

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust
Finance Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance Committee held in Picknalls First School, Uttoxeter, on Thursday, 28 March 2019 at 5.30pm.

Present:

Mrs V Bennett (in the chair), Mrs E Bell, Mr S Slater – Trustees

Mrs A Tapp – Chief Executive Officer

Mr A Storer – Chief Finance Officer

Mr R Sheldon – Clerk to the ULT

106. Apologies:

An apology for absence was received and accepted from Mr L Trigg (committee chair).

107. Declarations of Interest:

Declarations of interest were given from Mrs A Tapp (headteacher of Picknalls First School) and Mr A Storer (Business Manager at Thomas Alleyne's High School) in advance of discussions around ULT redundancy options. See Minute 111 (Confidential Appendix).

108. Minutes:

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance committee held on 31 January 2019 had been previously circulated and taken as read.

It was resolved –

That the minutes be received and approved.

109. Matters Arising:

a) Related Party Transactions (Minute 99(a) refers)

The chief executive officer reported that new regulations with regard to related party transactions had been discussed at recent meetings of the Headteacher Professional Board and School representation Board. The chief finance officer was having discussions with all concerned and would keep a record of any related party transactions undertaken and trustees would be kept updated as necessary.

b) Meetings with Local Governing Boards (Minute 99(c) refers)

The chief finance officer reported that he had met with local governing boards to discuss ULT financial matters. Discussion followed and trustees felt that attendance of the chief finance officer at a future meeting of the School Representation Board (SRB) would also be beneficial. The chief finance officer agreed to prepare a report for the next meeting of the SRB, at which he would not be able to attend, but would then attend the following meeting to discuss the report in more detail.

c) External Audit review (Minute 100 refers)

The chief executive officer reported that representatives of Mitten Clarke, appointed auditor, had accepted the invitation to be present at this meeting to discuss the external review process. However, due to the absence of the committee chair, attendance had

been postponed and they would now be attending the next meeting of the Finance committee to be held on 9 May 2019.

d) Marketing of Pupil Transition (Minute 101(c) refers)

The chief executive officer reported that the benefits of improved marketing for pupil transition from the middle schools to Thomas Alleyne's High School had been discussed at a recent meeting of the Headteacher professional Board. As a result of this a number of ideas were being developed and trustees would be kept updated.

e) JCB Academy Admissions (Minute 101(c) refers)

The chair of trustees reported that he had been in correspondence with the Department for Education (DfE) to challenge its view that the changes to the admissions arrangements at JCB academy were insignificant and also raise concerns about the admissions criteria that had been adopted. He further reported that the matter had also been raised at a recent with the Regional Schools Commission (RSC) who now had a greater understanding of the impact that the changes would have on schools in the ULT and, in particular, Thomas Alleyne's High School. A business case was being put together to seek financial support from the RSC should the admission changes at JCB academy remain in place.

It was resolved –

That the Finance committee fully supports the chair's actions in pursuing this matter with the DfE and RSC.

110. ULT Finance Report:

The chief finance officer presented reports on the following ULT and school finance matters:

a) 2019/2020 GAG Statements

A copy of the 2019 GAG statements for each of the schools was circulated and the chief finance officer went through the detail of it. He reported that there was a shortfall of around £270K across the ULT and outlined the reasons for this. The chief finance officer also circulated details of current pupil numbers in each of the schools and confirmed that they were less than originally anticipated and therefore a key factor in the financial shortfall.

Discussion followed and trustees considered in particular the impact of the financial shortfall for each of the schools and also questioned the in-year budget deficit for a number of schools. The chief finance officer reported that he was to visit those schools within-year deficits to challenge actions being taken to set a balanced budget.

It was resolved –

- i) That the 2019/2020 GAG statements be received and noted and that the chief finance officer be requested to include individual school information on future reports rather than cumulative totals.
- ii) That the chief finance officer be requested to update the Finance committee on actions being taken by school governing boards to set balanced budgets.

b) CIF Bids

The chief finance officer reported that all CIF bids had been submitted within the agreed timeframe and that decisions were expected shortly.

c) Gender Pay Gap

Discussion took place regarding the public sector equality duty and the chief finance officer circulated a report detailing the gender pay gap for staff across the ULT. Trustees were informed that the pay gap was higher than the recommended figure but was still less than a number of other multi academy trusts. The implications of this were discussed with consideration given to required actions to ensure that the ULT achieved its obligations for gender related pay. Mrs Bell undertook to find out further information regarding this for further discussion at the next meeting.

It was resolved –

That to support further discussions, the chief finance officer be requested to provide a breakdown of the differences between teaching staff and support staff.

d) Insight HR

The chief executive officer reminded trustees that the service level agreement with Insight HR was for a period of 3 years, to be reviewed annually. Confirmation was given of the value for money from the service currently provided by Insight HR

It was resolved –

That the views of the headteachers be sought at the next meeting of the HPB before taking a final decision to continue with the service level agreement.

111. ULT Redundancy Consultation:

See Confidential Appendix (attached).

112. Letter from Minister re. High School Funding and ULT Reserves:

The chair of trustees reported that in response to the letter challenging the unfairness of the new funding formula for high schools in a 3 tier system, Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards had stated that it was not ESFA policy to provide one off funding for individual schools, whilst also noting the apparently healthy financial position of the ULT through the large cumulative surplus of funds.

The chair further reported that this matter had also been discussed at the recent meeting of the RSC.

It was resolved –

That trustees note with disappointment the response from Nick Gibb but would continue to keep the matter under review.

113. RSC/ULT Meeting:

The chair of trustees and the chief executive officer referred to their recent meeting with the RSC, also attended by the headteacher of Thomas Alleyne's High School, and all had considered it to be a very positive meeting. It had been an opportunity to outline everything

happening across the ULT whilst also challenging the level of funding and likely impact of the change of admission arrangements at JCB academy. Reference had also been made to the shared school building between Ryecroft CE Middle and Dove First Schools and the implications of this due to the reluctance of governors at Dove First School to join the ULT. The RSC did though acknowledge the strengths of the ULT although expressing surprise at the comparatively low 2 ½% central funds contribution. The chair of trustees had been able to explain why it had been set at this figure but confirmed that it remained under review.

It was resolved –

- i) That the report on discussions at the recent meeting with the RSC be noted, with thanks to all present for highlighting the strengths of the ULT and making clear potential challenges due to external factors.
- ii) That the chair of trustees should write individually to all governors of Dove First School to inform them of the benefits available to the school should it agree to join the ULT.
- iii) That the chair of trustees would prepare a report for headteachers and local governing boards to outline how central funds were currently allocated and also explaining why it was possible to keep the contribution at 2 ½% although with ongoing review.

114. Sponsor Application and New Free School:

The chief executive officer reported that, following discussions with the Regional Schools Commission (RSC), confirmation had been received that the ULT was an approved sponsor. As such, work had commenced in preparing a bid to sponsor the new school on land to the west of Uttoxeter. The chief executive officer acknowledged the support being given by the headteachers of All Saints and Hutchinson Memorial Schools, and chair of trustees, in completing the required free school presumption process application form. Everything was on track for the application to be submitted before the deadline of 12 April 2019.

It was resolved –

That the Finance committee fully supports the bid to be submitted for sponsorship of the new school, with thanks to the two headteachers and chair of trustees for their help in preparing the application form.

115. Recruitment Process for the Appointment of CEO:

The chair of trustees reported that the recruitment process for the appointment of a new chief executive officer was now underway. The post had been advertised to offer it on a full-time contract but with some flexibility if necessary. A copy of the appointment pack had previously been sent to trustees together with details of the proposed recruitment timeline. Trustees were reminded that a short listing meeting was to be held on 17 April with interviews to be held on Monday, 29 April 2019.

It was resolved –

That the update on the chief executive officer recruitment process be noted.

116. Risk Register:

An updated ULT risk register was circulated at the meeting and the chief executive officer outlined the changes that she had made to the register, including an update of the progress of the identified risks. Trustees were informed that, as previously agreed, the scoring formula for risks had been revised. Discussion followed and trustees identified further changes required to be made:

- Swimming Pool at Thomas Alleyne's – remove as a risk now that the pool was to re-open.
- JCB Academy – the impact of the change to admission arrangements be moved to high risk.

It was resolved –

That the updated risk register be received and noted, subject to the further changes outlined above.

117. Policy Approval:

a) Investment Policy

A copy of the revised Investment policy had been previously circulated. Discussion followed with regard to the policy itself and the chief finance officer was also requested to outline current arrangements for ULT funds held in reserve. He reported that reserve funds were currently sat in a bank account but various investment options were being considered.

It was resolved –

- i) That the Investment policy be received and approved.
- ii) That the chief finance officer be requested to prepare a report for the next meeting outlining the various investment options and that consideration should also be given to the arrangements made by other multi academy trusts to invest reserve funds.

b) General Business Continuity Plan

A copy of the revised general business continuity plan for individual schools and the ULT as a whole had been previously circulated. Discussion followed and trustees recognised the importance of them being kept informed of any incidents that could prevent a school from operating as normal.

It was resolved –

- i) That the general business continuity plan be received and approved.
- ii) That all schools be requested to inform trustees of the make-up of their incident team and that each should also include the chief executive officer and chief finance officer.
- iii) That the distribution of any school incident report form should include the chair of the local governing board and the chair of trustees.

c) Risk Management Strategy and Policy

A copy of the revised Risk Management strategy and policy had been previously circulated. Discussion followed and its alignment with the risk register was recognised as being important.

It was resolved –

That the Risk Management strategy and policy be received and approved, subject to the scoring formula for identifying the level of risk be aligned to the risk register.

118. Date of Next Meeting:

It was resolved –

That as previously agreed, the next meeting of the Finance committee be held in Picknalls First School on Thursday, 9 May 2019 at 5.30pm.

Signed.....

Date.....