additional information from the Government by September so can only do what they can with the information they have.

KT agreed with JP that school safety and ratios to staff are maintained and is a priority. KT stated that they have been working on top up funding for special needs children to ensure more realistic support for children. KT explained that Alex, Andrew and Chris had been negotiating hard for this.

KT thanked JP and others for their comments and felt that they have worked hard to bring this budget to the Trust. KT explained that there was a network of specialist schools that she was aware of and they had explained the likelihood of huge deficits

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for themselves this year. She explained that there has been great effort to maintain a balanced budget.

JP commented that, "Just something to consider for the risk register, obviously that pressure that we've always got about Local Authority passporting money through, I do worry that challenge is going to get worse."

JP continued to explain that she has seen and heard that Local Authority schools, mainstream and special are more prevalent to set unbalanced budgets as this is dealt with at authority level, draining authority coffers more. JP continued that she felt the Trust should recognise that the budget has been prepared with a 'going concern, going forward' and she felt this was a key statement to make when creating end of year accounts.

KT responded and confirmed that JP was correct and all schools in the area were in deficit. This was a worry as the Academies are not 'allowed' to have a deficit and need to keep making cuts. Nationally there have been schools make cuts. She explained that corrective actions had been taken across the schools to prevent this from happening.

SB commented that they have been fortunate that they are opening Prestley Woods and hiring staff from Spring Common as this had made redundancies less likely and this had been good for wellbeing.

SB asked whether everyone has had time to scrutinise the budget and ask questions.

KT asked for a formal vote whether the board are happy to allow GC permission to pay awards as they are announced – even with the unknown percentage

JP asked whether this includes support staff too. KT explained that it does.

The decision to allow GC permission to pay the pay award increases without the need to bring this back to the board was raised to vote

ALL AGREED

SB asked whether everyone approved the budget and was happy to propose the budget and forecast.

ALL AGREED

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	SB thanked GC and KT for their work on the budget.	
5.	<p>Updates from Subcommittees</p> <p><u>TLW update</u></p> <p>SB explained that RB sent apologies for this meeting and had sent her report to the Clerk. These had been uploaded to the Teams file for members to view.</p> <p>SB summarised the points from the document. SB signposted the members to the rest of the report and explained that there was a feeling that Spring Common was 'OFSTED Ready'.</p> <p>SB explained that there would be a breakdown of success criteria from September. KT added that they had been working with the AEG and thanked MW for attending those. KT met with non-staff members of AEG and updated the terms. She asked that these be approved today. KT explained that the AEG were meeting in the coming week to discuss the parent strategy and that there had been some really good events involving parents which had demonstrated marked improvements for student wellbeing.</p> <p><i>KT asked whether the board are happy to approve the documents;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>AEG Terms of Reference</i> - <i>Scheme of Delegation</i> <p>ALL APPROVED</p> <p><u>FPP update</u></p> <p>MW presented updates. MW explained majority of FPP was spent working on the budgets, current year results and actions taken. KT's executive head report had been presented. This was brought to usual debate and he felt there was no more to share with the Full Board Meeting regarding this.</p> <p>SB commented that we have not yet met with auditors.</p>	

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	<p>MW explained that there was a desire to meet with internal auditors, Price Bailey – this had not happened yet as they had not completed their client take-on processes. This was likely to be completed in first meeting of next term.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Trust capacity discussion</p> <p>SB asked whether everyone is aware that KT has amended the strategy and had seen it.</p> <p>JP said she felt it didn't quite include KPI or criteria for achievement well enough – she expressed that she had shared a document that could be considered. JP asked whether this could be reviewed over the Summer to be reviewed in September.</p> <p>SB felt that the document did not include statements relating to how many and how long. She asked whether KT would be happy to reflect on these and had offered to discuss some different models with JP and AU. KT explained that this need completed promptly for DfE.</p> <p>SB suggested circulating dates for this. KT recommended this be an in-person meeting. JP also offered to circle her other Trust equivalent document</p> <p>SB encouraged open discussion about Trust capacity and future Trustee posts as this was not appropriate to discuss in previous meeting with Headteachers present. She asked KT to update on what is happening locally.</p> <p>KT referred to a document uploaded into Teams File for the trustees to review – Jonathon Lewis – Developing SEND Capacity; Developing MATs - these included plans for new Special schools in the area which she did not recommend the Trust being involved in. The second option, KT recommended the Trust should bid for based on several factors. This included the school already being part of the March catchment.</p> <p>Application needed to be in by 31st August, 2023 KT felt this was do-able but is coming up quickly. She had researched who may be bidding for these and has asked the board whether they would like her to pursue this.</p> <p>MW agreed that the school in March should be bid for</p> <p>The next question and response were raised as confidential</p>	<p>KT to circulate dates for a follow-up meeting to discuss the document with JP and AU and to re-present</p> <p>Clerk to review</p> <p>Articles of Association & Rules on Public Appointments and provide information to the Board about requirements of voting in Chair.</p>

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JP felt conflicted – she lived in March and felt that the provision was needed in the area. She explained there were many children failing in mainstream schools in the area. She was anxious about capacity but felt alleviated that the date was set for 2026. JP questioned the track record of success on this. This included sub strategies – relating to recruitment She felt the Trust needed to be more strategic in these going forward. JP also queried wellbeing and impact to KT.

KT stated that the issue was that she already had a bid but needed to be transferred to an alternative template. She felt the Trust had lots of information to bid but not many competitors likely to bid.

AU offered KT support to complete the bid, if she wanted the help.

SB commented that it was more reassuring to Trustees that the school was in line with the schools already established. SB queried financial impact and felt that there needed be clarity on expectations of central team. SB felt that she would like a clearer picture of the detailed growth of central team and financial commitment to it.

KT explained that DfE could provide a ‘capacity fund’ to bring in a new leader and it is likely the trust would like an Executive Head Model and CEO.

SB explained that the strategy plan currently covered 2026 and felt this did not take into account a potential new school. SB felt nervous about recruitment in an area of deprivation and how successful the Trust will be in Wisbech to promote ‘working for us’.

JP explained that March is part of the Fenland Opportunity area. JP has offered to research more about this area and school.

KT has recommended that the board watch the meeting online as this has been shared within the Teams folder. KT asked whether we have the ‘appetite to apply’? KT needs to know this week whether the board would like to go forward with this. She explained that there is no risk to bid as this can be withdrawn.

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	<p><i>SB asked whether everyone is happy to take initial meetings and to pursue bid.</i></p> <p><i>ALL AGREED</i></p> <p>JP queried trust indicators and quality descriptors sent to Trustees and the 'opaqueness' of the framework. JP felt that as a trust, there needs to be an understanding of these indicators.</p> <p>KT would like us to 'up our game' on our strategic documents.</p> <p>SB briefly discussed recruitment of trustees and succession planning. SB stated that Steph has sent link to KT and SB for an individual to follow up. The Trust have paid for a search for Ambassadors.</p> <p>SB asked for a brief update on this from KT who explained that she had been in contact with the group but was not yet in their 'matching service'.</p> <p>SB queried her role as Chair and information on whether she would need to be voted into the role again.</p>	
7.	<p>Dates of meetings for next year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Board meetings will be on Wednesdays - FPP meetings will be on Wednesdays - TLW meetings will continue to be on Wednesdays <p>Dates based on current years' timings</p> <p>MWe explained that Wednesdays were always awkward for him due to travel to and from London</p> <p>JP said this worked for her and queried whether these could be brought to earlier in the day to prevent longer working days.</p> <p>JP had also requested that physical location is rotated to allow all to join.</p> <p>SB explained that this had been raised in the past and this never materialised but would be something to do moving forward. SB explained that RB may not be able to attend before 6pm due to other commitments</p> <p>GC can be flexible for meetings.</p>	<p>Add the discussion about meetings to the next agenda</p> <p>Arrange a time for GC, RB and others to speak with Clerk for suitable meeting times.</p>

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	<p>KT stated that people need to be realistic about what is possible, she felt it was unlikely that everyone will attend sites due to distance – she had asked for trustees to consider how far they are happy to travel and that online meetings may still be as beneficial for attendees.</p> <p>SB felt we should encourage participants to attend in person but online meetings can allow people in different locations to participate. She felt that there should be a way for the board to demonstrate equal interest in each school.</p> <p>The board requested that this be discussed at the next meeting and be added to the agenda.</p> <p>MW commented that timings of meetings can cause issues with in-person meetings as they often run over.</p>	
8.	CONFIDENTIAL ITEM REDACTED	
9.	<p>AOB</p> <p>None</p>	
10	<p>Executive Head Report</p> <p>KT asked whether the board could approve the new Suspensions Guidance – this was Statutory from 1st September.</p> <p>KT asked whether the board approved the new Keeping Children Safe in Education Guidance.</p> <p>KT explained that she had been working on the de-amalgamation document and sign-posted this in Teams.</p> <p>JP explained that Trustees had a statutory responsibility to read and familiarise themselves with this document to meet the legal requirements for safeguarding. JP had requested that the Board adopt some of the principles relating to online safety even though the Government have not yet clarified these. KT agreed.</p>	

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SB had asked that trustees notify KT once they had read the documents and GC once she had read the Handbook

KT reviewed some of the safeguarding progress made throughout the previous year. She felt that there has been work on Risk Owners and Risk Management. She added that there are plans to bring a document to the next FPP explaining who people are and what they do.

KT hoped for Wisbech Green 14th August handover. S said she may send out invitations to trustees to visit.

Riverside Meadows had confirmed 60 pupils for September. Lots of enquiries had been made for new SMH setting. KT explained that there would need to be a planned open event.

KT explained that she was trying to get de-amalgamation for end of financial year. Consultation will involve name of the school. There had been discussion about the new school continuing with the name of Riverside Meadows, Wisbech Green.

MW asked whether the use of the same name would confuse staff, parents and others and defeat the purpose of the de-amalgamation

JP wanted to state on record that a discussion under TLW, is credit to Chris, Andrew, Alex and Kim about being clear about the children who we can meet the needs of. JP stated these schools would be 'oversubscribed' for the first time and this is a credit.

Meeting ended at 18:30

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