

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust  
Finance & Audit Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & Audit Committee held remotely (via Microsoft teams) on Wednesday, 30 September 2020 at 5.30pm.

**Present:**

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

Dr S Clark – Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Mr A Storer – Chief Finance Officer (CFO)

Mr R Sheldon – Clerk to the ULT

**Apology:**

An apology for absence was received from Mr S Harper.

**206. Election of Chair:**

It was resolved –

That Mr L Trigg be elected as chair of the ULT Finance & Audit committee until the first meeting of the autumn term 2021.

**207. Election of Vice-Chair:**

It was resolved –

That Mrs V Bennett be elected as vice-chair of the ULT Finance & Audit committee until the first meeting of the autumn term 2021.

**208. Introduction to Mazars (external auditors):**

Mr David Hoose, representing Mazars, had been invited to the meeting to introduce his company and outline the arrangements being put in place to undertake an external audit of the ULT. Mr Hoose was welcomed to the meeting and introduced to everyone present.

Mr Hoose went through the detail of the planned audit and confirmed that a key objective was to ensure that all ULT schools remained financially viable. The audit would mostly be undertaken remotely, due to Covid-19, and although the ESFA had extended the deadline for receipt of audit reports to 31 January 2021, his company was still to work towards the original deadline of 31 December 2020. The risks that had been identified in the previous audit report would be followed-up on and appropriate advice given to ensure compliance with the Academies Financial handbook. At the request of ESFA, the audit report would also identify any issues as result of Covid-19.

Discussion took place and a question raised by trustees regarding the review of local government pensions assumptions and to be included within the audit statement. Mr Hoose confirmed that regulators had made it clear that assumptions were required. Trustees also referred to problems experienced with the previous auditor regarding delays in receiving audit statements and reports and Mr Hoose gave an assurance that his company would be able to comply with the timetable agreed with the chief finance officer. The draft audit report would be submitted to trustees at their meeting to be held in December.

Trustees also referred to the required letter of representation and confirmed that there had been discussions with the previous auditor regarding this as trustees were unhappy with the phrasing of the letter. Mr Hoose gave an assurance that trustees would be able to see such documents well in advance to enable any discussion and for any necessary changes to be made.

Mr Hoose thanked trustees for inviting him to their meeting and also offered to support trustees with any training that may help them to better understand the audit process.

It was resolved –

That Mr Hoose be thanked for attending the meeting and for outlining the audit process to be followed by his company. They looked forward to working with him.

**209. Declaration of Interest:**

A declaration of interest was given from Mr A Storer (Business Manager at Thomas Alleyne's High School) in advance of discussions around the ULT redundancy scheme. (See Minute

**210. Minutes:**

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance committee held on 6 May 2020 had been previously circulated and taken as read.

It was agreed –

That the minutes be received and approved.

**211. Matters Arising:**

a) PR & Marketing Strategy (Minute 197(c) refers)

The CEO reported that tenders to support the PR and marketing strategy had been invited and a one-year contract had subsequently been awarded to SERO at a cost of £10K. Work to support the ULT would continue as outlined at previous meetings. Tenders for other PR and marketing support services would be considered at a point in the future.

Discussion followed and, in response to trustees' questions around value for money and measuring the impact of the contract, the CEO reported that feedback from headteachers would be important and subsequently through an increase in pupil numbers attending ULT schools. The impact of this though would be better judged after Covid-19 issues had settled down.

b) Trust Capacity Fund Bid (Minute 200 refers)

The CEO reported that a new bid for the Trust capacity Fund would be submitted before the December deadline. The bid would be strengthened through Richard Clarke First School joining the ULT on a permanent basis and it was hoped to get formal approval for this before the end of the year.

## 212. ULT Finance Report:

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

### a) Internal Audit

The internal audits for all ULT schools were currently being undertaken and were being conducted later than normal due to the implications of Covid-19. The CFO confirmed though that this wouldn't impact on the external audit being undertaken by Mazars. As previously reported earlier in the meeting, the external audit report would be submitted to trustees at their meeting to be held in December.

### b) CIF Bids

Trustees were disappointed to note that the only successful CIF bid had been the one for Picknalls First School to strengthen the external fencing for safeguarding purposes. The CFO reported that appeals against six of the other unsuccessful bids had been submitted and the outcomes were awaited. The CFO further reported that an emergency CIF bid for roofing repairs had been submitted on behalf of All Saints First School. £20K would be allocated from school reserves to financially support a successful bid. Trustees would be kept updated.

The CFO also confirmed that CIF bids 2021/22 were currently being prepared and Entrust was providing support for schools in identifying projects and putting bids together. Discussion took place regarding the condition of ULT schools, including Richard Clarke First School, and trustees recognised the importance of having an overall plan for building improvements. A suggestion was made for an external inspection of all school buildings to help identify and prioritise areas requiring future work. The CFO confirmed that all schools had an asset management plan and that all headteachers, with support from Entrust, would be aware of areas for improvement for their own schools.

It was resolved –

That the CEO and CFO be requested to explore options around an external inspection of all ULT school buildings and to arrange as considered appropriate.

### c) Pay Policy 2020/21

The CEO reported that the SCC model pay policy was still awaited and it had therefore not yet been possible to update the ULT pay policy. The budget modeller though did include the proposed pay increases for teachers and support staff and details of these would be shown in the updated policy.

Discussion took place regarding headteacher salary ranges and trustees recognised that headteachers should continue to be paid on their agreed salary range prior to the school joining the Trust, whilst noting the differences in salary ranges across the schools.

It was resolved –

That trustees confirm that all headteachers would continue to get paid in accordance with their current salary range but that the CEO be requested to prepare a report on future headteacher salary ranges for consideration at a future meeting.

d) ESFA Letter

Trustees had previously considered the letter received from the ESFA in response to issues raised during the last external audit and the CFO confirmed that all necessary actions had been taken to address the concerns that had been raised. The letter had also been shared with the School Representation Board. The CEO also reported that she was to write to headteachers and chairs of governors to make clear the concerns that had been identified and the actions taken by trustees to address them. They would also be reminded that Mazars would be looking at these matters when undertaking the external audit.

The CEO also made available a draft action plan to meet the requirements of the Academies Financial Handbook 2020. Once completed it would be discussed in more detail at a future meeting of the Finance and Audit committee.

It was resolved –

That the draft action plan be received and noted.

e) Integrated Curriculum Led Financial Planning (ICLFP)

The CFO reported that he was currently working on a model document provided by ASCL for the purposes of integrated curriculum led financial planning, prepared specifically for schools in a 3-tier system. The model had been adapted for use at Thomas Alleyne's High School and consideration was being given for using it across all ULT schools.

The CEO further reported that the DfE was also currently working on a similar model document for schools in a 3-tier system and she had therefore asked for ULT schools to be included in pilot programme that was being developed. A response was awaited but, if successful, there would be no charge to ULT schools. Trustees would be kept updated.

f) Covid-19 – additional funding and costs

The CFO reported that catch-up funding, currently £80 per pupil, was available from the DfE with agreed criteria for what the money could be spent on. The first instalment for ULT schools had been received. The CFO further reported that schools continued to incur additional costs due to the impact of covid-19 although it was not yet clear what further funding may become available. Trustees would be kept updated.

The chair of the Trust Board further reported that a request had been made by the School Representation Board for financial support to be given from reserves held by the Trust should it be necessary.

It was resolved –

That the Finance and Audit would continue to monitor the use, and impact, of DfE funding made available to schools and to also agree the use of Trust reserves to further support schools if necessary.

g) Growth of ULT

The CEO reported that the consultation exercise for Richard Clarke Fist School to join the ULT was nearing completion and it was hoped to submit the formal bid to the headteacher regional board before the end of the year.

The CEO further reported that the project board for the new school continued to meet with the DfE and that good progress was being made. It was hoped to be on site by May/June 20221. The CEO was also pleased to confirm that the local authority had agreed for the ULT to access the £12k funding available to support initial costs.

h) Pupil Numbers

The CEO reminded trustees that a requirement from the Financial Handbook was for a termly update to provided on pupil numbers across the ULT. A copy of a report outlining pupil numbers from September 2020, and details of where Y5 pupils had come from and where Y8 pupils had gone to, had been previously circulated and the CEO went through the detail of the report. Trustees were pleased to note a small increase in numbers from the previous year and also that the number of ULT pupils opting to attend JCB academy had not been as great as originally anticipated. The CEO further reported that some schools were looking to consult on proposed changes to the over-subscription criteria to favour pupils currently attending a ULT school.

i) Central Services

The CEO reported that, at its recent meeting, the Education committee had agreed to seek a review of IT provision and support across the ULT and consideration was currently being given to the scope of the review.

It was resolved –

That the Finance and Audit committee supports the external IT review across the ULT.

**213. Review of Redundancy Consultation Process:**

The chair of the Trust Board referred to a recent communication received from ULT lawyers again referring to the importance for collective bargaining with the unions. As such, he had met with the unions earlier in the week and agreement reached with unions to undertake collective bargaining on behalf of their members. The unions had, however, requested an improvement to the terms of the redundancy previously offered by trustees.

The CEO further referred to a draft letter to be sent to unions in response to the recent meeting and approval was sought for the letter to be sent.

It was resolved –

- i) That approval be given for the letter to be sent to unions on behalf of the Trust Board.
- ii) That the contracts for newly appointed staff to the ULT be amended to reflect the previously agreed decision of the Trust Board for newly appointed staff.

**214. Safeguarding (including Covid-19 Issues):**

The CEO was pleased to report that there had not yet been any positive covid-19 cases in any of the schools and that pupil attendance was good. The current testing arrangements for staff and pupils, however, continued to be a challenge. The CEO was also pleased to report that the letter sent to all staff by trustees with regard to the policy for staff holidays during the summer break had proved beneficial in preventing possible issues at the start of the new school year.

It was resolved –

That the safeguarding and covid19 update be noted.

## **215. Risk Register:**

Trustees had been previously circulated with an updated risk register and the CEO confirmed that the revised format had been put together with the support of a governor from Thomas Alleyne's High School. An outline of the revised register was given and discussion followed. Trustees noted that completion of the register would require information around trustee appetite for potential risks but recognised that it was difficult to agree any appetite for risk without knowing the implications of any change to the risk.

It was resolved –

That the revised risk register be received and noted and that a copy should be circulated to all trustees together with more detailed information and guidance for completion and ongoing review of the register.

## **216. Policy Approval:**

The following updated policies had been previously circulated:

### a) ULT Redundancy and Redeployment Policies

The CEO reported that a number of changes had been made to both policies to make clear the roles of trustees and local governing bodies. Discussion followed and trustees noted the similarity of wording in both policies although they often did not compliment each other.

It was resolved –

That the CEO be requested to consider combining both policies and to just have a ULT Redundancy/Redeployment policy.

### b) ULT Allowances Policy

The CEO reported that it was necessary for the ULT to have an Allowance policy and that the draft policy reflected the model policy as recommended by the DfE.

It was resolved –

That the ULT allowances policy be received and approved as presented.

### c) ULT Financial Regulations

The CEO reported that the ULT Financial Regulations were to be reviewed during the summer term 2021 but confirmed that the policy had been renamed in accordance with requirements of the Academies Financial Handbook.

It was resolved –

That the renamed ULT Financial Regulations be received and noted.

**217. Date of Next Meeting:**

As previously agreed, the next meeting of the Finance Committee was to be held on Wednesday, 2 December 2020 at 5.30pm. The venue for the meeting would be confirmed nearer the date, but if it was still necessary for the meeting to be held remotely, then the committee would continue to meet through Microsoft teams.

L. Trigg  
**Signed**.....

2 December 2020  
**Date**.....