

Uttoxeter Learning Trust (ULT)

Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee held in a virtual setting on Wednesday 11 May, 2022 at 5.30 p.m.

Present: Mrs. Bennett (Vice-Chair), Dr. Clark (CEO), Mr. Slater, Mr. Haswell

In attendance: Mr. Davies (Clerk to the Trust Board)
Mr. Storer (CFO)

1 Welcome:

Trustees were welcomed to today's meeting by the Vice-Chair. A full agenda had been circulated in advance of the meeting along with all relevant paperwork. There was the usual level of engagement throughout the meeting as Trustees asked questions/sought points of clarification as appropriate.

The meeting was quorate.

2 Apologies:

Resolved: That an apology for absence be received and accepted from Mr. Harper.

3 Confidentiality:

Trustees were reminded that all discussions that take place at this meeting should remain confidential to the meeting.

4 Declarations of Interest:

Mr. Storer declared the following interest in respect of the following items on today's agenda:

- Redundancy Scheme
- Review of Central Team and Finance Team.

5 Minutes of the Previous Meeting:

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Finance and Audit Committee held on Thursday 26 March, 2022 be approved as an accurate and true record.

Resolved: That the Minutes, Agenda and all reports and other papers considered at the meeting be made available for inspection if required.

The Clerk will sign and date the ratified minutes on behalf of the Vice-Chair. This task is important to ensure the PA to the CEO can ensure there is an electronic copy of historical minutes, retained for future reference and audit purposes.

6 Matters Arising:

The following update was provided in relation to key matters arising from the March minutes:

1.1 – The Richard Clarke First School and Tom Thumb Insurance Implications

The CFO confirmed that having checked with the Trust's insurance provider, no further action needs to be taken in relation to the lease.

1.2 – Bramshall Meadows First School

The latest update was shared with Trustees which included the status of applications for September 2022; the staffing structure for Year 1; the handover of the building and associated procedures; the approval of the Funding Agreement that has been signed by Trustees and the DfE and the preparations that have been made for the Ofsted pre-inspection visit that is expected in May.

Trustee Challenge: Trustees asked for clarification that the necessary insurance-based cover will be in place when the Trust takes possession of the building. The CFO confirmed this to be the case with the associated RPA premiums starting to be paid from 1 September when the building is actually in use. Trustees were reassured the CFO has the position in writing should there be any queries further down the line.

1.3 – Ryecroft/Dove Site

The CEO reported that there has been progress in this area with the Trust putting the appropriate measures in place for Ryecroft to take sole use of the IT suite. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been tweaked and is in the process of being agreed between the ULT and SUAT. It is anticipated that this issue will be resolved in the coming weeks to the mutual satisfaction of all parties involved.

As an aside, there was an update on a parental complaint linked to Ryecroft C o E Middle School that was sent straight to the ESFA. It was reported that the Chair of the Trust Board in liaison with relevant parties had produced a full and comprehensive response to the complaint (to a challenging deadline) with the Trust now awaiting any further correspondence in this area. There was a brief discussion of any key lessons learnt from this episode with the CEO having already implemented a number of follow up actions both at Ryecroft and across all ULT schools. Further actions are planned which include setting an accountability for a Link Governor within each LGB to carry out a termly check of website compliance with schools reporting on any resulting actions that have been taken. Trustees were pleased to hear that the Trust has moved quickly in this area but noted how time-consuming the related actions have been.

1.4 – Redundancy Scheme

The CEO confirmed that following a meeting on 29.03.22, a revised offer was shared with colleagues after the Easter break. This offer has been communicated in writing with a deadline for agreement of the revised offer set as 13.05.22. Trustees will be kept abreast of on-going developments in this area.

1.5 – All Saints Roof

It was reported that the CIF bid for this work has been submitted with a report including quotes from Entrust imminent. The CFO outlined his frustrations with the time it is taking to source the necessary quotes but confirmed that appropriate action is now being taken. He confirmed that he may need to liaise with Trustees on this issue once the quotes come through to ensure next steps can be agreed without having to wait for a scheduled meeting.

1.6 – Gender Pay Gap

A Gender Pay Gap Report for the ULT was shared with attendees. Trustees discussed some of the key trends in the data, accepting that the formula that is used to calculate the various outputs is rather crude in nature. That said, there is a legal responsibility for Trustees to publish this information online which the CFO will now action in the coming days.

Resolved: That the CFO take account of this action.

7 Risk Register:

The latest version of the ULT Risk Register was shared with Trustees.

1.1

The CEO began by focusing on the likelihood of future Ofsted inspections and how well-placed schools are to succeed in these external audits. As well as bringing a CPD plan to Trustees at next week's Trust Board meeting, the CEO is keen that opportunities are taken by Middle Leaders across the ULT to share best practice with each other – particularly in relation to curriculum intent, deep dives and the wider curriculum subjects. Risk mitigation in this area needs to be continuous to ensure all schools across the ULT are receiving the support they need to deliver a successful Section 5/Section 8 Ofsted inspection whenever the time comes.

1.2

Trustee Challenge: Trustees felt that in relation to some of the risk areas (notably 3, 5 and 12) the accompanying narrative could be strengthened by the additional mitigation that has been applied in these areas. As the Risk Register is a live document, there will always be a need to enhance and strengthen aspects of this document to ensure the ULT can demonstrate the necessary due diligence is being applied to different aspects of academy life.

Resolved: That the CEO take account of this action.

8 Financial Update:

The CFO was invited at this point to give his financial update. The following points were noted:

1.1 – Finance Report as at 30 April End

Trustees had received the consolidated management report, consolidated trial balance and cash flow forecast. The CFO reported that the budgetary outlook is looking better than expected for a number of reasons – i.e. higher than forecast pupil numbers in Nursery and the Early Years provision across First Schools last September; the lower pay award for support staff (actual 1.75%; budgeted 2.5%) and the receipt of the Supplementary Grant which was not included in the original forecast.

In addition, it was confirmed that the CEO and CFO have completed meetings with Headteachers and Chairs of Governors to review actions as a result of the previous internal audit projected outturn until 31 August and back office/central services for September 2022. The discussions have been very valuable and have allowed all key stakeholders to focus on any budgetary pressures and how these processes can be effectively mitigated. One such pressure is the cost-of-living crisis that is being monitored closely to the end of the financial year.

Trustee Challenge: Trustees did exercise one or two words of caution in relation to this promising outlook. There was some concern that the inflationary pressures that are currently being felt will only deepen which will have implications for the five-year modeler, particularly if no additional income comes into the Budget.

Trustee Challenge: Trustees also asked whether the ULT was in a position where it could claim back any additional expenditure as a result of increased supply costs from central government.

The CFO confirmed the Trust does not currently meet the criteria to make such a claim. It was agreed, however, that the status of the Sixth Form Fund would be looked at to establish whether there is any eligibility in this area.

Resolved: That the CFO take account of this action, feeding back to Trustees as appropriate.

1.2 – Internal Audit 2022

The CFO confirmed that the arrangements for this internal audit are still being finalised at present. That said, it was reported that some of the asset management surveys are underway with the results to be shared with Trustees once the full data set is available.

1.3 – CIF Bids

Trustees received the latest situation regarding existing CIF bids and the likely timeframe for when the works will be completed at a number of ULT schools. As some of the remedial action has gone beyond 31.03.22 the ULT has been successful in securing the necessary extension for the various projects.

In addition, the CFO confirmed the ULT is still awaiting CIF outcomes for current bids which were expected by the end of April. As and when there are any developments in this area, Trustees will be notified.

1.4 – Service Level Agreements (SLAs)

A timeline for renewing various SLAs had been shared with Trustees in advance of today's meeting. The information that was provided included additional items that the CEO would like to see included when any SLA is reviewed. Trustees are free to add to the list should they have any additional suggestions. The supplied information was noted by all attendees.

1.5 – Pupil Number Predictions 2022

The latest projections were shared with Trustees which overall painted a relatively healthy position. There will be some additional analysis around any dips in the data to establish root cause but from a budgetary perspective the reported numbers are strong. It was also noted that the numbers will also be impacted by in-year mobility with this impacting on the ULT schools to varying amounts.

Trustee Challenge: Trustees asked for a five-year projection of numbers so the mid to long-term impact on budgets can be broadly analysed.

Resolved: That the CFO/CEO generate a data set to support this request and share it with Trustees.

Resolved: That the CFO be thanked for his financial update.

9 Trust Growth:

A number of Trust-related matters were discussed at this point in the meeting.

1.1 – The White Paper

Trustees have no doubt taken stock of the White Paper and additional presentations that have been circulated by the CEO on educational reform. Although not in statute, the White Paper does lay out a clear path when it comes to future academisation with the ULT well placed to align with the expected direction of travel in the years ahead.

Trustees discussed the potential for growth within the ULT, the future roles for the Local Authority (LA) and Entrust within this evolving external landscape and how the future direction of travel will be determined for the ULT to ensure it maximises the benefits from this educational reform. The Chair of the Trust shared some views on these issues including how the ULT is well placed to work in collaboration with external partners (perhaps in some form of pilot activity) to secure the sustainability of the ULT in the mid to long-term.

This strategic matter will no doubt be revisited in the months and years ahead.

1.2 – Review of Central Team and Finance Team

Trustees were made aware of the following revised proposal that has been tweaked to take account of recent Trustee feedback:

- The post of CFO will be increased from 0.6 to 1.0 – an HR process will be put in place.
- A post to support First School Finance functions to be appointed and expected to be equivalent to 0.4 FTE. In principle support has been secured for Bramshall Meadows from the Office Manager at All Saints at no additional cost. This will be temporary, linked to the initial term agreed with the interim Executive Headteacher (October 2023). Support for Hutchinson and Richard Clarke First Schools has been identified from the central team.
- That a full-time post be advertised with a premises/facilities and health and safety operating remit. A job description is presented which will then be shared for job evaluation.
- The post of PA to the CEO has been increased from one to two days a week for the next academic year, during which plans for the permanent appointment can be reviewed.

At today's meeting, two further aspects linked to the revised proposal were agreed – firstly the top slice which will be set at 4% and the need to increase the salary range for the full-time post that will be advertised. The CFO was also asked to model different financial scenarios, taking account of the increased top slice taking effect from 01.01.23 and 01.04.23. In coming to these decisions, Trustees asked questions and applied the necessary due diligence in each of these areas.

Resolved: That the CFO model the two financial scenarios and share the outcomes with Trustees.

Resolved: That Trustees approve an increase of the top slice to 4% to take account of the extra provision and support ULT schools will be receiving. This decision will now go to next week's Trust Board meeting for formal ratification.

Resolved: That the CFO look into the impact on the Budget of increasing the salary of the full-time post to a Grade 10 equivalent. The implications of this move will again be shared with Trustees.

It is envisaged a number of these areas will be revisited at the Trust Board on 17.05.22 where any formal ratification of committee decisions is required.

Trustees were pleased to see that significant progress is being made on this key strategic issue.

1.3 – Stone Schools

The CEO confirmed that the on-going dialogue with the Stone schools continues to evolve in a positive way with further engagement sessions planned. Whilst no definitive agreement has been reached at this stage, the CEO is hopeful that the schools can be persuaded to become a fully fledged member of the ULT.

10 Safeguarding Update:

A brief Safeguarding update was provided by the CEO.

1.1

Trustees were informed that Ukrainian children are starting to enter the ULT system in increasing numbers. As well as discussing funding requirements, Trustees were pleased to hear that Headteachers are being engaged on this matter to establish what the emerging and evolving needs are of this vulnerable group.

Trustee Challenge: Trustees asked that whilst funding will eventually come through into the Budget, the focus needs to be on the here and now with funds released to provide short-term and impactful support to these children.

Resolved: That the CEO convey this message around funding to ULT impacted schools.

Overall, Trustees are proud that the ULT has been able to come to the aid of families in their greatest hour of need.

11 Policies:

The only policies that needed to be discussed at this meeting were the update to the Indexation in the Teachers' Pension Scheme and the ULT Health and Safety Policy.

1.1

The CEO confirmed that the Trust continues to seek guidance on the indexation of the final section of the Teachers' Pension Scheme from both HR and the LA. It was confirmed that the guidance at present is to maintain a watching brief and await further guidance – far from ideal.

1.2

It was confirmed that the Health and Safety Policy is currently being finalised and will be made available for approval at the next Finance and Audit Committee meeting. The expectation is that this policy will be rolled out in all ULT schools from September 2022.

Resolved: That the CEO add this policy to the next circulated agenda.

12 Any Other Business:

There was no additional business on this occasion.

13 Confidentiality:

Trustees were asked to identify if there were any items/materials which needed to be excluded from any Agenda, Minutes, reports or other papers discussed at the meeting which would normally be made available for inspection following the meeting.

Trustees were also asked to identify any items included on the Agenda which require recording in a Confidential Appendix to the Minutes.

Resolved: That it be identified that no item needed to be recorded in a Confidential Appendix to the Minutes.

There were no items/materials identified for exclusion.

14 Dates and Times of Future Meetings:

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 23 June, 2022 at 5.30 p.m.

The CEO added that discussions are already underway to plan a meeting schedule for 2022-23. This schedule, once finalised, will be shared with Trustees and is likely to take the form of a blended model – some meetings remote, some face to face.

Resolved: That the Clerk/CEO progress this matter.

All that was left to do was for the Vice-Chair to thank all Trustees for their attendance and contributions to today's meeting,

The meeting was brought to a close.

Mrs. Bennett
PP P. Davies (Clerk)

23.06.22

Chair

Date

Uttoxeter Learning Trust (ULT)

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on Wednesday 11 May, 2022 at 5.30 p.m.**

Action Matrix

Minute	Owner	Action Required	Action Update
5	CEO	Make March minutes available as a public record if requested.	
5	Clerk	PP minutes on behalf of Vice-Chair and email them through to PA of CEO.	
6	CFO	Publish Gender Pay Gap Report online.	
7	CEO	Strengthen narrative in places within Risk Register.	
8	CFO	Look into whether Sixth Form Fund is eligible for any kind of rebate.	
8	CFO/CEO	Generate five-year projection around pupil numbers.	
9	CFO	Action points following discussion of expansion of central/finance team.	
10	CEO	Convey message around funding to Headteachers as appropriate.	
11	CEO	Ensure Health and Safety Policy comes to next meeting for approval.	
14	CEO/Clerk	Finalise meeting structure for 2022-23.	

Date of next meeting: Thursday 23 June, 2022 at 5.30 p.m.