

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust  
Finance & Audit Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & Audit Committee held remotely (via Microsoft teams) on Wednesday, 23 June 2021 at 5.30pm.

**Present:**

Mr L Trigg (chair), Mrs V Bennett, Mr S Harper, Mr S Slater,

Dr S Clark – Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Mr A Storer – Chief Finance Officer (CFO)

Mr R Sheldon – Clerk to the ULT

**262. Declarations of Interest:**

There were no declarations of interest from trustees relevant to agenda items.

**263. Minutes:**

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee held on 5 May 2021 had been previously circulated and taken as read.

It was resolved –

That the minutes be received and approved.

**264. Matters Arising:**

a) Richard Clarke First School (Minute 254(b) refers)

The CEO reported that the issues around the land registry continued to be pursued and that an agreement in principle had been reached for a 'tenancy at will'. Further meetings were planned to help ensure that the school could formally join the ULT on 1 September 2021.

b) Leadership Salaries (Minute 254(d) refers)

The CEO reported that, as agreed at the last meeting of the Trust Board, consideration was being given to the level of decision making for school leadership salaries and that whatever was subsequently agreed should be aligned in both the ULT's Scheme of Delegation and its Pay policy. The CEO confirmed that current arrangements were for local governing bodies to make all salary decisions other than for headteachers. It was suggested, however, that all decisions of governing bodies pay committees should be ratified by the CEO or Trust Board. Further advice regarding this was being sought from the Trust's HR adviser. The CEO recommended that a special meeting/ briefing session be held to enable trustees to look in detail at the current Scheme of Delegation and Pay policy to identify where changes may be necessary to clarify the roles of the trustees and local governing bodies.

It was resolved –

- i) That the Finance committee recommends that the Trust Board arranges a special meeting/briefing session to enable full consideration to be given to the Scheme of Delegation and Pay policy and to determine changes where appropriate.

- ii) That any changes subsequently agreed by the Trust Board should also be discussed with chairs of governors before being implemented.
- c) IT Review (Minute 255 refers)  
The CEO reported that a review of the Trust's IT provision and support continued and arrangements had been made, taking account of trustee decisions, to ensure that a flexible system was in place for the following school year. The CEO went through the detail of the agreed changes which included the appointment of a managed service provider to offer third tier support and this was to go out to tender shortly. Other key changes included the IT manager now having a 50/50 split in supporting both Thomas Alleyne's High School and schools across the ULT. Support for the First schools had been proposed taking into account pressures on school budgets and the CFO outlined the charges and the rationale for the proposal. He reported that they were based on the revised IT team and the structure to support first schools and that costs for 2021/22 had been based on a flat rate service of £1,250 and the balance allocated on the numbers on roll. The costs for each school would therefore be:
- All Saints - £1,591
  - Hutchinson Memorial - £1,818
  - Picknalls - £3,394
  - Richard Clarke - £2,386

The CEO was also pleased to report that a room had now been allocated at Thomas Alleyne's High School for use by her, the CFO and the IT manager. This arrangement made working practices more effective.

Discussion took place and trustees questioned the impact on the ULT's central fund as a result of paying the IT manager 50% salary costs against the previously agreed 20%. The CFO reported that the additional cost would be in the region of £20K but this had been factored into the budget and was affordable.

It was resolved –

That the IT review update be noted and that the proposed first school charges be approved.

- d) School Resource Management Self-Assessment (Minute 256(d) refers)  
The chair of the Trust Board reported that he had submitted a number of views regarding the School Resource Management Self-Assessment but was disappointed that the data had been submitted before changes could be made. The CEO was requested to ensure that, when completing this form in future years, the views of trustees should be sought and any necessary changes made before submitting it.

## **265. Bramshall Meadows First School:**

The CEO was pleased to report that the build of the new school was to commence at the beginning of August and due for completion by June 2022. The S10 consultation had been completed and over a hundred responses had been received which was very positive. A report on the consultation was currently being prepared and would be circulated to trustees as soon as possible.

The CEO further reported that school leadership recruitment was shortly to get underway and, as previously agreed by trustees, an executive headteacher would be appointed and all ULT headteachers invited to apply. An application pack was currently being prepared.

The CEO also reported that the tenancy agreement for the new school had been completed and it was necessary for this to be signed by the chair of the Trust Board. Discussion followed and it was not considered appropriate for this document to be signed until the funding agreement for the new school had been received. The CEO agreed to explore this further with the local authority.

It was resolved –

That the update on Bramshall Meadows First School be noted and that all matters would continue to be kept under review.

## **266. ULT Finance Report:**

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

### a) CIF Bids

The CFO began his report by stating that an outcome on CIF bids was still awaited. However, whilst reporting on this, he received confirmation that the outcomes had just been received and was pleased to report that the following bids had been successful:

- All Saints – boiler and heating system
- Picknalls – heating
- Hutchinson Memorial - roof
- Thomas Alleyne's – fire safety

All other bids had been unsuccessful and the implications of this for the schools in question would need to be considered.

### b) Asset Management Planning

Consideration of the need for a Trust asset management plan had been considered at the last meeting of the Trust Board and the CFO reported that, to give an indication of likely costs, an approach had been made to Entrust who gave a cost of £21K to provide an asset management plan for all ULT schools for the next four years. The CFO also confirmed that the central budget, based on the current top slice, would not be able to support the employment of a ULT premises manager.

It was resolved –

That the CFO be requested to go out to tender for a condition survey of all ULT schools and the preparation of asset management plans.

### c) 5-Year Consolidated Budget – schools and central budget

Copies of the 5-year budget modellers had been previously circulated and the CFO confirmed that all, with the exception of Thomas Alleyne's and Hutchinson Memorial schools, had been approved by governing bodies. They were to be formally approved shortly.

The CFO further reported that the recently announced outcomes of the CIF bids, whether successful or not, would have implications on school budgets. He would therefore update them as necessary and re-submit for final approval. However, trustees were informed that the 3-year budget details had to be submitted to the ESFA before the end of July which would be before the next meeting of the Finance and Audit committee.

Discussion followed and trustees considered arrangements for inviting headteachers and chairs of governors/finance committee to meet with them, if considered necessary, to discuss specific budget concerns.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CFO be requested to revise school/central budgets as necessary and to circulate to members of the Finance and Audit committee for any views to be submitted and that formal approval then be given at the meeting of the Trust Board to be held the following week.
  - ii) That any schools causing concern be advised by the CEO and requested to outline plans to reduce any budget deficit and that the headteacher and chair of governors/finance committee of those schools be invited to the next meeting of the Finance and Audit committee to be held in September.
- d) Service Level Agreements  
The CFO reported that information around the various SLAs was still being collated and there was nothing further to report. An update would be given at the next meeting.
- e) Letter from ESFA  
A copy of the draft response to the letter received from the ESFA had been previously circulated and confirmed that trustees had taken the necessary actions as advised. The committee chair suggested an amendment to the wording of the letter.

It was resolved –

That the CFO be requested to submit the response to the ESFA, subject to the changes recommended by the committee chair.

- f) Ryecroft/Dove site  
The CFO reminded trustees that the site was shared by both schools and a local arrangement in place to split the service/utility charges. Bills were currently sent to Ryecroft and the appropriate contribution re-charged to Dove First School. This had implications for the re-claiming of VAT and a request had been received from Staffordshire University Academy Trust (SUAT) for all future bills to be sent to Dove and for the appropriate re-charge to then be made to Ryecroft. Discussion followed and the implications of this were considered. A number of suggestions were put forward which, if agreed, would be in the best interests of both schools.

It was resolved –

That the CEO be authorised to discuss this matter further with SUAT with a view to implementing a payment system as suggested by trustees.

## **267. Safeguarding:**

The CEO reported that arrangements had been made for a further safeguarding review of all ULT schools, to be undertaken by the local authority. Preparation for this was already underway.

The CEO further reported that there were no specific safeguarding issues to bring to the attention of trustees.

It was resolved –

That the safeguarding update be noted.

**268. Risk Register:**

A copy of the updated risk register had been previously circulated and the CEO reported that it continued to be updated as necessary.

It was resolved –

That the updated risk register be received and noted.

**269. Policy Approval:**

The following policies had been previously circulated for trustees to review and approve. The CEO confirmed that all policies were currently in place, having previously been approved by trustees, and outlined recommended changes as necessary.

a) ULT Business Continuity Plan

Full discussion took place regarding the Business Continuity Plan and a number of issues were raised with regard to its content, particularly relating to the differing terminology used. Greater clarity was required to make clear the differences between emergencies and disasters, for example. Trustees also agreed that the ULT Business Continuity Plan was the key document alongside individual school plans. Membership of the school incident management team should also include the CEO. Other suggested amendments included the inclusion of an incident log and to make clear where pupils would go in the vent of emergency school closures.

Discussion also took place regarding individual school business continuity plans and trustees agreed that copies of all plans should be available, at all times, to the CEO.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CFO be requested to update the ULT Business Continuity Plan to reflect discussions and that it be re-submitted at the next meeting of the Finance and Audit committee for further consideration and formal approval.
- ii) That the CEO also be requested to remind headteachers of the need to submit individual school plans and for it also to be made clear where all documents were stored to enable immediate access as necessary.

b) ULT Redundancy/Redeployment Policy

The CEO reminded trustees that the two policies (Redundancy and Redeployment) had previously been combined at the request of trustees and subsequently approved, subject to the various dates being amended as necessary following completion of the review process. Discussion took place regarding the updated policy and trustees were concerned that it reflected proposed changes to the redundancy scheme that had still to be formally approved and implemented by the Trust Board. As previously agreed, the matter had been put on hold due to the implications of Covid-19.

It was resolved –

That the ULT Redundancy/Redeployment policy be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Trust Board for further consideration to be given to the redundancy scheme, before approving any changes to the existing policy.

c) Reserves and Charging Policy

The CEO reported that headteachers and governing bodies had expressed concerns regarding the revised Reserves and Charging policy and that matter had also been discussed at the recent meeting of the School Representation Board. Governing bodies made clear the importance of them retaining the ability to take spending decisions in the best interests of their schools.

The CEO further reported that Picknalls First School had made a formal request for approval to spend school reserves to replace the mobile classrooms with a permanent building extension. Other possible funding streams were, however, being explored including the use of S106 monies. Trustees would be kept updated.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CEO and CFO be requested to further revise the Reserves and Charging policy to reflect views of headteachers and governing bodies and that it be re-submitted to the next meeting of the Finance and Audit committee for further consideration and formal approval.
- ii) That, if necessary, the headteacher and chair of governors be invited to a future meeting of the Finance and Audit committee to outline plans for school building improvements to be funded through reserves currently held by the school.

d) Risk Management Policy

Discussion took place regarding the updated policy.

It was resolved –

That the updated Risk Management policy be received and approved as presented.

e) Whistle-blowing Policy

Discussion took place regarding the updated policy, including the reporting process to be followed by anyone wishing to report a concern. The chair of the Trust Board requested that he should be contacted by letter rather than by email.

It was resolved –

That the updated Whistle-blowing policy be approved as presented, subjected to the amendment regarding the reporting process.

**270. Date of Next Meeting:**

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Finance Committee would be held on Wednesday, 29 September 2021 at 5.30pm. The venue for the meeting, if not held remotely, would be agreed nearer the date.

Signed.....  
L. Trigg

29 September 2021  
Date.....